INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL THEORY

DIALOGUES WITH CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORISTS

EDITED BY GARY BROWNING,
RAIA PROKHOVNIK
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To the memory of Conal Browning and Aristotel Dimov

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Contents

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Starting at the top from left to right

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1

Introduction – Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists: Then and Now

Gary Browning, Raia Prokhovnik, and Maria Dimova-Cookson

This book offers an engaging introduction to the range and vibrancy of contemporary political theory.[1] It provides a unique overview of the variety of ways in which political theory has been done and debated over the last few decades. Through the conversations and dialogues in this book, the perspectives and contexts of some of the most celebrated recent political theorists come alive. The important themes of liberty, equality, democracy, justice, gender, class, identity, and international politics are developed in the different chapters. The insights gained through reading these interviews are an invaluable place to start for those who have not already been steeped in political ideas, and for those with a preceding academic interest in political theory the book has even more to offer.

The phrase 'contemporary political theory' raises the prospect of systematic analytical reflection that is directed towards understanding current forms of politics, practical political guidance, and the expectation that we might comprehend the nature of the present. This book provides a broad survey of the multiple and diverse ways in which analysis and reflection are currently being conducted by some of the most eminent and controversial contemporary theorists. Controversy is the essence of politics and so the scope of contemporary debates about politics is necessarily broad, containing deep differences on what it means to undertake political theory. This disputable character renders this book and dialogues with contemporary theorists an ideal way of conveying how systematic analysis and reflection on politics are conceived and currently practised.

The dialogues that are included in this book enable theorists to stake their own positions within key debates and to explain their different

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

ways of imagining and construing politics. In responding to questions probing how their thinking has been shaped, the 12 theorists disclose the specificity of the contexts for their theories and their particular angles of vision. Hence the multiple styles of preeminent contemporary political theorists are set out and explained. Each of the theorists is prompted to speak in their own idiom. The dialogical form provokes a conversation with an interlocutor, and the ensuing conversation opens up an engagement with a wider audience.

The upshot is that this book maps how 12 contemporary influential controversial routes to contemporary political theory have been taken, allows for their articulation and defence, and thereby discloses some of the key voices in debates on political theory today. These voices may use the terms 'political theory', 'political thought', or 'political philosophy', and these words convey subtle differences but also overlapping meanings for specific groups of theorists. However, given the aim of this book in portraying the extensive range of theories and theorists, and allowing for the many ways in which these are deployed, we will employ these terms interchangeably and allow individual theorists to specify how they use them.

Political theory: then

The ways in which an activity is developing in the present is not easy to pin down. Part of the context for contemporary political theory begins in the 1950s, with Peter Laslett[2] famously observing that political philosophy was dead. This epitaph was declared in the aftermath of assaults from logical positivism and linguistic analysis on the range and viability of theoretical speculation. It harmonized with an apparent decline in the cogency of political ideologies in Western political cultures, experiencing post-war prosperity and the burgeoning consumerism of liberal capitalism. Hardly was the judgment in print, however, before it was recognized to be anachronistic. The 1960s witnessed ideological contestation with the left opening up areas of life that had previously been off limits for political activists, and were followed by the ideological revival of the right in the 1970s and the reformulation of notions of liberty and authority to suit individualism and a strong state. The self-denying ordinances of academic theorists were duly withdrawn from circulation.

In any event, Laslett's judgement obscured more than it revealed, for it failed to track the varieties of post-war political theories that had been produced and were in the process of making a mark. On the

left, Marxist theorists such as Marcuse, Macpherson, Bloch, and Adorno pressed intricate and unorthodox critiques of capital, the Soviet bloc, and traditional forms of Marxism. Habermas and the post-war Frankfurt School discarded Marxist concepts in the wake of Nazi destruction, and in the face of the pressing need to conceptualize the public sphere given post-war entrenchment of Marxist tyrannies in the East and the uncertain public engagement of liberal democracies in the West. Heidegger framed an ecologically inflected critique of liberal capitalist technology while resuming his post-mortem on Western metaphysics. Arendt delivered carefully crafted studies of political thought and action, imagining politics as a form of public creativity, whose credentials had been assaulted by the dictation of anti-political forms of totalitarianism. Fanon explored possibilities of post-colonial identity and freedom in the wake of Western imperialism and decolonization. De Beauvoir traced the existential dependence of women on socially constructed forms of private and public deference to roles enhancing the status of masculinity. Popper, Hayek, Berlin, and Oakeshott reimagined conceptions of liberalism and conservatism in the aftermath of Nazism and Communism and in distinctive ways identified liberalism and conservatism as counterpoints to the overblown rhetoric and politics of preceding political grand narratives. Meanwhile Rawls developed normative arguments for social justice that harmonized with the practical realization of civil rights and social welfare programmes of post-war American liberalism, which culminated in the beginning of the 1970s with his *A Theory of Justice*.[3] This text, like the works of the roll call of theorists listed above, demonstrated the continuing relevance of political theory to the practical problems and possibilities posed by the organization of social co-operation, as well as the persistence and animation of competing views.

Political theory in the 1950s and into the 1960s was not dead. It was alive in Europe, the USA, and beyond, but it was cultivated in differing contexts and in distinctive styles. All of these styles contributed to identifying issues and to suggesting engagement with the practices of politics from which they emerged. They did so in a way that engaged with ideas and the history of political thought and so went beyond ideological support or rejection. The limits of post-war liberal tolerance and democracy were traced by heterodox Marxists, whereas the power of patriarchy and colonialism was criticized by radical feminists and the colonized. The benefits of liberalism were construed in subtle ways that included the projected evolutionary advantages of diversity and the reasonableness of value pluralism. Pre- and post-war forms of totalitarianism were

dissected and condemned, while political and cultural forces and values resisting the fantasy of a predetermined political telos were articulated. Rawls's recasting of traditional social contract arguments exemplified how the history of political thought might be revisited in innovative and productive ways. The prevailing forms of political theory that flourished in the 1960s drew upon and recast the arguments and styles of preceding theorists. A version – or misreading – of Hobbes's state of nature was taken as a foundational myth of anarchy for realist international relations. Hegelian arguments were re-framed in distinctive and positive ways, notably in the arguments of Marcuse, Fanon, Oakeshott, and de Beauvoir, but also disparaged in idiomatic and strident ways by Popper and Russell.

In turn, Kant inspired theorists such as Popper, Arendt, Habermas, and Rawls who framed distinctive rational constructivist accounts of political associations. Marx was criticized by Berlin and Arendt and savaged by Popper but was revisited imaginatively by Bloch, Marcuse, and Adorno. The various forms of political theory that were developed in the immediate post-war years, however, tended to recognize epistemological limits within which theory might be practised. In particular, liberals were less inclined to invoke metaphysics and teleological historical development to justify their positions, offering instead conditional explorations of current possibilities.

Political theory: now

Political theory in the 1950s and 1960s was diverse and heterogeneous and was inspired by a variety of preceding theories and events, which were reconfigured by their assimilation into current perspectives. The theories themselves – even when, as with Oakeshott, practical impact might be disdained – were oriented to practice and to the pressing issues and problems thrown up by the idiosyncrasies of the post-war Western world. Political theory today has developed from the situation of the 1960s. Its debates have become more assured in their vibrant diversity and include more cross-cultural perspectives. There is no single way of doing political theory. There is no essence to a subject and hence it demands from its practitioners individual reflexive verdicts on its status and character. This variety of contemporary forms of political theory informs standard descriptions of its character and explains the distinctiveness of some of its journals, which cater for particularities of style and orientation. Analytical political philosophy, as practised in celebrated universities in the USA and the UK, is distinguished

from continental theory. Continental theory is cultivated by theorists in continental Europe and by radical theorists in the USA, UK, and elsewhere, who are influenced by pre- and post-structuralist European philosophers and by the lure of destabilizing standard ways of operating in theory and practice. Both analytical and continental theory have had a significant impact beyond the Anglo-American and Franco-German world, and more recently, traditions of political thought from China, Japan, and other non-Western sources are increasingly being explored.

The history of political thought serves as a sub-discipline of political theory, although it is cultivated in differing styles, the contextualism of Skinner, Pocock, and Collini vying with Foucauldian genealogies of discursive practices and Straussians who interpret texts esoterically in their quest for timeless philosophical wisdom. The gathering currency of international political theory, which R.B.J. Walker and others have led the way in developing, widens the perspective of political theory beyond either the confines of particular given borders or the interplay of states beyond and between given borders. Post-structuralist and radical forms of theory arise out of continental philosophy and a determination to challenge the assumptions of the dominant Western ideology of liberalism. Radical theory tends to be seen as an unsettling force, disturbing the conventional terms that are employed in analytic and historical forms of theory. Feminist and post-colonial theorists read and reinterpret the mainstream political theory agenda and the canon of political thought through the experiences of women and the colonized, observing how the political can appear in what is ostensibly the private realm or in everyday interactions of a society with a colonial past.

The conventional categorization of political theory debates, which assumes a division between these opposing camps promises to order the field, but this stabilization comes at a price. A typology is produced, for example, listing analytical political theory, radical theory, the history of political thought, international political theory, feminist thought, and post-colonial theory, but the division into schematized types ignores individual and overlapping aspects of particular theories. Such a list can signal ways in which theorists approach issues and questions differently, but theorists do not fit neatly into the scheme. The differences between theorists exceed what is acknowledged by designated labels, while theorists who are separated by opposing labels exhibit common features. Relations between theorists are insusceptible to neat and exclusive forms of categorization; differences between them cannot be reduced to a series of different answers to a common set of questions. The theorists who are interviewed in this book are distinct and have been labelled

as representing specific styles of political theory, but their overlapping concerns and styles, as well as their disparate and individual contexts of intellectual development should be recognized. The dangers involved in employing conventional formulas are emphasized by the incongruity of the labels, for they categorize theorists by unrelated criteria such as geography, procedure, and object of study. The categories are not mutually exclusive so that identifying a theorist by one label does not rule out the applicability of an alternative. Continental theory, for instance, is compatible with analytic forms of thinking, feminists may also be post-colonialist, radicals can be analytical, and post-structuralists invoke spectres of Marx. In their interviews in this book, for instance, Pateman recognizes affinities between racial and sexual oppression, and Connolly's post-Hegelian turn towards Foucault is explained via conceptual analysis of what is at stake in relying solely on reason or adopting a more corporeal perspective.

The late Gerald Cohen's work shows the bluntness of conventional categories in accommodating theorists. Cohen was at once analytical and radical, and the acuity of his analytical style was propelled by his commitment to the heritage of Marxism. Cohen's politics and intellectual heritage were bound up with Marx's emergence from post-Kantian continental philosophy, just as his work testified to his recognition of the sharpness and relevance of Rawls's analytical style. In his dialogue with Simon Tormey in this book, Cohen reveals how his radicalism emerges out of a background of left radicalism and how his thinking about politics and society had been stirred by his engagement with Marx. In a frank and engaging exchange, he recognizes the inspiration of Marx and the September or No-Bullshit Marxism Group to which he belonged. At the same time, he observes how he steered away from absorption in the content and style of Marx's theory towards the hard-edged analytical tradition of Anglo-American philosophy. Even in his *Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Cohen had contrived to lever Marx's thought away from its dialectical standpoint and towards a methodological individualism that prioritized rational choice arguments for emancipation and communism. Cohen identifies his own approach to political theory by observing, 'But by and large my own orientation is not to address contemporary questions. I deal with more general, more abstract questions, and I think that people make a big mistake when they suppose that the discussion of such questions has no impact on the world.' Cohen takes his approach to be focused upon abstract analysis of a concept such as equality and in doing so he expresses his admiration for Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in striking

terms, 'But I *do* think *A Theory of Justice* is a great work. There are at most two books of political philosophy that are greater: Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*.' In his later years, Cohen did battle with Rawls and Nozick but operated within the frame of analytical political philosophy. In this interview, he explains his egalitarianism as a progressive response to the legacy of the left radicalism of Marx, and in his commitment to working out the logical implications of a rigorous adherence to the principle of equality, he explains how he has engaged critically with Rawls's problematic defence of the difference principle.

Cohen's formidably rigorous analytical style of argument owed much to a background in Anglo-American philosophy, yet his career trajectory shows a significant personal, political, and academic engagement with Marx and Marxism. Cohen, in his interview, testifies to the ongoing relevance of an inspirational Marx Study Group and designates his most notable contribution to an understanding of the political present to be his identification of what remains of the radical project of the left after Marxist theory has been superseded and its dialectical examination of the interrelations between categories abandoned. Cohen's analytical approach is distinctive. It is inspired by Marx and the endgame of German idealism, and it is radical in its critique of standard forms of liberalism. Cohen's profession of sympathy for a global perspective in this interview follows from his commitment to egalitarianism.

If Cohen is revealed to be a highly distinctive analytical theorist, then Philip Pettit's analytical style is also highly individual and is motivated by a variety of influences. His concentrated revisionary analysis of freedom invokes republican periods of history and links freedom to social and political status in framing a view of freedom that is distinguished from classic notions of negative and positive freedom that have been assumed by analytic philosophers in the wake of Berlin. Pettit's analysis of the concept's implications is conducted at a level of abstraction and precision that is of a piece with preceding Anglo-American analyses of freedom. The degree of abstraction allows for a range of applications superseding particular historical and contemporary contexts, and the revisionary republican view of freedom is delineated via notions of agency and political association that are highly general and uncomplicated by their entanglement with metaphysical assumptions and counter-intuitive logical formulations that are framed by continental theorists from Hegel to Deleuze. While Cohen focused upon equality, Pettit has developed a revisionist reading of freedom that owes much to current analytical techniques. In his interview with

Maria Dimova-Cookson, however, Pettit discusses his reading of the continental philosophy of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and the influence of historical readings of freedom, notably, in Quentin Skinner's work on republicanism. Pettit recognizes the compatibility of historical study with an analytical review of the concept of freedom in that historic republican communities and modes of thought express what he takes to be a distinctive way of understanding freedom that resists falling back on statist or individualistic ways of operating.

A virtue of the work of Cohen and Pettit is that they frame clear general analyses of normative conceptions of equality and freedom, which allows political and social practice to be measured against rigorously formulated conceptual standards. Cohen and Pettit tend to work with intuitions and conceptions in which individuals can exercise agency in relatively uncomplicated ways which, in turn, can reconstitute social practices so that they are aligned with ideal normative conditions. The relationship between theory and practice here is one of taking the conceptual analyses to provide guidelines for how political associations should be best organized. These theorists offer bold formulations of principles that challenge contemporary politicians and citizens to recognize, for instance, how freedom implies that citizens are not to be dominated by elites and how egalitarianism precludes unequal economic rewards. The normative standpoints of Pettit and Cohen, however, are also informed by particular influences. For Pettit, the history of republican practice looms large as providing an alternative possibility to standard negative liberal notions of freedom, and the legacy of Marxist radicalism infuses Cohen's critique of the assumptions of neo-liberalism.

Amartya Sen's style is similarly analytical, providing a conceptual map for the development of freedom, albeit one which expressly accommodates imperfect regimes. These regimes are seen as valuable in playing a role in enhancing freedom via the promotion of human capabilities. But Sen's accommodation to the imperfections of practice is not practised at the expense of a sharp appreciation of the underlying general requirements of human freedom, which he sets in a global context.

Jane Bennett, William Connolly, and Bonnie Honig are standardly designated as radical theorists who critique contemporary analytical political theory. They are certainly radical, envisaging the very notion of theory as being problematic, and their radical agenda criticizes prevailing theories, notably liberal theory. Their radicalism is exhibited as much in their styles of theorizing as in the reimagining of the content of politics. Theory for them is not ready to hand, and they take the role of

theory to be to unsettle standard assumptions of agency and democratic practice rather than to provide general analytical conceptual analyses of notions of freedom or equality by standard philosophical processes of inference for application to practical politics. In this process of disturbing standard assumptions, concepts and practices are interrogated without necessarily being resolved.

Although these theorists share common goals, they remain distinct and bring characteristic influences to bear upon their readings of contemporary politics. It would also be a mistake to underrate the undoubted analytical sharpness with which they critique standard assumptions and repressive practices. Their separation from mainstream analytic political theorists should not be overplayed. Although there are overlapping influences upon these radical theorists, Bennett is notable for drawing upon preceding continental metaphysicians in framing an alternative metaphysics of a new materialism, Connolly recognizes the particular influences of Foucault and Deleuze, and Honig invokes literary and practical figures in challenging orthodoxies and expressing an agonistic form of democracy.

In the course of her conversation with Gulshan Khan, Jane Bennett remarks on how common-sense notions of agency and materiality should be overturned to enable us to get a better grip on the situated character of human agency and the material patterns enabling flows of action. Imagining material items to be in some sense agential requires a radical revision of common conceptions of individuality, both in relinquishing the sense of privilege that is standardly enjoyed by human agents and in reimagining the role of the material world in webs of interaction. Bennett's rethinking of notions of materialism and agency reflects her engagement with continental theory. Following an early preoccupation with Hegel, and personal experience of the ways in which the material conditions of agency can misfire or misalign in an individual, she develops a radical new image of agency that is influenced by continental theorists such as Deleuze and Latour. Her reconceptualization of agency is designed to establish a way of approaching environmental issues that allows for the ways in which inorganic aspects of the material world may interact with individuals to produce effects, such as in an electricity blackout. The advantage of her radical rethinking of concepts such as the world and agency is that it admits radically new insights and approaches. It also challenges political theorists to enrich or rethink cherished notions about the distinctiveness of human agents and provides an alternative world view to that of liberals, who privilege individual human beings as discrete subjects.

In the interview with Mark Wenham Connolly explains in the interview with Mark Wenham how his career began by engaging in a critical Hegelian interrogation of concepts, whereby conceptual assertions were turned inside out via exposing performative contradictions. He moved on to work with Foucault and Deleuze so as to accentuate differences and establish lines of flight from conventional routines of classification and practices. Connolly explains how in his engagement with Foucault's *Herculin Barbin* he experienced 'turmoil in my gut'. This experience underpins his move towards engaging viscerally with others rather than standardizing responses via a rationalist or dialectical overview. Connolly's developing materialism is accompanied by a pluralism constructed around a developmental visceral approach to appreciating differences via an ethos of engagement that is not to be restricted to formal conceptual unities. His developmental approach alerts him to the unfixed character of the political, so that he recognizes how thinking about rights is related to manifest declarations of rights. Hence gay rights and surrogacy claims create new worlds in which novel ways of thinking about rights are demanded and politics is not to be taken as the continuous application of a theory to emergent trends. Connolly is highly sensitive to the injustice, which is performed via the endorsement of seemingly universal principles that mask by excluding what is not included within their operational schemes. He combats processes of standardization and normalization that frame inclusive conceptual schemes which specify principles in which contingencies and subordinate elements are contained and constrained. Connolly remains alert, however, to the issue of how collective forms of organization and unity can accommodate diverse identities, and he invokes an ethos of engagement, which he takes as offering a way of reconciling styles, individuals, and groups that differ from one another without threatening identities or relying on formalizing notions of law that presuppose adherence to norms that stretch allegiances. Connolly embraces visceral experience and underdetermined forms of explanation and inclusion that expressly allow for variation and the emergence of new forms and identities. Connolly's thinking is analytical while aiming to resist premature conclusiveness that precludes radical differences and change.

Honig, in her interview with Gary Browning, takes her theoretical standpoint to preclude fixity and inclusiveness and deliberately favours discordant juxtapositions to attest to the unfinished and incomplete nature of theory to suggest how emerging elements may not be dismissed. What these radicals offer are ways to accommodate new and emerging claims by opening to the unprocessed, rather than

schematically insisting on what can be included. Hence the claims that are raised by the gay movement, refugees without papers, and transsexuals are valued precisely because they do not fit in with existing theoretical practice. Honig's commitment to an agonistic form of democracy, rather than appealing to equilibrating claims of deliberative democrats, also fits in with the intuitive sense that arguments do not always lead to accommodatory harmony. The question that more analytical theorists might pose to these radical styles of theory is the extent to which their conceptions of the possibilities of democratic engagement presuppose reciprocal recognitive claims that imply the acceptance of liberal norms.

Honig's radicalism is set against the prevailing paradigm of analytical liberal theory. In this interview, she explains how her seminal text, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* was inspired by dissatisfaction with mainstream Anglo-American theory, and in particular by a resistance to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls's analytic construction of a just society is designed to establish a framework that determines how resources and opportunities are to be distributed justly so that remaining inequalities can be relegated to inconsequential matters of luck. Honig self-consciously questions all inequalities and anomalies in any analysis of justice. She substitutes agonistic resistance for closed readings of society, which are motivated by the goals of order and completion. She points to remainders that resist analytic schemes of classification, urging a radical contestory form of democracy, which is reflexive about the ways in which the people are counted. In her interview, she acknowledges the influence of continental theorists such as Derrida, who deconstructs supposedly fixed answers to political questions, and Ranciere, who sees politics as arising precisely out of disputes over what may count as a political unit. Honig embraces a method that works to diagnose discrepancies and tensions rather than registering unities. She remarks, 'Diagnostic or therapeutic political theory aims to open us up to new ways of thinking and acting, often by way of catachresis – putting unlike things together.'

Honig's interview establishes her opposition to contemporary paradigms of analytical political theory and yet her work itself resists being pigeonholed according to the kind of supervening scheme of classification that she argues against in her substantive theorizing. She embraces a situated radicalism that engages with a variety of past theories, images, and styles, and takes analytical political theory seriously, precisely by meditating on what it overlooks. She rehearses a critique of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, which, simultaneously, acknowledges a debt

to Rawls. Honig relates how she has pointed to the ways in which foreigners are identified and marginalized in contemporary political idioms and how Arendt marks creative inspirational ways in which politics might be conducted. She also acknowledges influences from the history of political thought, such as by Green and Hobhouse that show how past thinkers can be invoked to countercurrents of the present and to open up radical pathways. Again, Honig is not limited to theory and theoretical works in her use of past material to shed light on present issues. She relates issues pertaining to foreigners to *The Wizard of OZ* and recounts how she is currently preoccupied in re-reading Sophocles' *Antigone* so as to point up the political ways in which burial practices and funeral observations were debated and practised that differ from contemporary uses of invoking the dead in political argumentation.

Bennett, Connolly, and Honig, then, are radical theorists, but their radicalism embraces analytical devices and they invoke a variety of distinct styles and sources. Moreover, their classification as radicals should not override their particular interests and substantive concerns in political theory. Hence, Bennett's materialism offers a particular approach to ecologism that distinguishes the project from liberal perspectives that assume a privileged perspective for human actors. Environmental issues are not to be separated from the fundamental ways in which the human is considered according to her radical, revisionary metaphysics. Likewise, Honig reviews the contemporary situation of feminism and explains how her agonistic democratic standpoint takes borders to be insusceptible to providing necessary fixed limits to political theory and practice, while eschewing a global cosmopolitanism that would replace statist universalism with a wider universalism that would in turn create injustices by excluding individuals and standpoints from its perspective. Connolly's identification of the developmental nature of rights highlights how the history of politics and political thought impacts upon substantive issues. Classifying theorists is a move that raises questions as well as answering them and as Derrida himself might have observed, the questions may be undecidable.

R.B.J. Walker, Carole Pateman, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Amartya Sen are notable for theorizing in ways that stretch the contours of politics. They attend to the literal borders of political activities, the distortive gender presumptions of theory and practice, and the influence of place upon the context of the practice of theory and citizenship. To say that they have made significant contributions to political theory by widening its perspective or exploring the embodied gendered reality of politics and so revealing its occluded contours is not to say that they are not to

be understood as analytical, radical, or historical theorists. Chakrabarty, for instance, is a distinguished historian, Pateman and Sen bring to their writings undoubted analytic expertise with a radical edge, and Walker's focus upon the international goes along with radicalism and an appreciation of the history of political thought.

In his interview with Raia Prokhovnik Walker discusses, in his interview with Raia Prokhovnik, his exploration of the reach of politics beyond its conventional given, the borders of nation-states. He stands out from many of the other contributors to this book in that he focuses upon how space represents a complicating factor in politics rather than a standard framing device lacking the contentious activity of politics. He challenges spatial presumptions. For Walker, it is of the essence of politics that spatial organization is political in theory and practice, and he emphasizes the need to deconstruct any naturalized constructions that predetermine or limit the ambit of the political. Politics is neither inside nor outside lines of political organization; it is the process of contestation itself which affects the shape of the outside and inside of political units. Walker's focus on the borders of politics is paradigmatic, and his far-reaching potent arguments intimate that the political theory of the future will be troubled by and in turn trouble the given meaning of the idea of borders and will explore and disturb the ways in which nation-states purport to constitute self-legitimating forms of political organization. Rob Walker's international perspective engages in theory and practice related to how the world is conventionally divided and organized into units and how the theoretical orchestration of these units is to be best explored and comprehended. He questions the notion of sovereignty, challenging its credentials to serve as an organizing suprapolitical formula underpinning nation-states, and he deconstructs the dichotomous division of the world into an international sphere and a countervailing space occupied by nation-states.

Walker's own pedigree in political theory and the history of political thought alerts him to a range of theoretical and practical formulations of wholes and parts, and his approach is also informed by an individual first-hand experience of inhabiting liminal places such as industrial Wales and the open spaces of Canada. He invokes post-structural thinking and musical forms as operational techniques and patterns to suggest deconstructions of classic explanations of the international political world that assume dichotomous external relations between the inside of states and the outside of international relations. He identifies a contemporary world where peoples and individuals are not to be contained within exclusive borders. In this interview, he summarizes the

argument of his seminal work *Inside/Outside. International Relations as Political Theory* and points to the argument of his most recent work, *After the Globe, Before the World,* in the following terms, 'And yes I was trying to challenge the naturalizations of constructed boundaries though I was thinking more about the boundaries of states than individual subjects or of the international (which is much more the focus of more recent work).'

Pateman's career as a political theorist encompasses more than her ground-breaking work, *The Sexual Contract*, though that work remains a highly significant expression of feminist political theory, formulating a radical challenge to liberal and pre-liberal contractual theorists. The breadth of that challenge is highlighted in the interview with Steve On. A social contract purportedly establishing the nature and limits of political association, for Pateman, presupposes a prior resolution of sexual power, and historically she observes the dominance of men over women in the determination of their social roles to be presumed in social contract theory. In her interview, she comments upon gender relations and contemporary currents of feminism. She observes how the so-called third-wave feminism is a confusing category, which lacks the defining political agendas of earlier feminist movements. She is critical of the absence of political engagement on the part of feminist scholars and reasserts how the inequality experienced by women in contemporary societies demands a committed feminism. Her recognition of the sexual dimension of political association is distinctive, but it is one that is shared by other interviewees, notably by Bonnie Honig and Quentin Skinner.

The most significant impact of Pateman's work on political theory is often construed in terms of her feminist perspective, but in this interview Pateman reminds us of her pedigree as a political theorist with wider interests, notably in political participation. She adverts to her book *Participation and Democratic Theory*, which was concerned with stirring conceptions of participative democracy in contemporary citizens. In the study, she revives notions of participative democracy, including industrial democracy in the light of the perceived failings of contemporary forms of democracy. She recognizes her obligation to analytic political philosophy generally and in particular in relation to the personal impact of the late Brian Barry. As well as acknowledging her debt to Barry, she also reflects upon her participation in professional organisations of political science.

Chakrabarty is distinguished by his sensitivity to the question of the setting of theory – the place from which it emerges and the atmosphere

in which the theory is cultivated. He maintains in this interview with Maria Dimova-Cookson that theory is rooted to particular places and that it is to be appreciated by its relation with the context of its inspiration. In his book, *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty recognizes how universalist theories are necessarily framed and articulated in particular places, taking life from the specific atmospheres that are created through the series of historical developments by which cultures impress themselves on a location. In his interview, he identifies his defining insight to be his appreciation of place via processes of historical articulation. He remarks, 'So I was interested in the relation between thought and place and my proposition was that philosophical thought expressed in ordinary prose (as distinct from symbolic notation or numbers), however much it sought to transcend its origins in particular histories, could never altogether escape the pull of the undertow of these histories, for such undertow was what one could discover in the idiomaticity of the original prose in which that thought was expressed.'

Chakrabarty tends to deflate universalist language by observing the particularities with which meanings are invested by specific cultural traditions that are generated through contingent iterations of place or space. For Chakrabarty, Enlightenment reason and the dynamic of modernity must be recognized as being subject to limits, which are due to the specificities of their generation. The West might assume that the net of its rational conceptualizations is to be spread across the globe, but the generality of its principles comes at the price of missing particulars that colour what is to be explained. Sen emphasizes the particularity of context for differing reasons. The poverty of the South matters not because it is the South, but because a general global view of poverty must recognize its particular forms and most dramatic manifestations. Human freedom and the politics of promoting freedom are not to be derived simply from abstract principles but require reference to particular problems and compensatory ameliorative remedies for their incidence.

In his moving memories of his formative years amidst the poverty of Bengal, Chakrabarty provides an insightful non-Western perspective on political theory and embraces a political reading that appreciates the significance of a sense of home. This sense of home is accentuated for him by his post-colonial reading of the complications of place in the contemporary world, where identities are often submerged, interlaced, and confused. Through his recollections of a particular context for his development, he highlights the particularities of place in the framing of political theory and in the practical experience of political engagement.

Like Pateman, Dipesh Chakrabarty is directly inspired by recognition of oppression. His work is animated by his personal experience of a post-colonial location in Bengal, India, and in this interview he bears witness to a first-hand experience of the problems of a post-colonial society and the demands of political action. He goes on to discuss his identification of place and home as markers of identity in a rapidly changing and globalizing world that inform his work as a social theorist and historian. Such identification alerts him to the dangers of assuming that there can be a rationalist approach that transcends the language and culture of particular places.

Amartya Sen's interview with Fonna Forman-Barzilai is akin to Chakrabarty's in that he recalls movingly the inspiration for his own political development to reside in a particular setting. He reimagines the familial context of the contrasting aspects of women and women's lives in Bengal and Burma and expresses his first-hand awareness of the hardships of poverty and famine. His commitment to non-ideal theory in providing criteria for improving actual societies in the context of a pressing need for development and the enabling of human capabilities is inspired by this first-hand appreciation of a localized expression of global poverty. Although other interviews, such as those with Walker and Cohen, also reveal a sensitivity to the particular existential contexts of their intellectual development, Sen and Chakrabarty are preeminent in recognizing the demands and loyalties of place. Sen's identification with his post-colonial homeland in Bengal testifies to the particularities of place impacting upon a theorist who has been deeply influenced by Rawls and Western analytical political theory.

In many ways, Sen is a paradigmatic analytical theorist, whose work is influenced by analytical theorists in philosophy and economics, but he also acknowledges the role of his appreciation of poetry upon the rhetoric of his style and the existential impact of the poverty of his homeland. Sen elaborates upon his first-hand experience of poverty and his recognition of the priority to be accorded to economic, cultural, and political development in improving life chances and capabilities. His direct awareness of famine in Bengal gives point to his appreciation of the need for political theory to respond to practical demands and to accept the role of admittedly imperfect political organizations in contributing to the provision of practical help in solving social and economic problems. His sense of the particulars of place also alerts him to the limits of localism and the need to go beyond the specifics of particular places and to theorize in an open way that is not restricted to a partial perspective that excludes different sorts of people and need. This

latter concern to be open to the requirements and perspectives of diverse peoples is what dissuades him from resorting to theorizing in terms of a social contract for a determinate set of people, whereby there would be a danger of closure.

In his interview for this book Sen remarks, 'My book is in this second tradition (of open impartiality), with its interest in the reasoning of all people (not just the citizens of a particular country), its concern about how the lives of people are going (not just how "right" the institutions are), and its commitment to making the world better, even short of any kind of perfection (rather than primarily identifying some "perfectly just" world, which may be far from feasible and on the nature of which there may be no agreement, even within one country).' His recognition of the demands of practice alerts him to the practicalities of appraising and operating with non-ideal theory. For Sen, the realities of poverty concentrate his attention on what can be done right now, in this context, with these particular people and non-ideal institutions. Practical improvements take priority over an analytical preoccupation with a rarefied abstract ideal of justice and how it is best articulated in equally ideally conceived institutions. Sen's commitment to render theory amenable to practice is shared by many of the theorists interviewed in this book, who conceive of the relevance of the theory in distinctive ways. Cohen and Pettit see the relevance of clearly articulated principles to the business of assessing issues of freedom and quality, whereas Connolly, Bennett, and Honig see the point of theory as challenging the standard and the conventional.

Quentin Skinner is a distinctive theorist in that his central and major contributions to political theory arise out of his work in the history of political thought. Skinner's sensitivity to a Collingwoodian sense of the changing terms of political theory alerts him to the many forms that political organization has assumed in the course of history. He recognizes the historicity of the nation-state and also of differing traditions of sovereignty and freedom. In the interview with Raia Prokhovnik, he discusses his review of a tradition of freedom that is set apart from the dominant negative tradition, but which is also at odds with what has been termed positive freedom. Like Pettit, Skinner identifies a form of republican freedom that he traces from classical times via Renaissance thinkers to its continuing relevance to contemporary forms of politics. Indeed, he remarks upon the relevance of the doctrine in the context of the conspicuous decline in Parliamentary sovereignty in the UK.

Although other theorists interviewed in the book invoke aspects of the past to bear upon present issues, Skinner is notable as the preeminent

historian of political thought in the Anglo-American world, bringing to bear upon present concerns a rich perception of the value of historical understanding. Skinner's methodology as a historian of political thought is influenced by the contextualist philosophies of Wittgenstein and Austin, who attend to the varieties of ways in which meanings are established and who resist the temptation to order and impose a supervening and general explanation of diverse forms and uses. Skinner's recognition of the changing terms and forms of meaning that are employed in debates on political authority and freedom alerts him to the dangers of assuming that there can be a rationalist approach that transcends the language and culture of particular places and times. His extensive and scholarly studies of forms of historical republicanism and traditions of republican theory, however, have underpinned and in turn been influenced by the contemporary republican theory of Pettit. Skinner's attention to context in the history of political thought, by opening up recessive traditions of liberty and sovereignty to contemporary inspection, allows for a reading of contemporary politics and theory that does not mistake present attitudes and ways of thinking for timeless truths. While Chakrabarty, Walker, Honig, and others also entertain the limits of theory, in recognizing particularities of various kinds, Skinner's thoroughly historical approach emphasizes the historicity of the modern state and the particularity of vocabularies of sovereignty, authority, and freedom.

Contemporary political theorists should not be pigeonholed into exclusive categories. The standard categories highlight particular traits, but they should not substitute for considered engagement with individual theorists. Ben Barber's powerful commitment to a strong version of participative democracy is a case in point. His interview with Michael Saward underlines how Barber's theoretical endorsement of a particular reading of democracy is supported by arguments drawn from experience, practical engagement, and familiarity with a range of distinctive political and philosophical literature. Barber's arguments for democracy are designed to revivify a responsible society that can resist the alienating forces of commodification and global stereotyping that are highlighted in his recent work *Consumed*. Barber's critique of economic man and his impassioned defence of democracy draw upon major figures in the liberal democratic tradition such as J. S. Mill, Popper, and Rawls. Barber's influences are many. They include representatives of analytical political theory, but his practical bent and familiarity with the history of political theory prevent his assimilation into a particular school of political theory. He urges a bottom-up conception of

democracy, which is not so much driven by abstract general analysis as by a practical and sociological critique of prevalent consumerism and public passivity. The openness to explore the concrete links between theory and practice, which so enriches Barber's work, is linked to his first-hand experience of the democratic practice of Swiss cantons, his work as an adviser to President Clinton, and his engagement with Libyan politics. Barber is notable in his determination to combine theory and practice in ways that involve meeting with and working for practical politicians.

The interview of Rainer Forst by Xavier Guillaume highlights what this introductory chapter has been arguing. It is a mistake to classify political theorists in ways that take them to adhere to mutually exclusive standpoints. It is standardly assumed that continental and Anglo-American styles of theory fall into opposing and exclusive camps, but this assumed dichotomy is misleading. Forst is a pre-eminent contemporary member of the Frankfurt School, perhaps the most famous school of continental social theory, whose alumni include Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno, and more latterly Habermas and Honneth. Forst relates how he developed his own thinking by working with both Habermas and Rawls as these two leading exponents of continental and Anglophone theory were writing their seminal works, *Between Facts and Norms* and *Political Liberalism*. Forst remarks upon the considerable overlap between the two theorists, reflecting a rapprochement that he detects between continental and Anglo-American styles of theory, and he is happy to acknowledge their mutual influence upon his own work.

Moreover, Forst aims also to rethink the dichotomy that is assumed to operate between universalist and contextualist approaches to the study of politics. His way of continuing the project of critical theory as practised by the Frankfurt School is to endorse its reflexive criticism of the standards of reason in their application as forms of justification, but to locate this critical commitment to specific contexts via particular social practices. In his interview, he observes, 'I would say that my attempts to redescribe practical reason as reason within practices of justification – as the art of justification, so to speak – and to reorient political philosophy to justification as an idea *and* a practice are animated by the critical theory program.' Forst's standpoint reflects his assimilation and development of ideas involved in the liberal–communitarian debate. In that debate, communitarians objected to the universalist aspirations of liberals, who concentrated on framing general individualist rights, and instead urged claims of particular communities and their traditions and practices. Forst turns

to justification as a practice taking place in particular contexts and so aims to work with reason against mere tradition, but by locating debate in specific practices he aims to militate the abstractions of liberal theory. The middle ground that Forst inhabits throws into question general schemes for classifying political theory, as he undertakes analysis but is radical, drawing upon differing traditions of theory and locating his theoretical practice in diverse contexts that supersede mere states.

Conclusions: now and then

If the categories commonly deployed to distinguish contemporary styles of political theory tend to overplay stylized differences between theorists, then they also underplay the individuality of theorists, their susceptibility to heterogeneous sources of shaping, and their tendency to cross between conventional categories of theory. One of the significant outcomes of the set of interviews in this book is the insight into the multiple allegiances and sources of influence upon these theorists' work, resisting their pigeonholing according to conventional labels.

This collected set of dialogues between major contemporary political theorists and interlocutors engaged by their writing provides an accessible introduction to the current state of political theory. Above all, the interviews disclose how contemporary theory is not one thing, rather it represents a series of distinct but overlapping ways in which politics may be questioned and appraised. Each of the individual theorists reflects upon politics in distinct ways, which evoke, analyse, and criticize its contemporary theory and practice. Their standpoints are in turn occasioned by individual contexts, personal experiences, political events, and particular traditions of thought. What these theorists collectively register is a diversity of perspectives from which the problems and possibilities of politics are viewed in the contemporary world. They imagine politics in differing ways and practise theory in particular styles. In their conversations, they observe what they take to be central to politics right now and speculate on how theory might develop in the future. In this conclusion, the current state of play in political theory and the nature of its overlapping webs of argument will be examined and its relationship to preceding traditions and possible future developments assessed.

Political theory in the 1960s was not dead after all. It perhaps seemed so if one only had a narrow focus and perspective. In fact, it was alive and kicking against the traces in many places and in several styles;

in Eastern and Western Europe, and in the Third World, even if the West set the paradigms and differences of place, gender, and culture were underrecognized. There were post-metaphysical perspectives and grand metaphysical schemes, leftist radical manifestoes for revolution and archly conservative anti-rationalist defences of the old or rather the new post-war order. Political theory today is also far from dead; indeed it is livelier than ever with a greater recognition of the contingency of the state, the significance of cultural and sexual differences, and the specificity of geographical orientation. The theorists who are interviewed in this book are drawn from continental Europe, the UK, the USA, and the developing world, and there are feminist and subaltern scholars as well as those who are classified as historical, analytical, and radical theorists, whose distinctive and overlapping influences may be traced to continental and Anglo-American sources.

There are also significant differences between then and now. Political theory will not be pronounced dead today, for there is a confidence in theorizing in various analytic and deconstructive ways. That confidence enlivens and informs the interviews that compose this book, for theorists trace and elaborate cross-cutting subtle stories of how the political world is to be understood and appraised. It is justified by the variety and richness of the imaginative engagement of the theorists collected in these pages, and it is mediated by a professional recognition of the limits of political theory. Most of the political theorists in this collection have a preference to refrain from engaging in large-scale metaphysics to support their theorizing. Forst, for instance, is a continental theorist, whose work is framed within the post-metaphysical limits that were pronounced by Habermas and accepted by analytical theorists. In different idioms, Honig, Skinner, and Pettit would accept that theorizing cannot presume to provide the underlying conditions of meaning and truth, within which the ontology of the political world can be disclosed.

Today, the conditionality and contingency of the nation-state have gained a more widespread recognition than before, so that it is no longer presumed to be the automatic unreflected object of political analysis, which liberals, conservatives, and radicals of the 1960s tended to assume was here to stay. Rawls, for instance, at the end of the 1960s published *A Theory of Justice*, perhaps the consummation of immediate post-war political theory, in which he postulated the principles of justice as applying to the nation-state. In the contemporary dialogues of this book, however, theorists from Walker to Cohen do not assume that the state is the limit of political analysis, and even theorists who are not

labelled international political theorists take the international order and challenges to it to be relevant to their analyses of justice, democracy, and freedom.

An intriguing question for the future of political theory is how theorists will reflect upon and assess the forms of political order, constituting differing scales of association from that of nation-states. While some political voices press for a global or cosmopolitan order, which is supported in his interview by Cohen, other voices, notably Chakrabarty in his contribution underline the particularities of judgment that theorists associated with specific historic cultural atmospheres are liable to construct. Many theorists, notably Sen, highlight how theorists, as human beings, are interested in issues of justice and freedom as they are exhibited in particular points of poverty and hardship on the globe. Others, such as Honig, Barber, and Forst identify citizens as being engaged in a variety of activities and argue that borders cannot arrest the flows of responsibility and concern. Honig is surely right to recognize that this widening of frames of political debate and judgment also allow for the possibilities of multiple forms of injustice as all frames are modes of exclusion as well as inclusion. In the developing focus on the changing frames of political deliberation and analysis, it is perhaps surprising that theorists today tend to ignore more general historical frames of reference. Skinner and Chakrabarty bring an evident historical perspective to bear upon theory, and many recognize the historicity of political cultures and political judgments.

In comparison with classic predecessors such as Kant, Hegel, and Marx, there is generally a reluctance amongst the writers who are featured in this book to engage in large-scale theorizing to explain how the frames of political analysis are changing. Perhaps this reluctance is a product of justifiable professional caution in the light of the critique of grand historical narratives that was conducted in grand continental style by Lyotard and assumed more modestly by analytical scholars in the Anglo-American world. Again, the prevailing problems of the world economy, and in particular the problems besetting American and European economies may inspire a greater concentration upon issues of political economy. However the future of political theory develops, it is a reasonable prediction that political theory will retain its dynamic energy and that the theorists interviewed in this book will continue to be read with great interest by succeeding generations and will have influenced the theorists of the next generation. Political theory debates are animated and vibrant and the evidence is contained in the pages that follow.

Notes

1. Some of the interviews constituting this book were inspired by the feature article 'Dialogues with Political Theorists' in the journal *Contemporary Political Theory*. The interview with the late Gerald Cohen is reproduced here; the interviews with Benjamin Barber, Jane Bennett, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, Carole Pateman, Philip Pettit, and Quentin Skinner have been revised and extended for this volume. The interviews with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rainer Forst, Amartya Sen, and R.B.J. Walker have been conducted specifically for this book.
2. Peter Laslett (1956) 'Introduction' *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (ed. P Laslett), Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
3. John Rawls (1971) *A Theory of Justice* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

2
A Conversation with Benjamin Barber

Michael Saward

The first dialogue with Professor Barber was recorded in Peterborough in September 2008, with later follow-up questions and responses in June 2011. Professor Barber had been part of a team helping the city of Peterborough in the United Kingdom to think about its future and strategize how the arts can be used as an integral part of a regeneration plan. His presence in Peterborough was an opportunity for a face-to-face discussion about his work more generally. The further questions and responses in 2011 follow up on Professor Barber's engagement as a political theorist with other key issues of political practice.

Michael Saward: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk about your work.

Ben Barber: I'm delighted to do it.

MS: There's quite a bit I'd like to ask you about – democratic theory, your recent writings, your work on Interdependence, and theory and practice in recent US politics. But before that, it's fair to say that some early political influences shaped a good deal of your thinking?

BB: I went to an international high school called the Stockbridge School, an extraordinary school devoted to international and global understanding. Then I left for Switzerland for my freshman year in college; did my junior year at the London School of Economics, where I studied under Sir Karl Popper, Michael Oakeshott, and Ralph Miliband; and had a real introduction to political theory. I was particularly interested in Popper's idea that limited government was the only meaningful form of democracy, and that anything else was dangerous. But in Switzerland I saw a direct democracy in practice with people much

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

more attuned to their citizenship in the commune than to the nation, a direct democracy that mandated 15–20 referenda a year in the local cantons.

MS: Along with the strong face-to-face element in the meetings of the Landsgemeinde?

BB: The Landsgemeinde as well, exactly. It was hardly a place you could call totalitarian! So it was clear to me that the generalizations of Popper and others, coming out of Anglo-American political experience, really failed to capture the essence of what I understood to be direct democracy. That began a kind of quest to explore the parameters of direct democracy in a variety of systems, and led to my first book, *The Death of Communal Liberty: A History of Freedom In A Swiss Mountain Canton*. The book made it clear that communal freedom was not some totalitarian surrogate but rather a form of communal engagement that in later years people would describe as communitarian. I was later associated to some extent with the communitarian movement through that.

But of course the debate went on because people said 'well, yes, but Switzerland's a special case', if you try direct democracy in larger modern societies it's impossible, and representation is the principle that 'rescued' democracy in large-scale industrial societies in the modern age. If you take direct democracy and put it into a modern large-scale industrial society such as the United States, what are its possibilities, what are the objections? Does Popper's thesis hold? That led me to explore the possibility of a stronger, more participatory democracy in the United States, resulting in *Strong Democracy* in 1984.

MS: It has struck me that proponents of the main recent current in democratic theory (not least in the United States), deliberative democracy, bypass direct democracy, despite the practice of the latter in more than 20 states in the United States.

BB: To a large degree. Although deliberative democracy is seen as a feature of popular participation, the bias of modern liberal representative democrats comes into play. That bias sees ordinary citizens as incapable of deliberation. Therefore, deliberative democracy means democracy by seasoned, prudent representatives. This was Madison's view too – representation was a filter through which you pass popular passions on the way to electing capable delegates.

Now, on the contrary, it's my view that deliberation is precisely what ordinary citizens do when they think like citizens. I agree that the distance from the consumer to the citizen, from the rights-bearing

individual to the citizen, and from the private person with preferences who is polled by polling organizations to the citizen is a long journey. And it's a journey that involves civic education, lived experience, political engagement, and ongoing participation. Where I disagree with deliberative democrats is that I think ordinary people are perfectly capable – through civic education, community service, political engagement, and experience – of becoming good judges, and reflective, deliberative citizens.

MS: Does that view lead you to look askance at innovations such as deliberative polls and citizens juries?

BB: Not askance, no. With deliberative polls Jim Fishkin has shown that ordinary rather prejudiced citizens who haven't been very deliberative, if they are put into a setting where they're exposed to different points of view, actually become deliberative. I would say these are model extrapolations of the sort of process that happens among ordinary citizens – in a PTA or a neighbourhood council trying to decide whether or not to ban through traffic.

Deliberation is one piece of democracy. But sometimes we're forced to choose – do you want deliberation, or do you want people to participate? If it's a choice between not participating at all or participating in an initially undeliberative way, I prefer the second, because empowerment over time produces deliberation, whereas deliberation by itself cannot produce empowerment. I've been engaged for a long time in the community service movement, and I worked with Clinton on the development of the Corporation for National Service. There, I argued strongly that one of the reasons for community service is that, in working in groups, in a participatory way, young people learn the meaning of deliberation, in a way that they can never do in a classroom, or through abstract debate, or listening to people lecture them.

MS: I'd like to move forward to *Consumed*, your most recent book. I was struck by the importance of the idea of authenticity, which connects with the notion of citizenship that you raise in the book. You write of a kind of loss of a public sense of citizenship. I know you were in Denver for the Democratic Convention in August 2008. It was an event that looked very staged – perhaps 'inauthentic'. I wonder from your experiences in Denver in particular, do you think there is such a thing as an authentic politics?

BB: This quest for authenticity is one that attracts but also troubles me. I adore Rousseau but am on the side of Moliere and Ibsen in this

debate, when they insist that artifice *is* our nature. Authenticity is partly a product of the Romantic movement, the notion that there's some deep internal self hiding behind the mind, prudence, rationality, and deliberation. But to me politics is about understanding the other, sympathy for the other, understanding what we share in common; not just who I am authentically, but what we are as unnatural creations of a community. The politics of authenticity is not to me the route to democracy. Common will is artificial; it's something we have to construct to survive among strangers.

MS: What of widespread concerns about the sheer constructedness of the political spectacle, which is perhaps most on display at US party conventions? Are US major party conventions mostly about emotional branding, something you discuss in a market context in *Consumed*?

BB: Of course they are, but the party convention is a once every four year, three-day event that helps party members feel some solidarity and fellowship to the party, some patriotism, helps them get excited, get a little reward for all their work. If the party and its principles were nothing more than the convention spectacle, I would be concerned. But Rousseau was right about spectacles. He wrote about the Swiss spectacle, how on Swiss Independence Day on 1 August people gather to play games, perform William Tell, and enact patriotic spectacles. Every country has its day of spectacle that invokes a certain commonality and patriotism.

MS: Nonetheless, some would say that marketing techniques are today much more evident in mainstream political life. You write in *Consumed* of the corporate need to develop a love of a brand, rather than just an attachment to a brand, citing, for example, Kevin Roberts's book *Lovemarks*. Is that need now reflected strongly in political techniques?

BB: Well that's a very good question. Although I am a proud participant in political conventions, increasingly they are stage managed and marketed for a television audience. That I don't like. An example? At the Democratic Convention, we were handed out signs as the speeches went forward. But if you held up the wrong sign at the wrong moment, the whip, the floor leader in your state delegation, would shout 'Put that sign down, it's not time yet. No. Not now. Wait!' My reaction was to raise my untimely sign even higher. Fortunately, the American people being the rebels they are quite a few others did the same. So the degree to which marketing has displaced the purposes of fellowship and solidarity does bother me. There is a sense of inauthenticity when it's too stage

managed, when the participants are mere props in making television images.

MS: You are perhaps unusual as a political theorist in having at times played a close role in practical political affairs at a high level. You've written about involvement with Bill Clinton in *The Truth of Power* and were involved as foreign affairs advisor to Howard Dean when he was a presidential candidate.

BB: I've also been an advisor to international political figures, such as President Rau in Germany, to the city council of Peterborough in the United Kingdom, and I'm currently working with Muammar Gaddafi.

MS: You have talked about stepping through the looking glass. I think it was a phrase you used when you were talking about a car journey to Camp David to speak to then President Clinton. Is it an uncomfortable step? How have you managed to mediate the theorist and the advisor?

BB: As Plato discovered when he went to Syracuse, the danger is that it's an all too easy and seductive step. The danger is we imagine that, as counsellors to presidents, we somehow share in their power. I'm here to tell you we do not. At best we are privileged to stand on the periphery and pretend that we have some influence, when in fact all we are doing is getting a front row seat to that power. Now that's tremendously useful if you have a certain humility, and you use it to inform yourself as a critical theorist, which I've tried to do.

MS: What was the single thing about the experience with President Clinton that you would not have anticipated going into that advisory role?

BB: Trying to understand what it was that President Clinton, or for that matter Gaddafi, was after in talking to people like me. It's very clear what a public intellectual wants from the powerful: influence. It's much less clear what the powerful want from us. To some extent you might say they legitimate themselves by talking to intellectuals. That was true of Gaddafi; it's certainly true of Clinton. But they actually do so little of what they're counselled. Clinton would meet with a series of outside advisors. All weekend in Camp David we'd speak for eight or ten hours a day, and late into the night. Brilliant discussions – Clinton was a brilliant man who could've been a scholar himself had he chosen. And then Monday morning he'd call Dick Morris and the other practical pols and say 'Well now what are we going to do next?' It was almost like he'd had a little R & R, a little fun with us, and then went back

to the real issues of governing, thinking 'God forbid I listen to these people!'

But there's one thing worse than a president not listening to the intellectuals, and that's a president who listens too closely to them. Because ultimately he's been elected, and we haven't. One of George Bush's worst problems is people think of him as someone who has no brains, when in fact he's smart enough but listened too much to the neo-cons who infiltrated his regime and who advised him. He listened all too closely. And did exactly what they told him to do. Had he used a little more of his own common sense fraternity smarts, as he actually did in the second term, he might have distanced himself from the ideological rigidity of those counsellors. So at the very moment, I was in effect not being listened to, as a democratic theorist I was saying 'and that's certainly a good thing'.

MS: So for a political theorist or a political scientist to answer the call is a good thing, but it's important to carry the appropriate attitude with you?

BB: Very much so, just look at history, Rousseau went to Venice, Locke was a counsellor, and Burke served in parliament. After all, a political theorist should by definition be a public intellectual – you're not just a scholar; you're writing about politics, power, and participation. You're writing in a way that you hope will be heard by a public. I think the difference between political theorists and political scientists is that all political theorists are potential public intellectuals. They don't all have the ability to speak in popular terms. But I think the desire to do that comes with the territory.

MS: Are the political and scholarly roles in serious tension?

BB: From my personal perspective, they are completely synergistic. For me, writing about politics and participating in politics seems a completely natural fit. But in the academy, to the extent I actually participated in the real political world, I was sometimes admired but often decried for not being a pure intellectual. There was a pejorative view that if you write so that ordinary people can read your books there must be something wrong with you. That's not a problem with traditional political theory – you talk about John Stuart Mill, or Rousseau, or Locke, or Hobbes, or Machiavelli, or all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, you're talking about people who knew how to speak to the public.

But in the twentieth century, partly as a result of the nineteenth century German scientific research university, and the legacy of Hegel,

the notion was that scientists needed a precise, specialist language inaccessible to the public. So anyone who wrote accessibly by definition wasn't a scientist, and anyone who was a scientist couldn't be accessible.

MS: One case that makes me think of is John Rawls, one of the greatest political theorists of the twentieth century. I suppose it's possible that *A Theory of Justice* could not have been presented accessibly because of the complexity of the ideas. Could it be that in some cases the ideas just are singularly complex?

BB: I'm going to give perhaps an unexpected answer. I think John Rawls was a public intellectual. To be a public intellectual doesn't necessarily mean that you write op-ed pieces of 700 words for the newspapers, or that you go on PBS, or the BBC or Canadian Broadcasting and do a reductio of your work. By definition, as a philosopher Rawls was one of those guys who couldn't speak one sentence without three dependent clauses, and then each dependent clause required two other dependent clauses. That's how he thought, and in that sense what he wrote sentence-by-sentence was inaccessible. But the fundamental idea of *A Theory of Justice*, an idea that has echoed through the world in very popular ways, was deeply accessible because Rawls was trying to take this notion that you shouldn't do to others that you do not want done to yourself, and turn it into a methodology for achieving a way to reason to principles of justice. He didn't do it himself, but his ideas have been popularized.

Rawls's brilliance was to say I think I can make an argument for social justice by starting with the notion of liberty. That's a brilliant and rather simple idea. The execution was complex and took him down some difficult roads, so that even well-educated people couldn't necessarily read *A Theory of Justice*. But I think a lot of people appreciate the fact that what he's done is to elaborate the nexus that connects liberty to justice in a way that nobody had done before.

MS: A recent popularizer being one Barack Obama in *The Audacity of Hope*. Rawls's ideas on public reason in his later work on political liberalism get nicely translated into straightforward prose when Obama talks about pluralism and religious claims in the public sphere.

BB: That's a wonderful example. I really like that because Obama also starts with his own story. But he shows that his own story is an emblem of our responsibilities to community, even though it's a story very much rooted in the idiosyncrasies of its own narrative, which

is again another way of talking about the way in which individual liberty and our collective destinies are linked together in democratic politics. And that made him certainly a very, very appealing candidate to a lot of young people who were absorbed in themselves, but at the same time committed to wanting to do something more than just further their own interests and their own careers, and he's allowed those two to be joined.

MS: One thing you were doing in *Consumed*, in my words rather than yours, is describing a form of free market economics and politics, which actually deprives us of a sense of citizenship, or of a higher form of freedom, citizenly freedom – whereas free markets of course are meant in the prevailing ideology to promote freedom on all fronts.

BB: That's I think a very thoughtful and appropriate question. Because one of the things I try to do in *Consumed* is to link identity politics to the politics of liberty. And to argue that among other things market economics and neo-liberal ideology, in reducing us to our private desires and preferences, trivializes and cheapens our identity as human beings. They turn us into very partial creatures, a little in the way the *homo economicus* of eighteenth century liberal economics did, as if we are nothing but an economic animal, in Bentham's term 'a bundle of desires and interests'. When you start there you don't get very far! John Stuart Mill has notably said about Bentham that in describing man as a series of sensations, a bundle of interests, a platform in which a certain kind of trivial happiness was his only goal, Bentham had erased more or less half of the full range of human desires and needs. And in doing that had trivialized and reduced man to something very small.

MS: Pushpin and poetry again.

BB: Exactly. And that's very much what market liberals – whether they're on the left, or the right, whether they're New Labour or New Democrats – have done because in reducing us to that they do dishonour to the human race. By the way, there's nothing partisan about that because of course Burke, or Michael Oakeshott, would be the first to side with John Stuart Mill in his argument against Bentham.

In some ways, this boils down to a question of identity politics, and when we reduce human beings to nothing more than consumers we have a problem. Traditional identity politics is rooted in ascriptive understandings of who we are: I'm a Catholic, I'm a Frenchman, I am male or female, straight or gay. Those identifications give us a strong sense of affinity and fellowship. But often they are exclusive,

hierarchical, and inaccessible to liberty and opportunity. But the consumer strips all those away, leaving us only with the cash nexus as a basis for our commonality.

The alternative is the citizen, the citizen not just as a way into politics but as an *identity*. The citizen as a form of identity points to what we share in common, points to work, and the common projects we can do together. It speaks to common will and to the common goals that we aspire to, common dreams if you like. Civic identity responds to the challenge of traditional ascriptive identity with a voluntaristic identity that is nonetheless enriching and that brings fellowship, solidarity, and patriotism. That's why I was talking in the way I did about the Democratic Convention a moment ago. You could add Bastille Day and the Fourth of July. Holidays that point to citizenship not just as a means to democratic participation and deliberation but also as a form of civic identification, an identity that can bring a community together and create fellowship without the exclusivity of traditional closed ascriptive forms of identity organized around religion or race. Common civic participation provides a fair bit of what traditional ascriptive identity does. But it does it in the context of liberty because it's a voluntary identity, it's one we choose for ourselves, not one that's chosen for us by our history and our origins.

Today we confront a triplex of choices. First, you can embrace who you were by origin, be your old ascriptive self, who you were born as. Second, you can understand yourself as a bundle of desires, a solitary individual defined by your preferences and desires – the kind of person Jeremy Bentham imagines you to be. Third, you can define by commonality, the chosen communities to which you can belong: be a Rousseauian, or a Jeffersonian. The communities may include people with many differences, may be multicultural communities, but their commonality is bred by what you do, the projects you make together.

MS: You appear to be a strong political decentralist as a theorist, but decentralization is a theme that has hardly been on the radar of democratic theory in recent times?

BB: There is a great paradox of political theory, call it the paradox of participation. Participation is always local, but power is more and more centralized if you live in Peterborough than power is in London, in Frankfurt, in Tokyo, or in New York. But *participation* is in Peterborough – even more locally in the specific neighbourhood you're in. And that's a tremendous paradox because ideally in democracy you unite participation and power. But most people are concerned

with power and dealing with power, so participation and locality disappear. The key here is devolution. One of the confusions of the modern world is that people don't like bigness, and they talk about privatization as the answer to bigness. Terrible category mistake, because when you privatize you don't devolve power, you don't go to the locality. All you do is take big *public* power and turn it into big *private* power, turning big transparent power into big opaque power, and big legitimate power into big illegitimate power. Confederalism is how you try to put together through institutional arrangements the locality of participation and the centrality of power – some call it 'glocality'.

And that of course is the secret of modern Europe. Europe today is less a covenant of nation-states, than a covenant of cities, a covenant of regions. People might say I'm European and I'm Catalonian, I'm European and I'm Bavarian, I'm European and I'm Provencal. They identify with their local region *and* the larger entity, not the middle entity of the once omnipotent nation-state.

MS: Can you outline the thinking behind your recent initiatives and activities around Interdependence Day?

BB: *Strong Democracy* said that even in large industrial societies there were at least some paths to a more participatory democracy – you can't have everybody participating in everything all the time, but you can have some people participating in some things some of the time, and that's very important. But what about democracy in the global context? In *Jihad versus McWorld* and again in *Consumed* I argue that we live in the paradox of a world in which every challenge faced by nation-states – environmental and public health challenges, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, crime, exploitation of women and children, markets, technology, finance capital, immigration, you name it – is global and interdependent but the whole array of solutions and responses remain tethered to the nation-state. So it's like the nation-state is a cage holding democracy in, whereas all the problems democracy once dealt with are let out. That asymmetry spells danger for democracy because it means unless we find ways either to globalize democracy or democratize globalization then democracy's going to be an old fashioned, antiquarian feature of a [pre-] sovereigntist world in a post sovereigntist age.

MS: You deliberately talk about citizens across borders rather than governance or government across borders? There are of course respectable

proponents of world parliament, or world government even, including the cosmopolitan model of democracy á *la* David Held.

BB: Well, I just gave the keynote at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an umbrella of parliaments that tries to do some of that. The United Nations is of course a congress of nations. But both the IPU and the UN have the real problem that ultimately the entities they embody and represent are sovereign nation-states. They don't really work very well as truly international institutions for that very reason because at their heart is the contradiction of an international organization defined by a congress of sovereign states that are by definition autonomous.

MS: This is one reason why some people, including Robert Dahl, say there's a real limit to the extent to which international bodies of all types can be democratized and therefore real limits to the extent to which they can become a part of a kind of transnational democratic space.

BB: I completely agree. And that's why in the long term we need to find forms of global citizenship. If bottom-up democracy means you create citizens, then build a constitution afterwards, build an infrastructure based on citizens, then if we want anything like global governance we first have to develop citizens who identify across borders. This is a key part of what our Interdependence Day project is all about. We started it seven years ago following 9/11. What we thought is if 11 September is a memorial day for this horrendous event, maybe 12 September could become a day in which we thought about how one could respond to global terrorism in some other way than a war on terrorism. So on 12 September in a different global city each year, we would bring together artists, politicians, scholars, intellectuals, and civic leaders to think and talk about interdependence: how, if we face a world of brutal and malevolent interdependence, we might construct a world of democratic interdependence in response. We met in Philadelphia in 2003, where we wrote the Declaration of Interdependence (available online) and since then in Rome, Paris, Casablanca, Mexico City, and Brussels. Next year, Istanbul then Berlin. We also have a research project that involves about 20 scholars from scholarly research units in Turkey, Hungary, France, Germany, England, Morocco, Libya, India, and China. They are working together on what a new global paradigm might actually look like.

MS: So in institutional terms?

BB: Well, initially it's theoretical, but we are talking very specifically about institutions. For example, we proposed the notion of a global parliament where people don't vote, but where they meet. We've also talked about a network of global cities – when you take Hong Kong, Mexico City, Tokyo, Jakarta, Rio de Janeiro, or San Paulo, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, and Frankfurt, you have a series of cities that to some extent are more a part of the world than they're part of their own countries.

MS: Something many people worry about with regard to global space is the issue of representation. Without conventional representative institutions there's a worry about who's got a right to speak for whom – who do Oxfam and Greenpeace represent, for instance? You've written critically about representation on a theoretical level. Is that a real issue for democrats, with respect to global space?

BB: Two responses. There are many forms of representation. There's virtual representation where anyone who's a member of a certain group represents that group (like bishops in the House of Lords, there because they're bishops, not because anyone has to vote for them). There's a way in which African-Americans think that Obama is their candidate because he's African-American. Certainly, some of these international organizations are 'virtually' representative, as opposed to 'mandate representation', which involves voting and tighter control over what the representative says.

But of course we know that many traditional mandate representative systems are less than fully democratic. In the United States, particularly money and media are very powerful and utterly undemocratic in impact. Some people even think it so skews the democratic system that the peoples' voice is no longer heard – what you're hearing is money's voice, or the media's voice. So the notion that there's some perfect mandate representation system within national systems that can never be replicated globally just isn't convincing. So yes there are issues of representation that have to be dealt with, but I don't think they are decisive in impeding the development of transnational institutions.

MS: Do you have issues with representation as a democratic practice quite generally?

BB: I do, and again let me preface it this way: representation rescued democracy from modern large-scale industrial societies, without it I think democracy would've gone under all together. So I am deeply

appreciative as a theorist and a citizen of the role representation played in allowing us to remain democratic under conditions that every political theorist from Aristotle down to Machiavelli and Rousseau said weren't possible. They wrote that once you get large states they are suitable only for empire, and for autocracy. Representation rescued democracy but also brought with it a whole new set of problems for democracy, the most formidable being Robert Michels's so-called 'iron law of oligarchy', evident in Joseph Schumpeter's definition of democracy as a choice between competing elites.

Jefferson called that democratic aristocracy. The problem is the culture of leadership means that no matter how close to the people newly elected representatives are, very quickly they become distanced and alienated from those they serve. We see that in the United States today. Both presidential candidates, Obama and McCain, said they're running against Washington, as George Bush, Clinton, Reagan, and Carter all said before them. But of course Washington is nothing more than our elected officials. What the candidates are really giving a voice to is the iron law of oligarchy, they're saying very quickly Washington becomes a culture of its own, distanced from the people it supposedly represents. The problem is that they quickly join the culture they claim to run against.

So representation's deepest problem is it creates a passive spectator citizen body, which basically thinks its only job is to vote the rascals in and then to vote them out again, letting others do the work of government. This debilitates and demeans democracy; it diminishes the glories of citizenship, the glories of engagement, and self-government. I don't mean people should be doing what the lawmakers in Washington do, but the trouble is they end up doing nothing, even seeing tax paying as a burden, not as a contribution to the common weal.

My appeal to strong democracy intends not to *replace* representation with strong participatory democracy, but to *complement* it with greater participation because that attenuates the iron law of oligarchy, making it less likely that we'll lose touch with our representatives.

MS: Proximity is incredibly important in a lot of what you're saying. Virtual proximity is a notion presumably you could embrace as a part of that?

BB: And I do, and that's why young people using the internet and Facebook do feel very much more global in some ways than the older generation does because through virtual connectivity they have a sense of being part of something larger than just their neighbourhoods.

MS: Switching to something different – in *Strong Democracy* you linked the American pragmatist tradition to a kind of open-ended democratic experimentalism. Do you still feel you have a guiding philosophy, and does having one matter?

BB: More than ever it is important to me that I have a compass, as well as guiding principles. I think I can notate them fairly specifically. The experimental method to me is still deeply important, that's number one. The second principle that remains fundamental to me is the belief that – and believe it or not here I'm agreeing with George Bush – there's no human being who doesn't long to be free, and who is not capable of exercising freedom. Democracy is a universal value. It takes many different forms, there are many different roads to it, and there are many different ways of exercising it – tribalism may be one form of democracy.

The third principle is pluralism. There's lots of different ways of building institutions; there's lots of different ways for men and women to relate to each other. We ought to be aware of variety, and the possibility of variety, and not so insistent that *our* way, or some way we've theorized, is *the* way. Pluralism grows out of the experimental approach.

MS: Some fellow democratic theorists would claim that there's a tension between pluralism, on the one hand, and the universal value of democracy, on the other hand.

BB: I don't think there is, because democracy is how you honour the diversity of the human species, by saying each individual, each group, and each community has a right to rule itself by its own principles. That's not a cultural relativism that says anything goes, like performing clitorodectomies on women or imprisoning children. But there's a lot of room for cultural variety, and democratic principles that start with our diversity as a species.

The issue does get thorny. When I say you can have a lot of diversity but not enslave children, well why not? That's the sort of area where the tensions arise. But I think the Rawlsian approach is a very good one. Often people who say 'but this practice is embedded in our culture' are actually saying we men like to oppress women, and so on. That's one of the things that really interests me; how do we adjudicate the tension between universal human rights and democracy, between the universal right to self-government and the specific right of a people to govern themselves according to their own ideas and principles?

The democratic principle says that we want to honour diversity, but presumably we want to say something like 'but for it really to be democratic it has to govern itself by rules, which empower and allow a voice to everyone in it'. The general tensions arise out of the difference between self-governing communities and self-governing individuals within the communities.

Maybe an important fourth principle is the principle of uncertainty. You have to accept that there's no perfect resolution, no final principle. Conflict and irreconcilable puzzles are part of human life.

MS: That takes us back to Popper doesn't it, on fallibilism and the links between scientific method and politics?

BB: It does. I was very drawn to Karl Popper on fallibility as a base for knowledge. The claim we can never prove anything true, we can only show some things to be false – leaving a whole universe of things we haven't proved or disproved about which we have to be modest. That has always struck me as one of the essential features of the democratic mentality: that I might be wrong, and the other guy who I really think is out of his mind might this time around have it right. This points to Popper's 'open society'.

MS: What do you feel you could most usefully do if President Obama in about six months time has one of his key advisors on the phone to you saying we'd like you to come and spend some time down here, and talk in a series of groups, and sometimes the president will be sitting there with you, and . . . '

BB: Well one of the first things I might do is say go look at what's happening in your own city that's utterly disenfranchised, you know, among your fellow African-Americans in healthcare. And having a look at that will tell you a lot about what's wrong with the healthcare system. In other words, I would use my experience in local community organization to try to speak to the president about something he nominally cares a lot about, but no doubt as president of the United States he's going to be pushed away from in terms of his own community organization experience.

MS: The so-called Arab Spring is clearly a hugely important development for democracy. You have mentioned the role of Facebook – and we might add Twitter – in popular politics. You also stressed both the universal value of democracy and the value of pluralism in democratic

practice. In light of those issues, how would you respond to the recent events such as those in Tunisia and Egypt?

BB: The virtue of the 'Arab Spring' was its viral, interdependent character that engendered a kind of democratic mimicry across many distinctive societies. Yet the response to the democratic spirit has been parochial, each society caught up in its own special problems – Sunni/Shia hostilities, revanchist tribalism, fundamentalist/secular schism, monarchical traditionalism, and the fear of instability. Hence, even in the most promising settings like Tunisia and Egypt, progress has been slow and problematic – figurehead change but hardly regime change, let alone socioeconomic change (the Egyptian army still dominates the economy).

The reality is that overthrowing a tyrant is not yet establishing a free society, as is evident from the history of revolutions from Paris in 1789 to Russia in 1917 or Budapest and Warsaw in 1956. My view is that in a world of interdependence, there is little chance that democracy will prevail in the Arab world one country at a time. What is needed is a pan-Democratic movement across the Arab lands: the building of bottom-up civic and democratic institutions on a cross-border basis with Europe acting as a source of leadership and funding rather than of warplanes and oil companies. One might even imagine a Mediterranean pan-Democratic civic parliament bringing together civil society representatives of old and emerging democracies in a cooperative venture in the name of democratic interdependence.

MS: We have spoken about the opportunities and challenges of intellectuals advising governments and leaders. You previously played a role, along with a number of noted intellectuals, in advising the Libyan leadership on civil society and reform issues. What are your reflections on the challenges of such roles in the light of the outbreak of hostilities in Libya in 2011?

BB: There is an important argument against engagement by intellectuals in trying to change autocratic societies from within. This argument, looking back to Plato's futile efforts in Syracuse and Machiavelli's failed consultancy with the Medicis, suggests philosophers will be tainted by the exposure to tyranny without impacting the regimes that affect to modify. They will sanitize the dictators without changing them. Yet intellectuals also have a responsibility as citizens to try to live their democratic principles and affect change where they can. Ideas count,

as is evident from the powerful sway neo-liberal thinkers have had on the privatization and marketization of our world.

Moreover, there is no clear path from violent revolution to democracy, which means patient and peaceful methods of bottom-up change may have a better long-term chance of success than the alternatives. Certainly the uprising against Gaddafi was both inspiring and justified, but the consequences may turn out to be tribal war and the disintegration of Libya, while the slow internal reform process that people like Saif Gaddafi as well as former Justice Minister Jalil and former economic minister Gebril (both now in the opposition) were engaged in might have in time transformed Libya.

The real problem with the critique of engagement, however, is the hypocritical selectivity of its application. Those who fret at the London School of Economics accepting a grant from the Saif Gaddafi Foundation ignore the infusion of hundreds of millions by Saudi Arabia's Kingdom Holdings into Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, Harvard, Yale, and other elite institutions. Those who scoff at taking civil society reform efforts seriously in Libya and Syria pay little heed to the far more ambitious (and far less likely to succeed) efforts at civic engagement in China.

MS: You have been involved in local participation and engagement issues in Peterborough. With the arrival of the coalition government in the United Kingdom, large-scale cuts to funding of local government are in train. Optimists might say participation may be enhanced through implementing 'Big Society' ideas, and pessimists say that possibilities for fostering local autonomy and participation are under serious threat. What is your take?

BB: Big Society is a big idea, especially in a nation that is as unitary and paternalistic (nanny-state style) as Britain. For while America, with its separation of power, federalized, weak-state system, could actually use a little more concerted central government, the United Kingdom could do with more civil society and engaged citizenship – exactly what the Peterborough experiment was about. However, government and civil society work in tandem, each needing the other to be successful. Civil society cannot be a surrogate for government.

You cannot defund the public sector and take away all of its government resources and then ask civil society to step in and do all the public work. Cynics argue that Big Society is merely a diversion so that the Tories can dismantle the public sector. But even if well intentioned, and even if a more robust civil society is needed in Britain

today, taking all the air out of the government sector in the name of blowing air into the civic sector is a dangerous and delusional strategy bound to leave citizens as sceptical about civil society (they shouldn't be!) as they already are about government (they shouldn't be). Civil society is not about saving money but about engaging citizens.

MS: Thanks so much for taking the time to have this wide-ranging conversation.

BB: Thank you very much.

3

Vital Materiality and Non-Human Agency: An Interview with Jane Bennett

Gulshan Ara Khan

Jane Bennett, Professor of Political Theory at the Department of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, published her awaited book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* in 2010. Her distinctive notion of 'vibrant matter' invokes a new and different political imaginary outside the Hegelian and psychoanalytic framework of the subject and object/other relation. Bennett demonstrates that both human and non-human entities (including inorganic matter) are composed of 'vibrant matter'. In Bennett's view, matter that we consider 'dead' such as fossils and stones is not actually dead but very much alive and is constituted by a lively and energetic play of forces. Following a long tradition of thinkers who have sought to decentre 'the human' (e.g. Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault), Bennett's emphasis on non-human matter challenges the ontological privileging of 'the human'. However, her notion of 'distributive agency' creatively affirms the necessity of human embodiment, understood as one site of agency within and across a multiplicity of other material bodies and formations. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett deploys the provocative strategy of anthropomorphizing to demonstrate the affinities between human and non-human matter and to challenge the anthropocentrism of humanist approaches. Her notion of agency also seeks to avoid reducing politics to morality, which has implications for the predominant analytical framework that is heavily underpinned by a Kantian conception of moral agency with its emphasis on intuitions, duties and obligations. Bennett's contribution to political theory with its accentuation on nature, ethics, aesthetics, environmentalism, and vitalism is inter-laced with a political interest in the literary writings of Kafka, Coetzee, Thoreau, and Kundera, on whom she has

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published several articles and essays. Her work has clear implications for rethinking our relations to and engagement with the vitality of nature.

Gulshan Khan: Jane, thanks for agreeing to this interview. I would like to begin by exploring some of the themes from your new book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), which has been positively received by both sympathizers and critics alike. I will then move onto questions about your theory about the enchantment of modernity, nature, and agency. So to begin, then, can I ask you to explain your notion of 'things' or 'vibrant matter' and how it differs from contending versions?

Jane Bennett: I'm trying to take 'things' more seriously than political theorists had been taking them. By 'things' I mean the materialities usually figured as inanimate objects, passive utilities, occasional interruptions, or background context – figured, that is, in ways that give all the active, creative power *to humans*. I focus on five exemplary 'things' in the book: stem cells, fish oils, electricity, metal, and trash. Our habit of parsing the world into passive matter (it) and vibrant life (us) is what Jacques Rancière (in another context) called a 'partition of the sensible'. In other words, it limits what we are able to sense; it places below the threshold of note the active powers of material formations, such as the way landfills are, as we speak, generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane, or the way omega-3 fatty acids can transform brain chemistry and mood, or the way the differential rates of cooling organize the unpredictable patterns of granite.

My experiment is this: What would the world look and feel like, were the life/matter binary to fall into disuse, were it to be translated into differences in degree rather than kind? And how would political analyses of events change, were they to recognize an elemental, material agency distributed across bodies, human and non-human? Who or what would count as a 'stakeholder'? How would a 'public' be constituted? Would politics become less centred around the punitive project of finding individual human agents responsible for the public problems of, say, an electricity blackout or an epidemic of obesity, and more concerned with identifying how the complex human non-human assemblage that's churning out the negative effect and with investigating how this assemblage manages to hold itself together – how it endures or feeds itself? Until we do that, political attempts to remedy the problem are likely to be ineffective.

GK: What sort of politics or agency follows from your notion of 'vibrant matter'?

JB: I seek a style of political analysis wherein the default locus of agency is presumed to be an assemblage of human and non-human, of physiological, physical, and technological elements. By assemblage I mean a configuration of an ontologically diverse range of actants, of vital materialities of various sorts that produce effects. Assemblages are throbbing collectives with uneven topographies, and because some of the points at which their affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, power or efficacy is not distributed equally across its surface. An assemblage has no sovereignty in the classical sense, for it is not governed by a central head that persistently determines its trajectory or impact. The effects generated by an assemblage include those that are unheralded or emergent, rather than preformed as possibilities awaiting realization. Assemblages appear as such when their effects are felt by us as problems, or as affordances. In other words, the outlines of these strange machines appear retroactively in the wake of their effects on us. The 'on us' remain important to me as a human, even as I strive to better acknowledge the vital participation of a host of non-humans inside and around human bodies. These others too strive to persist, in Spinoza's sense of a conative drive. But I too have a conatus and thus still retain a degree of 'speciesism'.

To be clear: the agency of assemblages of which I speak is not the strong kind of agency aspirationally attributed to humans or God. My contention, rather, is that if one looks closely enough, the productive impetus of change is always a congregation. As my friend Ben Corson helped me to see, not only is human agency always already distributed to 'our' tools, microbes, minerals, and sounds. It only emerges *as* agentic via its distribution into the 'foreign' materialities we are all too eager to figure as mere objects.

GK: What kind of materialist are you and from whom do you take inspiration?

JB: I was initially drawn to (what turned out to be a quite diverse tradition of) materialism because of its non-theism and its pragmatic this-worldly focus. I sought in particular a materialism where a *mechanistic* model of Nature or of change did not serve as the default, for that model implicitly gives humans the status of consummate agents who run the machine. I wanted to follow what Althusser called an underground stream of a more aleatory materialism. For me, the stream

includes Spinoza, whose notion of affective bodies that strive to enhance their power of activity by forming alliances with other bodies contributes to my materialism – even if the question of God-or-Nature within his metaphysics of Substance is more complicated than that. The stream also includes Diderot's picture of matter as a spider web of vibrating threads, Nietzsche's image of Nature as a 'play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many', Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a 'material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden', and Bruno Latour's horizontal ontology of human and non-human actants.

I also take inspiration from Epicurus and Lucretius because of their idea that there is a swerve of unpredictability at the heart of matter (the *clinamen*) and their monistic faith that everything is made of the same quirky stuff, the same 'building blocks', if you will. Lucretius speaks of primordia; today we might call them atoms, quarks, particle-streams, and matter-energy. This same-stuff claim, which insinuates that deep down all's connected, resonates with an *ecological sensibility*, and that is important to me. But the oneness to which Epicureanism attests is neither a smooth harmony of parts nor a diversity unified by a common spirit. It is, as Michel Serres (2001) says about it in *The Birth of Physics*, a turbulent field in which various and variable materialities collide, congeal, morph, and disintegrate.

Epicureanism is too simple in its imagery of individual atoms falling and swerving in the void, but I share its conviction that there is a natural tendency to the way things are – and that human decency and a decent politics are fostered to the extent that we are tuned-in to the strange logic of turbulence. This ontological field of turbulence is heterogeneous, with lots of internal differences and differentiation. This differentiation is profound in the sense that there is no one key difference, no single red thread – 'this is human, this is not' – running through it. Any assemblage that forms and operates is a joint effort of human and non-human elements.

One additional point about the idea of 'vital materiality': I've found a rich source of ideas in the tradition of 'vitalism', even though I do not endorse that tradition finally. Especially important are those early twentieth century strands called 'critical' or 'modern' vitalism, whose advocates included Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch. These vitalists distinguished themselves from the 'naive vitalism' of soul by means of their close engagement with experimental science. They of course were anti-materialists of a sort, for many of the 'materialists' of their day (and still of ours) were mechanists for whom materiality

is something that was in principle fully calculable. The critical vitalists did not think that nature is that simple. And so they struggled mightily both to remain *scientific* and to appreciate the fact that not everything was fully *calculable*. They were attuned, not to an intrinsic purpose in things but to an excess that escapes quantification, prediction, and control. They named that vital force 'life', *entelechy*, *elan vital*.

In their subtle attempts to give philosophical voice to the vitality of things, Driesch and Bergson came close to a vital materialism. But they stopped short: they could not imagine a *materiality* adequate to the vitality they discerned in natural processes. Instead, they dreamed of a life force of non-material nature. Their vitalisms nevertheless fascinate me, in part because we share a common foe in mechanistic or deterministic materialism, and in part because the lively materiality of which I dream hovers close to a notion of vital force.

GK: How does your notion of 'vital materialism' differ from Marx's 'dialectical materialism' and what we might call the 'materialism of the body' expressed in the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler?

JB: An especially dogged resistance to anthropocentrism is perhaps the main difference between the 'vital materialism' I pursue and Marx's materialism, Foucault's biopower, and Judith Butler's notion of bodies that matter. Although the power of non-human bodies and flows is acknowledged by these profound thinkers, I want to emphasize, even over-emphasize, the contributions of non-human forces (operative within 'external nature' but also within our bodies and artefacts), in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought. What counts as the material of vital materialism? Is it only human labour and the socioeconomic entities made by men and women using raw materials? Or is materiality more potent than that? How can political theory do a better job of recognizing the active participation of non-human forces in every event and every stabilization? Can we invent a better and richer theoretical vocabulary for 'thing-power' and the irreducibility of objects to the human meanings or agendas they embody?

As my political theory friends keep reminding me, Marx was not himself a 'historical materialist', and interesting work is being done to examine the place of a notion of active materiality within dialectical materialisms bequeathed to us from Marx and Marxists. Diana Coole's work here is exemplary, I think. I'll demur on the complicated question

of the materialism of the body in Foucault and Butler, except to say that the more one focuses on the activeness of the elements that compose the human body, the less sufficient the notion of the 'incorporation' or 'materialization' of human ideas and practices seems. The bodily incorporation of cultural processes is only one side of the story. Equally important are the persistent lines of connection between us and interior forces (e.g. hormones, chemicals, microorganisms) and between us-and-our-interior and the exterior milieu. What becomes appropriate is to explore the affinities between our bodily composition and that of non-humans, both natural and artificial. I agree with Deleuze and Guattari when they say that 'a fibre stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles and so on to the imperceptible.' Foucault said that his 'main concern' in the *History of Sexuality* was to trace the outlines of a strange new kind of power he vaguely discerned around him, a *productive* power that did not operate by repressing or by 'refusal, blockage, and invalidation'. Extending Foucault's method, I want to keep my eye trained on the *productive* power of things.

GK: Over the past 20 years a number of themes and concepts run through your work, which point in the direction of the notion of 'vital materiality'. How has this idea been modified over time and who or what has shaped the development of this idea into its current manifestation? What added directions does this concept take in your new book?

JB: When I wrote *Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment*, I was trying to 'unthink' my way out of an oscillation, identified by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, between two responses to a modernity conceived as haunted by meaninglessness, or as suffering from 'disenchantment'. On the one side was the 'enlightenment' response, which attempted to restore meaning by mastering or more thoroughly humanizing the world; on the other side was 'faith' or the attempt to re-enchant the world with a more modern (less sensuously present) form of divinity. In that book I didn't question the *diagnosis* of modernity as disenchanted (later I would); I accepted it, examined the pros and cons of the two responses, and then, finding both wanting, tried to imagine a better response (outside of a Hegelian frame).

The enlightenment response had negative implications for my ecological commitments, but the faith response conceived of nature as more purposive than my encounters with it warranted (especially with regard to my brother's struggle with schizophrenia). I then affirmed a stance

called 'fractious holism', which remained true to the ecological slogan that everything is connected but rejected the idea that the connections were part of a pre-given, intelligent plan. The idea was that we should try to discern, and then more carefully engage, the frictions, noises, excesses, and (though this idea was underdeveloped) surprising powers circulating through nature-culture.

Later, I turned to Thoreau's notion of the Wild to develop the idea of that fractiousness: yes, humans were 'part and parcel' of nature, but (internal and external) nature included that which was perverse or uncanny to it. Thoreau celebrated this wildness for the moral refreshment it could bring to a self that was also naturally attracted to conformity. Thoreau's idea of the Wild morphed, I now see, into the idea of 'vital materiality', a notion I first evoked in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. That book was not an attempt to re-enchant the world with divinity but to bring to the fore the ways in which 'modernity' is always already filled with lively and enchanting, albeit non-purposive forces. In *Vibrant Matter*, I try to position the idea of lively matter within a larger history of philosophical materialisms. I guess that in each book my ultimate aim has been to find ways to better cope – more artfully, more wisely – in a world that's neither a divine creation, docile matter, nor completely lawful. I should add that I pursued the image of a world of 'vibrant matter' in conjunction with a particular political-ethical problem: how to induce a more ecologically sustainable sensibility in a population whose political economy is irrationally devoted to endless growth, consumption, and waste. (Here I also recommend Thomas Princen's (2010) *Treading Softly*.)

GK: You say that your brother's struggle with schizophrenia caused you to question the idea of nature as purposive. I hope you don't mind if I probe you a bit further on this. Could you elaborate on the problems associated with understanding nature as having an explicit design and how this has influenced you in theorizing an alternative conception of nature that cannot be fully mastered and has no inner *telos*? How have your experiences with your brother's struggle with schizophrenia led you to question or support medical discourses on 'madness', 'abnormality', or 'difference'?

JB: To put the point bluntly, repeated (second-hand) encounters with madness eventually undermine any notion of a Providential nature. And it makes classical scientific conceptions of a law-like nature less plausible too. Or at least that is what happened to me. Like most people

in my (Italian-Catholic and Irish-Catholic) neighbourhood, I grew up with a background notion that external nature – the animals, vegetables, and minerals that surrounded us – was designed according to a divine plan. This article of faith was for me set in a liberation-theology-inflected Catholicism (a Catholicism all but dismissed by the Vatican today), according to which Jesus is a countercultural peace activist, a nature-lover who, like the Franciscans, Gandhi, and Thoreau, practiced 'voluntary simplicity' when it came to the consumption of material goods. These beliefs were an important part of the rationale for the Earth Day environmentalism I affirmed in the 1970s: if nature was God's handicraft, it was worthy of care and protection, and we ought to tread lightly upon it.

It was in 1980 that my then 16-year-old brother (a common onset age for schizophrenia) had his first psychotic episode. (He jumped off the garage roof because he thought he could fly.) He has been in and out of madness ever since. (The legal policies in the United States render it effectively impossible to hospitalize someone against his/her will, which means that the jails are filled with people suffering from mental illness and many others live on the street.) If you live with a person living with a brain that periodically malfunctions in dramatic ways – coherent sentences can no longer be formed, laughing erupts independently of any social or psychic meaning, the movement of ants on the sidewalk or cars on the highway appear as sinister plots – you can easily lose interest in the idea of a purposive or providential natural order. (The notion of nature as a purposive plan starts to seem like the mirror image of my brother's perverse conviction that the impersonal behaviour of ants and the anonymous movements of traffic are out to get him. Both assume purposiveness.) Again, the classical science figure of nature as law-like also loses much of its persuasive power.

The misery caused by the diminishment of the lives of those whose brain doesn't work right will make it hard to believe in *either* a benevolent god-creator or in a Newtonian world where the eternal laws of nature correspond to the mind of a law-giving God. The figure of matter as an active power capable both of (undesigned) self-organization and of aleatory alteration becomes more credible if and when you forsake those two contending conceptions of divinity.

I support medical – in the sense of biochemical – discourses on schizophrenia. Although of course it is true that social conditions, family contexts, and psychic structures are also involved, they do not alone seem to have the power to fix (or cause?) many types of breakdown of

the organic machinery. I support research in brain science and experimentation with pharmacological agents that might re-calibrate the delicate chemistry that makes normal thinking possible.

The political-theoretical impact of my experiences with schizophrenia is this: I needed to find a new basis – besides the 'natural order' – for my lingering commitment to a green politics, to a way of life that was more ecologically sustainable, less poisonous of the water, air, soil, and thus of human bodies. I needed a figure of nature that did not rely so heavily on what my friend Hent DeVries calls a 'theological archive' of images, concepts, and narratives. The figure of 'vital materiality' or lively matter is one such candidate for that role.

GK: Throughout your work you have suggested that an appreciation of the liveliness of non-human matter can help us to live ethically, and you maintain that we ignore this at our own peril. Could you explain how an understanding of the vitality of matter enables us to live ethically?

JB: I think that the relationship between an enhanced sense of the vitality of things and ethical life is indirect, although indirection can sometimes be the most effective tactic. It is a matter of possible alliances and mutual reinforcement of tendencies – a meandering connection subject to many intervening forces. In the context of, in particular, an American political economy, there seems to be a resonance between the idea of matter as dull stuff/passive resource and a set of gigantically wasteful production and consumption practices that foul our own nest. These practices endanger and immiserate workers, children, animals, and plants here and abroad. To the extent that the figure of inert matter sustains this consumptive style, another figure might disrupt it. It isn't a coincidence that Kant, when he talks about natural objects at the end of the *Critique of Judgment*, affirms together that 'the essential character of matter is lifelessness, *inertia*' and that man, as 'the only being on earth that has . . . an ability to set himself purposes in his own choice', holds 'the title of lord of nature'.

With regard to Heidegger's notion of standing-reserve, I agree that it can be put to Green use, although I don't pursue that task. I don't because Heidegger longs to recapture a sense of the universe as an encompassing whole in which nature and culture engage in a kind of primordial cooperation (even if that system of relations fades off into indefiniteness and incalculability). I too am critical of the picture of nature as calculable mechanism. But I am attracted to a more 'pagan' conception of materiality – as turbulent, energetic, and capable of

emergent forms of self-organization. It is worthy of our respect because we are composed of it, because we enter into various relations of dependence with it, and because its force fields can turn on us if we don't attend closely to them.

So, should we, for example, love HIV? I don't know if we *should* love HIV, but I don't think that we *can* love HIV. It is associated with too much human suffering. But its vitality nevertheless demands respect, more respect than was at the base of our initial attempt to *eradicate* the virus, which often resulted in killing the patient. The more *effective* therapy now aims to keep the viral load low, enabling a tense coexistence between human and non-human. It is also good to recall the vast array of vital materialities that were enlisted in response to HIV, the condoms, the laboratory instruments, the animals tested, as well as the revised sexual practices and rituals of human bodies.

GK: In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* you develop a polemical critique of the idea – associated particularly with Max Weber (1981) (but also many others) – that modernity is characterized by a progressive disenchantment of the world. Common to the various narratives of disenchantment is the idea that the emergence of modern scientific rationality has radically transformed our understanding of nature, greatly extending the capacity for human agency in a world, but at the cost of devaluing non-human matter, which has come to be seen as lifeless, inert, and devoid of enchantment or vitality. Your alternative narrative emphasizes the enchantment of the modern experience of the world. Does your counter narrative of the various continuities between modernity and pre-modernity enable us to draw a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power?

JB: I'm not exactly saying that there is no break with the enchanted world of pre-modernity. Clearly things have changed, especially with regard to what is plausibly considered to be the ultimate source of the power of things to provoke a mood of 'enchantment' in humans. If the natural world was once enchanted with divine will and intentionality (forming an episteme that Foucault called 'the prose of the world'), my claim is that something akin to that wonder can persist even without the postulate of a God who is actively infused into all facets of the sensible world. Today things can and do enchant people by virtue of their material complexity, or by their sheer this-ness, or by their refusal to fit into the categories we bring to bear upon them.

I think that those moments when things call us up short and reveal our profound implication in non-humanity are relevant, perhaps even indispensable, to ethical action. For ethics requires a bodily comportment conducive to the enactment of 'good will' or generosity towards others. What Spinoza called the joyful affects can provide a source of fuel for bodies that are called upon – by reason, habit, sympathy, or some unnamed motive – to love, forgive, or treat others with compassion, or to do as little violence as possible in one's actions.

So of course I affirm the 'rationalizing' project of disentangling political power from oppressive traditions, and of the norms of due process and the rule of law. But the will to contest oppressive effects must itself be induced, and the norms of due process and democratic rule are not self-enacting. In each case, they require aesthetic-affective energy to spark or fuel them. If, for example, the American public is to be aroused to repudiate torture as a tool of foreign policy and re-endorse some legal framework such as the Geneva conventions, the fearful and vengeful mood that predominated in the decades after 9/11 must be supplanted by another repertoire of public comportments. If Americans are to change established modes of energy production and consumption (to avoid catastrophic climate change and to decrease the social violence it is already entailing), we will need to stop thinking of earth as a basket of passive resources for the satisfaction of desires.

GK: For many modern thinkers such as Heidegger, Arendt, and Habermas, the distinction between the human and the non-human remains highly significant. By way of contrast, you draw attention to the fact that (despite their best intentions) the actions of human individuals often have effects beyond their intended consequences, and you suggest that forms of non-human matter possess agency to a certain degree. Indeed, one innovative (and highly provocative) element of your approach is that you do not restrict the notion of agency to humans alone. Do you think that there is any distinction to be drawn between the human and the non-human in terms of a capacity for agency? By attributing agency to non-human matter is there not a danger that the criterion for responsible human action is dissolved?

JB: I think that *human* agency is best conceived itself as the outcome or effect of a certain configuration of human and non-human forces. When humans act they do not exercise exclusively human powers, but express and engage a variety of other actants, including food, microorganisms, minerals, artefacts, sounds, bio- and other technologies, et cetera. There is a difference between a human individual and a stone, but neither

considered alone has real agency. The locus of agency is always a human non-human collective. (If this is true, it also puts pressure on the viability of the distinction between an agent and a mere cause.)

What happens, then, to the question of 'moral responsibility'? The responsibility of humans is reconceived away from an ideal of autonomy and towards the ideal of experimental heteronomy. If selves are always enmeshed in various assemblages whose contours appear only in the wake of their effects, then it becomes an ethical task to learn how to 'reverse engineer' the assemblage and its morphology. The aspiration is to become self-sensitized to the effects of the assemblages in which one finds oneself participating, and then to work experimentally to alter the machine so as to minimize or compensate for the suffering it manufactures. Sometimes it may be necessary to try to extricate your body from that assemblage, to refuse to contribute more energy to it (in the way Henry Thoreau advocated), and sometimes to work with others to tilt the existing assemblage in a different direction. In a world where agency is always of the distributive kind, a hesitant attitude towards assigning moral blame becomes a virtue. Outrage should not disappear completely, but a politics devoted too exclusively to moral condemnation and not enough to a cultivated discernment of the web of agentic capacities can do little good.

One example I work with in the *Vital Materialism* book is the agency behind the electricity blackout in 2003 in North America (and later in the year, in Europe). The government and industry response in the United States was to identify some human – some Enron executive or energy trader – who was responsible and then to punish him. Meanwhile, the relations between the infrastructure of the grid, the legislation deregulating energy trading, the structure of consumptive desire, and the natural tendencies of electricity remained unchanged. The danger of blackouts remains the same. The fetish of the exclusively human agent and the tendency to define social problems as moral failures – and their implicit assumption that we are in charge – prevented us from discerning the real locus of agency and attempting to alter its configuration. I don't say, then, that single, non-human actants are agents. I do say that agency itself is located in the complex inter-involvement of humans and multiple non-human actants, which together form an effective assemblage. So, an actant is any single force with the capacity to make a difference, and an agent is a more complex formation made up of a variety of actants. Humans too are emergent and complex phenomena, which means that the intervener does not fully pre-exist the intervention.

My point is really a pragmatic one: ethics and politics have more traction on material assemblages and the way they reproduce patterns of effects than they can have on that elusive spiritual entity called the 'moral subject'. Here, I agree with John Dewey that 'philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.'

GK: In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* you explore the power of commodities to enchant us. You agree with Marx about the mystifying nature of the commodity. However, you argue that his understanding of commodity fetishism – as well as Adorno's and Horkheimer's (1972) work on 'The Culture Industry' that builds upon Marx's analysis – is insufficient to explain the fascination with commodities and the power of advertising in contemporary capitalist society. How can your emphasis on the elements of enchantment in modern capitalism help oppressed people resist and challenge the superficial desires created by capitalist entrepreneurs and help bring about a more equitable society?

JB: Since I had been arguing that cultural artefacts (and not only nature) had the power to enchant and that this power could become ethical, I wanted to examine a hard case: enchantment issuing from the commodified object. In particular, I focused on The GAP's khakis pants, or, to be more precise, on the television advertisement for them where young men and women clad in beige material danced to swing music.

I don't believe in God, magic, pantheism, or the (almost-convincing) panpsychism defended by Freya Mathews in her *For Love of Matter* (2003) and *Reinhabiting Reality* (2004). I am a materialist girl living in a material world, and I take my enchantment where I can get it. When I watched the GAP commercial, I was enchanted. It animated in my body, and presumably in others, a certain pleasurable energy or vitality. But what kind of relationship did this affect bear to the intentions of its artistic creators? My answer was that, like electricity, the charged affect generated by the commercial was an unruly, swerving force, one apt to overflow the design of its corporate sponsor. This suggests that corporate capitalism cannot be all-powerful, and that the affective energy it generates might be put to other uses. For affects, once let loose or put into play, have a degree of independence from their creators. To be too committed to the idea that capitalism recaptures entirely all the forces it unleashes is to turn capitalism into a (perhaps evil) god and us into its servants or victims.

My aim was not to defend existing capitalism or even to idealize a more ecologically sustainable form of capitalism, although I do think it would be foolish to oppose the latter just because you favour more radical changes in the political economy. My goal was to explore how the mood of enchantment *works*: what were its tendencies, its typical path of development, and its aetiology? How does it sometimes manage to activate or enliven human action?

In your question, you worry that even if enchantment can sometimes motivate acts of ethical generosity, doesn't it matter whether the source or provocateur of enchantment is itself an ethical agent? Could generosity issue from an encounter with an advertisement designed to get consumers to desire khakis for this season only (designed, that is, as part of an economy of waste), and also designed to obscure from view the working conditions of the people who assemble the slacks (designed, that is, as part of an economy of exploitation)? My 'yes, it can' answer is based on a theory of affect as a wayward force able to ally itself with a wide variety of semantic contents and political projects. I also said that acknowledgment of the attraction of commodities needs to be combined with a commitment to reorganize work and the established patterns of consumption.

The point I elided when I wrote the chapter, however, was this: the promiscuity of affect means that it will *also* be unfaithful to any ethical re-deployment of it. I should have thought more about how to cope with or compensate for that fact, and because I didn't, it sounded easier than it is to transform commodity enchantment into non-commercial or counter-hegemonic modes of activity.

What I continue to affirm is the way commercials, by technologically animating the materialities that we normally experience as inert, dead, or beneath notice, pose a challenge to the life/matter binary, which is also at the base of the system of exploitation. I found in this high-tech refusal to depict matter as merely passive a potential ally in my own project to rethink what materiality is and does in the world. The infectious energy of the GAP ad issued from the moving human bodies on the screen, from the sounds and rhythms of the humanly composed music, but *also from the khakis themselves*.

This animism was what the ad men sought: viewers would associate vitality (or youth or life) with GAP khakis and, because vitality is attractive, desire the pants. This would not work where the dancing pants to be joined, in the full picture, by the exploited, fatigued, and stressed bodies of the assembly workers. But in calling its viewers to a pagan sensibility – to the childhood idea that matter is alive, that ordinary,

non-human things have powers over us – the advert nevertheless produced affective effects in excess of its intentions or of the moral compass of its authors.

Let me end by saying that what I try to do when I write is to call myself and others to a different direction, to point to those uneven spaces where non-humans are actants, where agency is always an assemblage, where matter is not inert, where man is not lord, where everything is made of the same quirky stuff. We regularly traverse these spaces but tend to pass through them without paying attention. To inhabit them more fully is to find ourselves speaking new words, having new feelings, taking on new postures and practices, making adjustments to the pace and scope, and ranking of our encounters with the 'outside'. I can't predict what kind of politics would result from this. My hunch is that the grass would be greener in a world of vital materialities.

GK: Many thanks for these thoughtful reflections on your thinking.

JB: Thanks, and also to my friends Rom Coles, Bill Connolly, Bill Dixon, Jairus Grove, and Jennifer Lin for helping me to say what I say.

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4

Subaltern Studies, Post-Colonial Marxism, and 'Finding Your Place to Begin from': An Interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty

Maria Dimova-Cookson

Maria Dimova-Cookson: Dear Professor Chakrabarty, many thanks for agreeing to give us an interview. You are well known as one of the founders of the subaltern studies project and as a scholar of South Asian history and culture. However, I can see from your biographical notes that your university education started with a degree in physics in Calcutta. You are now at the University of Chicago. What has been the path that led you there?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Yes, I did begin with an honours degree in Physics (with minors in Geology and Mathematics) from Presidency College affiliated to the University of Calcutta. But I was always more interested in the philosophical or conceptual aspects of Physics than in the more applied or practical sides of the discipline. The de Broglie wave–particle hypothesis, for instance, fascinated me more than finding out how exactly a DC motor worked. But that was not what got me into history. If India had had a more flexible education system or better educational counselling when I was an undergraduate student, I would have probably switched to philosophy. What aroused my interests in the social sciences – although I did not know them then as such – was my youthful desire for an India that was less corrupt and more just. One could call it an incipient interest in politics, I suppose. But inherent in that desire was a sense that the kind of nationalism my parents' generation grew up with had failed. I was born within a few years of Indian independence. By the time I was in high school, Mahatma Gandhi's party, the Indian National Congress that dominated the political scene,

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

appeared dominated by corrupt and self-serving politicians (they were actually much less corrupted in comparison to the average Indian politician today). Our adolescence found India in all kinds of crises. There had been a really humiliating border-war with China in 1962. Food scarcity racked the country and exposed the weaknesses of the country's agricultural sector (later 'corrected' through the so-called Green Revolution) in the mid-1960s. There was widespread unemployment, abysmal poverty in the world I knew in Calcutta. I had some very indigent close relatives whose condition, for me, acted as a mirror of the country.

A general sense of disaffection saw a combination of leftist parties elected to govern in West Bengal – my state – in 1967. Dominant among these parties was a new Communist Party – the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) – that had split away from the parent CPI. Like many Bengalis of my generation, I got caught up in the enthusiasm that generally surrounded the formation of this party in 1964 and its subsequent rise. The parent party sided with Moscow after the Sino-Soviet split. CPI(M) had members whose sympathies were with the Chinese on the question of the global split in the Communist movement, but the party had not quite declared its hand. Soon, however, it faced a challenge from within its own ranks. A tribal insurgency broke out in a village called Naxalbari in North Bengal and the CPI(M), then in power, violently put it down. The leaders of the insurgency were members of the CPI(M), but they believed in the Maoist theory of a violent peasant-based armed revolution ushering socialism in.

Many of my friends in College joined this new movement – soon to result in 1969 in a new and Maoist party called the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Haversacks on their backs and the little Red Book in their hands, these romantic revolutionaries left for the countryside to organize a peasant army that they thought would liberate the country by 1975! I did not join them, not because I did not share their belief but because I was genuinely scared of the prospect of being hounded by police who I knew could be extremely violent and cruel. My courage failed me. I actually admitted as much to my friends who, understandably, condemned what they called my 'petty bourgeois attitude' and began to shun my company. The trouble was that in my own heart, I agreed with their moral judgement and, on graduation, decided – out of self-hatred and as a morbid measure of self-punishment – to apply for admission to one of the two business schools that the Government of India had recently set up in collaboration with American universities. I succeeded. In I969 I entered the Indian Institute

of Management, Calcutta (IIMC), as a postgraduate student. The Institute was in the sixth year of its existence. A deep irony of post-colonial development in India lent this business school some unique features. I owe my career as a historian to that irony.

Let me explain. Marxist history was something I formally learned in my business school years. But this was because of the kind of curriculum the Institute had developed. Spurred by the belief that India could industrialize only by producing a professional class of engineers and managers, Prime Minister Nehru's government had encouraged the setting up, first, of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and then of the Indian Institutes of Management. There were only two IIMs in the beginning, one in Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat and one in Calcutta in West Bengal. The Ahmedabad one had been actively helped in its early years by the Harvard Business School, whereas the Institute in Calcutta had been graced by the cooperation of the Sloan School of Management of the MIT. The IIMs were modelled on American business institutions but with one critical difference: history was made a compulsory subject for all business school students. And the Calcutta IIM had recruited a well-regarded Marxist historian, Barun De, to teach courses on how British colonial rule underdeveloped India. But, at the same time, the key economist we read was the very neoclassical Paul Samuelson. It was as if the Indian manager was meant to look forward to a capitalist future but carry a deep anti-colonial, anti-capitalist memory! (It is this legacy that globalized India fights today.)

This split symbolized Nehru's India: an aspiration to be a modern market-economy combined with a deep distrust of the West's predatory history and thus a conflicted relationship to capitalism. But for me the discovery of Marxist social history was a godsend. Here I was, learning about large-scale socioeconomic forces that dwarfed the ambitions and foibles of individual humans. Suddenly, my morbid obsession with my own failure to be a revolutionary seemed overly narcissistic! I took all the courses my professor offered, courses that the more practical-minded business school students normally would not take. When I graduated and got a job as a trainee personnel manager with a Scottish company in India, and my professor asked me if I would rather be a historian, my choice was easy: life seemed meaningless without the study of history. I opted to be a historian. I knew nothing about the subject though. My professor was extremely generous. He taught me much, often on a one-on-one basis, and sent me off to the archives after showing me a big, fat book called *The Making of the English Working*

Class. He asked: 'Do you think you could do something like this for our country'? There was, of course, no question of doing what one of the greatest historians of the twentieth century had achieved. I was a person of much more limited capabilities. But doing working-class history itself was a concept I was to engage critically in my first book, and of that more in the next response. For now, let me just underscore the further irony of the fact that without the Nehruvian legacy – a legacy we would later on challenge in the pages of *Subaltern Studies* – there would be no question of business schools appointing Marxist historians on their faculty, and without my encounter with Barun De, I would have probably been a standard, run-of-the-mill business school professor, ignorant of the ways in which the past mattered in human affairs.

Practical and personal considerations eventually took me to Australia to study for a doctoral degree in History. The University of Calcutta was too conservative an institution to admit someone who had never done any formal degrees in history as a PhD student. In December 1976, I went to the Australian National University (ANU) to work with a gifted and generous imperial historian of Africa and India, Professor D.A. Low. I met Ranajit Guha, who would go on to found *Subaltern Studies*, in 1979 while on a research trip in England. He moved to ANU in 1980. After completing PhD, I taught history and social theory at the University of Melbourne in Australia when, sometime around 1993, I received an invitation to visit the University of Chicago. I was offered a position there in 1994 and took it up in 1995.

MDC: I want to ask you about your 1989 book *Rethinking Working-Class History. Bengal 1890–1940*. In this book you argue, as opposed to Marx, that political economy cannot be fundamental in explaining the social relations and practices in Bengal working class community. You also take issue with the Marxian idea that history makes the bourgeois individual an indispensible part of the progress towards political emancipation, while the current liberal-capitalist society has only demonstrated 'the bankruptcy of bourgeois individualism'. You recommend an alternative path to political emancipation that combines better the 'citizen' and the 'comrade'. How is that possible? What are the outcomes of rethinking working class history in Bengal?

DC: Let me begin to answer this autobiographically, to keep a sense of continuity with my previous response before I move on to a more intellectual register. My first book, which was based on my PhD thesis, may be read as a long argument within Bengali or Indian Marxism. From

the very beginning of my research career – when I was an apprentice to Indian Marxist professors of history in India – I developed a troubled relationship to the particular variety of Marxism that influenced my teachers. On the one hand, this was the Marxism I knew and was sympathetic to it, but on the other hand it was all rather too formulaic and schematic. With Mrs Gandhi's rise to power and her political tilt to the Soviet Union – about the same time I was doing my apprenticeship in History in Calcutta – my professor and his other Marxist friends came to dominate the historical profession in India. Although many of them were good historians, they developed, under the influence of Latin American Dependency theorists, a tendency to blame every 'failure' of economic and political development in India on colonial rule, including of course the outbreak of major conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in the subcontinent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

My brush with such Marxism came early in my career in the mid-1970s when I discovered in the archives records of some significant violence between Hindu and Muslim workers in the jute mills of Calcutta in the 1890s. I reported my findings to a large audience, mostly Marxists, of historians and social scientists of the city. It was one of the most traumatic and transforming experiences of my life as an apprentice academic (though I have to say that my professor later generously encouraged me to publish the paper in *Past and Present*). I was intellectually mauled by my audience for not being able to produce an analysis or narrative that, by blaming the employers or the structure of competition in the labour market, would absolve workers of any real human responsibility for participation in ethnic or religious violence. I sensed two problems here, one that I could immediately see and another that I would see more clearly later after my encounter with Hayden White, and structuralism generally had introduced me to the idea of meta-narratives in history. I could see that my fellow Marxist historians attributed to *the working class* a morality and an epistemological privilege that were treated as trans-historical, as though they were true by definition. It was this realization that led me to ask a historical-philosophical question: What did it mean to write 'working-class history'?

I was still arguing with friends in Calcutta when I wrote my doctoral thesis in the relatively isolated and calming environs of Canberra. I retained from this Marxism a certain image of the working class as a potential bearer of revolutionary consciousness. This consciousness, by definition, was internationalist in character. It did not respect the

bounds of nationality, religion, or ethnicity though, as Marx and Engels said in the *Manifesto*, every working class was expected to come to terms first with the national context within which it was born. E.P. Thompson's great book walked a very delicate line between historical contingency and the theoretical expectation that a working class must – whatever its actual history – become class conscious!

The more I worked in the archives in search of class characteristics of labourers in Bengal, the more I was puzzled by the place of history in Marxist narratives of transformation of workers' consciousness. Were they always destined to become class conscious, whatever their actual histories? If not, was it always due to obstacles placed in their path by the ruling classes or the labour market? What room was there for historical contingency and, more importantly, historical difference? Did the latter really make any difference to theory? What was the relationship between Marxist categories and the actual categories through which my workers and their leaders, Bengalis of another generation, experienced and organized their lives? Where did the historian's analytical categories come from?

I should not claim that I resolved all these questions satisfactorily in *Rethinking Working-Class History*. That, I think, would be plainly wrong. But the book is caught up in all these questions that at least capture the spirit of a debate with which the book was infused. My thoughts went primarily in two directions, and I did not really succeeded in bringing them together until much later when I got involved in the project of *Subaltern Studies* and in writing *Provincializing Europe*. But that last-named book really came out of the last chapter of my first book.

Now to return to your more theoretical questions. It was clear to me that Marx, thinking through the idea of juridical freedom and the freedom of the contract that wage-labour entailed, wrote the figure of the citizen into the figure of the worker. One might say that in the classical telling of the story of industrialization in England, the Marxist narrative went somewhat like this: peasants > factory workers > disciplining and Luddite protests > struggle for union rights > the figure of the citizen/revolutionary worker. But this line of thinking was clearly at odds with developments in many Asian countries where the peasant worker became a citizen/revolutionary overnight, thanks to nationalist and revolutionary movements that sought modernization under conditions of low-level industrialization. Could the peasant become the modern subject without becoming proletarianized? Would the struggle to be a 'citizen' be part of the struggle to be a 'comrade', and not precede

the latter as in the English case? It was in this context that Marx's draft letters to Vera Zasulich became important to us as well as Gramsci's thoughts on Italian history.

MDC: Marx and his categories play a significant role in your analysis of Bengal history, and I would like to ask you what you think more generally about Marx's relevance or irrelevance in the South Asian context. Don't you think that there is a paradox in your treatment of Marx? In the context of your study, Marx stands as the pivotal figure of Western liberal thought, whereas Marx saw himself as a staunch critic of liberalism. Mainstream liberals are also sceptical of Marx – especially the cold war liberals who blamed Marx for the totalitarian regimes of the communist block.

DC: Marx was a great thinker of the nineteenth century. To think, however, that he did not suffer from some problems of his age would be wishful. He developed a fascinating historical-philosophical category called 'capital'. He was, in all this, deeply influenced by both Hegel and Kant. But it would be wrong to think that this category ever fully described capitalism (a word he never used) either as it existed in his time or later. Marx's 'capital' describes only some important aspects of the many connected histories that create the web of capitalism in which we find ourselves. I find the idea of surplus value to be an interesting philosophical fiction, very nineteenth century as an idea. You can't measure surplus value or transform value into prices. Profits are different from surplus value. Yet the concept is critical to Marx's idea of exploitation and to his critique of the category he saw as definitive of the capitalist mode of production – capital. In studying the history of capitalism, I have found it useful to distinguish between the many logics by which profits are made and the universal logic of surplus-value extraction intrinsic to Marx's category of capital. I think the dynamic of capitalism come about from its ability to mix multiple logics, which is where many Marxists would disagree I suppose. I tried to work some of this out in a chapter called 'The Two Histories of Capital' in *Provincializing Europe*.

But to think of Marx as totally opposed to the liberal tradition would not be right either. Of course, he was a critic of liberal philosophies that did not see into 'capital', as it were, and that thought the juridical freedom of the marketplace answered all needs of human freedom. But, as Lucio Colletti showed a long time ago, the influence of Rousseau on Marx was deep and many strands in his philosophy valued the development of the concrete individual no less than, say, a Mill would.

I also think that there is usually no direct line connecting the intricate thoughts of great thinkers, be they of the right or the left variety, to terrible acts others may conduct in their names. No political philosopher can protect his ideas from terrible misuse by those who are bad readers of them but who may be effective leaders of people.

MDC: I would like to turn to your most famous book *Provincializing Europe* (2000, second edition 2007) and discuss the alternative-to-modernity analytical framework you develop there that explains Indian culture and history in non-apologetic terms. In this new framework, you bring together Marx's critique of capital and Heideggerian insights on human belonging. Is not the overall balance of your historiography, however, tilted towards the second? Is not your analysis more helpful in explaining Bengali culture than in criticizing oppressive social practices?

DC: The last comment is not quite true, and I submit to you my chapter on widows and citizenship in defence of myself! Indeed, the 'Eurocentrism', if I may call it so, of the book lies precisely in the claim that European thought – like liberalism or Marxism – is indispensable if one wants to develop modern critiques of oppressive relations in India. There are many pre-colonial critiques of caste, for instance. But to base the critique on the idea of equality before law (not simply equality in the eyes of God) would not have been possible before British rule. There is nothing in the book that rejects this position, which is why – and I have been criticized for this – I end the book by expressing my sense of 'anti-colonial gratitude' to European intellectuals. And that is also why the book accepts the need for universalist thinking and I claim not to be a relativist.

That said, it is true that the main objective of the book was not to produce critiques of oppressive relationships. These critiques, I took for granted. Instead the problem that I set myself was to think about the relationship between universalist thoughts we needed to produce these critiques and their particular origins in the deep recesses of European histories, even if one granted, as I do, that European thought incorporated much that Europe actually borrowed from others. (But then the capacity to borrow, one's credit worthiness, is always a sign of privilege.) So I was interested in the relation between thought and place. And my proposition was that philosophical thought expressed in ordinary prose (as distinct from symbolic notation or numbers), however much it sought to transcend its origins in particular histories, could never altogether escape the pull of the undertow of these histories, for such

undertow was what one could discover in the idiomaticity of the original prose in which that thought was expressed. The idiomatic nature of any prose reflects the accretion of particular and arbitrary histories. Historical difference thus attached itself – like tissues to bones – to all our social science ordinary prose categories. Hence the importance I give to questions of translation at all levels, from the philological to the metaphorical.

Reading Marx on a Heideggerian register helped me to make this point. But this position also allowed me to say that any historical case of transition to capitalism was also a case of categorical translation. I have recently written more about this in a chapter called 'Can Political Economy be Postcolonial'? in the book *Postcolonial Economies* edited by Jane Pollard, Cheryl McEwan, and Alex Hughes (London: Zed, 2011).

MDC: In *Provincializing Europe* you also develop a rather powerful critique of modernity, by disclosing its inability to conceptualize non-European cultures. Modernity has had many critics and I would like to invite you to tell us more about the specific nature of your reading. My understanding is that for you, modernity has not just epistemological but also ethical deficiencies. It fails analytically because its key categories of 'capital', 'citizenship', and 'equal rights' cannot account for the 'relationship between thought and human belonging'. It also fails on ethical grounds because it does not live up to its paradigms of justice and equality: your analysis of its history unveils elements of 'repression and violence'. Is this reading along the right tracks?

DC: There were two sides to my critique of modernity and your remarks capture one of them very well indeed. Yes, I did write about the repression and violence of 'modernization'. Now one can, analytically, separate modernization from modernity. And you may even think about individuals who were thoroughly modern but were against modernization (Gandhi, for example, but there were many others). But modernization – the building of the infrastructure of modern life: factories, hospitals, schools and universities, armies, the police, and so on – is impossible to think without some ideas about what it means to be modern, that is to say, without some ideas about modernity. Modernization invariably entails the process of someone claiming to think on behalf of others (who are supposedly not as modern as them). I was interested both in *Provincializing Europe* and in its companion volume, *Habitations of Modernity*, to ask if there could be genuinely

democratic modernization. What it would mean, for instance, for the modernization process, assuming it was unavoidable in the modern world, to be an open-ended dialogue between the subaltern and the elite classes? Can people displaced by a dam – constructed in the so-called 'national' or 'public' interest – actually stop the dam, resist the obsession with 'growth', and still be part of a dialogue about modernization? Or does modernization invariably entail strategies of 'management of populations' by those who choose to govern?

But I can say this only as a modern person, standing within the horizons of democracy and development. A person from pre-colonial India could not have made the statement I made in the paragraph above. Perhaps I did not make the distinction between modernity and modernization clear enough in the statements you refer to. I should have.

There remains, however, the question of belonging. That goes back to the issue of translation raised before. Very briefly, my position was this. As we in India made European categories our own (for instance, when Bengali poets began to write poems in Bengali condemning inequality in general humanist terms), we also translated these categories into our languages and thus into the process of being historical in Bengal. My idea of belonging was not so much about being rooted. Being historical in a place is not a matter of being rooted there or having lived there for generations. No. Being historical was what Europeans did in Bengal and elsewhere in India before they became our colonial masters. They went about observing native customs and practices and made some of them their own. That is what belonging is to me: acknowledging in any place that others have been there before me and have left traces about how to be in that place. This learning of how to be in a place involves what I call translation.

MDC: In your work you do mention the fact of proliferating theories of multiculturalism. What do you think about thinkers like Will Kymlicka, Bhikhu Parekh, or Iris Marion Young, who like you, explain and defend the significance of cultural difference? Could you relate your own way of unveiling the significance of cultural difference, 'dwelling', and 'human belonging' to the ideas embraced by various multicultural political theories of recent decades?

DC: As you know, one's debts are more numerous than one knows. I have been interested in political theory debates about minority/group rights versus individual rights, sovereignty for indigenous peoples, and

such questions. My interests in these questions arose in the context of debates about multiculturalism and indigenous rights – the indigenous people did not want to be part of the official 'multi-culti' push. But I have also learnt much from the authors you mention as well as from the writings of Seyla Benhabib, James Tully, Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra, Paul Patten, and Charles Taylor on these and related questions. Bhikhu Parekh's work on Gandhi has been most instructive for my own thoughts. And Iris I knew as a colleague. Very sadly, death took her away just as she was developing an interest in post-colonial thinking. Their work, Kymlicka's for instance, even when it considers the past, is understandably oriented to the present, sometimes even addressing dilemmas of policy. You are right to detect certain affinities here. But there are some friendly differences too. As someone interested in history broadly conceived, my own quest has been more directed towards understanding the place of the past in creating our sense of what Balibar calls 'anthropological difference'. I use 'dwelling' and 'belonging' fundamentally to disagree from a tendency prevalent in many Marxist (and liberal) writers, that argues from nowhere. Instead I emphasize the located nature of arguments, their often-hidden relationship to places.

You may ask, what is a place? For me, the idea of place has an inseparable connection to the passage of human time. A place becomes a place – that is, not nowhere – when you become aware of the various ways in which your practices and statements acknowledge, often unintentionally, without you being aware of such debt to dead people, how others have been there before you and have left traces of guidance about how to be in that place. Places can be local but they need not be. For instance, as we realize that the dangers of our present fossil fuel-based civilization are increasingly touching the lives of everybody – though in different ways – the planet in question becomes the place, and we talk about planetary belonging or about how humans should dwell on the planet. I should mention that Hannah Arendt interests me increasingly on many of these questions. You would not perhaps call her a professional political theorist, but she was certainly a philosopher of politics.

MDC: You have defended subaltern studies from the accusations made by secular Marxists that your critique of Enlightenment rationalism could give rise to fascist and right wing ideologies. What are the challenges the subaltern studies are facing now? Would you be prepared to comment on Spivak's statement on the new location of subalternity 'being covered over by the standard ignorance of elite theory'? ('The

new Subaltern: A Silent Interview' in Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*)

DC: Yes, those accusations were silly. No person on the Hindu Right ever used our writings. They consider us to be part of the left and rightly see these accusations levelled in the 1980s as symptoms of the internecine conflicts that usually eat up the Left. Those criticisms do not have any life left in them anymore.

The present challenges to subaltern studies have come from the changed circumstances of today. We thought of subalterns in a national context and through the filter of the peasant revolutions of the 1940, 1950s, and 1960s (in China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Latin America). Such dreams of peasant-based modern revolutions ushering in some kind of non-capitalist development have ceased to be inspiring. But given the consequences produced by global conditions today – food shortage, failing states, expanding megacities (Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums*), climate refugees, financial crisis, jobless growth, and terrorisms of different hues – the new subalterns are those excluded today from the benefits of capitalism while so much in the service sector depends on their labour, both in the advanced and the growing economies. These are the illegal immigrants, the refugees, and asylum seekers that all states militate against. How do we write their histories when national archives would no longer suffice and when memories and recordings of historical injury are dispersed and fragmented? Our old subaltern studies project, rooted in Gramscian and Maoist terms of a nation-based revolution, does not seem sufficient any more.

I am not in a position to comment on Spivak's comment except to say that I have always agreed with her observation that to write about the subaltern ethically one has to unlearn one's privileges. Our privileges stop us from seeing what we need to see. But learning to unlearn is an ongoing process.

MDC: What is your assessment of the current state of political theory? Your own historiography and philosophical analysis are based, to a large extent, on a critique of modern political philosophy. What do you make of the way subaltern studies and post-colonial theory have now become a significant strand of contemporary political theory?

DC: I do take an interest in political theory but since I am not a specialist, I will have to speak as an outsider. I think of *Subaltern Studies*

as historians' contribution to political thought. We were in effect trying to theorize the subject of the history of modernity in nations that have been formed on the backs of peasants, that is, by mobilizing and drafting peasants into modern nation-building projects. Typically, such mobilizations have involved peasant uprisings, jacqueries, disorder, and collective violence – no matter whether they were led by a Gandhi or not. In our theoretically weak moments, we wanted to see these events as presaging a bigger and collective revolution to come. But we increasingly became aware of the hopelessly utopian and romantic nature of that reading. Peasant insurgencies in the modern world were modern in that they contributed to movements driven by recognizably modern ideologies and institutions (political parties) and yet they posed the question that Ranciere and Spivak have grappled with in different but related ways: who is the subject of history? The question has implications for how we theorize post-colonial democracies. My colleague in *Subaltern Studies*, Partha Chatterjee, a political scientist who works with historical material, has used his experience of working in *Subaltern Studies* to conceptualize modern mass democracies in post-colonial nations through a distinction between civil and political societies. I am not persuaded by his argument that the disorder that characterizes democracies such as India's will help in the creation of societies that are recognizably democratic. But I do welcome his effort, as I do Ernesto Laclau's, to create new genealogies of modern populisms. I would say that *Subaltern Studies* provides the history that answers to such political theorizing.

MDC: Do you see yourself as a political theorist? Do you go to political theory conferences? What do you think of mainstream analytical political philosophy after Rawls?

DC: I make a distinction between a thinker and a theorist, something I have learnt from reading Heidegger. A theorist needs to tie up all the loose ends of his or her thoughts; he or she may build a system. They show a certain kind of intellectual prowess that is enviable. A thinker, to me, is someone who cuts her or his own path through a jungle. There are many loose ends, many paths not taken, many unexplained turns and yet there is the sheer pleasure of thinking. I think of Heidegger of *Being and Time* as a theorist, a theorist of Dasein. Later Heidegger is more of a thinker – his analysis of Holderlin teaches us as it goes along, it does not become a theory. Both modes of thought are valuable. But by temperament, I think I am more of a thinker than a theorist. I see myself

as someone who thinks politically – or more precisely thinks about the global career of the political – but with the methods of a historian, for these are the methods I have been trained in.

I have not been to many political theory conferences. I do take an interest – but an outsider's interest – in analytical political philosophy after Rawls, mainly because I remain interested in the future of liberal political thought. In Amartya Sen's work, for example, or in Philip Pettit's.

MDC: Which philosophers have influenced you most? Some names, like those of Marx, Heidegger, Derrida, Nietzsche, and Habermas, often appear in your work, but I am sure that there are others who have been significant in shaping up your ideas. Who have you learnt most from? Which thinkers do you think are the most profoundly important? Has this changed over time?

DC: As I have already said, I started out as a Marxist. I did not have much choice in the matter, having grown up in Calcutta and having gotten involved in Maoist politics of my adolescent years. For a long time, Marx was the key thinker I thought through. But the more aware I became of the European provenance of his thinking – in the Indian Marxism I imbibed, Marx was simply treated as scientific and basically right – I began to see both the possibilities and the limitations of his thought. I am still a student of Marx, but he does not define the world for me in the way he once used to. Just as reading Marx had encouraged me to go back to Kant and Hegel, reading Derrida and Foucault took many of us back to Heidegger and Nietzsche. And they transformed the questions that my friends and I asked in *Subaltern Studies*. Much of this, I should say, resulted from the way Gayatri Spivak confronted us with her feminist–Marxist–deconstructionist reading of *Subaltern Studies*, beginning with her epochal question: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Much of my later thought evolved in conversation with other scholars of or from South Asia, who also became key thinkers of the phenomenon called globalization. The three people to whom I owe a great intellectual debt from this phase of my life are Sheldon Pollock, Arjun Appadurai, and Homi Bhabha. But there are others as well.

In the evolution of *Subaltern Studies*, our initial socialist critiques of Indian pasts eventually became an interrogation of concepts and practices of modernity in the colonial context of British India. I guess two sets of questions animated much of our discussions at this stage. One was: What did it mean for intellectuals of non-European and

mostly non-industrialized countries – intellectuals who felt themselves to be both attached and outsiders to the orbits traversed by thinkers of Western Europe – to have to deal with the massive presence of European ideas in their institutional, personal, and political lives? How did they cope with this situation? Secondly, how would one think about the contributions that subaltern classes – peasants, tribals, and semi-peasant workers who became the 'masses' that Gandhi and others would lead – made to the formation of the modern political sphere in India? In thinking through these questions, I found in Heidegger a deep and important thinker who helped me to think about what it might mean to dwell in a world that had been profoundly transformed by European expansion. But he did not help with developing an approach towards thinking about the political in the context of Indian 'democracy'. There, I think, more recent thinkers from Foucault to Agamben, Badiou, Balibar, and Ranciere as well as older thinkers like Schmitt and Leo Strauss (especially their reading of Hobbes, not to mention Spionza's thoughts on the multitude) have continued to sharpen our debates. There are some profound problems to be tackled here. Life has been colonized by politics in India – there is, properly and practically speaking, no sphere of the private left that actually could be defined by rights – but does this actually make the political harder to conceptualize?

Currently, one of the problems I am working on is how one might think the human after climate change, particularly in an era when many climate and other knowledgeable scientists say that humans collectively have become a geophysical force capable of changing the planet's climate to the detriment of humanity. Yet I am fascinated by how empty the category 'humanity' remains and how difficult it is to operationalize it even when we know that there are planetary problems affecting us all, though not equally. I am working on the problem of conceptualizing multi-scalar narratives of human history. Most established political thinkers are not much help there.

MDC: Do you see similarities between the 'third' and the 'second' world's politics and culture? After reading yours and your fellow scholars' work, I am impressed how good 'third world' academics in humanities are – I hope you won't mind this categorization – in articulating their position in a philosophical world dominated by Western concepts. You have made significant progress with a challenging task: to provincialize Europe. Do you think there are 'second world' scholars who do not simply engage effectively with (or, indeed, simply challenge

successfully) the European modern paradigm, but who also revise it according to their unique cultural insights? As you convincingly argue, a self-serving critique of the West will not get us far: only a well-grounded reconstruction of modernity will allow the subaltern worlds to establish their place in a global community. Do you think you have established a model that other non-Western thinkers should follow?

DC: Quite a few friends from the so-called 'second' world – I remember in particular fellow historians Monika Barr from Hungary and Ewa Domanska from Poland – have told me, partly in jest of course, that I should have called my book, *Provincializing Western Europe*. Their point is well taken. There were indeed many similarities between how eastern European or southern European nationalist intellectuals thought about catching up with the Western part of the continent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the way Indian intellectuals dealt with this question. Why else would Gramsci's 'Notes on Italian History' be so riveting for us in India? At the same time, something I appreciated in Heidegger – a feature absent from Kant, Hegel, or Marx – is that, unlike the latter trio, Heidegger did not think for you. Kant, Hegel, or Marx had the answer ready for you even if they knew little about your history. Their systems allowed them to do that, whereas the later Heidegger did not give you the answers to your problems as they arose from different historicalities. He was more someone who said to you, 'This is how I proceed, given where I proceed from. From where would you begin?' So, no, I did not see my project as aspiring to create a model, even for fellow Bengalis who may define their historical inheritance differently. No history is a model for another. But our pasts are connected. We can resonate to certain thoughts and narratives in others' lives. That's all I aspire or wish for: that what I have to say may make others ask this question of themselves – 'From where would I begin to think my history?' 'From where do I begin to think?' – that is the question I have learnt to ask. The 'where' could be the planet. I don't mind so long as its 'where-ness' is explained. But so much thinking on the left seems to issue from a presumed 'nowhere'. I do not resonate to that.

MDC: Thank you for the fascinating insights you've given into your thinking.

5
An Interview with Jerry Cohen

Simon Tormey

This interview was conducted before Jerry Cohen's death in August 2009.

Simon Tormey: Jerry, many thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. I wonder if I could start by asking you about the project for which you are perhaps best known: analytical Marxism. What became of the project – and should we regard it as a success or a failure?

Jerry Cohen: In the beginning, there was Robert Brenner, Robert-Jan van der Veen, Philippe Van Parijs, Hillel Steiner, Erik Olin Wright, myself, and some others. When we originally met, the work was very Marxism centred. Bob Brenner wrote about issues of transition from feudalism to capitalism. Of course, Bob Brenner has continued to be very Marxist, even in his most recent extraordinarily ambitious books about contemporary capitalism. Van der Veen was writing about exploitation, so was Philippe Van Parijs, so was I – as of course was John Roemer. And everybody was committed to the application of analytical standards to the corpus of and the development of Marxist and left-wing thought. In some cases that meant analytical philosophy, in other cases it meant neo-classical economic techniques. I suppose that the people in the group looked inward to the Marxist heritage itself and outward to the world and to issues that engaged people other than Marxists in all kinds of different ways. Gradually a great deal of the Marxian corpus was eroded by careful attempts to decide what could be kept and what had to go. But in addition that process of purification led to a loss of an essentially Marxist orientation. For example, in the normative domain it came to be thought by many of us that exploitation, while a very important concept, was essentially secondary, normatively speaking, to the concept of equality. We therefore have to

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

be egalitarian and investigate what that implies. And then there will be certain consequences for what you are going to call 'exploitative' relations. That's why so many of us began to discuss equality, rather than exploitation.

In addition to that intellectual trajectory, there was also a political trajectory. The year 1989 saw the collapse of the communist world. Although nobody in the group was a friend of the communist world in their attitude to it, many of us, I think, experienced the Soviet Union – hideous though it was in many respects – as a non-capitalist space onto which you could project many aspirations and reflections about how you might run a planned economy in a more democratic way with more liberal freedoms and so forth. So it was very important. I remember when the Soviet Union collapsed, Sam Bowles, who is a member of the group (he joined in 1987), said: 'We're partying'. I thought that was a very superficial response to the collapse of the Soviet Union, because with the disappearance of the rival to capitalism comes the axiomatization of the absence of alternatives to capitalism. I don't remember when I began to realize that once capitalism got into serious difficulties, thinking about alternatives to it could be more imaginative and freer because people wouldn't be stigmatized by saying, 'Look what the alternative is: the Soviet Union', which I think to some extent is now true.

Two members of the group left in the wake of 1989: Adam Przeworski and Jon Elster. Neither gave as their expressed reason that there had been this collapse of socialism, but I think this was a factor – and I disagreed with each of them. Przeworski said, 'I'm leaving because we decided to get together in order to find out what was true in Marxism. We discovered that very little was, and now there's little else to do.' I found that monstrously arrogant because he wasn't there at the foundation and it wasn't for him to say whether other people wanted to stay together or not. He meant that he was leaving because the group no longer had a rationale. But that's absolute rubbish because the group continues to have a rationale being a number of people from different academic disciplines who have a radical orientation and who can fertilize each other's thoughts. There's still a great deal of interesting work that goes on, although it takes a different form. It's much less Marxist in its scope. For instance, one of the things that Seana Shiffrin, who is a new member of the group, has been working on is the way credit card companies rip people off and how they phrase the loan obligations. She's done a lot of legal work on that. Well, it's obvious that it has a radical character. It's equally obvious that compared to 'the contradictions

of capitalism' and how they are going to destroy the system, it's terribly 'small beer', so to speak. But I think there are still things for people to do.

So that transformed the group to some extent. The loss of those people and the kinds of topics that now get discussed in the group are sometimes a number of removes from central Marxist ideas. For example, another newish member in the group, Stathis Kalyvas who is a sociologist – I don't know if you'd call him a political scientist – at Yale, has written very interesting stuff about the character of civil wars, insurrections, and guerrilla movements in game-theoretical terms and so on. It's very important and innovative for understanding the contemporary world, but it isn't particularly left-wing. So really what happened to analytical Marxism is that on the one hand the rigorous and honest approach to central Marxian ideas led to their erosion and radical modification, and on the other hand the history of the period seemed to render the ideas of socialism obsolete.

I have a tiny book called *Why Not Socialism?*, which has not yet had the approval of the publisher. It's in this series published by Princeton University Press, which also includes Harry Frankfurt's book *On Bullshit*. I was asked whether I had anything equally small that could be like sausage with a lot of water in it – a bit of meat with a serious 'intent'. So I suggested this, which was published in a fairly obscure place. And I suggested it conscious that it was out-of-joint with the times at the time when it was suggested, because that was two or three years ago. But now, *Why Not Socialism?* could be really at the top of the agenda of reflection.

The fickleness of political thought is quite extraordinary. But of course people exaggerate everything, for example, all these statements about how Marx anticipated globalization and the global crisis are total nonsense. The reasoning that Marx applied to reach those conclusions has nothing to do with what actually happened. It's not because of the falling rate of profit, or problems with the organic composition of capital, or anything like that. What you have in capitalism is a fragile system – we now know better than we did before – because lots of things have to be kept delicately in place for the system to keep reproducing itself. And the people who run the system, especially in the United States recently, screwed up royally because they thought the market could correct some of these problems, which it doesn't correct – it exaggerates. So that's why we have had this collapse. But I met a Marxist friend a few weeks ago who said, 'This is Sismondi all over again.' Sismondi is one of the precursors of Marx who talked about

underconsumption – the workers not having enough money to buy the stuff that's produced. And this is, Sismondi says, because they just can't pay for the mortgages. But for Sismondi and Marx this is a characteristic of the *system* as such, and thus built into its dynamic. And nothing like that is true. It's just that some people were allowed to depend too much on what were going to be defaulting debts from other people.

ST: So does the current 'crisis of global capitalism' alter or change your own view of the relevance of Marx – do we need to revisit the Marxist prognosis? Should we be re-reading *Capital*?

JC: Well, *Das Kapital* is worth reading because it's a great book, but I don't think it has great lessons for the current crisis. I think it might have pregnant one-liners that make you think in a certain direction, but that's the sum of it. I don't think the analysis of the dynamic is relevant. But what I *do* think in the case, what is so welcome about the crisis, is that the ideological transformation is breathtaking. Since the Thatcher-Reagan years we've had – to some extent – a laissez-faire-ization of institutions of the economy, but we've also had a radical change of ideology – anti-collectivist ideology, a belief in individualism. And of course in popular thought things get confused, just as they do in sophisticated thought. But there are two utterly different bases for Thatcherite, Keith Josephite individualism. One is that every person has a right to decide what he or she is going to do with his or her own powers, and no one has a right to organize people in a socialist fashion to pay for other people's needs and so forth. That whole discourse is a matter of philosophical first principle. But of course they *also* believed that individualism produces an economy that is fantastically efficient and works brilliantly. That's bullshit, and now we all know. The current crisis is not, as a matter of logic and reasoning, a reason to question the philosophical foundation because it doesn't speak to that. It just speaks to the consequences of organizing something, which has that philosophical base, but nevertheless it gets polluted with that. So people doubt the philosophical foundation. The philosophical foundation could not have been based on the consequences of capitalism in the first place. People have less confidence in it if they have to believe it as a self-standing doctrine as opposed to because it leads to good results. And that gives an enormous space for egalitarian, progressive thought I think.

ST: On that note, some of your recent work has been about 'rescuing' things: 'rescuing conservatism from the Conservatives', 'rescuing justice

from the Rawlsians'. Is there a sense that you want to revalorize ideology? Revalorize the fundamentally different principles that people can choose as part of their self-identity?

GC: Well, first of all, there's supposed to be a self-irony about this 'rescuing' phrase. So the phrase is used in the book *Rescuing Justice and Equality* and it's also used in a paper 'Rescuing Conservatism'. Now I certainly didn't use the same phrase because these are parts of one project of ideological evaluation. I just used them because I thought it would be funny to add that other one. 'Rescuing Conservatism' is less rescuing from the Conservatives than *Rescuing Justice* is from Rawls. I'm trying to identify, in the rescuing conservatism work, an enormously large truth in conservatism that I don't think is widely recognized. The way to put it is if something is valuable, it ought to be cherished. And if you were willing to reject it just because something on the horizon is a bit more valuable, then you don't cherish it. Therefore, if something is valuable (the argument goes), you have a bias in its favour, even if something could replace it. So that's a conservative thought and I think that it has massive application in the way we think about the transformation of our society. Both planning and the market are hostile to that truth. Planners are always going to say: 'How can we get the optimal thing?' They don't have any particular respect for the current embodiment of value. I'm saying that the current embodiment of value warrants tender treatment, disproportionate to the amount of value it has. So we should conserve that which has value, rather than conserve value – because to conserve value simply means to keep the value rating as high as possible. And that means destroying whatever is in the way of it. I think that everybody actually thinks this. I think it's a fundamental part of how we negotiate the world. We have a commitment to the valuable things that exist, not just because they produce 'this much' value. That would mean that commitment isn't there. That's what I've been interested in. I suppose that I have pretty conservative attitudes to many things!

ST: It sounds a little bit like 'use value' and 'exchange value'.

JC: Absolutely: there is a relationship. And it goes back to Aristotle's distinction between use-value and exchange-value and his condemnation of the limitless acquisition of exchange-value and the so-called 'chrematistic'. But it's a more general point, because it's not just exchange-value, but even the highest kind of value you might want to designate. Suppose you have a friendship with somebody, and suppose you come to know someone else new to the neighbourhood. And

suppose the new person's characteristics are such that if you had a friendship with that person instead of the already existing friend – and there's some competition where you can't be friends with both of them – it would be deeper. It's still inappropriate to cash in your existing relationship for this deeper one. This isn't use-value versus exchange-value. The value in question is deep and honourable and fine, and you don't want to condemn people for seeking that value. But once you find the embodiment of that value, it is different.

Here is a way of conveying this in rather popular terms: loving and valuing have something in common. We could argue whether one is a species of the other, but certainly there are resemblances. There is a song from 1953 by the Ames Brothers that goes, 'You, you, you – I'm in love with you, you, you – I could be so true, true, true – To a girl like you, you, you.' If I were the girl to whom that was sung, I would beam during the first three lines, because they are directed at me in particular. Then the final line says, 'To a girl *like* you, you, you.' If the love is arrested at the stage of the reasons for the love, then should someone come along who is even more like me – or who's more like the features that the person has in mind, then I should be replaced, right? The problem in the song is that it goes from 'you', which is fine, to 'a girl', which is not fine because it's just some embodiment of these characteristics. Now if you take the song from *Grease*, when Olivia Newton-John sings, 'You'd better shape up because I need a man.' It starts with 'a' – and of course it has to start with 'a', that is, nobody in particular, because you are seeking love. But then when someone *does* shape up – John Travolta – she says, 'You're *the* one that I want.'

So there is this dialectic of the general and the particular, and what I am saying is that though you come to value something because of the characteristics it has, which other things in principle might have, you value it as the thing that has those characteristics, not just *for* those characteristics. So that is the centre of what that work is about.

ST: I am curious about your thoughts of the Rawlsian paradigm. It was very dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, and now there's been this ideal versus non-ideal discussion, which suggests that it might be on the back foot.

JC: I don't know. I read very slowly and consequently I don't read as much as I should. I would read more if I didn't read very slowly, and I'm not really familiar with that discussion. I can't really comment on it. I think, famously, Humphrey Lyttelton was asked, 'Where is jazz going?' And he said, 'If I knew where it was going I'd be there already.' I think

it's like that. I don't have a view of where philosophy is going. And also the phrase 'the Rawlsian paradigm' can be taken more or less narrowly. It can be taken in such a way that I am anti-Rawlsian or it can also be taken in such a way that I am working within the paradigm. I think what has been shed is the confidence in the original position as a device. That is obsolete and instead you have the Scanlonian idea that the foundation of all the norms has to be that no one could reasonably reject them. And that is a big transformation. Whether there is a lot of mileage to be got out of working with that new idea remains to be seen.

ST: Does the difference principle still inform your own views on equality?

JC: No, in my new book I have a chapter that attacks the difference principle. I claim that there is a *décollage* (if I may be permitted that phrase) in the argument. The original position argument for the difference principle isn't really a good argument any more. But there is an informal argument for the difference principle, which says no one really deserves more than anybody else, so we should really begin with equality. You begin with equality because there is no good reason for anybody to have more than anybody else. Then you reflect that if we could make everybody better off it would be stupid to stay with equality. Then you say that *the* principle of justice is the difference principle. But I claim in that chapter that the grounds given for starting with equality contradict the characterization of the difference principle as a principle of justice because the difference principle is going to allow inequalities that are based on arbitrary endowments that people happen to have and they are just lucky. The original thought is that if anybody has any more than anyone else then it's just luck, so let's start with equality. Well if it's true that it's mere luck and that's unfair, then the difference principle endorses that unfairness. The appropriate thing to say is that the state of affairs endorsed by the principle is unfair but beneficial to everybody. That is the right thing to say, rather than this is a principle of justice as such. So this is a criticism of the difference principle, not as a matter of policy but as a matter of characterizing it as just a principle of justice, rather than some kind of compromise between justice and being sensible – letting other people have more stuff, even if you have to bribe people unconscionably to produce the bigger pie. I think it's overwhelmingly clear to 'neutral reflection' that capitalism as a system is utterly unfair in the contrasts in wealth and

welfare that it produces and massively productive. This gets reflected in political philosophy, but the honest way to reflect it is to say, yes, it is unfair but very productive.

In what are the most moving paragraphs of Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx talks about the capitalist market, and he says that here we have 'freedom, equality, property, and Bentham'. By freedom he means that nobody is required to contract with anyone else; by equality, that they all face each other equally as owners; by property, that the workers own themselves and the capitalists own the means of production; and by Bentham he means that everybody is seeking his own. These four great values are certainly the values of capitalist civilization, and different political philosophers care differentially about these different values. Some are only interested in utilitarianism, others only in freedom, others only in equality, and so forth. Rawls tried to put it all together, but I don't think they *can* all be put together, because there are contradictions in these things. I think that Rawls is like the tailor in the story. A man comes to the tailor – he was there the previous week and the tailor had taken his measurements. Now the tailor has the suit ready, and the man is going to try on the suit. So he tries on the suit, first the jacket. But the left arm seems too short. The tailor says, 'You aren't wearing it right,' and he pushes down the left shoulder. The man feels a bit awkward but he respects the tailor's expertise. Then one of the trouser legs seems a bit askew, and the tailor makes him twist his leg a bit. Eventually, compliantly he leaves the tailor's place, struggling a bit with his suit. A couple is walking in the opposite direction. As they pass by the woman says, 'Poor man. What an affliction.' And her husband says, 'Nice suit, though.' So I think there is an edifice – the suit that Rawls tried to produce that would cover all these values – and it has lots of awkward places in it. And that's the story of much of the Rawls criticism. But I *do* think *A Theory of Justice* is an incredible book. There are at most two books of political philosophy that are greater: Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*. I don't mean that there aren't other *thinkers* who are just as great as Rawls – that's another matter – but as books. The thing is its relationship to the real world. In Hegelian terms, it is liberal democracy come to consciousness of itself.

ST: One of the more fertile ways in which this set of debates is being played out is in terms of 'global justice'. I haven't seen a contribution of yours to that debate and I wondered whether there was one brewing, or if you just felt there was an extension of the fundamental thought there, and that in a sense that all justice is global.

JC: Yeah, I'm a knee-jerk so-called 'cosmopolitan'. Absolutely. I haven't got anything to say about those debates. I read them. I'm interested in them. And I think that the cosmopolitans are not only on the right side, but also that they argue better than the non-cosmopolitans do. I think that the state is a really a horrible thing. It's a repository of violence, but of course others see matters differently. For example, if you take Nagel's anti-cosmopolitanism it's not that he says states are great; he's saying that the occasion for justice arises only when you are subject to a curse of authority. So that doesn't work. If you take David Miller, it's one thing to talk about communities, which don't involve a state, and maybe there is a community that is coterminus with the state, but it doesn't look very plausible for Great Britain. Even take out Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and call that a 'community'. But it seems to me that the kind of ties between people that Miller says they have to be for a welfare state are not ties characteristically occurring within a nation-state but rather in communities *within* it. Miller once said – we used to give seminars together – that if a student from Oxford from his college approached him with a question, he would consider it more important to deal with him than a student from Oxford at large and more important to deal with the latter than a student from somewhere in the country. I have a lot of reservations about that.

ST: Are those reservations primarily ethical in origin? That all individuals are owed?

JC: In a sense. If someone writes to me from Nottingham or Keele and has a question, those people could have greater need than people at Oxford who are surrounded by a lot of people they could talk with. I just don't share that way of thinking about it. I know it's difficult. I've just started to write about this (it's in a very embryonic stage), that is, about what it means to regard another human being as equal. I don't think there is too much literature about that in the analytical tradition. There is Bernard William's famous article of 1962 called 'The Idea of Equality'. I don't think there has been very much work on that and I profoundly believe that everybody's equal. But I don't know what I *mean* by it and I'd like to try and find out. I've done a lot of work on the *norm* of equal distribution. But that is a different matter. I think a laissez-faire, let-them-go-to-the-wall person is incapable of regarding everyone as equal. But I still don't know what it means. Now there may not be a question here. It might be, just as Barkley said, I've thrown dust up before my eyes and now I complain that I can't see. But I'm not sure.

ST: Doesn't this relate back to the starting point? That Marxian thought is a cosmopolitan egalitarian gesture?

JC: Yes, it does. There's this axiom that everybody should have the same amount of stuff. People who believe that probably also regard human beings as equal. But as I suggested, it doesn't suffice to regard everyone as equal to get that kind of ethic of distribution. I do think that laissez-faire people can believe that. So this isn't going back to the starting point because this is beyond and behind the starting point, something more general. In pre-bourgeois civilization people didn't regard everybody as equal. I use the example of All Souls College. Some fellows you can tell by their behaviour really do regard the Scouts as equal to them and others don't. If I say that, doesn't it resonate with you that some people really regard others as equals and others don't?

ST: Yes. Changing tack a little bit, there is a school of thought that says political philosophers, political theorists, should be engaging with the 'real world' – and they mean by that at the moment environmental catastrophe, War on Terror, credit crunch. I'm wondering how you would respond to the thought that for political philosophers to earn their keep in the world to be addressing these kinds of questions.

JC: I think these things *are* being addressed. And I think it's marvellous that they are being addressed. For example, I'm thinking of an article in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* by a philosopher named Leif Wenar about the resources curse. Very good article. All these questions are being addressed and they ought to be addressed. My orientation is not to address them. It's not something that I'm good at. But it's funny when people talk about political philosophy being divorced from the real world because it's so myopic in my opinion. John Stuart Mill wrote *On Liberty* in 1859, and Roy Jenkins implemented it under the Wilson government in the 1960s – a lot of it, and of course it's a simplification. You could have said to John Stuart Mill, 'You're off the wall. What are you talking about? Nobody is going to accept this.' So ideas have consequences along many routes.

It's undoubtedly true that if you draw your government people and your civil servants steeped in Nozick, you'll get different results than a generation steeped in more egalitarian thought. How will this show itself? In biases. Even in tiny things like local authorities where there are conflicts about how much you're going to tax the middle class, or are we going to have an expensive recreational facility in the poor part of our borough? Well nobody can conceivably say that *all* the money

has got to be spent on the poor, and nobody is going to say *no* money should be spent on the poor. And the people who listen to egalitarian lecturers are going to be biased in a certain way, rather than another way. That's a huge way that political philosophy has an effect. And people are trained as journalists. Jonathan Dimbleby might still have become the friend of Prince Charles had he not gone to philosophy at UCL. But I remember him well and it seemed to me that he was radicalized by that experience and he is an influential person. Things do percolate back and forth. I think that political philosophy is very consequential. It's myopic to think that it has to focus on the real world in order to be consequential for the real world.

ST: Do you have a view more generally on the health of political philosophy? Do you see political philosophers coming along who are going to produce the next *Theory of Justice*?

JC: Well, I think the flagship journal, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, of analytical philosophy is in very good shape and there are younger people coming along. What will emerge from it I don't know. It goes back to the Humphrey Lyttelton point. But I remember Nietzsche – I think this is in *Beyond Good and Evil* but it's an aphorism somewhere – 'What is a people? Nature's detour to two or three great men.' Partly, of course, it's a rather repugnant statement of contempt. But there have to be lots of ordinary workers in the vineyard for something special to emerge, and you don't know when something special is going to emerge. It's impossible to say if someone is going to come up with a synthesis of the same sweep of Rawls but of a different orientation.

ST: I suppose a different way of putting is, do you still feel the same sense of excitement about going to a major conference or taking part in a workshop? It's not a question of having seen it all or heard it all before?

JC: Well, I don't go to many conferences and workshops. I mean, for the selfish reason that I don't want to sit there listening to endless papers. I once said to Bernard Williams that I don't go to conferences because I either have to be bored or I have to be rude. And he said, 'Or like me, you could be both.' But in terms of excitement about the ideas and reading stuff, absolutely. Not diminished. I remember Richard Wolheim used to say about his relationship to philosophy – he was my boss for 20 years – he used to say, 'One's relationship to the subject changes from

time to time. At times one finds it most repugnant, at other times . . . ' I've never had an ambivalent relationship to philosophy. I've always loved it and the stuff that gets produced, and I still do. I still think there's lots of exhilarating stuff out there.

ST: Many thanks, Jerry, for sharing your thoughts with us.

6

Pluralism, Capitalism, and the Fragility of Things: An Interview with William E. Connolly

Mark Anthony Wenman

Mark Wenman: Bill, perhaps I can start by asking you questions about the development of your work and how you see the different elements of your project fitting together. I will then move onto questions about your most recent work on the 'politics of becoming' and the connections between your ideas and other approaches within contemporary political theory.

For a period of more than 40 years you have made important contributions to the discipline of political theory, you have engaged in many different debates, and – since the publication of *Identity/Difference* (Connolly 1991) – you have developed your own distinctive 'post-Nietzschean' account of late-modern politics. One theme you have returned to repeatedly in your writings is the concept of 'pluralism'. This has been of interest to you since your earliest publications – for instance *The Bias of Pluralism* (Connolly ed. 1969) – and since the mid-1990s you have established your own account of 'multidimensional' or 'network pluralism': most notably in the *Ethos of Pluralisation* (Connolly 1995) and *Pluralism* (Connolly 2005). Over this period, the concept of pluralism has also undergone a remarkable series of developments in Anglo-American political thought more generally. In the late 1960s, this term was associated with American political science, with the work of Robert Dahl, David Truman, and others who were criticized by radical thinkers – including you – for their narrow conception of the political and their naive behaviouralist assumptions about the operations of political power. Subsequently, this term has undergone a renaissance, so that it is now used widely – and in a positive manner – by neo-Kantian liberals, deliberative democrats, and by those – such as you – who are

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inspired by post-structuralism. This development is surely related to the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism, as John Rawls would have it: we now live in a society defined by the 'fact of pluralism'. However, we know from Friedrich Nietzsche that there is no such thing as facts, only interpretations, so could you please say something about your distinctive understanding of 'pluralism' and how it differs from these other approaches? What exactly is pluralism? And to what extent do contemporary liberal democratic societies approximate the ideal of pluralism? How have your thoughts changed on these issues over the past 40 years?

Bill Connolly: My thinking about pluralism has, as you say, shifted over the years, as I have encountered new events and have moved through intellectual encounters with Hegel, Marx, Wittgenstein, Taylor, and Hampshire to those with Foucault, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and James. Early on, I sought to show how 'the fact' of pluralism was exaggerated and how this exaggeration also served to obscure inequality. Most pluralist theory focused on a diversity of interests brought to the 'governmental arena'. It seemed to me that when the independent power of corporations and other elites to shape the world was combined with their governmental power to veto policies that might rectify the adverse effects of those initiatives, the stratification of power became more transparent. I was also concerned, along with Peter Bachrach and Steven Lukes, with the 'other face' of power ignored by pluralist theorists of the day, power as the ability to stop potential issues from achieving sufficient definition to reach the public arena for decision.

It soon became clear to me that these concerns suggested a significant revision of democratic pluralism rather than its replacement. The rise of gay rights movements in the 1970s helped to prod me to dramatize how resistance to diversity flows from the visceral register of presumptive judgement into more refined modes of argument. To me, pluralism includes several dimensions. First, a pluralistic society is not merely one with multiple interests. It is multidimensional, involving diversity in the domains of creed, sensual disposition, gender practice, household organization, ethnic identification, first language, and fundamental existential orientations. The activation of multidimensional pluralism helps to open up public arenas and to ventilate the internal life of numerous organizations. Gays bring pressures to bear upon their churches; church activists apply it to their workplace; feminists bring it to bear upon both; and so on.

Second, a pluralistic society is marked by recurrent tension between already existing diversity and new movements that press upon this or that established assumption about God, freedom, identity, legitimacy, rights, and the nation. This torsion between the politics of pluralism and that of pluralization is constitutive. Those who think that we already have access to a definitive list of rights, for instance, miss how new rights periodically surge into being through a complex political process. The rights to sexual diversity, to gay marriage, and to doctor-assisted suicide, precarious as each is, were not even on the liberal list of rights a few decades ago. Drives to install them were initially launched from places below the registers of legitimacy. One could pretend they were 'implicit', but to me such an assertion insinuates more logic into social and political processes than their real messiness allows. Movements of this type uncover power sedimented into established practices of identity, rights, and creed. Such an insight eventually invites you to rethink the logic of morality itself, perhaps supporting a shift from a fixed morality of principle, replete with previously unstated 'implications', towards an ethic of cultivation as you become alert to new forces arising in the world.

Third, attention to the first two dimensions pressed me to come to terms with the need for a positive 'ethos of engagement' between diverse, interdependent constituencies. This is particularly pertinent to a world in which the secular separation between private and public is exaggerated and secular proceduralism is insufficient to itself. Such an ethos solicits participants to recoil back upon their most fundamental creeds or philosophies – the two terms now move close together for me – to affirm without existential resentment the profound contestability of each in the eyes of others. Many priests, theorists, philosophers, economists, and media talking heads find this difficult to do. Such a bicameral orientation to citizenship is fundamental to the politics of pluralism. It is more difficult in circumstances where numerous forces press militantly against pluralism itself.

Thus, the other side of the theory is that many of the same forces that create opportunities to extend and heighten pluralism today also intensify the anxieties of those who resent the presence of living counterexamples to their own identities, faiths, and household practices. Today pressures to pluralize and to fundamentalize the present encounter each other. This is a struggle that goes on within as well as between us.

Those are some elements in my rendering of pluralism. I should say that I also believe that numerous contemporary forces – including

the globalization of capital, the rapid movement of people, things and affects across official borders, and the growing income differentials between regions of the world – intensify pressure for pluralization within and across territorial regimes. Pluralism is also connected to other practices. For instance, drives to reduce inequality within a state today are not likely to be successful unless a positive ethos of engagement is negotiated between multiple minorities of different types. The aspirations to pluralism and equality thus speak to each other now, despite what those who treat the highly centred nation as a precondition of equality say. Under contemporary conditions, without an ethos of pluralism, the drive to equality falters as chauvinist elites deploy opposition to immigrants, gays, single mothers, Muslims, and atheists to turn back egalitarian pressure. Similarly, without pressure towards a more egalitarian society one support for a positive ethos of pluralism is pulled away. So pluralism and egalitarianism, while tensions persist between them, now more fundamentally set conditions of possibility for each other.

The very forces noted above also make it essential for more citizens to participate periodically in cross-state citizen movements to put pressure from the inside and outside simultaneously upon states, corporations, and international organizations. That means that today both the scope of diversity and the sites of political action have expanded. You might call that the fourth dimension of pluralism, as I construe it.

MW: The thinkers who appear to have had the deepest and most lasting impact on your thought (as it has developed since the mid-1980s) are Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. Their ideas have been at the forefront of your work, and your engagement with other thinkers – for example, Rousseau, Marx, and Tocqueville – has been developed through the lenses of your explicitly 'post-Nietzschean' perspective. This has taken you further and further away from the concerns of the mainstream in Anglo-American political thought towards an interest in the politics of becoming, embodiment, and affect. Your positive reception of these thinkers also distinguishes your work from other strands within post-structuralism, for example, those who are influenced by Derrida (with or without Levinas) and/or Lacan. The ideas of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze resonate closely with one another; nevertheless there are also differences between them. Foucault was careful to avoid engaging in questions about the transcendental, while he strove to unearth the cultural and historical contingency inherent within established claims to truth and seemingly stabilized

social practices. By way of contrast, Deleuze has focused on the classical controversies of metaphysics, developing his own account of the fundamentals of Being, albeit one that remains intrinsically open and irreducible to the principle of identity. Could you say something about your understanding of the relationships between these thinkers? Where do you see the critical points of tension between them? Has there been a development in your thought away from the critical genealogy of Foucault towards Deleuze's 'transcendental empiricism'?

BC: I encountered Foucault first, Nietzsche second, and Deleuze third. As these engagements unfolded, I found myself focusing on sites at which each complements or corrects the others. These complementarities and corrections, of course, are filtered through my own sensibility, as it has also been affected by them. So I sometimes lose a sense of where they fade and I begin. That is why, for instance, I occasionally speak of 'my Nietzsche', not always worrying too much about whether I am representing his work or drawing selective sustenance from it in the interests of my project. He, of course, commended this sort of relation to his work.

When I began to read Foucault in the late 1970s, my initial intention was to overcome the challenge he posed to my left Hegelianism, drawing some of his themes into a more encompassing and coherent theory. The idea, of course, was to show how he succumbed to a series of performative contradictions. That seemed to work fairly well when I engaged *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1970). But it collapsed under its own weight when I read *Herculin Barbin* (Barbin 1980). I then carried the shift in sensibility that began to accrue back to the first book and to *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1979, 1986, 1988). Hearing Foucault for the first time at Dartmouth in 1980 helped, too. One discerned a lightness in his voice that expressed his fundamental attachment to existence as such.

As I read *Herculin Barbin*, the autobiography of a nineteenth century hermaphrodite who committed suicide, accompanied by a series of journalistic, legal, and medical reports on 'her' condition and a brief statement by Foucault, I experienced turmoil in my gut. That is, I sensed vaguely how my visceral understandings of normality and morality delimited my theoretical judgements. I was a carrier of judgements that contributed to a life of hell for Alex/ina, and many others too. I felt a vague, intense pressure to work on the images of normality, biology, ethics, freedom, and politics with which I was imbued.

It soon became less a matter of convicting opposing theorists of a series of performative contradictions, more that of working tactically on the visceral sensibility that infused my orientations to 'immanent critique', judgement, and politics. I eventually saw how often the charge against others of a performative contradiction involves a focus on one dimension of their thought joined to other assumptions unconsciously projected into it because *you* have not yet conceived of alternatives to them. How many theorists in the 1980s, for instance, convicted Foucault of contradicting in theory his own practical judgements without first coming to terms with his distinctive conception of ethics? If you treat a theory as a 'problematic', consisting of multiple, connected elements replete with loose ends, remainders, and paradoxes, you also begin to see how the master tool of critique advanced by rationalists and dialecticians can easily devolve into modes of closure and self-conceit. To change a theory involves many things, including work on the visceral register of prejudgement that becomes sedimented into us as we breathe the air, absorb the culture, encounter new events, and experience bouts of suffering, rebuke, praise, and exaltation.

Foucault thus started me on a journey to challenge Kantian and neo-Kantian theories of morality with an ethic of cultivation, linking that to efforts to work tactically upon some affect-imbued prejudgements about biology, culture, and politics into which I had been inducted. *Neuropolitics* represents one upshot of those efforts (Connolly 2002).

Nietzsche came second. I read him to challenge a series of dispositions of judgement lodged in contemporary culture and political theory. The question was whether it was possible to draw selective sustenance from his work without committing myself to every priority he embraced. Since Foucault and Deleuze had already started this process of agonistic indebtedness to Nietzsche, as I came to call it, it did not turn out to be that difficult – even though I still occasionally encounter critics who say that Connolly 'says' Nietzsche was a democrat, or that he 'domesticates' Nietzsche. It is fascinating how many theorists insist that you must either swallow Nietzsche whole or spit him out entirely, even though they do not bring that same insistence to debts to Augustine, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Arendt, or Rawls. To me, such an inordinate demand expresses a desire to ward off the challenge posed by Nietzsche's fundamental ontology before you have engaged it. So I have been selective, ascertaining as I proceed whether the insights selected can be folded into a problematic he himself did not entirely

share. Nietzsche's themes of time as becoming, nobility as a positive relation between multiple nobilities, the cultural dangers of *ressentiment*, a pathos of distance, the spiritualization of enmity, gratitude for being in a world of becoming, tragic potentiality, becoming your own guinea pig, the place of existential affirmation in ethical life, the 'unequal' as difference even more than inequality, the immorality of morality, the insufficiency of both mechanical and organic conceptions of nature, and the torsion at key 'moments' between being and becoming have all infected me. I rework those themes to draw them into a theory of democratic pluralism, doing so because classic theories of democracy, pluralism, and morality urgently need infusions from elsewhere today.

I did not turn to Deleuze until the early 1990s. I was dazzled by the way *Difference and Repetition* tracked and challenged the Kantian and neo-Kantian problematics at each critical point (Deleuze 1994). Each time Kant encounters a flash point and resolves it in one direction, Deleuze first hovers over it like a hummingbird and then flies in a different direction. I later became fascinated with his work on capitalism, rhizomes, and nature/culture imbrications, and after that, the groundbreaking work on film and time. His engagement with experimental films teaches us more about duration and time as becoming than philosophical analysis does by itself. Indeed, Deleuze mixes dramatization into analysis, *showing* us how new thoughts bubble into the world and helping to usher some in as he goes. If he is right about the complexity and irreducibility of the virtual/actual relation, dramatization is an inherent part of philosophy itself. In this he follows Nietzsche, who wrote in a cinematic style before the rise of film.

Deleuze has not been engaged often by analytical philosophers because many have a visceral commitment to the sufficiency of analysis that is challenged by his practice. On the other hand, it is fascinating how young Anglo-American philosophers with an analytical background are effective at bringing Deleuze to a wider audience. I mean those such as James Williams, Paul Patton, Jane Bennett, Dan Smith, Lars Toender, Davide Panagia, and Nathan Widder, with several others in the wings. For, again, the kind of philosophy Deleuze practices involves delicate variations in the mix between dramatization and analysis, depending on the assignment. It takes close analysis to identify flash points in Kant. However, when Deleuze enacts the highest purpose of philosophy as he defines it – to introduce new concepts into life during a period of heightened disequilibrium in this or that zone – experimentation and dramatization gain priority. The point of the suggestion is

that we live in a world of becoming, where periods of relative equilibrium in this or that zone are periodically interrupted by those of sharp disequilibrium. When the latter occurs in a zone, we may need a new concept or two to help negotiate the terrain. Their invention involves dwelling in fecund moments of duration, as layered elements from the past reverberate in a new situation, sometimes encouraging something new to surge into being. That is why Deleuze is so taken with irrational cuts, flashbacks, and crystals of time in films, as well as with the work of Proust, Bergson, and, of course, Nietzsche. For, as already intimated, Nietzsche reintroduced the method of dramatization into modern philosophical discourse. Sophocles was a noble predecessor in that regard.

Although I have paid more attention to Deleuze recently, my debt to all three is fundamental. And Foucault's work on neo-liberalism and biopolitics remains extremely important. Together they advance what I call a philosophy of immanent naturalism, placing it in contention with other philosophies of the day on the ontological, ethical, religious, and political registers. They help to set an ethic of cultivation into competition with the morality of duty; and they provide cues to follow as we enact living experiments upon our own visceral registers. Indeed the latter two explore both tactics of the self and collective modes of micropolitics that touch the visceral register of intersubjectivity. Micropolitics is indispensable in an age of the media, deploying mixtures of rhythm, words, images, and music to infiltrate multiple level of the sensorium. So each thinker plays up the visceral register of relational life while refusing to link it authoritatively to a divine injunction.

Sometimes, I find Deleuze to be too reckless, and Foucault becomes a valuable corrective. Sometimes, I become frustrated by the bellicosity or aristocraticism of Nietzsche, and both Deleuze and Foucault help out. Sometimes I think that Foucault's engagements with discipline, normalization, governmentality, and surveillance, invaluable as they are, do not address sufficiently the centrality of the media in contemporary life, and Deleuze once again becomes valuable. And if you seek to place the revolution in contemporary neuroscience into closer conversation with cultural theory, all three thinkers are useful, augmented by Bergson, Proust, Merleau-Ponty, and James. Above all, these three join the vision of a world of becoming replete with tragic possibility to the commendation to cultivate further that gratitude for belonging to life and the earth that already simmers in us when we are lucky. For all three are concerned about the recurrent political danger of what Nietzsche

calls *ressentiment*, a covert resentment of the most fundamental terms of human existence that can easily become insinuated into electoral politics, military pursuits, consumption practices, and state priorities.

I am a bit less drawn to Derrida and more wary of Lacan. I sense a tendency to authoritarianism or dogmatism in the latter, and I pursue articulation of a more robust, dissident metaphysic than Derrida allowed. Interpretations in the 1980s and early 1990s of Nietzsche as a post-metaphysical philosopher have always seemed exaggerated to me. He is a speculative philosopher of immanent naturalism, who challenges the Christian background of most theoretical stances in the history of the west. He also acknowledges that neither he nor his opponents have proven the philosophy embraced. That's why he invites a 'spiritualization of enmity' between protagonists of different theo-metaphysical doctrines, while noting how many priests, theologians, and philosophers refuse the invitation. Perhaps I still have things to learn from Derrida and Lacan. Certainly, Derrida's essays on white mythology, *différance*, violence, and friendship have touched me. I also appreciate his attempts to identify those pregnant points of 'undecidability'. But since I emphasize the power of (what Deleuze calls) 'passive syntheses' that flow up into refined cogitation I suspect that we are already strongly inclined in one way or another at these very points. That is why micropolitics and macropolitics are so pertinent to the quality of democratic life, and why the drive to reach a point where we can acknowledge without resentment the relational contestability of our basic faiths is too. I also appreciate the point of the Levinasian focus on the face of the other. But as I understand him, at least, the experience of alterity is not extended sufficiently either to the *politics* of becoming by which new identities emerge or to cultural imbrications with non-human nature, perhaps because he resists the Nietzschean image of a non-human world set on multiple tiers of becoming to which we are joined by a thousand affinities, pressures, and dissonances.

MW: One of the principal motifs of your work since the early 1990s has been the notions of 'agonistic respect' and 'critical responsiveness'. In *Pluralism* you describe these as the 'civic virtues' appropriate to conditions of multidimensional pluralism (Connolly 2005, 126). Elsewhere, you have said that these virtues resemble an ethic of cultivation rather than a command morality, but that this is an ethic that cannot be reduced to a fixed teleology. In short, you counsel competing social forces to strive to accept contingency in order to circumvent the

ever-present temptation to seek revenge against others for the precariousness of their own identity and their most fundamental beliefs. This idea is indebted to Nietzsche' reflections on *ressentiment*. However, you have turned these ideas in many interesting directions and given them your own inflection. Could you say something about how you first arrived at the notion of 'agonistic respect'? What kinds of political conflict did you have in mind? Also, how does this concept differ from contemporary liberal theories of tolerance, and of the public/private divide? At times you have intimated that the widespread dissemination of agonistic respect would be sufficient to bind the diverse moral and cultural constituencies together in contemporary societies. Is this a position you explicitly endorse?

BC: In *Identity/Difference*, I sought to come to terms with how every identity, whether religious, gender, sensual, or ethnic, is defined in part in contrast to an array of differences. Not so much yet the other register of difference as a swarm of virtual forces, but difference in its mode as the alter-identity you must engage to be. The most profound temptation of identity is to secure its self-certainty by negating, punishing, or conquering those differences that threaten its self-confidence the most by the mere fact of being in the world. Out of this living paradox, the ethos of agonistic respect emerges as a civic way both to affirm our own identities (for identity always has relational, collective dimensions) and to support presumptive space for different and sometimes contending identities to be.

The dynamic in question is clear in religious engagements. But it is both present and obscured from itself in secular practice and theory. Secular assumptions of a set of rational public principles or neutral set of procedures around which diverse private faiths revolve misreads much about both private and public life. For instance, Christian notions of free will, freedom, punishment, gender, marriage, sexuality, and responsibility are active in both domains in Euro-American cultures, as they also flow back and forth across the porous membranes between these two domains. The liberal idea of tolerance is set in a public/private matrix. It assumes that secularism is sufficient to itself, even as it quietly smuggles its own substantive views into the public realm. That is how it depresses the agonistic element of public life. Everyone, says Rawls, participates in the image of justice he advances, while particular aspects of their comprehensive views can contribute to the overlapping consensus. In fact, however, everyone, including secularists, brings this or that chunk of faith into public life with them as they engage specific

issues. It is not, to me, whether we do so but *how* we do so. In these ways hollow secular assertions of neutrality (and allied notions) have made a modest contribution to the theocratic responses they protest against. The point is both to resist the theocratic agenda and to revise secularism.

The idea of agonism conveyed there has two sides: the disturbance it poses to constituencies that initiate these engagements and the disturbance it poses to those addressed by them. Agonism involves both suffering and engagement.

But, again, agonistic *respect* is the notion I pursue. In a political relation of agonistic respect – so important to a world in which multiple minorities occupy the same territory – each constituency absorbs some of the discomfort posed to it by the existence of an alter-identity that challenges some of its own commitments, as it also contests some assumptions and priorities of the other. It brings pieces of its own articles of faith into the public realm when it is pertinent to do so, and it then recoils back on itself to acknowledge without deep resentment the comparative *contestability* of some of these articles of faith. This is how the respect side of the agonistic relation appears. So the popular coinage of 'agonistic democracy' does not suffice for me. 'Agonistic respect' emphasizes the *torsion* poured into the heart of the relation.

People ask sometimes from whence the element of respect arrives, if I do not endorse Kantian morality. But respect can flow from multiple theistic and non-theistic sources; it is a conceit to pretend that everyone must honour the same source of it. I know Buddhists who convey profound respect for the preliminary bearings of others, without embracing Kantian or neo-Kantian philosophy. And it is also important to seek relations of agonistic respect with monotheists who draw support for pluralism from that tradition. It is difficult to cultivate the presumption to agonistic respect and to pursue such negotiations between constituencies. And it takes at least two parties to promote such a relation. But it does not usually take heroism. It is about as difficult as it is in the teleological tradition to cultivate the virtues of community. It is just that, in my view, the latter tradition dramatically overplays the potential for community residing in politics and underplays numerous pressures today to minoritize the world. In fact, we encounter examples of agonistic respect around us all the time, even as we face bellicose constituencies who seek to degrade and erase those very examples.

Critical responsiveness is the twin of agonistic respect. If the first speaks to relations between already established constituencies, critical

responsiveness is a civic virtue to practice when a movement seeks to move an incipient identity, faith, right, or sense of the good from below the threshold of articulation, legitimacy, and justice onto those registers. 'Incipient' here means a pluripotential movement as it is underway, rather than something that is already implicit in a universal. Critical responsiveness speaks to the politics of becoming or pluralization, during those protean moments when it is in the middle of exploration and consolidation. When you are on the initiating side of becoming, your own feeling-imbued ideas and judgements may change as the movement unfolds. When you are on the receiving end you may find some sedimented judgements about nature, biology, morality, the good, rights, or the cultural limits of diversity jostled or disturbed by the claims to attention advanced by the new movement. By internalizing a portion of that disturbance, you allow the injuries that occasioned the movement, your prior assumptions about universality in one or two of the above domains, your presumptive care for the diversity of being, and your concern to redress suffering to reverberate back and forth for a time. On some occasions, you will find your thinking about rights or identity loosening up in this way or that, allowing you to admit a new candidate onto the register of legitimacy, even if you yourself do not seek to exercise, say, the new right you embrace. Millions of people go through this ringer from time to time.

Theorists who equate morality with the provision of sufficient criteria to resolve each issue in advance dislike the open, exploratory character of such a process. They want to close down the politics of becoming in the name of a morality already sufficient to itself. But in the instances under discussion overweening confidence in universality and closure becomes one of the problems. Perhaps you eventually decide that some of your own visceral dispositions need work under the pressure of new, unanticipated circumstances, or that you were alerted vaguely by this same register to a danger that you now resist and identify more sharply. In a world of becoming – where periods of stabilization in this or that zone are periodically punctuated by a more active disequilibrium – theory can often point the way but not settle the issue. At such a point you try to draw into creative collaboration presumptive care for the diversity of being and sensitivity to a new, surprising situation. Perhaps something creative and noble will emerge from that gestation.

I do not think, however, that in a culture of robust pluralism everyone must accept the fundamental 'contingency' of things. That would

make it less pluralistic. My theory has been interpreted this way before, though, and I must accept a portion of responsibility for that fact. I emphasize branded and sedimented contingencies as I challenge elements in philosophies of providence, extreme voluntarism, and genetic determination. But others may embrace a more fixed biology, the sufficiency of philosophical analysis, or a transcendent vision. They evince respect for others when they acknowledge the *contestability* of that creed in the eyes of others and enter into thoughtful, comparative engagements with them. The appreciation of contestability, not universal acceptance of contingency, sets a key condition of pluralism and pluralization. Its appreciation does not introduce mindless relativism into the world, as Straussians sometimes love to insist. For to say that a vision, faith, or philosophy is contestable is to admit that it can be challenged at numerous points, by new evidence, immanent critiques that press for clarification, citations of unexpected suffering that it promotes, reference to other traditions that make subliminal claims upon the holder, and dramatization of loose strands of feeling and thought circulating in it that have not been heeded sensitively before. The number and variety of modes of contestation means than one problematic is apt to survive such engagements.

I have always insisted that a culture of pluralism and pluralization must acknowledge limits, and it must sometimes mobilize a pluralist assemblage to resist, say, bellicose drives to nationalism, or religious unity, or sexual normality. Today, for instance, a dangerous challenge to pluralism, equality, and ecology comes in the United States from what I call 'the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine'. It must be opposed sharply by those who admire pluralism. What I hesitate over, however, are attempts to define in advance a final demarcation of diversity. Such attempts in the past have too often pushed outside acceptance practices that later became incorporated into the pluralist matrix itself. So you take such issues as they arise. The established terms of contestation may shift again as a new competitor emerges.

Would the widespread dissemination of these virtues *suffice* to produce pluralism? The most I can say is that they would help. Extreme inequality militates against pluralism, and so it sets a condition too. What else? Well, not *too* many things can be put up for grabs at the same time. That is because too much public disorientation in too many zones at once is apt to foster either a breakdown or the rise of an authoritarian regime, or each in turn. A certain fragility stalks the politics of pluralism, a fragility that Foucault became alert to in his later work. Much of the time, in the countries that I know best, pressures of the

day point towards consolidation and preservation at all costs. That is why many of my critiques take on those arrangements. Nonetheless, we also live in a time when the acceleration of pace, the repetition of natural disasters, state and non-state terrorism, and a simmering culture of *ressentiment* aids and abets attempts through the media–state–corporate–church apparatus to foment radical change from the right. The susceptibility of panic-stricken constituencies to such pressures is a key danger of our time. At its best, the balance between pluralism and pluralization invokes a public life in which not too many things are thrown up for grabs at the same time.

MW: At numerous points in this interview you have touched on the temporal conditions of politics; what you have called the politics of becoming. This has been a pivotal theme in your work since the *Ethos of Pluralisation* (Connolly 1995). One of the central concerns of that book was to conceptualize the introduction of genuine novelty into existing constellations of political identities, which you associate – for example – with the politics of the new social movements from the late 1960s; introducing issues such as Gay rights, and confronting gender inequality and so on. In your most recent work, your concern with temporality and change has once again become the focal point of attention, and this is evidenced in the title of your latest work *A World of Becoming* (Connolly 2011). There you have elaborated a detailed conception of the temporal, which draws on a variety of sources, including some of the most up-to-date developments in the natural sciences, such as complexity theory and neuroscience. I wonder if you could say something about these themes. Why is the question of temporality so important? How do notions such as 'complexity', 'open systems', and 'emergent causality' taken from the natural sciences help us to explain the latest developments in politics and in the system of capitalism? How does your model of the politics of time improve upon alternative conceptualizations?

BC: Yes, the interaction and tension between the politics of pluralism and the politics of becoming by which new identities, rights, dangers, and goods arrive periodically is critical to my work. My most recent books, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* and *A World of Becoming* (Connolly 2008, 2011), together seek to extend and deepen those themes. If neo-liberal capitalism is marked by intensification, acceleration, shifting state activity, a fantastic image of market self-sufficiency, and renewed fragility with respect to its encounters with multiple non-human force fields, then all these issues must be incorporated

into theory today. I contend that we inhabit a cosmos of becoming composed of multiple, heterogeneous, and interacting force fields moving at different speeds. Many of these fields display some degree of self-maintaining power, a condition that already exposes the conceit of those who insist upon the *uniqueness* of self-regulating economic markets. Take climate patterns, glacier flows, the ocean current system, viral evolution, sunspot activity, and outer-space weather. Each of these temporal force fields periodically intersects with others, sometimes creating new mutations out of the intersections. Such intersections can make a huge difference to capitalist performance and political life.

Recent work in complexity theory in the domains of biology, neuroscience, and geology engages varying degrees of real creativity in these systems as they interact with each other and the human estate. Stuart Kauffman is exemplary in this respect. His work on biological evolution is situated somewhere between the conditioned open world of Alfred North Whitehead and the even more open world of Deleuze. Coming to terms with work in these areas both heightens our sensitivity to the dicey relations between human and non-human force fields and provides clues about how to rework dominant images of time, causality, pluralism, capitalism, ethics, and politics in the human sciences.

Late capitalism intensifies our imbrications with several non-human systems as it also enhances the *fragility of things* for the human estate. Capitalism thus requires radical transformation in the zones of energy use, investment practices, state priorities, the infrastructure of consumption, and the ethos of consumption, doing so to respond wisely to a fragility of things it has itself amplified. The dilemma today is that democratic radicalism requires both heightened *sensitivity* to several non-human force fields previously relegated to the background of cultural life and a politics of *militance* to promote pluralization, the reduction of inequality, and a sustainable ecology. The tension between the priorities of sensitivity and militance, I contend, is not simply internal to my theory; it is intrinsic to the contemporary condition.

One effect of the acceleration and intensification of capitalism is the enhancement of pressures to minoritize territorial states along the dimensions of ethnicity, family structure, erotic relations, and religious traditions. The interesting thing, to me, is that the ethos that promotes pluralization along those dimensions – as opposed to violent and repressive reactions – has some affinities to the ethos needed to cope with the fragility of things under the regime of late capitalism. These

affinities can be glimpsed by looking at movements that negate them, as carriers of religious extremism, nationalism, and neo-liberal faith in the autonomy of markets often coalesce to resist formation of such a positive politics.

My critique of neo-liberalism, again, does not concentrate merely on defects inside its notion of economic markets. Another deficiency is that it treats *an economic market as the only type of system in the universe that displays self-organizing and self-maintaining capacities*. But many of the systems noted above display differential degrees of self-maintaining power, and they interact with each other as well as with capitalist processes. Such complex conjunctions disclose the idea of the market as unique to be parochial. They also reveal how vulnerable economic markets are to the multiple force fields that they both intrude upon and need. You can, for instance, trace a series of interchanges between capitalist carbon emissions, global warming, accelerated glacier flows in Greenland, enhanced glacial 'calving' of icebergs, accentuated vibrations created by such calving events, the escalation of earthquakes in the region, and the further acceleration of glacier flows – generating a dangerous human/non-human system of self-amplification. Some complexity theorists identify bifurcation points at several of these junctures, replete with uncertainty as to which turn will be taken. The role of iceberg vibrations in this amplification system, which only very recently became apparent to geologists, suggests that established models of climate change and rising ocean levels need to be revised upward.

My new work explores unstable conjunctions between the intensification of capitalism, the fragility of things, and the need for a new militance in a world of becoming.

MW: Finally, Bill I'd like to ask you how you see relations between your work and other traditions within contemporary political theory? It's tempting to categorize you in a number of different ways: you're a pluralist, with a certain fidelity to the American tradition of pluralism, a post-modernist perhaps, an 'immanent naturalist' no doubt, with a close proximity to Nietzsche and Deleuze, a theorist of agonistic respect as distinct – for example – from the deliberative model of democracy or the neo-Kantian approaches, which seem so prominent today. Which of these insignia would you want to adopt? And how do you situate yourself in relation to other normative and ontological frameworks? Where are the most significant fault lines between different traditions of political thought today?

BC: I have been less drawn to 'post-modernism' because of the hesitancy in that tradition to engage metaphysical and cosmological dimensions of politics and because of its strictures, at least early on, against positive visions of ethics and politics. Its early supporters tended to think that to challenge Kantianism is to reject ethics *per se*. But the countertradition of an ethic of cultivation, generated by thinkers such as Epicurus, Spinoza, James, and Bergson, was already there awaiting attention. I think, with James and Whitehead that a positive vision of politics contains a speculative element, and I embrace the need for both. I am not highly disposed to 'post-humanism' either, even as I emphasize the need to explore intersections between human and non-human systems of multiple kinds. Although the exclusive humanism of much of cultural theory has been too confined, the idea of post-humanism suggests a lack of concern for the fate of the human estate.

To speak of the fragility of things is to enlarge the theatre of thought and action, to resist the hubris in classical notions of humanism, and to focus on dangers and possibilities facing the human estate itself today. My sense is that Rawlsian and deliberative images of humanism, democracy, secularism, and pluralism do not come to terms sufficiently with the layered character of cultural politics, with dynamic, non-human force fields closely imbricated with cultural life, with independent powers of metamorphosis sometimes attached to those force fields, with the power of an ethic of cultivation to explore creative adjustments to forking moments in a world of becoming, and, perhaps, with the fragility of things during the time of late capitalism. I admire, however, Habermas's early work on *Legitimation Crisis*, and I appreciate how that fecund text can be brought into contact with concerns expressed here.

Hannah Arendt is also fascinating. She explored 'the politics of enactment', appreciating moments of real creativity in politics. And she had a sharp sense of the fragility of things, even though the concepts of nature, bodies, and science she drew upon are in tension with themes reviewed briefly here. The potential for fruitful discussions between these two traditions is great.

I seek, I suppose, to modernize the Greek tragic vision, joining it in refusing both providential images of the cosmos and hubristic images of human knowledge and mastery. I embrace a cosmos that is full of meaning, sustains the sweetness of life on at least one planet, and is not that highly predisposed to us in the last instance. Attention to the sweetness of life, the dangers of hubris, and the fragility of things finds

ample expression in Sophocles. I now receive, for instance, those plagues that often surround and infect the city as signs of his vivid appreciation of close imbrications between human and non-human systems. If you translate the idea of preordained fate – that some interpreters deploy to render Sophocles only appropriate to early Greek life – into that of tragic *possibility* in a universe that is not predesigned for us, you can join Nietzsche in transfiguring tragic resignation into a will to affirm such a world as you fight against the evils and dangers it foments. Such a combination is indeed discernible in the admirable work of Bernard Williams.

These themes need to be explored today in relation to the delicate ecology of late capitalism, new pressures to minoritize the world, anxieties haunting several spiritual traditions as they increasingly rub shoulders together, and dangerous drives to reinstate bellicose versions of the nation-state under highly unfavourable conditions of realization.

I am not a carrier of 'pessimism': that is a spectatorial attitude adopted when you say, 'this is the way of the world writ large, but it *ought* not to be that way'. It is wiser to embrace, with Foucault for instance, commitment to activism in a world that is both full of vital possibility and replete with real dangers. That carries us back, I suppose, to the torsion between sensitivity to the fragility of things and the need for a timely militance.

MW: Bill, thank you for sharing your thoughts on these issues and for your exemplary contribution to the discipline of political theory.

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7

The Right to Justification: Towards a Critical Theory of Justice and Democracy. An Interview with Rainer Forst

Xavier Guillaume

Xavier Guillaume: How did you become interested in political theory? What were your formative intellectual influences? And in light of those influences, how would you reflect on your own trajectory in terms of the normative questions you have tried to raise and engage with over the past two decades?

Rainer Forst: The 1970s and 1980s in Germany, when I learned to think politically, were marked by intense social conflicts. The general and militant challenge of the 'system' (and its reaction against that) dominating the discourse of the 1970s, reaching its tragic pinnacle with a number of terrorist assassinations of politicians and other persons in powerful offices, was mutating into a different framework, namely that of the radical opposition against nuclear weapons (especially triggered by the so-called Nato 'Double Track-Decision') and against nuclear energy. There was a certain catastrophic and apocalyptic mood involved, quite exaggerated at times, and many of us (not me) feared that we would be the last generation alive. In any case, political struggle was seen as a matter of life and death. Both issues led to many conflicts and fights, also combined with opposition against other projects like a new runway at Frankfurt airport (now quite often used by me). We were all heavily critical of and much alienated from official politics.

Yet, at the same time, the Greens – then quite far away from what a normal 'party' was at that time – were formed and, partly *à contre-coeur*, built essential bridges between my generation of protesters, disillusioned as we were with institutional politics and the formal system, which we did not regard as fully deserving the name 'democracy'. However,

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

we also did not quite know what that term exactly meant. But it was something else, we were sure. In a way, I am still looking for that 'something else'. Already then, even though I was heavily influenced by the green movement, I also thought that social injustice was the main issue that needed to be addressed, within and across societies; this gave me a certain counterweight to the love-of-nature ideology of some of us, although it also did not bring me to identify with the social democrats, who appeared as a rather conservative social force at that time.

Early on it was clear to me that I would have to devote myself to the study of the big questions of political philosophy – what is a just society, what does freedom mean, and so on. I read social contract theories, I read Marx, Bloch, and the Frankfurt School, Nietzsche, too and I was fascinated. I read Kant only after Nietzsche, and possibly I was a Kantian even before I had digested Kant. At that point, after leaving school and doing my civil service (as a conscientious objector, which we all were, using admittedly a wide view of 'conscience'), I decided to go and study in Frankfurt. Habermas had returned to Frankfurt from Starnberg in the early 1980s, and I knew that this was where I wanted to be and with whom I wanted to study.

So I went there, and still consider it as a most fortunate move. For philosophy was alive in those days; Habermas was a great teacher and influential figure, but there were other powerful philosophers and political theorists, too, such as Karl-Otto Apel, Iring Fetscher, or Axel Honneth, at the time Habermas' 'Assistant'. Here, the questions that interested me were discussed in impressive ways, and what was thought seemed to matter. Around Habermas, an international context of foreign students, researchers, and visiting professors such as C. Taylor, J. Searle, R. Bernstein, or H. Dreyfus was forming, which prevented us, or so I hope, from developing a provincial form of thought. Habermas, when he published the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* in 1985, ignited a number of controversies that we students also intensely became engaged in. Furthermore, at that time Habermas figured prominently in the so-called 'Historians' Debate' (*Historikerstreit*). So these were turbulent times for us youngsters. The debate with the so-called 'post-structuralism' left many of us students with the task of constructing our own approach, since I for one did not regard the 'either-or' between Habermas and Foucault as productive. At the same time, we also could see how in the fierce Historians' Debate, 'Frankfurt style' critical intellectuals were despised as subversive, arrogant, and out of touch with German society. This contributed to our identity as critical philosophers, too.

So if I look back on my formative period, doing philosophy for me was always also a political intellectual enterprise, but not in the narrow sense of standard politics or in one that would force you into unnecessary oppositions of thought. As students of Habermas, we knew that when he spoke about discursive democracy, he developed a *critical* theory of really existing democracies. Democracy, as I saw and see it, is a task: that of trying to take sensible – and possibly radical – steps to establish a practice of justification in which those subjected to norms, rules, and institutions have a real and effective possibility to become their authors. Is this realizable? I don't know. Is it worth trying? Yes, absolutely.

XG: You are widely considered to be the leading figure of what one could call the fourth generation of scholars of the Frankfurt School. How would you characterize the continuities and discontinuities between these four generations? In other words, how would you characterize the contemporary situation of the Frankfurt school in light of its history?

RF: Thanks for the compliment implied in the question, I am honoured. And even though I am not sure whether the Frankfurt School really is a family with generations of descendants, some close, some distanced, let us accept that picture for a moment. Then what would a generation of critical theorists be worth that uncritically accepted what the elders bequeathed to them and did not search for the best and improved tools of social critique? A tradition only stays alive if it changes. And this one has, to quite some extent. But we have to see that far-reaching changes had already taken place in the 'first' generation itself, if you compare the original program of Horkheimer's in the 1920s with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.

The next major shift was of course Habermas' gigantic reformulation of the Hegelian-Marxist-Weberian-Critical Theory-story of social rationalization as a history of alienation, reification, and catastrophe into a history of a systemic distortion of communicative potentials in the life-world and in politics. What a synthesis of philosophical and sociological traditions to grapple with. But here, as in later transformations such as the one by Axel Honneth's influential and productive paradigm of social struggle as a struggle for recognition and my own humble attempts at a critique of what I call 'relations of justification', the main question of critical theory remains the same: What does it mean to speak of a 'rational' (in the sense of *vernünftig*) ordering of society, both philosophically and in social theory? And what are the forces that prevent such a society, even in moderate steps towards a 'more rational' form of life, to develop?

Now, to make a long story short, critical theory is a form of theory that holds on to this question but is reflexive in thinking critically about the very notion of 'reason' and the exclusions and forms of domination it itself produces. Critical theory reflects on the practices and institutions of political, social reason and it engages in theorizing in an innovative form about the forces that prevent social emancipation to take place. That is no small program, and if I were to claim to contribute to it productively, I would say that my attempts to redescribe practical reason as reason within practices of justification – as the art of justification, so to speak – and to reorient political philosophy to justification as an idea *and* a practice are animated by the critical theory program. I call what I aim at a 'critique of relations of justification' and hope it has something to say about the concepts of reason and (existing) unreason in the noumenal as well as the social and political realm. I try to combine discourse theory and recognition theory within the paradigm of justification, including other approaches as well, from theories of 'public reason' to approaches to power and democratic practice developed in French social philosophy. The core, however, remains a Kantian one: The categorical imperative that no one should be forced to live under norms or institutional schemes that cannot be properly justified to all subjected as equals. I call the basic claim of persons a 'right to justification' and try to unpack what that means in philosophical and political-theoretical terms. Philosophy turns practical once this idea of justification is spelled out.

XG: What were the key intuitions behind your intervention in the debate between liberal and communitarian theories of justice in *Contexts of Justice* (2002 [1994])? Why do you think there was a need to provide a 'mediating position' (231) between the two? And how did you proceed to do so through the idea of 'contexts of justice'?

RF: During my student years, I had the good fortune of not only being taught in Frankfurt, but also quite early on to go abroad and have excellent teachers in the United States, and at a crucial juncture in my development I studied with John Rawls. As a visiting student in New York, I had become acquainted with the liberal–communitarian debate in the mid-1980s and then had decided that this would be an interesting topic to write my dissertation on. Habermas was very positive and encouraged me to go to Harvard and work with Rawls for some time, who was extremely generous. And what a great time was that to work with or between these two great figures – Habermas was about to finish *Between Facts and Norms* (and I had the honour of being part of

the great research group in which this was discussed – my first job), and Rawls gave me the manuscript of *Political Liberalism* and was kind enough to discuss it with me. I could also mediate between the two, as they were embarking on having a debate with each other – each asking me what the other thought (and also what I thought).

The topic of liberalism versus communitarianism was of interest to me not just because I saw more in it than just a second-hand rehash of the Kant–Hegel debate (most Germans saw things that way) but also, and especially so, because I saw many important dimensions of a general theory of justice addressed there but in an often confused and unfortunate way. For example, why would it speak against a strong view on individual rights that we are social and communal beings, and what exactly were the universal principles at work in critiques that were often called 'contextualist'? This is what got me going, and I set out to use a theory of justification in different contexts – ethical, legal, political, and moral – to distinguish between various issues in the debate and to suggest a solution. If we got these contexts right and the principles of justification within them as well as the respective conceptions of the person and of community, we could arrive at a differentiated and yet unified theory of contexts of justice both as contexts of justification and as contexts of recognition or community. Here, as so often in my later work, I could use my 'Frankfurt tools' of discourse theory and a theory of recognition and combine them with theories of public justification (Rawls, Larmore, Ackerman) and a situated account of justice (Walzer) and the person (Taylor).

In general, I consider stark oppositions between universalist versus contextualist forms of theory, between 'transcendent' and 'immanent' critique or between abstract principles and social practice as stale and undialectical. What we need to see is that practices of justification or critique are practices of reason and reason-giving, which are social and concrete but which also always have a reflexive potential of opening the space of reasons that might be closed in a given structure or system. This questioning is what we call critical reason(ing). So any form of justification is necessarily concrete and embedded and has a tendency to become reified and constrained, and any such form can be questioned and opened up. This is what critique is all about. In such contexts, it makes no sense to call a radical argument such as the one brought forth by early social contract theorists or later by Marxists 'acontextual', for it was precisely their social context that led critics to speak that way. Also, the principle alluded to above, which says that no person should be subjected to norms or rules that cannot properly be justified to him or her

in an appropriate practice of justification is as abstract (as a principle of practical reason) as it is concrete in its application, grounding social critique. If we regard society as an 'order of justification', as we do in the Frankfurt research cluster on the 'Formation of Normative Orders' (see www.normativeorders.net), which I direct together with Klaus Günther, we can develop conceptual tools to analyse its normative potentials and its normative reifications at the same time.

XG: You have also provided a similar engagement within the emerging field of International Political Theory with an argument for a 'critical theory of transnational justice' (in *Metaphilosophy* 2001) between statist and globalist conceptions of transnational justice and with an interpretation of human rights as based on the right to justification (in *Constellations* 1999 and a recent *Ethics* article in 2010). How do you consider that the idea of 'contexts of justice' is transposable to the international?

RF: As the debate about transnational justice unfolded – I favour that term rather than 'global' justice because I want to point out that in the debate between cosmopolitan and nation-centred approaches there is no simple either-or – I used the term 'context of justice' to ask in the tradition of Hume and Rawls about the 'circumstances of justice', but in a redefined way. Which social, political, or legal context gives rise to duties of justice in the first place? What kind of relations between human beings, what kind of structures and institutions have to be in place for a 'context of justice' to exist? There is by now a huge array of positions trying to answer this question. Of the many 'relational' approaches, some highlight the communal charter of ties of reciprocity in a political community, others highlight the state as a cultural context, others again the state as a context of legal coercion and thus of a political relation of justification, others as a context of cooperation and production, and so on. Often, these approaches do limit the context of justice to the confines of a political community, although this need not be the case if, for example, you have a wider view of legal coercion exercised by institutions beyond the state. At the other end of the spectrum, we find 'nonrelational' approaches, which stress that any inequality of important life chances and provision of basic goods is a form of injustice that needs to be overcome; hence arguments for a cosmopolitan social order are developed on that basis.

I try to develop a relational approach, but of a different kind from the ones mentioned already. For that purpose, I distinguish between two ways to think about justice. I believe that our thinking concerning

social or distributive justice is held captive by the idea that the primary issue is what goods individuals justly receive or deserve. This then leads either to comparisons between people's sets of goods and thus to relative conclusions, or to the question about whether individuals have 'enough' of the essential goods, regardless of comparative considerations. To me, such goods-centred and recipient-oriented points of view tend to obscure four important aspects of justice. First, the question of how the goods to be distributed come about, hence issues of production and its organization are often neglected. Furthermore, there is the second problem that the political question of who determines the structures of production and distribution and in what ways is often disregarded, as though a great distribution machine could exist that only needed to be programmed correctly. For these two points, I am indebted to Iris Young's critique of the 'distributive paradigm', although I find the way in which she phrased this misleading, for it seems to suggest that she criticizes the idea of 'distributive justice' generally and argues for 'political justice'. But the point is that anyone who is interested in distributive justice has to answer the political question first, that is, the question of power.

Third, the goods-oriented picture also neglects the fact that justified claims to goods do not simply 'exist' but can be arrived at only through justificatory discourses in which all subjected are involved as free and equal individuals. Finally, the goods-fixated view of justice also largely leaves out of account the question of injustice; for, by concentrating on distributive deficiencies of goods to be overcome, someone who suffers want as a result of a natural catastrophe is equivalent to someone who suffers want as a result of economic or political exploitation. Although it is correct that help is required in both cases, in one case it is required as an act of *moral solidarity*, in the other as an act of *justice* conditioned by the nature of one's involvement in relations of exploitation and injustice and the specific wrong in question. Ignoring this difference can lead to a situation where what is actually a requirement of justice is seen as an act of generous assistance or 'aid'. This is an important ideological move we often find in political arguments; a critical theory of justice needs to identify such moves and provide tools for criticizing them.

For these reasons, it is especially imperative to recognize the *political* point of justice and to liberate oneself from a view fixated on quantities of goods. Justice must be geared to *intersubjective relations and structures*, not to *subjective* or *putatively objective states* of the provision of goods. In my view (following Rawls), the concept of justice has a

core meaning whose essential contrasting concept is that of arbitrariness, understood in a social sense, that is, be it the arbitrary rule by individuals or by a part of the community over others, be it arbitrary social contingencies that are passively accepted as fate and that lead to social subordination. The term 'domination' is appropriate here, for it means the arbitrary rule of some people over others without legitimate reason, and when people engage in struggles against injustice they are combating such forms of domination. (So I am using here a discourse-theoretical notion of domination, with some differences from that suggested by Philip Pettit.) The basic impulse that opposes injustice is not one of wanting something or more of something; rather, it is the impulse of not wanting any longer to be dominated, harassed, or overruled in one's claim to and *basic right to justification*, as I said above. This right expresses the demand that no political or social relations should exist that cannot be adequately justified towards those subjected to such a regime.

XG: How would you describe the main difference from other 'relational' approaches of justice?

RF: Most of these approaches take a positively defined political context as the essential context of justice – by which I mean both a context of positive law and a context of positive, mutual social cooperation. But I fear that these approaches often fall prey to what I would call 'practice positivism'. For by focusing on positive legal orders and positive cooperation as defining and confining a context of justice, they put the cart before the horse and neglect the true nature of justice. Justice is a Goddess, if I may speak metaphorically, that comes into the world to 'make things right' between human beings that have gone wrong – relations of domination, that is, of rule without adequate reasons. But then her primary contexts are of course contexts of *injustice*, of arbitrary social rule. So for its realization, justice calls for the establishment of structures of justification to create the condition of the possibility of establishing reciprocally and generally justified (and justifiable) social relations. But then a positive context cannot be its presupposition, for that would be using a conclusion for a premise. A context of justice arises wherever there are relevant relations and structures of domination or of rule in place, that is, structures of *negative* (enforced and asymmetrical) or of *positive* (mutually benefitting) cooperation and structures of legal rule, whether justified or not, and structures of social or economic domination possibly even outside of legal regulations, at least transcending state boundaries. These are all contexts of justice where

the first task of justice is to establish adequate structures of justification. A context of justice is a context where domination has to be banned, either because it exists (as in negative cooperation or political domination) or because it threatens to exist (as in any system of rule in need of justification).

To apply the notion of justice as justification in transnational contexts, we thus need a refined view of domination (formal or informal) and rule (which I take to be formal), which would allow us to identify the relations and structures within, between, and beyond state borders, which qualify as relations and structures of (in)justice. So we need not primarily look for established and defined *demoi* or political interstate relations. Rather, we need to identify the structural relations, connections, and contexts, whether institutional or not, which show certain forms of rule or domination and which qualify as contexts of (in)justice. A *demos* as a subject of justification would then be defined as a 'demos of subjection', and these need not (and mostly will not) be identical with established *demoi*. So we start from an analysis of rule and domination on a transnational scale. Not an easy task, I know, but one that awaits us if we want to talk about global (in)justice. Needless to say, if we had no social science perspectives available, which are capable of giving us such analyses, a critical theory of justice would only remain a mere program, and a hollow one, I fear.

XG: What is the role of the concept of human rights in this connection?

RF: In contemporary discussions, we find a huge array of approaches to justify human rights – some rely on a basic notion of the good life and its conditions to be protected, some on the idea of an overlapping consensus, some on a reconstruction of the idea implicit in the political and legal practice of human rights, some on a minimalist account of anthropological evils to be avoided, and so on. But when we reflect on human rights, we must not overlook the central *social* aspect of such rights, namely that when and where they have been claimed, it has been because the individuals concerned suffered from and protested against forms of oppression and/or exploitation that they believed disregarded their dignity as human beings. As in the current revolutions in Arab countries, the protesters have viewed the acts or institutions that they opposed as violations of the basic respect owed to them as human beings. Human rights are first and foremost weapons in combating certain evils that human beings inflict upon one another; they

emphasize standards of treatment that no human being could justifiably deny to others and that should be secured in a legitimate social order.

But if it is true that human rights are meant to ensure that no human being is treated in a way that could not be justified to him or her as a person equal to others, then this implies – reflexively speaking – that one claim underlies all human rights, namely human beings' claim to be respected as autonomous agents who have the right not to be subjected to certain actions or institutional norms that cannot be adequately justified to them. Thus, human rights have a common ground in *one* basic moral right, the *right to justification*. And then the legal and political function of human rights is to make this right socially effective, both substantively and procedurally. The substantive aspect consists in formulating rights that express adequate forms of mutual respect, the violation of which cannot be properly justified between free and equal persons. The procedural aspect highlights the essential condition that no one should be subjected to a set of rights and duties – to a political-legal rights regime – the determination of which he or she cannot participate in as an autonomous agent of justification. Thus, human rights do not just protect the autonomy and agency of persons; they also *express* their autonomy politically.

I believe that this way of grounding human rights is not open to the charge of ethnocentrism haunting so many justifications of human rights, for that charge itself demands a right to adequate justifications that do not exclude those affected. I call that approach to human rights one of critical theory, because it starts from the participant's perspective in social struggles and reconstructs the basic emancipatory claim of human rights.

XG: What is your perspective on the development of political theory in the German-speaking world since Jürgen Habermas? What do you see as the affinities and differences between continental and Anglo-American political theory?

RF: Habermas' work, especially in Germany, but also in a much wider, international context, has led to many changes. One of them is in the field of political theory, although there are many other influences that have been combined with those of Habermas. There has been a general revival of political philosophy after John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, which was received in Germany first in philosophy but which also made its way into political theory, which at that time in Germany was focused

on the history of ideas as well as the theory of institutions, not primarily on political philosophy. This has changed, and I think Habermas' work, especially after *Between Facts and Norms* (1992), has been influential here. For he shows how the classic question of a justifiable political and social order needs to be approached from a non-reductive combination of various disciplines: philosophy, sociology, political science, legal theory, to name the most important. But the systematic question of what a 'reasonable' order can be in which 'public reason' has a special place is in the foreground (as it already was in the *Transformation of the Public Sphere*). The later Rawls also placed the Kantian idea of public reason in the foreground of his thought. 'Deliberative democracy' was the crucial term in that context.

So it might be fair to say that political theory in Germany after Rawls and Habermas opened itself up to philosophical and normative thought especially in that Kantian tradition (which then calls for Aristotelian, Hegelian, Marxist, or Humean critics), such that today the disciplinary boundaries between political theory and philosophy are much less rigid than they were before. This is parallel to the Anglo-American context. Still, due to the difference of traditions and intellectual cultures, in German political theory the connection between normative thought and sociological and historical considerations might be stronger than that in Anglo-American discourses, but there are many more overlaps now, and exchanges. Current debates about transnational justice also attest to that, I think. In the younger generation, especially, I see many productive scholars crossing the boundaries of political science and philosophy, to the advantage of both, I think. Again, Habermas' works on these issues is a model for that.

There have been other reasons for the development of a closer link between political science and philosophy. One is that in the Anglo-American literature there has been a lively and conceptually impressive debate about multiculturalism, which was picked up in Germany, mostly by importing theories such as Will Kymlicka's or Jim Tully's. Again, these were debates in which philosophical, legal, and institutional as well as historical and sociological aspects were and needed to be combined, and this also broke down certain barriers. There had been very few theoretical offers in the German-speaking context to deal with the questions subsumed under the title 'multiculturalism'. But these questions were and are on the agenda.

There is another trend that needs to be mentioned, but maybe here there is more hope than a statement of fact in what I say. What has traditionally been called 'history of ideas' is undergoing important changes

in Germany. Here a certain form of historicism had dominated. Now, however, due to an increased exchange at the international level, we see that in areas such as studies on republicanism, if you think of Pettit as well as Skinner (though the Cambridge School stresses the historical and strategic context of the development of political ideas), historical reflection and systematic political philosophy form new combinations. There are other areas, too, where this happens, and I hope that my book *Toleration in Conflict*, forthcoming finally in English (it is a very long book) will contribute to that.

Basically, then, we are witnessing a general process of the internationalization of intellectual and academic cultures, and again Habermas is one name that especially stands for that. At the same time, however, he is an exemplar for someone who comes from a particular background and preserves it; internationalization thus does not necessarily mean streamlining or absorption into hegemonic discourses, as many fear today.

For the so-called 'continental' and 'Anglo-American' divide, this means, I think, that the distinction no longer makes sense as a geographical one. Still, different styles of thinking remain, but many more than two are not confined to certain cultures. On the one hand, there are very important differences between approaches influenced by Marxism, post-structuralism, phenomenology, critical theory, or what have you, and on the other hand, you find Rawlsians, pragmatists, rational choice approaches, libertarians, communitarians, and so forth. So there is no clear demarcation between two 'camps', but a wide plurality of approaches in political theory if, for example, you compare the bulk of publications in some of the journals I am involved with at the editorial level, such as *Ethics*, *Political Theory* or *Constellations*, to name just a few. This is not a problem, for the world is a complex place and human beings always have and will have different perspectives on it. What is desirable, however, is that the most productive of these perspectives remain in dialogue, be they Rawlsians, Habermasians, Arendtians, or Foucauldians. Especially from a critical theory perspective, we have to aim at a combination of the best tools of critique – say, when it comes to analyse power. Despite the plurality of perspectives, I believe in the possibility and desirability of a common political-philosophical conceptual language.

XG: Swiss voters accepted in 2009 an initiative on the interdiction of new constructions of minarets. Over the past decade, several European legislative bodies, at the local or national levels, have passed laws

restricting what is perceived as overt affirmations of religiosity. Whether it is justified in terms of emancipation or security, many European countries have castigated, implicitly or explicitly, Muslim communities and individuals. How would you analyse this current state of affairs? What tools can critical political theory offer?

RF: These questions relate to my work on toleration and multiculturalism, and I am happy to say a few words about this. It helps, when one thinks about these cases, to know a bit about the history of intolerance and toleration, which I reconstructed in my *Toleration in Conflict*. A ban on minarets or religious headscarves reminds one of age-old forms of intolerance or of only limited toleration within European (but not just European) societies. Religious minorities have always been subject to discrimination or strict regulation in social life – which means that even if they were tolerated, they often were still not allowed to build churches, and if they could build them, it was a matter of debate whether these could have towers, bells, entrances from the main street, and so on. Looking at these debates and regulations, one sometimes thinks we are back in the wars of religion of early modernity. But looking at it again, things appear different. Today's religious discrimination in Western societies is often framed in secular terms, such as gender equality, security issues, and democratic decision-making. Of course, one may say that this also is not so new. Locke, for example, when he argued against tolerating atheists or Catholics, did so on moral and political grounds. Or at least he thought he did, which points towards the important lesson of the history of toleration that we should strive for a common language of political morality that cannot easily be colonialized by certain religions or by intolerance dressed in secular garb.

It is useful to remind ourselves of the complexities of the concept of toleration in these debates, not least because both sides in certain struggles – such as for or against banning *hijabs* – claim to speak in the name of toleration. This is not so because there are different concepts of toleration involved, for I think there is only one such concept. But there surely are different conceptions of it. Let me explain.

The concept of toleration has three components: objection, acceptance, and rejection. First, beliefs or practices that are the object of toleration have to be seen by the tolerant party as false, wrong, or bad. Otherwise the attitude towards them would be one of indifference or of affirmation, both of which rule out toleration. Second, apart from such negative reasons there have to be positive ones in place, which say why it is nevertheless permissible, maybe even right or required to tolerate

what is wrong. These positive reasons must not eliminate the negative ones, but trump them when it comes to an instance of toleration. Finally, there are negative reasons, which determine the so-called limits of toleration, where the positive reasons run out, so to speak. Where the limits of toleration are drawn with the help of law, especially, the threshold of justification for restrictions must obviously be high.

Historically, a number of different conceptions as well as a multitude of justifications for toleration have been developed, some religious, moral, epistemological, pragmatic, or a combination thereof. Of these conceptions, I find two most important. The first is the one we find in most classic justifications and legislations for toleration, such as the Edict of Nantes 1598 or the Toleration Act of 1689. I call it the *permission conception* of toleration. The main idea is that an authority – a monarch, for example, backed by a religious majority – permits minorities to live according to their beliefs, provided that they do not overstep certain bounds, which the authority defines. In this conception, minorities pay for security and some form of freedom with extreme loyalty, and the authority reserves the right to determine all three components of toleration by itself – say, for example, by way of a religious objection, pragmatic acceptance, and political or religious rejection. We should not think, however, that this conception is a thing of an absolutist past only, for today the tolerating authority appears in a majoritarian democratic form. So it is sometimes argued that tolerating a religion (or a way of life) means not forcing someone to abjure it or denying its practice – while it would not mean equal respect towards such groups or granting them equal rights. For example, in the debate about same-sex marriage, a conservative German party was using the slogan 'Tolerance yes, marriage no'. This is mere permission toleration, which has often been criticized; Goethe, for example, called it an 'insult'.

Also historically speaking, another conception of toleration developed, which I call *respect conception*. It is based on the insight that in a pluralist and democratic society, those who tolerate are also those who are tolerated, reciprocally, and that the basic institutions of the state should be based on principles all citizens can share as equals and can regard as fair, that is, as justified with reasons that do not arbitrarily favour one of the conflicting parties or religious views. It is thus generally accepted that the components of acceptance and rejection are not to be determined by one party only, but by a process of justification all are involved in. The justification for such a conception of toleration as, for example, found in the work of Pierre

Bayle, though in embryonic form, has two aspects. The first is a normative one: Each citizen has to grant all others an equal right to justification such that basic principles have to rest on reciprocally and generally non-rejectable reasons, which means that no party makes any claims it denies to others and does not determine what a reasonable claim is by itself denying others the same right. Also, all involved and subjected to the norms in question have to have an equal say. The second aspect is of an epistemological kind. For, as Bayle saw, in order to avoid that religious truth claims would override the principle of equal respect and justification, a distinction between religious faith, general knowledge, and moral principles had to be established, which means that religious truth claims are still possible but cannot trump empirical knowledge or principles of equal respect because such religious claims are both reasonable to accept and reasonable to reject, depending on the beliefs of a person. They are 'beyond reason', as Bayle argued, that is, neither irrational nor general truths of reason. So toleration did and does involve a certain self-relativization by religious believers but not of a sceptical or relativist kind. All one needs to accept is that religion is a matter of faith, having certain presuppositions that are not generally shared or necessary to share.

So if we want to call decisions such as the one banning minarets in Switzerland intolerant as well as undemocratic, we have to rely on the respect conception of toleration. Then we see that this decision denies the basic equal standing of citizens and their basic rights, for it turns a religious-political objection into a legal-political rejection in an impermissible way; a way that violates equal respect and does not rest on reciprocally and generally sharable reasons. This is not only a Swiss problem nor a rare phenomenon. More often than not, majorities think they have the right to determine the basic institutions of their society according to their religious beliefs and thus ban abortion, same-sex marriage, headscarves, and what have you. But if one takes the notion of justice as justification that grounds the respect conception of toleration as basic, then they have no such right. No one has it.

XG: Finally, where do you see political theory heading to in the near future?

RF: Political theory may not always be able to answer the challenges of its time, but it always mirrors them. So one does not need to be a prophet to anticipate that the trend towards the 'post-national',

with respect to finding political forms and rules facing the facts of increasing cultural diversity within societies, as well as to the justification and design of principles and institutions beyond the state, will continue and gain strength. It will take some time to liberate us from old-fashioned ways to think about politics ordered by the classic state system, and we do not yet know what will come after so as to safeguard – and reinvent – basic principles of democratic participation and social fairness. But this is what we will have to spend our energies on. This also holds true for our tools for analysing power, for example, because we need to find ways to understand forms of social and political power no longer located only in the nation-state.

Methodologically, I foresee further debates between hermeneutic, Kantian, or Platonic approaches, if we think of recent books on justice by Ronald Dworkin, G.A. Cohen, Martha Nussbaum, Axel Honneth, and Amartya Sen, for example. This is a discussion I very much welcome, for it forces us to rethink our normative commitments and our way of connecting theory and practice. And here critical theory has something to offer, although it again comes in different versions, some more Hegelian, some more Kantian. This is how it ought to be with every living tradition.

XG: Many thanks for this very enlightening interview.

8

A Conversation with Bonnie Honig: Exploring Agonistic Humanism

Gary Browning

Gary Browning: Bonnie, we were very enthusiastic to secure an interview with you and to enable readers to find out about your intellectual development and current thinking, so many thanks for agreeing to this interview. Your approach to political theory is notable for its valorization of politics. *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993) argues for the ongoing contestation of the rules and arrangements framing political activity and argues against theoretical ploys to reduce politics to underlying forms of communal consensus, law, or reason. Would you elaborate on why you take politics and contestation of the ground rules and principles to be of such significance?

Bonnie Honig: Training in graduate school in the United States in the mid-1980s, I read a lot of Rawls and, perhaps in part because I had done my previous work in Canada and England in programmes not yet touched by Rawlsianism, Rawls' project struck me as strange and alien. The philosophical project of designing institutions that would, to the extent that they were successful, make any further political struggle, contestation, or engagement unnecessary struck me as odd, and anti-vital, an idea I came to see in Nietzsche, whom I read rather late in my graduate training. But initially, this was simply my inchoate sense of things when working with Rawls. My first instinct was to go to other thinkers within the liberal tradition to find alternatives. T.H. Green was an early hero of mine and in the mid-1980s I spent some time at Balliol College reading the T.H. Green manuscripts. In the end, however, I found better articulation of my objections to Rawls' systematic approach to justice and a clearer sense of how differently to theorize

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

and motivate political practice from the work of Hannah Arendt and Nietzsche.

What I found in Arendt and Nietzsche was an alertness to the propensity of any political order to engender what I came to call *remainders* (reworking the term from Bernard Williams). Nietzsche and Arendt also impress upon us an awareness of the fact that those who benefit from existing sets of arrangements are implicated in some way in what is done to those who are remaindered by them. I had been prepared for this insight, perhaps, by my earlier encounter with Hobhouse's rather similar sort of argument on behalf of unemployment insurance. But how should we think of our implication in the inequalities from which we benefit? At stake for me, as for Hobhouse and other critics of the infelicities and injustices of capitalist economies, was the issue of whether we think of institutional remainderings as deserved, as did those social theorists of whom Rawls was critical, or as a 'misfortune' as Rawls does, or as an injustice. For Rawls, many of capitalism's remainders do constitute an injustice that ought to be remedied or addressed. But Rawlsian justice itself is unimplicated in the inequalities it produces. Its inequalities are *justified*; that is, the whole point of the exercise in *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

That justice itself could do injustice is unthinkable from within the Rawlsian framework. For me, it was absolutely necessary to think this thought and to render 'political' – contestable, changeable, and accountable – Rawls' idea of 'misfortune', to expose the ways in which the category of misfortune solved the problem of the injustice of justice for Rawls. By deploying the idea of 'misfortune' to describe those whose natures just by chance do not fit the needs of the institutional arrangements of justice (his nature is his misfortune, Rawls says of the misfit), Rawls props up a kind of justice that is unimplicated in the violence it spawns and by way of which it maintains itself. Here I was influenced I believe by William Connolly who has since attended in detail to how certain things but not others rise to cross the threshold of justice. From Connolly, too, and also from Derrida, I figured out how to convert my intuitive objections to Rawlsian justice into a more considered and ultimately very appreciative analysis of the attractions and limits of that approach for democratic theory.

In the end, what struck me then and still does is the inattention in political theory as a field to the *politics* of justification. Liberals and deliberativists know well the *dangers of* '*decisionism*'. The *dangers of justification* also need to be acknowledged. I find such acknowledgment in Bernard Williams' ethics. Especially in his work on moral conflict,

he captures the ethical importance of the unjustifiable. Writing about tragic situations in which there is, as he put it, 'no right thing to do', he rejects both Kantian and utilitarian approaches. In a case in which a moral agent must consider a repugnant act, killing one so as to save the lives of nine versus allowing ten to be killed, Williams insists that the actor is under no obligation to insert himself in to the situation (contra utilitarianism) but that if he does do so, he ought not to *justify* the violence he performs, as utilitarianism would. Instead, even though he may well feel he acted for the best by killing one and saving nine, and there may be good reasons for his action, the actor ought also to feel regret for his action. Acting in a tragic situation means his action will have remainders to which a decent moral agent ought to have some fidelity.

In an article about Williams' work, 'Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home', which appeared right after *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* I explored Williams' treatment of tragic situations and their remainders and extended his insight to political theory. I criticized Williams' account of moral integrity for its political withdrawalist implications, calling attention to what I took to be the significance of the fact that, in his example, the most tragic and explicitly violent situation he thinks about (and the only one in which the utilitarianly correct act – killing one to save nine – is not impermissible for Williams) occurs in an unnamed, politically volatile country in South America. The subtle counsel of Williams, I argued, conveyed by way of this example, was that good moral agents ought not to put themselves too much at risk; those who care for their moral integrity ought not to venture too far from home. Thus began my later interest in the politics of foreignness.

But Williams was already important to me in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* where a politics of virtù (or, in the last chapter, a contestatory politics of virtue and virtù), or what I came later to refer to simply as agonism, was for me a commitment to a certain fidelity to the *remainders* of politics. These are not only those persons who do not fit the requirements of the orders in which they happen to find themselves living. The term, *remainders*, refers also to those undone oughts that haunt political life and to those parts of all persons that are ill fitted to dominant norms and forms of subjectivity and kinship, whether we mark this ill-fittedness as queer, feminine, unconscious, criminal, or resistant. Virtù, the unruly virtue, cross-gendered in my first book by way of the manly female figure of the virago, was for me a way of marking that resistance or unruliness and calling for an analysis of its

political production and implications. In a way, then, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* was a call to a kind of political responsibility (and indeed my reading of Nietzsche in that book centres on that very concept).

GB: In *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* you critique forms of virtue politics, notably those of Kant, Sandel, and Rawls. Do you take the post-Rawlsian world of analytic political theory to be continuing in the same vein?

BH: Although others divide the terrain of political theory into continental versus analytic approaches, I tend to think in terms of a different divide. I am drawn to the sort of work that seeks to diagnose our stuckness in certain categories or habits of thought or modes of power. Diagnostic or therapeutic political theory seeks to open us up to new ways of thinking and acting, often by way of catachresis – putting unlike things together. At the start of *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001), for example, I read Rousseau's *Social Contract* together with *The Wizard of Oz*, comparing Rousseau's lawgiver to Dorothy, the heroine of the Frank Baum book and the Hollywood movie. Salman Rushdie wrote a great book about the film for the BFI book series in which Rushdie treats Dorothy as an iconic immigrant who leaves the greyness of her home (in Kansas) and seeks out the more colourful adventures of the road. Rushdie's embrace of Dorothy provides excellent counterbalance to Bernard Williams' moral homebody. Dorothy also has political potential. I read Dorothy as a kind of foreign founder, the unwitting agent of Oz's liberation not just from the Wicked Witch of the West but also from the impositional, infantilizing alienating rule of the Wizard. Dorothy takes it upon herself to do things that would be unthinkable at home. Rushdie's reading suggests that she grows up by putting herself at risk. But if we move our focus away from her and toward those affected by her, we can see that by putting herself at risk she not only grows up but also serves as an agent of much needed change. This may seem problematic from a post-colonial perspective, and it is. It seems to suggest that native citizens cannot govern themselves and need to be rescued by outsiders. That role is played not by Dorothy, however, but by the impotent and self-serving Wizard in the Oz story. Dorothy does not claim power but is the agent of its redistribution. What she poses for us, along with Rousseau's lawgiver, who also comes from elsewhere, is the question of why democracies tell such stories to themselves? What work is the script of foreign founding doing for democratic citizenship and self-understanding?

Studying the scripts in which citizens do seem to self-infantilize and await rescue from the burdens of democratic politics is not the same as approving of them. In fact, the opposite is the case. The foreign founder script whose many iterations I look at in *Democracy and the Foreigner* confronts us with a diagnostic question: Instead of asking 'how should we solve the problem of foreignness?' or 'What do we do about them?' the book poses a question that is distinct but might help with those others – 'What problem might foreignness be solving for democracies, as we fret about or welcome immigrants, try to secure our borders or welcome the new cosmopolitan age?'

Other contemporary thinkers whose work I think of as diagnostic and by whom I have been influenced would include Foucault, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Michael Rogin, Jacques Derrida, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Peter Euben, Richard Flathman, Jane Bennett, Judith Butler, Eric Santner Jacques Ranciere, Barbara Johnson, Michael Warner, Stephen White, Sam Weber, Peter Fenves, Wendy Brown, and Bill Connolly. There are many more. These are not all political theorists, of course, but political theory is well instructed by all of them and all, notably, combine diverse modes of theoretical inquiry with literary texts and analyses.

By contrast with such diagnostic approaches, a great deal of political theory is ideal or systematic, offering not a diagnosis of current limitations but a fully laid out alternative that is said to pass the tests of justice, virtue, coherence, or equality and is championed as worthy of implementation, even if such implementation is impractical or unlikely. Others may describe this second type of theory as positive and cast as negative the work of diagnostic theory – it is said to offer no alternative – but I think there is a great deal that is positive (and practical!) about a commitment to opening up room for new patterns of thought and action on behalf of underspecified change. Moreover, from the perspective of diagnostic approaches, the repeated imagination and construction of ideal theory that passes various tests of justification that are themselves powerful only in certain segments of the theoretical world is itself an avoidance rather than an embrace of any positive politics. (It also entails another avoidance, as I said earlier: that of the *politics* of justification.) That said, sometimes the presentation of an ideal alternative, as readers of utopian literature know very well, can itself be a very effective tactic of defamiliarization.

For a while in the 1990s, it seemed to me, those who sought to avoid theory's impasses on questions of ontology and epistemology – between continental and Anglo-American approaches (though with the influence

of continental theory in the United States and the United Kingdom, this spatialized categorization is more and more inapt) – sought refuge in the history of political thought. There, it was thought, a kind of positivism could supply a respite from the more intractable, political problems of political theory. But the politics is not so easily disposed of and history is itself more interesting and less distant than the positivists hope it is. New work in the history of political thought in recent years has performed the diagnostic approach's work of defamiliarization powerfully. Here I think of Jill Frank's Aristotle, Sara Monoson's Plato, Uday Mehta's Burke, Jennifer Pitt's John Stuart Mill, Kirstie McClure's Locke, among many others.

In my own most recent book, *Emergency Politics* I found that post-9/11 US politics of security could be usefully approached by way of comparable events and problems during what in the United States is called the First Red Scare (1917–1920). I also found in the work of Carl Schmitt's contemporary, Franz Rosenzweig, conceptual resources with which to break the paralyzing effects of the Schmittian state of exception and orient it in a more democratic direction. Right now, I am working on Sophocles' *Antigone*, that classic text on the politics of mourning in wartime, and finding in it resources for thinking anew about our politics of death, burial, and war.

GB: In *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001) you invoke cosmopolitanism as a way of contesting images of the foreigner. To what extent is a cosmopolitan standpoint sustainable, given the global variety of ways of conducting politics and contesting standpoints?

BH: A cosmopolitan standpoint is, as such, unsustainable because cosmopolitanism as I understand it names not a standpoint but a political project. This political project presupposes the nation-state while also denaturalizing its perspective in order to put pressure on some of its more pernicious mechanisms of self-maintenance, such as its discourses of native/foreigner supported and informed by border policing and other national state institutions. Cosmopolitanism does not cede to the state ideological or ontic priority as the scene of politics; it seeks to identify alternative bases of political engagement and collectivity.

In *Democracy and the Foreigner*, I was interested in particular in varieties of immigrant and immigration activism as models of democratic practice increasingly marginalized by nation-state institutions. Since then, in *Emergency Politics*, in new work on new or emergent rights, I explore also the transnational politics of food production and

consumption, in particular the international Slow Food movement, and that of the less well known but very important localvores.

I admire Slow Food's funny but deadly serious declaration of a right to taste and the ways in which that right is tethered by Slow Food not to a sovereign palate but to a relatively responsible earth stewardship in which the pleasures of the palate are dependent upon responsible ethical and political farming, production and consumption. But the localvores introduce some caution to Slow Food's embrace of global networks to save local economies. Global markets may be able to help support local economies, especially when locals are aided and supported by groups such as Slow Food. But the shipping and travel that support niche producers in far away places also exact environmental costs and create expectations among consumers of taste satisfaction that is undisciplined by seasonality or scarcity. There is much to admire in Slow Food, but its ethics and politics could usefully be seasoned by just a dash of localvore brand stoicism and scepticism, in my view. The project of cosmopolitanism is never inalert to such considerations that take account of the politics of place, pace, and space.

It is important to note that this way of thinking about cosmopolitanism is different from the Habermasians' in which the focus is on internationalizing the rule of law and its juridical institutions, not the practice of agonistic politics, *per se*. The cosmopolitan viewpoint that I (along with others such as Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins) forward takes a more ambivalent and wary view of such extensions of law, knowing that they are themselves modes of governance that will engender their own remainders and injustices, while also relieving constituencies very often of the felt need for democratic responsibility and activism (while also providing ever newer but now merely dissenting actions in response to the new injustices invariably about to be wrought by these new institutions). Indeed, in my reply to Seyla Benhabib's Tanner Lectures (The Lectures along with replies by me, Will Kymlicka and Jeremy Waldron were published as *Another Cosmopolitanism*, ed., Robert Post (2006)), *agonistic cosmopolitanism* is the name I gave to the alternative I favour and whose diagnostic perspective and affirmative politics I explored in the European context. Agonistic cosmopolitanism postulates and engenders acts of citizenship and claims of right across borders, on behalf of the remainders of the state system. Etienne Balibar makes this argument as well, in the *United States of Europe?*, noting how important it is to reclaim sovereignty on behalf of such activisms, too. This is all the more important, not less so, as

we find ourselves more and more governed by international institutions and law, which do not only attenuate but also prop up the sovereignty of state institutions, as Derrida pointed out with regard to Europe in the 1990s.

Derrida's work is important here because it trains us to be alert to the undecidability of the values and virtues to which we are most committed. He emphasizes *both* the commitment *and* the wariness needed in relation to law's new global reach. In that vein, I tracked in *Democracy and the Foreigner* the undecidability of the lawgiver, the foreign founder of Rousseau's *Social Contract* who reappears in American immigration politics as the iconic good/bad immigrant on whom, in the American political imagination, citizens depend to re-energize or threaten their stale democracy. The idea that the very thing you depend on is the thing about which you must be most wary is, to my mind, the instructive contribution offered by gothic romance, a genre that has a great deal to offer democratic theory.

When Hannah Arendt was once asked about her views on feminism, she said her thought was: 'What will we lose if we win?' I think of this as an excellent political caution generally, one that any social movement should keep in mind; it is also a quintessentially gothic romantic thought. The thing we desire and fight for *may* be our undoing. This is not a reason to give up our desire or our fight; but the thought, if kept alive, may change the shape of our desire, may affect how we fight for it, and how we live with its (dis)satisfactions. It informs my thinking about cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitics.

GB: Your admiration of Hannah Arendt is expressed throughout your work, notably in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. You take Arendt to be valuable for feminism precisely because she does not wear the label of feminism or allow any such labels to dominate her thinking. Given your own sensitivity to the dangers of essentialism and reification, do you consider feminism to be a significant standpoint, to which you want to contribute?

BH: I am a feminist, which to my mind simply means that I am committed to sexual and gender equality, and to sisterly solidarity, where the latter is possible. Feminism means (inter alia) working to (re)define equality in light of always new developments. It means taking and sharing power and using it to institute equality. This means one is always giving power away when one gains it and trusting there is always plenty more to go around because it will be generated and multiplied, never simply consumed, squandered, or guarded as their own, by those who

take it. It means supporting others who do the same. It means being truly democratic.

My work is always engaged with, influenced by or written alongside feminist and queer theory. My commitment to feminism and feminist theory and my sensitivity, as you call it, to the dangers of essentialism, are such that I do feminist theory and/as democratic theory. Thus, aside from my edited volume of feminist work on Hannah Arendt and my own article in that volume, both of which sought to alert feminists to the resources in Arendt's thought for third-wave feminism, my contributions to feminist theory have been *part* of my work in democratic theory: my use and then deconstruction of the gendered distinction between virtue and virtue in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, my turn by way of a reading of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* to gothic romance as a model genre for democratic theory in *Democracy and the Foreigner*, my work in that same book on the biblical Book of Ruth as a model of sororal politics alongside Derrida's politics of friendship, and my current work on *Antigone* and the gendered distinction between justice and mourning that we have inherited from Hegel's reading of that play.

GB: In your work, you draw upon Derrida. Could you say how you consider Derrida to be valuable to political theory and how you see deconstruction relating to the historic texts of political theory?

BH: Deconstruction is the mode of interpretation by which I am most influenced though I do not always practice it, and even when I do, I do not perform it in its most playful sense. As Derrida said more than once, you can only deconstruct something you love. The labour of deconstruction is an expression of attachment and investment. I think the greatest difference between political theory's traditional styles of interpretation and deconstruction is not that the former deal with the canon and the latter do not. On the contrary, so many of the texts that are the focus of deconstructive ardour are themselves the most canonical – Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Exodus*, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Aristotle's *Politics* – these leap immediately to mind, but there are many more. The innovation of deconstruction is not a demotion of the canon. Rather, deconstruction offers a promotion to the reader. It puts the reader, the careful, devoted deconstructive reader, on an equal footing with the text, avows that equality (since it is often subtle but denied in other modes of interpretation) and positions the reader to see, better than the author him/herself (as it were), the vagaries of the text, its aporias, undecidabilities, and impasses.

Paradoxically, this approach both recanonizes and decanonizes. It recanonizes by attending anew to traditional texts of central importance to western civilization. It decanonizes by approaching those texts focusing not only on their successes, wisdom, and virtue but also on their failures, insufficiencies, and contradictions. But the love and attachment, the sense of debt and inheritance/imposition that canonicity postulates in readers? – these are entirely presupposed by deconstruction.

GB: Could you say how you see contemporary political theory contributing to the analysis of present practical political issue?

BH: There are so many present practical political issues to address!! War, violence, terror, emergency politics, statelessness, global inequality, gender inequality, economic and environmental disaster, the ethics, and politics of current practices of production and consumption, racism, prejudice of all sorts – one hardly knows where to begin to answer such a question. In *Emergency Politics*, I argue that in the face of emergency, democratic theory of late tends towards two responses: we either question the reality, the facticity of the emergency, arguing that there is no international network of terror or we turn to legal means, and insist that the best way to deal with violence is by way of proper, procedural justice or the broadening of an international rule of law. These tactics are both important. But the to and fro of fact and law is not sufficient to a democratic politics. Emergency politics must also include civic activism, agonistic politics. The challenge is to locate within an increasingly narrowed domain of the political (daily circumscribed by security needs) opportunities for political action on behalf of democratic values of solidarity and equality. The challenge is to resist the securitarian scripting of *risk* as unaffordable.

Much like therapy, theory can in a slow and careful way help us identify and mobilize our best powers, break habitual patterns of action and thought that tie us to current asymmetrical distributions of privilege and safety and help us begin to think and act otherwise, individually and collectively. Like deconstruction itself, this can be a long, slow, laborious, fun, and rewarding process. Unlike therapy and deconstruction, however, this work can only be successfully performed and maintained, in the end, collectively. Thus, the work of politics brings us face to face with the other. No doubt this is one reason we often avoid it. But it is unavoidable. Here no one has been more right than Hannah Arendt – action in concert is especially powerful in creating

new relations and realities. Without it, in our own time, we will not long be able to go on referring to ourselves as *democratic*.

GB: Earlier in this interview you remarked on how you are drawn to work that diagnoses our stuckness in certain categories of thinking and acting. *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* has now been published, and it constitutes a series of imaginative and interlinked challenges to the current practices of emergency politics. Throughout the book, the prevalent binary opposition between the notion of an emergency, legitimating extraordinary nondemocratic measures and a sense of normal politics, which purportedly encompasses and accommodates the particular and the dissident, is challenged. Would you see this book as resisting top-down forms of 'miraculous' political intervention in emergency situations and standardizing ways of reviewing political issues in favour of creative democratic responses to emerging questions?

BH: The idea of a contrast between top-down miraculous action and more immanent, emergent democratic forms is one I take from Franz Rosenzweig who in his work is writing about miracle and its place in theology, not about action and its place in democratic politics. Still, I find his work useful, especially since there is such precedent for analogizing action or decision and miracle, most notably albeit very differently by both Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt. If we want to rework the resources left to us by these thinkers, for whom the sovereign decision is like a miracle, or natality and its expression in action is like a miracle, then we do well to explore the contretemps over the status of miracle among theologians in early twentieth-century Germany. What we find is that Rosenzweig, on behalf of what he termed 'the new thinking', was interested in looking at miracle not in terms of the divine sovereign power that performs it – in a ruptural way – but rather at the human powers that receive it (or not) as a result of long practices of preparation and the cultivation of receptivity.

If even divine miracle depends on the orientation of those it solicits, on human powers of perception and belief, then surely, politically, we see how dependent are political events, just as Arendt said, on practices of reception and interpretation. I find this in my reading of Rousseau, who invests the lawgiver with so much power, in the Social Contract, but still sees the lawgiver is ultimately dependent on the people's decision about him: Is he a lawgiver or a charlatan? The people must decide, and they must do so in advance, as it were, of being formed into the people they need to be to make this decision. This is one version of

what I call the paradox of politics, which exposes and endorses the groundlessness of political action.

The book argues that the paradox of politics is the only real and productive paradox for democratic theory. In deliberative and liberal democratic theory today, however, the paradox of politics is displaced by other paradoxes that are less productive for democratic theory and seem to be more soluble. That is why people like them. Among these are the paradox of democratic legitimation, the paradox of constitutional democracy (Chapter 1), the paradoxical dependence of the rule of law on the rule of man (Chapter 3), the paradox of the legal suspension of law (Chapter 4), and the paradox of bounded communities (Chapter 5).

Arendt was very open to the paradox of politics, which she wanted not to escape but to embrace. In my earlier *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, I showed how she avoided the paradox but in *Emergency Politics* I see better the ways in which she also cultivates openness to it, especially in her concern that innovative actions not be folded back into old causal frameworks that might undo the power of emergent new forms, ideas, practices, and institutions. Thus, I do believe that mine is in a way an Arendtian reading of Rousseau: highlighting the dependence of the lawgiver on the people and the stories they tell about him rather than the dependence of the people on the lawgiver to bring them good law.

This connects up with one of the most important things to me in *Emergency Politics*: the emphasis on *how* the stories of political action or events are told. In other words, if it is important from an Arendtian perspective to enter into action in concert, it is also important to tell the stories of such efforts in ways that preserve their qualities as action (contingent, free, risky, thrilling, principled, efficacious) and inspire others to put themselves at risk as well, when called to, and to cultivate the forms of receptivity that knit such events into the fabrics of common lives.

In *Emergency Politics*, one of the stories I tell is that of Louis Post, assistant secretary of labour during the First Red Scare in the United States in 1919–1920. Amid several acts of political violence in the United States (which would now be called terrorism), xenophobic fears of radical politics emboldened people like the young J. Edgar Hoover to help round up and deport aliens charged with being anarchists in favour of violent revolution. Louis Post stood up for such political dissidents. His story is usually told as follows: a principled lawyer stood up for the rule of law and used his power as a member of the executive branch of government to grant due process to aliens, paving the way for those rights to be

later recognized by law. Key here is a phrase often used by legal historians: Post was a principled proceduralist who is said to have 'anticipated the law'. In my book, I note that at other times, however, Post was no proceduralist, as for example when he set aside due process considerations to arrest KKK members in South Carolina after the civil war. And I make clear how celebrations of Post that claim he anticipated the law actually undo his agency and grant all the power to law; the language of 'anticipation' tells us that law was headed to alien rights anyway, that Post just played a part in its inevitable unfolding, a courageous part, but still a supporting role, not the lead.

My own reading of Post is more uncomfortable for legalists. Post did not just defend the rule of law, he also pressured, reworked, and innovated it, resorting to technicalities wherever possible to free those who had been unjustly detained. As a member of the executive branch, he was in a position to decide on the law's interpretation and application. He may have sought to undo a certain form of sovereign decisionism (the Alien and Sedition Act) but the way he did so was by exercising his own discretionary power, and he did still more: He also sought to mobilize a public and this is the key to my reading of him as a democratic actor. When examined before a congressional committee, Post mobilized American ideals of justice, equality, and humanism to counter American xenophobia and nationalism. He was effective and the public was swayed by his appeals. The sad irony of the story is that he won the battle but lost the war: this was one of Post's last political actions, since he was 71 years at the time of these events and he was powerfully marginalized by his adversaries afterwards, kept out of the public realm and off the lecture circuit. J. Edgar Hoover by contrast went on to play a key role in building the national security state of the twentieth century. Such contingencies, of age, longevity, political efficacy and opportunity matter decisively, as Michael Oakeshott never stopped emphasizing in his work on historiography (I am sure 'anticipation' is his least favourite historiographic figure).

I confess, though, that when I first wrote about Post, one of my central aims was simply to get his story – in any form – into wider circulation. That is, although his story and its reception provided an ideal way for me to explore an important issue to political theory – how we domesticate human agency in ways that are deleterious to radical democratic politics, sometimes precisely by celebrating the 'hero' of the story as, say, a great American, or cosmopolitan, or humanist – the most important thing was, in my view, that this story might educate people about the opportunities for democratic action even in the very

narrowed frameworks of emergency. It might even inspire someone. For this reason, my book connected the concept of emergency to that of emergence, to highlight the dimensions of possibility, agency, and innovation even in an emergency setting and, conversely, to acknowledge how moments of political emergence (as in the case of new rights, for example, such as the right to suicide) may become part of our narratives of modern emancipation in the long run but in the short run will generate in us, in the moment, a sense of uncertainty or even panic. This is all part of what I call 'emergency politics', which I define broadly to include emergent rights issue areas such as environmental politics, the infrastructure of food and agriculture, animal rights, the right to suicide, and more.

GB: In this interview, you have observed how you are attracted to deconstructive ways of dealing with texts, as they enable equality between reader and author. Your recent work on *Antigone* is outstanding in the subtle ways it engages the ever-burgeoning literature on *Antigone,* while also identifying its ongoing political resonances. You see the interpretation of the play as in some ways undecidable, although you decide it by careful readings of Greek contexts and re-readings of textual interventions. Do you see agonism as a way of uniting the interpretation of texts and the interpretation of politics by contesting the undecidable characters of texts and politics?

BH: It is striking me now in the context of this interview that my aim in my new book on *Antigone* is much the same as was my aim in *Emergency Politics*. Here we have a play, an ancient Greek tragedy, that has become a touchstone of dissidence, an inspiration to generations struggling against sovereign power. But dominant receptions of this story have rendered it inspiring precisely in ways that pitch the tale around emergency power, rather than the important work of everyday maintenance, receptivity, and preparation. Moreover, the Antigone who inspires dissidence is not an actor in concert but a solitary, principled, perhaps mad woman who dies for her cause.

A great deal of work has gone, over the centuries, into ruling out other possible readings, it seems to me; I develop these over the course of the book, arguing that Sophocles' play, read closely, in historical context, and in dialogue with later receptions, features an Antigone who acts in concert with her sister (Chapter 4), quests for power (Chapter 3), and seeks sovereignty (Chapter 2). Antigone, then, is not merely anti-statist, as so many of her admirers assume. Herself no democrat (of course!), she may offer useful instruction to democratic theory now, nonetheless.

More important, and more difficult: it is absolutely necessary to scrutinize the mortalist humanism that she underpins. Mortalist humanists try to do what Post did in his day, to find commonalities around which to mobilize publics in opposition to sovereign state violence. But where Post spoke of political principles such as equality and fairness, mortalist humanists invoke our shared finitude and mortality in order to move us to cross, as Antigone is said to have done, the lines of friend–enemy in grief. Democratic theory, however, is charged with critique it seems to me and so, when certain lamenting mothers like Cindy Sheehan are dubbed an 'American Antigone', we do well as democratic theorists not only to join our voices to that chorus, as it were, but also to ask after the construction of such extra-political universalisms (the lamenting mother) by way of this heroine of Greek myth and tragedy. Here again Arendt is very helpful: she rejects mortality, insists that natality is the ontological condition of action, and demands that action be understood in terms of the principles it makes manifest, rather than the common motives or conditions that may be said to motivate it. We can attenuate her somewhat rigid distinctions (as I have argued we should [in PTDP]) while still learning from her on this point.

A humanism that calls on us to act not out of shared finitude but out of natalist commitments to worldiness is an agonistic humanism. I develop this idea in detail in the Antigone book. Here I can say that one trait of an agonistic humanism is a commitment to attenuating the human–animal distinction that other humanisms seem only to resecure. I say 'seem' because it is notable to me that such distinctions are always fraught, for example, the mourning sister of Greek tragedy, Antigone, is quickly maternalized even after Hegel privileged precisely her sorority as the iconic marker of purity and equality. And that maternalization happens in the play and since by way of a certain animalization of the heroine who is compared in the play by the sentry to a mother bird lamenting at an empty nest. The bird referred to here, to render natural the agony of the sister, is actually the product of a prior anthropomorphization, however, and so the circle of human/animal seems eternal and vicious here, something to which an agonistic humanism is particularly sensitive.

GB: One of the aspects of your reading of *Antigone* that I find to be really intriguing is the extent to which you are dealing with the historical figure of Antigone, the dramatic character of Antigone, Sophocles' dramatization of the politics of mourning and the refraction of Antigone in contemporary issues of mourning and readings of *Antigone*. Given

what you have to say about the role of tragedy as an intervening in the politics of time, as well as the subtlety with which Antigone's speeches are framed, would you emphasize the role of Sophocles?

BH: In *Antigone, Interrupted*, I am really interested in how the text, even after all these years (there can hardly be a more-read text in the history of reading?) carries surfeits of meaning that remain to be read. These remainders testify to the insufficiencies and insistences of prior receptions and evidence the recalcitrance of the text to appropriation and interpretation. A colleague recently asked me if some of these surfeits – the ones that come out when I read Antigone's final speech (long thought to be inauthentic) in the context of fifth-century burial politics – are best seen as an ancient example of what Carl Schmitt called Einbruch der Zeit in das Spiel (the rupture of the play by historical time)? or of what Benjamin would see as an instance of a crisis/possibility in our own time, our own Jetztzeit? Sophocles could not help us answer this question even if we could conjure him, and I am not sure we can answer it either. Any play is always already shot through with historical time (though not all evidence the rupture noted by Schmitt in Hamlet) and an interpretation of any play is surely positioned for new insights by its position in its own Jetztzeit, now-time. However we do it, however we manage it, the reason for returning yet again for new insights regarding *Antigone* has to do in part with our need as democratic theorists and feminist theorists to *un*do the play's ongoing hold on us now: the protagonist has come to stand for the liberal ideal of a heroine of conscience, the double side of which is the terrorist – Zizek, and others, have identified Antigone with the RAF's Gudrun Ensslin. But Sophocles' play gives us every reason to retell the story in a more democratic way, focusing not just on isolated heroics or suicidal violence but also on (attempted) actions in concert, not just mortality but also natality, and not just crisis and resistance but also the quest for sovereign powers of self-governance.

In my book, I argue that there are alternative practices of lamentation and death practice that do not go the usual way of the received Antigone, and I ask why recent mortalist humanists have not turned to them for inspiration. Certain strands of queer theory, involved in lamentation but not reducible to it, formed by the crucible of finitude in response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, manifest a quest for power and not just a discomfort with it, that is an absolutely essential element of democratic theory and practice.

I should add, in closing, that there may seem to be many issues of more pressing importance politically right now than rereading an ancient tragedy. But the premise of my work in political theory and cultural politics is the idea that our options as political actors are always shaped and constrained by inherited scripts. Reworking those scripts can help release us from their grip and allow us to find in them more emancipatory alternatives. Acknowledging the ways in which we – in our often insistent reading and spectating practices – have narrowed their promise rather than actualized it gives expression to the diagnostic promise and power of agonistic democratic theory.

GB: Many thanks Bonnie, for being so open and informative about the development and nature of your thinking.

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9

A Conversation with Carole Pateman: Reflections on Democratic Participation, *The Sexual Contract*, and Power Structures

Steve On

Steve On: Professor Pateman, we were very enthusiastic to secure an interview with you and to discuss your latest research. Many thanks for agreeing to this interview. To begin, *Contract and Domination*, which you co-authored with Charles Mills, came out in 2007. Perhaps, not everyone has had a chance to read this book, but it is safe to assume that most political theorists, and surely those working in contemporary political theory, have heard of and read *The Sexual Contract* (hereafter *TSC*), which had appeared in 1988. *TSC* has received the Lippincott Award for 'a work considered still significant 15 years since the original publication'. Andrew Vincent (2004, 128) in his book *The Nature of Political Theory* describes *TSC* as a 'seminal work', contributing to our understanding of patriarchy and how social contract underwrites it. Looking back on the past 20 years, I was wondering if you could provide a rough sketch of the historical and social context in which *TSC* emerged. How did you, for instance, become interested in political theory? What was the field of political theory like then?

Carole Pateman: I have to look back over a much longer period than 20 years to answer the last part of your question. *TSC* is my third book, and the second that I have written about theories of original contracts. My first book, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, was published in 1970. It is still being used in courses today, so it may well be that more political theorists, and I would say certainly more political scientists,

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

have read it than have read *TSC*. However, the latter has been read by more people in other disciplines.

I became interested in political theory when I discovered it at Ruskin College, an independent college in Oxford for adult students. When I went to Ruskin in 1963 (the same year as John Prescott, the former Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) I thought I would be interested in economics; this was in the days of Keynesianism and before mathematics and models that went far beyond indifference curves dominated the discipline. But in my first year – our course was for two years – I was introduced to political theory. At that point I had no notion that subjects such as democracy, participation, political obligation, or consent had been debated and analysed for several centuries and I had not heard of Hobbes, Locke, and so on. I was completely fascinated by it all, much more so than by economics. Then I was fortunate enough to obtain a place at Oxford University, at Lady Margaret Hall – I am pleased to say long before the women's colleges began to be, sadly, turned into mixed establishments – where I read Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). That was how it all began, and in a very different political and intellectual context than today. In the 1960s political science in Britain was not the professionalized discipline that it is today and there were far, far fewer books and articles. I read my first piece of political theory long before Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and before *Political Theory* began to be published. Those were still the days of pen, pencil, paper, manual typewriters, and carbon paper.

My first book reflects the political and academic climate of the late 1960s, but there is a link that is not often noticed between *Participation and Democratic Theory* and *TSC*. In the earlier book I argued for, and presented empirical evidence to show the feasibility of, workplace democracy and part of my argument in *TSC*, but a part which has received little attention, is a critical analysis of the employment contract. My second book, *The Problem of Political Obligation* (first published in 1979), discussed some of the classic theories of original contracts and I drew on my interpretation when I was writing *TSC*. But the development that was essential to many of its ideas and arguments was the revival of the women's movement in the late 1960s and the subsequent emergence of feminist academic work, including feminist political theory (my Afterword to the second edition of *The Problem of Political Obligation* in 1985 also reflects this).

In my discussion of political obligation I had taken for granted that the social contract was the whole of the original contract, and it was only when re-reading the classic texts from a feminist perspective that

I gradually realized that the original contract was not one-dimensional. The social contract, the justification of the authority of the state over citizens, was only one-dimensional; the other was the sexual contract, the justification of the government of women by men. More recently, my argument is that the original contract is three-dimensional. Charles Mills explored the third dimension in *The Racial Contract* and I have made a contribution in Chapter 2 of *Contract and Domination*. The other development that was crucial in the formulation of my ideas in the 1980s was, of course, the revival of contract theory following Rawls, publication of his major book in 1971. There was also an expansion of analytical political philosophy in those years and both it and contract theory influenced leftist political theory, which was also part of the intellectual context of the argument of *TSC*.

SO: You have served as the first woman President of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), what was that like? In comparison to the countries you have lived, what are your reflections on how politics, and political theory, are conducted in different countries and university systems? How do you find the intellectual developments of the different countries?

CP: Being at the head of an organization such as the IPSA can be challenging in various respects whoever is in the position. The IPSA is very different from a national association because its member associations come from around the world, and thus from a variety of different intellectual and academic cultures. The President has to engage to a certain degree in 'international relations' and 'diplomacy', which, rather to my surprise, I found I had a certain facility for and I enjoyed. As for being the first woman President, that certainly had its moments although, for the most part, I had supportive and helpful colleagues, many of whom I had worked with in the Association for some years in a number of capacities. But there was one European male political scientist who behaved disgracefully by insulting me in public at a dinner during the 1994 Congress.

My predecessor, Guillermo O'Donnell, had begun the process of opening up the Association by, for example, making it more friendly to women, and I continued in that direction. But you have to remember that the IPSA was founded in 1949 and I was elected in 1991 (the President's term is for three years) so there were many years of consolidation of a masculine culture before I took office. It was only in 2006 that Lourdes Sola was elected as the second woman President. By the beginning of the 1990s, there were feminist political scientists active in the

Association, but most national political science associations were very heavily male dominated. There were a few amusing moments – looking back on it – when a man, it was always a man, wanting to speak to the President headed straight for Franco Kjellberg, then the Secretary General of the IPSA, and was surprised and taken aback to discover that he was talking to the wrong person.

Especially nearly 20 years ago, national political science associations and the discipline in different countries were at very different levels of development. And in the early 1990s the Berlin Wall had recently fallen and the Soviet Union collapsed so political scientists in that region were in some state of disarray. Some Latin American countries and their political science associations were still recovering from the legacy of military dictatorships, and in many poor countries political science was hardly represented at all. On the other hand, political science was flourishing, for example, in India and Taiwan. I tried to encourage more participation in the Association from African and Arab countries, but although I had slightly more success with Africa both the continent and the region were badly underrepresented. As I have mentioned, I had been active for some years in IPSA in a variety of capacities before I became President but have not been involved since 1994.

SO: In situating your work within the second wave of feminism, how would you compare and contrast your argument with those of your academic successors, say, the third-wave feminism? For example, Generation Xers such as myself who came of age on the back of the gender protections and equality rights that had been obtained by first- and second-wave feminists, such as yourself, tend to align themselves with feminists and scholars of colour, negotiating a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related issues and culture-oriented questions. How does your work address the concerns of the current generation? (Of course, besides race and culture, third-wave feminist scholars have examined these issues: essentialism, reification, contestation, and analysis of present practical political topics such as globalization and discrimination in the workplace.)

CP: I am not sure that I altogether understand the label 'third-wave feminism'. The 'first wave' refers to the very large women's movement, the enormously wide range of political activities and feminist social and political thought during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in Britain and the United States. Feminism did not die out in the period from the 1920s to the 1960s but political and intellectual activities were much less in evidence. The 'second

wave' refers to the re-emergence of the women's movement as a major political organization that began during the 1960s, feminist questioning of some fundamental beliefs and institutions and the appearance of feminist pamphlets and books, consciousness raising groups, cultural spaces, and women's shelters, and, a bit later, the development of academic feminism. So the labels first wave and second wave make sense. But what is the counterpart to this that constitutes a 'third wave'? Rather than a revival of a big political movement, the women's movement has declined and become fragmented, but at the same time the legal props of women's subordination have been eliminated and feminist ideas, often in very diluted form, are now part of popular political consciousness and part of the corporatized mass media. But is that sufficient to talk of a new, third wave? To be sure, over the past decade or so a large number of very vigorous women's movements, many of which put women's human rights at their centre, have developed around the world but I am not clear that that is what the 'third wave' refers to.

If the term is used with reference to feminist academic work rather than political movements, then I must admit that I am altogether up to date. Still, one of the topics that you mention, essentialism, was a major issue at the time that *TSC* was published, and some reviewers and critics spent more time hunting out what they perceived as essentialism than looking at the arguments that I actually made. I am not denying that essentialism can be a problem, but rather less within feminism itself than some of the most fervent essentialism hunters were claiming. Moreover, they were hardly the first to notice it. In the 1790s, Mary Wollstonecraft drew attention to the fact that the term 'man' (as in, for example, the rights of man) was not generic but masculine, and she argues vigorously against the view that women's characteristics are natural, an essential attribute of women, rather than socially constructed, a product of hierarchical institutions and men's oppression of women. But it has not been fashionable for a while to focus on the power of men over women. As I remarked in my dialogue with Charles Mills in *Contract and Domination*, the shift in attention to differences among women (part of the third wave?) led to accusations against those of us who want to argue that such differences exist within structures of sexual power that we were in the grip of 'binaries' or believed that men and women were naturally antagonistic and so forth. This was despite the fact that I took some trouble in *TSC* to show how, despite the language of nature, sexual difference had been constructed as a political difference between subordination and freedom from the time of the classic contract theorists.

You say that third-wave feminists look at practical political problems such as discrimination in the workplace. But how does this distinguish the third from the second, or even the first, wave? Practical problems, including women's equal access to and equality within the workplace, have been a perennial concern of feminists for over a century. The world has changed dramatically since the 1960s, with the end of old-style colonialism, the end of legal discrimination against women in Britain and the United States, globalization, the rise of the power of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment, massive displacement of numerous populations, and large-scale movements of people around the world. The old male 'breadwinner' jobs have been swept away and the workforce is full of women and non-Whites, many of whom are immigrants. New problems have also emerged with the very rapid increase in commodification and the commercialization and sexualization of Anglo-American culture over the past two decades. (I do not share the view advanced in recent years that prostitution is 'transgressive' and empowering for women.) But the question is whether long-standing problems are now part of the past, part of an outmoded second wave? That hardly seems a convincing position when men still monopolize the higher level, better paying positions in the occupational structure and still monopolize positions of authority in major institutions in general, and when such long-standing problems as women's poverty, violence against women and women's standing as citizens are still very much with us; even legal equality is not yet universal (and see my discussion of the global problems in Chapter 5 of *Contract and Domination*).

As Chapters 2 and 5 in *Contract and Domination* make clear, I welcome the recent growth of attention to empire and racial power. Charles and I tried to do two major new things in the book; to make a contribution to the 'other' contract and to say something about the intersection of the sexual and racial contracts. In Chapter 5, I look at the mutually interrelated development of the idea of 'race' and a particular conception of masculinity and femininity. I draw on historical material from Britain and the United States together with some current global evidence and, departing from my usual understanding of 'contract' and adopting the metaphorical usage so prominent in political philosophy and much feminism. I also discuss how indifference to the suffering of certain categories of people is connected to what I call the global sexual-racial contract. In my chapter 'The Settler Contract', my contribution to the racial contract, I analyse the importance of the doctrine of *terra nullius* in European expansion to both the southern and northern New Worlds and the justification of the construction of civil societies, that

is modern states, in the expropriated territories. I argue that the settlers made (can be said to have made) an original contract. This took the form of a (racial) settler contract which excluded the Native peoples, although their lives and lands were henceforth governed by it within the jurisdiction and borders of new states. Today the claim that the territories were 'empty' or 'vacant' is politically and legally bankrupt, but this means that the problem of legitimacy now lurks just below the surface (thus there is a link with my second book).

SO: The developments of academic feminism in Anglo-North America can be described as falling under the rubric of either 'liberal', or 'radical' or 'cultural'. Yet your work *TSC* cuts across all three major streams. I think that's one of the strengths of *TSC* and why *TSC* is still considered significant today. Could you comment on why we do not find within contemporary political thought similar works that can speak to more than one audience? Has feminism today become so fragmented and specialized that a work like *TSC* would not be able to find a publisher interested in pan- or inter-feminist audience?

CP: First, I must take issue with your categorization of academic feminism. For a very long time now it has seemed to me that the conventional labels, such as 'liberal' or 'radical', applied to feminist scholarship are unhelpful and, in thinking about the history of feminist political thought, are very misleading, as are conventional categories used in political theory more generally. The attempt to place everything in boxes with familiar labels is no doubt part of the reason why feminist commentators on *TSC* have had little to say about my criticism of contractarianism, the employment contract and my use of the concept of property in the person. But they are not alone; political philosophers who give the idea of self-ownership a prominent place do not read my work, or if they do they fail to mention it. Yet the two concepts are closely related and some proponents of self-ownership are, like myself, critical of libertarianism (which I called contractarianism in *TSC*). I discussed this in a paper, 'Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts' in 2002.[1] It is not only feminist work that has become fragmented and specialized but also political theory as a whole; indeed, this is true of the discipline of political science. Everyone can find a niche and does not necessarily have to stray too far beyond it. Publishers, most of which are now parts of large conglomerates, and even academic presses, all give priority today to the bottom line, but there is still room for good books that are wide in their scope. And we are all now urged to be interdisciplinary.

SO: One of the points of *TSC* is that women are confined to the non-political, the family or domestic realm. Since contracts are made at the political or public level, women are by definition ruled out. This is a central theme that feminism wants to address. This still is a subtext in late twentieth-century theories of justice, such as Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. In American and British society, we have laws in the book outlawing the exclusion of women (and girls) from education, political offices, employment, except religion. Yet it would be quite untrue to say that religious exemption to sex discrimination laws is maintaining a vestige of patriarchy, or is it? What is your view on this? That is, what is your view of liberalism's current state? Is it still patriarchal as its past was? Has liberalism of today wiped out its patriarchy of yesterday?

CP: Let me start with the theorists of an original contract who, with the notable exception of Hobbes, draw pictures of the natural state in which women lack the capacities required for freedom. Thus women cannot be parties to the original contract. However, my argument was that they are always party to one other contract, namely the marriage contract. This is necessary if the presentation of the new political order of civil society as a free society is not to be undermined from the beginning. Therefore, women's freedom must simultaneously be both denied and affirmed. My argument was also that the 'private' sphere in its modern contractual form is created (can said to be created) along with the rest of the political order through the original contract and is reproduced through the marriage contract, which recreates relations of domination and subordination; it is just as political as the rest. But in political theory and popular ideology it is seen as natural or non-political. The idea was that women should stick to domestic matters, but the practice was often very far from the theory.

To turn to liberalism and patriarchy, the major problem is what is meant by 'liberalism'. The term is now so ubiquitous and used to cover such a large array of theories and arguments that, in my view, it is now more of a hindrance than a help. *TSC* is an analysis of contract theory, a distinct tradition of argument, not of liberalism. As I stated in my book, I see the 1840s to the 1970s as the heyday of modern patriarchy. The question is whether the multitude of changes since then means that it no longer makes sense to refer to patriarchy and that we are now in a situation of, say, 'post-feminism'. Well, as I noted earlier, women still earn less than men and women's poverty is still a major problem; men still monopolize the leading positions in politics, the economy, universities, the judiciary, and the military; and violence against women is

still carried out with impunity – in Britain the rate of conviction for rape, for example, is now lower than it was in the 1970s – so it seems somewhat premature to start talking about the end of women's subordination. Social beliefs have changed too, but the legacy of old attitudes is still discernible. Old patriarchal convictions can still also be found, not least among religious fundamentalists, whether these are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and so forth. I am not much interested in religion, but it is sensible that in matters of religious observance only Catholics, for example, should officiate at Catholic worship, although ancillary activities or businesses are another matter. So is an exemption from sex discrimination legislation; we now have examples of women priests, bishops, rabbis, and so forth. I thought we were all supposed to be equal in the sight of God.

SO: Now returning to *Contract and Domination*, it seems to me, you and Charles Mills are 'working the same street', so to speak: you both are challenging and revising our understanding of the social contract. A point in common between you and Mills is that society is a system of group domination masked by contracts that are supposedly freely entered into. So women are ruled out of the social contract because of patriarchy and blacks are living under domination because of White supremacy. What other differences, besides patriarchy and White supremacy, are central between you and Mills? What are the implications, and practical consequences, of these differences?

CP: Before I comment on our differences and similarities, I want to make an observation about my work. I do not think of it in terms of groups but, rather, as focused on power structures, subordination, and freedom. Leaving aside all the complex problems about how 'groups' are to be defined, men and women are not groups (nor, in the case of women, are they a minority, though one often finds such formulations as 'minorities x, y, women, and z'). The sexes are, rather, the two halves of humankind, and humankind lives in a multitude of complex variations in many different social and cultural circumstances. And I am not sure that it is very helpful to think of 'race' in terms of groups because it cuts across and complicates such categories as women, men, working class, elite, poor, peasant, or citizen.

Charles and I do not differ over patriarchy or White supremacy, at least in general terms. We agree that a crucial political goal is the dismantling of structures of sexual and racial power and that these structures are interrelated. As we state in the Introduction to *Contract and Domination*, we had both noted in our earlier books that our respective

discussions were about only part of the story. So in our joint book we have made a start on remedying that. For example, in *Contract and Domination* I bring the sexual contract and racial contract together – as they must be if we are to gain a better understanding of the development of the modern state and its patterns of subordination and freedom from the seventeenth century until the present – and show that, for example, my earlier exploration of the relationship between the marriage contract and citizenship has to be revised. I argued that the power and privileges of a 'husband' extended into first-class citizenship. But this was true only for married White men. African-American husbands, along with their wives, were long denied political rights and civil rights and were not in practice admitted to full citizenship and its benefits until the 1960s. In my earlier book, I also examined how women were relegated to second-class status as 'workers', but a full account would also have to investigate racial privilege in the institution of employment.

The main difference between Charles and myself, which we discuss in Chapter 1, is over our understanding of contract theory and whether we should keep it in a modified Rawlsian form that Charles utilizes or abandon it. As he argues, contemporary contract theory is extremely influential and so he wants to persuade its practitioners to broaden their scope from the narrow confines of ideal theory to take account of race. Whether or not other contemporary contract theorists will follow his lead remains to be seen. His discussion of reparations is an excellent example of what can be done, but I nevertheless remain unconvinced that this is the best way forward. This difference between us stems from our very different conception of contract theory. My work stands in contrast to contemporary contract theory. I like to think that I am working within the tradition of classical theories of an original contract. These were political theories about the creation and justification of the modern state and its power structures (the three dimensions of the original contract). Contemporary contract theory, and Charles' own work, treats 'contract' merely as a metaphor and the focus is on moral argument. But, if 'contract' is nothing but a metaphor, my response is why use contract at all; why not approach the problems more directly?

Another related difference is that although the original contract is a story, an extremely powerful political fiction, in *TSC* I tried to show how this story is reflected in and has helped shape actual contracts about property in the person into which individuals enter every day. I argued that these are key mechanisms in the reproduction of modern relations of domination. I was less interested in the conditions of entry

into these contracts than the consequences. That is, my question was how voluntary entry into contracts about property in the person, such as the employment contract, that are claimed to result in free relations continually recreate structures of subordination. But both my question and my answer have frequently been overlooked. Contract theory has a great deal of baggage and when contemporary theorists refer to their classic predecessors they rarely if ever mention the embarrassing bits; contract theory is purged and then reduced to metaphor. And this leads to another question; if 'contract' is merely metaphorical and all the work is done, for example, by concepts of intrinsic human worth or moral equality, what is its appeal? The answer I suggest lies in the widespread assumption that freedom and contract are coextensive. To call upon contract is to lay claim to the mantle of freedom. But contract is merely one form that voluntary agreement can take – and it has also been a crucial vehicle for subordination. Self-ownership, as I noted earlier, has become the preferred term in political philosophy, often interpreted in a very general, bland fashion as referring to individual agency, so it is all the harder to see the political purchase and political teeth of (the fiction of) property in the person, and why, in a context of juridical freedom and equality, the concept is necessary, albeit that it ultimately must be abandoned along with contract theory, if free relations are to be distinguished from subordination.

Let me also mention one other reason why contract should be treated with great caution. In arguing that contract theory should be relinquished, I am swimming against a strong tide in political theory, and in being critical of contract I am swimming against an even more fierce tide in the real world. Contract is a valuable commercial device – when kept in its place. The problem is that contract has come to be seen as a model for the 'good society' and as the means to restructure social life according to the vision of contract all the way down. This vision was once an intellectual curiosity, but developments over the past three decades have shown the havoc that can be wreaked through very vigorous attempts, both national and global, to put it into practice. The rise of neo-liberalism to global power has seen an enormous and very rapid expansion of commodification, privatization, and private property rights, with contract at their centre, in everything from wombs and genetic materials, to municipal water supplies and social services, to warfare (note: 'private contractor'). There has been much talk of freedom during this process, and it has been accompanied by an expansion of universal suffrage and (in varying degrees) associated civil and political liberties, but at the same time the gap between the rich (mostly White)

and the poor (mostly non-White) has grown considerably, and women are the poorest of the poor. Moreover, the social supports that make juridical freedom and equality worth something for the vast majority who have very little or nothing have been disappearing as economies are remade by structural adjustment or neo-liberal governments. One way of looking at this is that the non-contractual bases of contract are being rapidly eroded. Little attention is paid in contract theory to the argument that contract is parasitical upon a non-contractual social foundation of mutual aid, reciprocity, and co-operation, which is given institutional form by the social services funded from the public purse. Evidence indicates that these are not the policies that citizens want and in Latin America some governments are beginning to turn against them – and perhaps the current global economic crisis sparked by deregulated finance capitalism will concentrate our minds.

SO: In political theory, especially in current thinking, where do you see the contemporary trends? More generally, is there a significant gap between the Anglo-American analytical tradition and the Continental tradition? Which, if any, political theorists currently working do you admire, and why?

CP: Political theory is now a large and expanding field with a variety of sub-fields. Democratic theory is one area that has grown very rapidly and diversified in recent years (perhaps not surprising when governments, international agencies, and NGOs are in the business of democracy promotion and export). Globalization has pushed some theorists to look beyond state borders, cosmopolitan, and a number of other new forms of democracy are being discussed, but the development that has had the most success is deliberative democracy, which has taken over a considerable part of the field, and resulted in a large and fast-growing literature. I am not one of its adherents, although I find some of the empirical side of deliberative democracy interesting. Another new area is the re-reading of the classic texts to highlight their entanglement with European expansion, race, and the pursuit of empire. I am involved in another little corner, in the theoretical exploration of the idea of a basic income, which has grown sufficiently for an online journal *Basic Income Studies*. On your second question, while Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel have long been studied in Anglo-American universities, if you look at, say, an analytical political philosopher writing about egalitarianism compared to, say, Deleuze and Guattari, then there is a pretty large gap. But many European political theorists are now interested in

mainstream Anglo-American theory and texts, while many European theorists such as Habermas, Derrida, Heidegger, and numerous others have had a considerable influence over the last quarter century in the Anglo-American world.

I am going to take the last part of your question as an opportunity to say a few words about Brian Barry. Some people have been rather surprised to learn that I was Brian's student; indeed, I am the First Student (a title suggested by Bob Goodin before the dinner in Chicago at which Bob, Keith Dowding, and I presented Brian with *Justice and Democracy*).[2] I wrote *Participation and Democratic Theory* under his supervision. At one point I had reached something of an impasse and Brian suggested that I should go into the Nuffield College library and read G.D.H. Cole. So off I went and after I had completed my reading the argument of the book fell into place. To my considerable surprise at the time he also suggested that I send the completed manuscript to Cambridge University Press, and to my utter astonishment I became an author. I greatly admired his intellect, the clarity and rigour of his prose, his ability to cut to the centre of the question at hand and to show what the arguments are and his commitment to equality and justice. He was the master of the witty phrase and devastating book review. He did not suffer fools gladly – and he kept a very good table. We maintained our friendship through the years from those long, long ago Oxford days, although we were too seldom in the same place at the same time. I did not follow in his academic footsteps, or his appetite for institution and journal building, though I absorbed *Political Argument*, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* and *The Liberal Theory of Justice*, and have been influenced by his style, but we joined hands more recently in our mutual support for basic income. Brian told me just before it was published that I would like his last book, *Why Social Justice Matters*; he was quite right.

SO: We have covered a lot of ground. Let me step back and draw some implications of *TSC* and *Contract and Domination* for contemporary setting. Some of the research being carried out by scholars interested in gender and race, broadly defined, are directly influenced by your and Mills' revisions and challenges of the classical social contract. Take, for example, Christine Keating's research that has applied your theory, as well as Mills', to new contexts, namely, colonial and postcolonial India. In a sense, then, one might describe Keating's work as 'the postcolonial sexual contract'. How do you find Keating's and related scholarships that build on and/or apply the theoretical breakthroughs you made?

CP: I made clear in *TSC* that my argument was about the Anglo-American societies, societies in which contract theory has flourished. These are also now societies in which juridical freedom and equality have been universalized, anti-discrimination legislation has been enacted and old patriarchal understandings of masculinity and femininity have lost much (though by no means all) of their power. Moreover, a major question in which I was interested was the consequence of voluntary entry into contracts about property in the person. My argument was about a particular history and was culturally and socially specific.

In light of all this, I have been delighted that scholars from many different areas of the world, living in very different kinds of society, have found my work useful (and *TSC* has been translated, for example, into Chinese and Korean). I assume that the reason that it has struck a chord far beyond the Anglo world is because the subordination of women is ubiquitous and because the institution of marriage is at its centre everywhere. Moreover, the phrase 'the sexual contract' can readily be untethered from the moorings that I gave it in classical political theories of original contracts and used, in a general, metaphorical fashion, to sum up and highlight any of the many forms that women's subjection takes and the many contexts in which it is found around the world.

In addition, 'intersectionality' (e.g. the interconnections between sexual and racial subordination) is currently very fashionable, so that *Contract and Domination* was published at a timely moment. But you specifically mention Christine Keating's work, in which she applies our arguments to the case of India. From what I have read so far, she is doing some very interesting research on an extraordinarily complex country that provides numerous historical and current examples of sexual and racial power hierarchies. For example, she uses the concept of 'compensatory domination' to illustrate how in the colonial era British rulers obtained support by giving Indian elites an area of government of their own in return for their subordination as colonial subjects; or, in independent India, how men from different religious communities, in return for agreeing to support national rulers, are allowed to continue to govern the conduct of women inside marriage and the family, notwithstanding egalitarian national law. I sometimes wonder, however, about the term 'post-colonial'. Of course, formally the 'post' is correct in all but small corners of the world, but are we seeing something like the old relationship in a new form? The current round of plunder of the riches of Africa, for instance, the continuing aggression by the United States and Europe (NATO) against Muslim resource-rich countries or countries vital for the

transport of resources, or the history of structural adjustment, does seem at least to put a question mark over the term.

SO: What direction is your current research taking? How does it relate to the body of works that you have produced and contributed to political theory and political science?

CP: I cannot talk about a Big New Project; for a variety of reasons I have not embarked upon anything of that sort. But in recent months I have begun to think about a new question and, who knows, it might possibly turn into something bigger than a talk or an essay. In September 2010 I had the honour to be elected as president of the American Political Science Association, and during my year as president-elect and my presidential year there have been one or two occasions when I have had the opportunity to reflect on my career, so my earlier work has been on my mind.

These reflections have combined with other factors to persuade me that I might have something to say once again about participatory democracy, the subject of my first book. I still think that participatory democracy is a good idea whose time is, I hope, still to come. This takes me in a different direction from the one I have been pursuing in my discussions of theories of original contracts. I mentioned earlier the remarkable rise of deliberative democratic theory and I have come across a few rather curious ideas about participatory democracy in the deliberative literature. The tendency among deliberative democrats is to claim that deliberative democracy now encompasses participatory democracy – a claim that I find very wide of the mark. More importantly, for some years now I have been interested in participatory budgeting (though without doing any academic work on it). So, focusing on participatory budgeting, I decided to take another look at participatory democracy, a part of democratic theory that has not been fashionable for a long time. The question is complicated by the fact that something called participatory budgeting has spread vary widely in recent years, supported by organizations such as the World Bank, but in most cases it bears little or no resemblance to participatory budgeting as it was originally established in Porto Alegre. That is to say, it has little or nothing to do with structural change or democratization, questions which have animated my work over the years.

I am still in the middle of this work, so I am not sure at this point exactly how it will turn out. I am still interested in basic income and I am currently putting together (with Matthew Murray) an edited book that is looking at both existing examples of and experiments in basic income,

and some practical proposals for its implementation in both developed and developing countries around the world. This is not political theory but, given the current state of the world, I find my attention being drawn to more practical questions – which, of course, I have always tried to bring together with my theoretical work.

SO: Many thanks, Professor Pateman, for this interview and discussing the development and nature of your thinking.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge duly and gratefully the editorial guidance of Raia Prokhovnik, whose suggestions sharpened some of my questions of the Carole Pateman interview.

Notes

1. Pateman, C. (2002) 'Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 10, 1, pp. 20–53.
2. Dowding, K., Goodin, R. and Pateman, C. (eds) (2004) *Justice and Democracy: Esays in Honour of Brian Barry,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10

Republicanism, Philosophy of Freedom, and the History of Ideas: An Interview with Philip Pettit

Maria Dimova-Cookson

Maria Dimova-Cookson: Professor Pettit, thank you very much for agreeing to an interview. There are many things I would like to ask you, but I would start with a question on your republican theory of liberty. This is not only due to the fact that this is where my research interests lie, but because this theory has exerted tremendous influence on contemporary political theory. It has made you a leading figure in contemporary liberal scholarship of freedom where your influence, and indeed popularity, compares to that of Isaiah Berlin. My first question is about how you got to republican liberty. Your paper 'Freedom as Antipower' appeared in Ethics in 1996 and then your book *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* came out in 1997. However, as far as I can see, the theme of republicanism does not feature prominently in your previous work.

Philip Pettit: I won't comment on the excessive generosity of your remarks, but I will say a few things on this question. I think that three quite different impulses primed my thinking about the topic. I hope it won't be tiresome if I go through them in turn.

The first is that I had worked through the 1980s on a book, *The Common Mind*, which appeared in 1993, and as part of that project I had begun to think about a range of political values, freedom included. The book argued for a social ontology built around two theses. First, a pro-individualist thesis, to the effect that there are no good grounds for thinking that social relations or forces undermine the ordinary workings of our psychology, as in certain Durkheimian or Marxist approaches. Second, an anti-atomistic thesis, to the effect that nonetheless there are good grounds for holding that human beings need

G. Browning et al. (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Political Theorists*

social relationships – and need them for more than contingent, causal reasons – in order to develop crucial capacities, in particular the capacity to reflect and reason and deliberate. While much of the book was given to the argument for this individualistic holism, as I called it, the last third was an attempt to display its implications for social methodology and political philosophy.

I argued that, given the anti-atomistic turn, we should expect the main role in political theory to be played by essentially social values – values that presuppose social life, unlike a value like utility or freedom as non-interference – and I asked whether there were any essentially social values available for such a role. In that context I began to realize that freedom itself might be reinterpreted as an essentially social value. Your freedom might be cast as the status you enjoy when, living amongst others, you are more or less insured against their interfering, or at least their interfering with impunity, in your life. I found the ideal of such status-freedom inherently attractive and this may have been the first consideration that made an impact on my thinking.

But a second and third factor quickly reinforced my enthusiasm. The second was that as I described the notion of status-freedom to a colleague in legal history, David Neale, he mentioned that it was reminiscent of material in some recent papers by Quentin Skinner on how freedom was conceived in the long tradition of Italian-Atlantic republicanism that John Pocock had described. I knew Quentin personally and was familiar with much of his work but those articles were new to me and reading them was a revelation. Given his particular interpretation, I found in the various theorists he discussed an image of the sort of status-freedom I had begun to think about. And more than that, of course, I was deeply influenced by those figures, and by Quentin's interpretation, in further developing that conception of status-freedom.

The third factor that had a major impact on me at the time was collaborating with John Braithwaite at the ANU on a book on criminal justice, *Not Just Deserts* (1990). Our aim in the project that led to that book was to explore and interrogate the new retributivism that had come to dominate in law and criminology. As we worked through our ideas, we decided that the best way to articulate them was to rely on the republican conception of status freedom – in that book we called it freedom as dominion – and indeed we described the book in a subtitle as 'A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice'. That exercise made me increasingly aware of how profitable it was to think about policy issues in terms of this idea of freedom and it boosted my commitment to the research

programme, as I later described it, of seeing how political philosophy might be pursued on a republican basis.

I don't think I'm fantasizing in saying that these three sources of influence, philosophical, historical, and practical, have continued to have an impact on my own adherence to the republican research programme. Over the past decade or so my belief in the programme has been reinforced by my own work, but above all by the work of others, on all three fronts.

I have gained a deeper understanding of the philosophical framework through collaborative work with a number of people, in particular Christian List of the LSE – our book *Group Agency* appears in 2011 – and through exchanges with opponents such as Ian Carter and Matt Kramer: see the 2008 collection by Cecile Laborde and John Maynor on *Republicanism and Political Theory*. I have been encouraged about the historical claims in which neo-republicanism began by the continuing work of Quentin Skinner and a range of other writers, including my own students, and by my own work on Hobbes and modern political thought more generally. And I have been excited by the continuing development of republican ideas for policy-making and constitutional design that many scholars have helped advance. See, for example, the 2009 collection on *Legal Republicanism* by Samantha Besson and Jose Marti, the 2010 collection on republican democracy – *Building a Citizen Society* – edited by Daniel Leighton and Stuart White, and the 2010 issue of *European Journal of Political Theory* on republicanism and international relations. The use made of republican ideas in the 2004–2008 Zapatero government was also encouraging, as those ideas sponsored a range of important reforms: see the 2010 book with Jose Marti on *A Political Philosophy in Public Life: Civic Republicanism in Zapatero's Spain*. The recent work that gives me faith in the promise of the research programme is often done, of course, by others. Just in the last two years, I have been very impressed by Cecile Laborde's 2009 book on the Hijab controversy, entitled *Critical Republicanism*, and Frank Lovett's 2010 book, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*.

MDC: You have another book on freedom, *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (2001), which offers a more philosophical as opposed to a 'political theory' analysis of freedom. The definition of freedom as discursive control in this book is distinct from the republican theory of freedom as non-domination. Would political theorists understand republican freedom better, if they have an enriched knowledge of freedom as discursive control? More generally, this is a question

about the link between the philosophy and the political theory of freedom. Would political theorists be well advised to focus exclusively on your Republicanism?

PP: The 2001 book begins with the equation between being free in the choice between two actions, x and y, and counting as fit, within our ordinary practices, to be held responsible for choosing between them. I was interested in the fact that this equation promises to give a unified perspective on freedom in psychological and social domains and that it imposes an interesting constraint on what we should think that such unified or comprehensive freedom requires. I argued that what full, comprehensive freedom requires can be cast as discursive control, where this control has two aspects. On the psychological side, it means that the agent is fully sensitive to the values he or she endorses, and informed and rational enough to let those values impact on choice. On the social side, it means that the agent enjoys relationships to others in which, ideally, their influence goes via reasons offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis or, to allow for the effects of charm and humour and congeniality, does not in any way restrict such reason-mediated influence.

If this is the way to think about freedom in a comprehensive sense, how in particular should we think about political freedom, that is, freedom insofar as it is a proper concern of the state? The book argues that the state should concern itself in one way with more than discursive control and in another way with less. The state should be concerned with more to the extent that it focuses not just on whether people are free in choices within the opportunities for choice that they are given, but also with how far they enjoy adequate opportunities for choice. And the state should be concerned with less than discursive control to the extent that it has little business in trying to ensure the psychological freedom of its citizens – their positive freedom in a psychological interpretation; it should concentrate on their social freedom alone.

What does this focus mean in practice? Here I returned to republican themes, arguing that the state will not adequately cater to the needs of discursive control unless it adopts the republican ideal of political freedom, that is, freedom as non-domination. The last chapters of the book restate some of the basic themes of the 1997 book, *Republicanism*.

You ask whether political theorists would be well advised to focus on the 1997 book and to neglect this later book. I'm not the best person to answer that question. But between these two books, I think the predominantly political book from 1997 is the more successful on its

own terms. The 2001 book is more ambitious as well as more philosophical and, while I find that people of Kantian or Hegelian affiliations are often supportive, I feel that it often tries to cover too much material in too short a space.

MDC: You and Quentin Skinner are the founding fathers of the late twentieth-century revival of republicanism. Would you tell us more about your academic relationship with Skinner? You have explained very well where exactly your theoretical disagreements reside: while Skinner believes that republican freedom combines non-domination and non-interference, you insist that republican freedom is only about non-domination and that it can cohabit well with non-arbitrary interference. Are there other differences between you and Skinner? Quentin Skinner has acknowledged your positive impact on his ideas: has he had a positive impact on the development of your ideas?

PP: I could hardly overstate the influence of Quentin Skinner on my own thinking. On the interpretation of the republican tradition in the articles I mentioned, he stressed the fact that contrary to Pocock, the idea of freedom maintained there was not any version of positive freedom: not the psychological version of positive freedom, in which it requires something like autonomy; and not the political version, in which it means participation in a self-determining community. It was this move that transformed our possibilities of looking again at that tradition and it is hard now to remember what a radical move it was; it represented a break with those like Constant and Berlin, who rejected positive freedom as a main ideal for the state, but also with the many nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers who embraced that ideal.

While Quentin represented republican freedom in those earlier papers as a variant on the notion of freedom as non-interference, it seemed to me that his sources and comments lent themselves to an alternative construal in which freedom requires the absence of domination, not interference. I felt that I was merely articulating what was already implicit in his work and I was delighted that in his 1998 book, *Liberty before Liberalism*, he adopted this way of putting things.

You mention that in that book he suggests that interference as well as domination is inimical to republican freedom, while I had argued that domination alone fills that slot. Perhaps I can comment further on this, using an equation that Quentin himself also frequently employs. The equation identifies domination with subjection to the will of another. It is of particular interest because it makes it absolutely clear that interference as such need not be inimical to freedom.

To be subject to the will of another in a choice or set of choices is to be dependent on that will for being able to choose as you wish. The most dramatic form of dependency occurs when another person actually interferes with you, actively imposing an alien will on you. They may remove one of your options, replace it by a penalized alternative, or deceive or manipulate you so that you cannot reason properly about what to choose. The nice thing about equating domination with subjection to the will of another, however, is that it makes it absolutely obvious how you may be dominated without suffering such active interference and, on the other hand, how you may be actively interfered with without suffering domination.

Domination may occur without interference, because you may be subjected to the will of another just by virtue of being exposed to that person's power of interference. Suppose that I have the power of interfering with you in a series of choices but am good-willed enough to let you choose as you wish. You are still subject to my will in those choices – how far subject will depend on the extent of my power – since you depend, for being able to choose as you wish, on my remaining good-willed; you choose as you wish only because, in effect, I allow you to do so. I do not interfere with you but I invigilate your choice and thereby subject you to my will. Apart from dominating you by invigilation I may also dominate you by intimidation. If you believe, rightly or wrongly, that I am invigilating you, so that I am ready to interfere should I take against you, then you are likely to second-guess my wishes or try to keep me sweet, letting my will rule in your choices without my having to do anything to impose it.

But not only may domination occur without interference – that is, by invigilation and intimidation – so may interference occur without domination. Again, the equation with subjection to the will of another makes this clear. Suppose that you feel that you drink too much in the evenings, and that in order to cope with your weakness you have given me the key to the booze cupboard, with instructions that I let you have it at your request only on 24 hours' notice. In refusing to give you the key on a particular evening, I will certainly be interfering with you. But in doing so I will not be imposing an alien will, just your own more reflective will. Hence that sort of interference – interference on your own terms, interference that is in that sense 'non-arbitrary' – does not constitute domination because it does not subject you to the will of another.

To be free, as Cato's Letters put it in the eighteenth century, is 'to live upon one's own terms'; to be dominated is 'to live at the mere mercy

of another'. It should be absolutely clear that if I interfere with what you drink in the manner envisaged here, then I interfere on your terms, not on mine, and I do nothing to take away from your freedom. You may be subject to that interference but still enjoy what Algernon Sidney had described in the previous century as 'independency upon the will of another'.

MDC: What do you think about the distinction between political theory and political thought? Do you think it reflects an important on-going tension between philosophical and historical approaches to the study of ideas? This question has some relevance to your republican theory, which, on the one hand, turns to a specific tradition of the past, but on the other hand, engages with normative claims whose justification has little to do with the historical context of classical republicanism. What do you think about the interplay between historical and theoretical modes of republicanism?

PP: The history of political thought is distinct from political thought itself: from the discipline, analytical or normative or institutional, of thinking about what the state is and how the state ought to behave, both in relation to its members and in relation to other states. But in the pursuit of that discipline in any period I believe that it is of great importance that practitioners remain in touch with the history of their subject. And, on the other hand, I think it is equally important that those who deal with the history of political thought are active in thinking about issues of political theory in their own right.

The reason why historians need theory or philosophy – I don't make a distinction there – is methodological. It is next to impossible to work out what figures in the past were thinking if you have no experience yourself in that sort of exercise, as it is impossible to work out what they were thinking if you are unaware of the context and pressures under which they were working. The only extensive historical work that I have done myself is in my 2008 study of Hobbes, *Made with Words*. I don't think I could have begun to make good sense of many of the things Hobbes maintained – I hope I did make good sense – without being familiar with working through the sorts of issues that he was confronting too.

The reason why political theorists or philosophers need history, however, is substantive rather than methodological. In developing any wide-ranging political perspective, it is necessary to cover a great range of topics. It is almost inconceivable that someone could develop a seriously interesting viewpoint without exposure to what the greatest minds in the past have thought about such topics. To deny yourself a

knowledge of the history of political thought, while trying to do political theory or philosophy, would be a wilful refusal of potential insight. One lesson of the contextualism that people like Quentin Skinner and John Dunn sponsored is that political philosophy is not like science. There can be nothing resembling a gradual accumulation of accepted results, if political thought is conducted now in one distinctive context, now in another. For contextualist reasons, then, any contemporary political theorist ought to take an active interest in the history of the subject, since historical work is required if you are to acquaint yourself with the best that has gone before. You cannot rely on the best being preserved in received wisdom, as the best in science may be preserved – Kuhn notwithstanding – in the assumptions of contemporary practice.

Elaborating on this thought, I don't think I could have had any confidence in the value or viability of the ideal of freedom as non-domination without the discovery of its importance over very different contexts in the history of political thought and practice. And I don't think I could have appreciated the contrast with freedom as non-interference without an understanding of the role that this alternative played in the work of intellectual iconoclasts like Hobbes, or utilitarian reformers like Bentham.

Just to focus on one crucial aspect of the older ideal, it gave an indispensable impetus to my own thinking to realize that whereas freedom as non-interference has always been cast as an ideal for the isolated choice, freedom as non-domination was primarily understood as an ideal for a person or citizen. In our established ways of thinking, it is choices that are free in the first place and persons in the second: persons are free just to the extent that their choices are free. In the older way of thinking, things were the other way around. The recognition that this is so forced me, I think profitably, to reflect on what it could mean for a citizen to be free.

Thinking about that issue, I was led to the view that we should represent the free citizen as someone who is protected against domination on a common basis with others in the society – specifically, on a basis of shared laws and norms – and in the same range of choices: certainly in the range of the basic liberties, however, they are best interpreted in the local culture. That, in essence, is how traditional republicans thought about the figure they described in the masculinist, elitist terms of their time as the free-man: the *liber* of Latin law who lives *sui juris*, that is, on his own terms.

But, to move on a little, you also ask about how far it is useful to take ideas from past contexts and apply them in the contemporary world.

I can best respond by continuing to focus on this idea of civic freedom: the freedom of the citizen. In all pre-modern contexts, the citizen was male, propertied, and mainstream and the main amendment that must be made by anyone who wants to invoke this ideal of civic freedom – civic freedom as non-domination – is to extend the category of citizenship or membership so that it is suitably inclusive; what suitably inclusive is, I put aside for now. Is that sort of amendment wholly inappropriate? I absolutely fail to see why it should be. If there is an institutional possibility of achieving or approximating equal civic freedom in this sense, then it would be sheer dogmatism to declare that this is something we should shrink from: that the ideal of civic freedom is the property of distinctive past contexts and cannot be extended beyond their bounds.

Why should the ideal of equal civic freedom as non-domination appeal in the contemporary world? First, the ideal is rooted in accepted ideas, and articulated on the basis of an attractive and precedented understanding of those ideas, so that it has some chance of being endorsed on a wide front. Second, the ideal is a properly political or public good that cannot be adequately provided for within the market or civic society, although it imposes constraints on both; it requires a system of protection that only the state can provide. Third, it requires the state to go well beyond the minimal protection of the night-watchman regime, arguing for a system of empowerment with many elements: a rule of impartial law and norm; a well-regulated and sustainable economy; a regime of universal education, information, and access to law; social insurance against illness, homelessness, unemployment, and the like; safeguards and alternatives that guard against domination in special relationships, say within the home or workplace; and restrictions on the operation of corporate bodies, such as companies and churches, that can guard against their dominating individual human beings. Fourth, it does not force us to embrace more or less utopian demands for equalizing resources, even though it is bound to require a considerable amount of redistribution. And fifth, it provides a base for thinking in a fresh way about old or even new problems: it is, in that sense, a generative research programme. In illustration of that last theme I might mention that it provides a novel way of rethinking democracy – I comment on this in response to a later question – and of re-conceptualizing international relations in light of the ideal of non-domination amongst peoples. On that matter see the papers in the recent issue of the *European Journal of Political Theory*, mentioned above, or indeed books by people like Steven Slaughter and Jim Bohman.

MDC: Your scholarship ranges widely over different areas of moral philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of social sciences, philosophy of mind and action, and metaphysics. Which areas of your research do you see as most significant, and why? Who are your philosophical heroes from the past and the present?

PP: I come from a rather eclectic background. I did my early research work in Ireland on figures like Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur and then developed more analytical interests in a period as Research Fellow at Trinity Hall in Cambridge. One of Derrida's arguments (in an early book, *La Voix et le Phenomene*) convinced me that the continental tradition had been insensitive to the role of language in shaping our minds and thoughts and that, ironically, led me into a study of more analytical figures like Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Austin. My defence of an individualistic holism in *The Common Mind* tries to develop Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following and he, of course, must count as one of my great heroes. But I didn't ever go along with his antipathy to theory and his view that philosophy could only offer therapy. Here I have always been attracted to the ideal of painting on a large canvas, developing a framework of ideas that might regiment and reshape the picture of things that is encoded in our ordinary practices, and in our unexamined idioms of speech and thought. I confess to retaining some of the excitement I experienced as a late teenager when I read through Sartre's literary and philosophical work and marvelled at its novelty and scope. It may not have been wholly persuasive – certainly it was not very precisely drawn – but my goodness, it was impressive.

I like to think that philosophy should aim at the sharp focus it often achieves in analytical work without reneging on the ambition of providing the panoramic vision that continental theory – postmodernism aside – seeks to provide. While I think that his work sometimes loses sharpness of focus, one of my heroes is certainly Jürgen Habermas. He stands well above most contemporary thinkers in arguing for a framework of thought that encompasses the philosophy of language and mind at one end and the philosophy of law and politics at the other.

So apart from Wittgenstein and Habermas, who are my philosophical heroes? The strange thing here is that the republican ideas that I often identify with in past writings are present in the works of people like Polybius, Cicero, Machiavelli, Harrington, Sidney, Montesquieu, and the American founders who are not great philosophers by any metric. I use their work for the insights that I find in them on specific themes like the nature of freedom, the viability of the mixed constitution, the role

of the citizenry in public life, or the possibility of relying in institutional design on what Geoff Brennan and I described in the title of our 2004 book as *The Economy of Esteem*.

Those in the past that I regard as great thinkers and that I read with the greatest pleasure are often figures with whom I do not agree on vast ranges of issues. They include Kant and Hume, for sure. And they include Rousseau, although I recoil from the way he replaced Italian-Atlantic republicanism with a Franco-German variant. In this transformed republicanism, freedom remains non-domination – at least it does so in Rousseau and Kant – but the traditional institutional ideal of the mixed constitution, combined with a contestatory, law-checking citizenry, is transformed into the romantic, highly questionable ideal of an assembled people with a participatory, law-making role. I think that the Franco-German development that he prompted eclipsed the more traditional form of republicanism and created the illusion that there were only two shows in town: the romantic Rousseauvian show and the more realistic, modernist performance associated with utilitarians and classical liberals.

But before going to your next question, I must say that one of my great intellectual heroes is Hobbes, whose views on political and related matters I utterly abhor. In the book on *Made with Words* I try to show that uniquely amongst early modern philosophers, he developed an image of human capacities that underwrote a comprehensive, naturalistic vision of the natural and psychological, the social, and the political realms. His guiding idea is that human beings become special amongst other animals, not by virtue of a higher level of natural capacity – to put it in modern jargon, the 3% of genetically marked difference – but by virtue of our having been lucky enough to invent language. It is language that accounts for our ability to think in general terms – to escape from the prison house of the here and now – and, more specifically, to reason our way between propositions, to give our words in contract to one another, and to rally behind a single voice in incorporating with others as a group agent. It is also language, alas, which leads us into the war of all against all, as it facilitates the formation of desires that extend into the far future and that encourage us to settle for nothing less than being first or to the fore in comparison with others. But, and this is where Hobbes's political theory figures, the resources with which language provides us make it possible to rescue ourselves from the very predicament to which it gives rise. We can incorporate as a commonwealth, if only we are willing to recognize the single voice of the sovereign as an unchallengeable authority. The conclusion may not be fetching and it may be

reached by some deft but dubious footwork. But the sweep of the vision is magnificent. It thrills me intellectually, although not morally and not politically.

MDC: I can see that you have a book with CUP entitled *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory of Democracy*. How does this differ from a republican theory of freedom? What other theories of democracy does the book challenge?

PP: There are three domains in the theory of justice: domestic justice, global justice, and democratic justice. I gave some indication earlier of where I think that republican theory points in matters of domestic and global justice. But where does it lead in democratic justice? That is the issue in this book, which is based on the Seeley lectures that I presented in Cambridge in April 2010.

The question in democratic justice, at least in a national context, is this. What is the relationship between people and government that justice requires? A government might deliver domestic justice, having policies that promote equal civic freedom as non-domination amongst people, and yet be democratically unjust; it might even be a benevolent despotism. So what is required for democratic justice? Republican theory gives a clear answer. The relationship between the state and its people should be, so far as possible, a relationship in which the governors do not dominate the governed. Government will always interfere in the lives of people, of course, since it will have to levy taxes for its own operation, impose coercive laws and sanction offenders against those laws. But republican theory suggests that this interference need not be dominating, if it is controlled by the will of those interfered with. And so it holds out an ideal of democratic justice: that government should be controlled by its people in such a way that its laws can be reasonably seen by members of the society as impositions that they have authorized.

The idea is that members might be able to view the laws as you, in the earlier example, would view my refusal to give you the key to the drinks cupboard. The citizen who finds some law or ruling particularly onerous, even perhaps unjust, can reasonably think that it's just tough luck that the law or ruling assumes that form; it does not come of the fact that the system is discriminatingly insensitive to his or her own claims or principles. Equally, and again ideally, those who break the law and suffer the imposition of sanctions can think that that is what they always knew was coming to them in the event of offending, and that the law itself does not represent the imposition of a wholly alien will.

I have always thought that the biggest challenge for republican theory is to be able to articulate a picture of democratic institutions in which this ideal might be achieved or approximated. In my book, I begin from a number of points that are crucial to meeting that challenge. First, that just having to live under a state, no matter how wonderful that state is, does not mean that you are dominated; it is due to the bad luck of living in a state-bound world, not the result of anyone imposing an alien will on you. Second, that having to live under laws that do not treat you as special, giving you a veto or giving you a set of privileges, does not mean that you are dominated either; it is the product of normative necessity, as living under a state is the product of historical. And third, that you will not be dominated by the state insofar as it is controlled by the people as a whole in a way that treats you as an equal, giving you an equal share and an equal stake in the control exercised.

With those points in place, we can begin to ask how we should think of the people who are to control government, what we should take control to require, and how we might organize things so that people really can expect to enjoy an equal share and an equal stake in that control. Those are the questions that I address in the book. The upshot, I believe, is a way of thinking about democracy – a design specification for a system that deserves to be described as a democracy – that is distinctively republican and institutionally novel. It is distinctively republican in arguing that the ideal of the democratic state is the ideal of a state that is not only committed to reducing private domination, as domestic justice requires, but is also organized so that in interfering in people's lives it does not practice public domination; it operates on the people's terms so that its interference does not subject them to an alien will. The ideal is institutionally novel in arguing that what is required for the democratic control of government goes well beyond the collective contestatory control that open, periodic elections may secure.

An electoral arrangement is certainly part of what is institutionally required but it is not sufficient on its own to promote the republican ideal. The full arrangements necessary, so I argue, must foster connected public discussion across many forums; identify the terms of argument about public policies that gain acceptance as relevant considerations on all sides of such discussion; help ensure that no policies that are inconsistent with those terms remain as options for government; and help ensure that the choice between rival policies that are equally consistent with those terms should be made on the basis of processes that are themselves supported by the terms. To say this, of course, is just to go to a lower level of description in characterizing a design specification for

republican democracy, not yet to offer a description of the institutions that might do the job. But that is all, obviously, that I can offer here.

MDC: As a Bulgarian, I cannot resist asking you whether you think the end of the cold war has had an impact on moral and political philosophy. Do we now discuss different topics? Do we ask different questions? When we met at an Isaiah Berlin workshop in Vancouver in 2008 you told me stories of visiting communist Bulgaria in the 1970s both as a tourist and as a delegate of the 15th World Congress of Philosophy. Your stories were about the 'mistreatment' you, as western tourists, received from the local officials. We live in a different world now: you will be treated very differently in Bulgaria, or any other Eastern European country, if you were to travel there now. Do you think the scholarship in moral and political philosophy has been impacted by these changes?

PP: Let me finish with just a brief remark in response to this set of questions. The end of the cold war meant the end of the dichotomy between free world and communist world, democratic world and dictatorial world. Thus it focused attention sharply on rival democratic visions. In that focus, two pure rivals stood out. On the one hand, a social democratic position that looked for a rich protective state and a regulated market; on the other hand, a minimal or libertarian democratic position that argued for a night-watchman state and a free, relatively unregulated market. In the intellectual, idealized conflict between these pure models, I always felt that the libertarian did much better, although no state ever thought of embodying it in its full form. While it had a single ideal to invoke – in effect, freedom as non-interference – social democracy seemed to endorse a hodge-podge of desiderata, not any single vision. Even the relatively simplified, Rawlsian version of the social democratic ideal, combined the freedom ideal – a system of maximal, equal freedom as non-interference – and the rather rococo difference principle.

One of the reasons that republican theory appealed to me in the early 1990s, and one of the reasons it appeals to me still, is that it offers a simple and unified version of the social democratic ideal, arguing for a suitable range of protective and empowering policies on the basis of a plausible version of the single ideal of freedom. In that respect it does as well as libertarianism. But in another respect it does much better. For while libertarianism – or indeed social democracy – has never been clear about what in particular democracy requires, or what makes it attractive, the republican theory offers a reasonable vindication of democracy, as

we saw, and a design specification for guiding its institutional realization. But I had better stop. I'm beginning to sound too much like an advocate, too little like a political philosopher for whom republicanism remains a progressive and progressing research programme, but not necessarily the Holy Grail.

MDC: Many thanks, Professor Pettit, for taking part in this interview and sharing these insights into your work and your thinking.

11

Taking a Broader View of Humanity: An Interview with Amartya Sen

Fonna Forman-Barzilai

Fonna Forman-Barzilai: Amartya Sen is Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University, and a Fellow and former Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. Best known for his work on social choice theory and development economics, his work over 50 years has spanned a great variety of subjects in economics and philosophy, including welfare economics, public health, gender studies, moral and political philosophy, and the economics of peace and war. He's one of those rare intellectuals whose work has impacted both academic culture and practical life, pushing the boundaries of academic discourse in paradigm-shattering ways while bettering the condition of human life on the ground. His work on famine has saved untold millions of lives. His development of the 'capabilities approach' to development assessment has very literally changed the way we all now think about global development goals. His career exemplifies the impact that social science can have in the realm of global justice.

Sen's books have been translated into more than 30 languages, and include *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (1970), *On Economic Inequality* (1973), *Poverty and Famines* (1981), *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (1982), *On Ethics and Economics* (1987), *Inequality Reexamined* (1992), *Development as Freedom* (1999), *Rationality and Freedom* (2002), *The Argumentative Indian* (2005), *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2006), and *The Idea of Justice* (2009).

Sen has served as President of the Econometric Society, the Indian Economic Association, the American Economic Association, and the International Economic Association. He was formerly Honorary President of OXFAM and is now its Honorary Advisor. He is a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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I recently sat down with Amartya Sen and asked about the evolution of his remarkable career and his thoughts on politics and political thinking.

Fonna Forman-Barzilai: When did your interest in politics and political thinking first emerge? Were there particularly salient events or periods in your personal biography that first shaped your political vision?

Amartya Sen: I was fascinated by the organization of society from very early days. My early childhood was in Dhaka, my ancestral town (now the capital of Bangladesh), where my father taught Chemistry at the University. I was also in Mandalay in Burma, where my father went as a visiting professor for three years – I was between three and six years old in my Burmese days. My earliest memories included those of huge contrasts, not only of the physical surroundings (dusty and elegantly dry Mandalay differed from wet and lusciously green Dhaka), but also of social differences. Since there were many political activists among my relations, the connection of society with politics, which often figured in adult conversations which I heard, began to interest me from very early days.

One contrast that was hard to miss was the active and powerful role of women in Burma. Much later in life, when Bangladeshi women became more and more active and upfront, led partly by politics, but also by greater economic participation (the innovative NGOs in Bangladesh helped greatly in this), I remember thinking with much satisfaction that Bangladeshi women were beginning to catch up with the Burmese women whom I found so inspiring in my early youth. Indian women too have made considerable progress, and while there are few problems in some parts of India, others have a lot of ground to cover still.

Another contrast was the role of organized politics in Bengali society. Connecting society to political issues was very much in the air. Several of my relations (including my maternal uncle) were imprisoned by the British rulers in their dying days, under what they called 'preventive detention', and a significant part of my early life was spent in visiting them in various prisons, with my parents or grandparents. The British were, evidently, afraid of many things, and they probably were right, since the last decade of British rule was full of rebellious thought at every corner of undivided India. The conviction that determined political action can end tyranny was very strong in my mind. That early thought has been with me throughout my life.

The disasters I saw around me, such as the big Bengal famine of 1943 or the suddenly erupting communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in the 1940s, also turned my thoughts to politics all the time. My conviction grew that the gigantic social tragedies were also political failures. Questions about how to prevent these – and other – terrible social calamities engaged me greatly from very early days, even though I was not clear about the answers on which I could equilibrate.

FFB: Who were your earliest intellectual influences? And looking back who were the three or four most important influences over the course of your career?

AS: I was a determined reader. Bengali was my mother tongue, and there was much to read in that vast literature, but soon I had fairly good knowledge of Sanskrit too. My maternal grandfather taught Sanskrit in Santiniketan, in Rabindranath Tagore's radically progressive school, where I studied from the age of eight to seventeen. Incidentally, Tagore himself became a constant intellectual companion from my early school days (this was through his writings, and I was much too young when I actually met him regularly – my family was very close to him and he had even chosen my name).

Sanskrit opened the door to me not only to great poetry and drama (I remember my thrill when I first read *Meghadutam* – 'The Cloud Messenger' – by the fifth-century poet and dramatist Kalidasa) and the great epics (I would, much later, write an introduction to the English translation of *Ramayana* in the Clay Sanskrit Library), but it also led me to the hugely influential – at least for me – argumentative essays and discourses in Sanskrit. All this also made me deeply interested in the writings of the heterodox schools of philosophy, from the materialist – and atheistic – 'Lokayata', to the intellectual religiosity of Gautama Buddha.

I was fascinated with Buddha and Buddhism for quite a while in my school days, and that interest also made me determined to visit the ruins of the ancient Buddhist university at Nalanda in Bihar – about 55 miles south east from what is now Patna. This was, arguably, the oldest university in the world, established in the early fifth century, which flourished for many hundreds of years. At its peak, this residential university had 10,000 students, drawn from not only all over India, but also from China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Mongolia, Tibet, and elsewhere. Even though Nalanda was run by a Buddhist foundation, it also taught secular subjects, including public healthcare and medicine, languages and linguistics, astronomy and logic, architecture,

and town planning. On a joint Asian initiative of the East Asia Summit, including China, Japan, India, Singapore, Korea, Thailand, and others, a new university – as 'modern' as the old Nalanda was in its own days – is being set up next to the old Nalanda, and I am privileged to be chairing the group charged with the re-establishment. This takes a lot of my time right now, but it is very much a return to my childhood dreams.

Indeed, the intellectual basis of the Buddhist tradition has been a big inspiration for me. A good example is Buddha's argument that you don't have to believe in God – Buddha himself remained an agnostic – to distinguish between good and bad, and to scrutinize what would be the right thing to do. I do not have any great hostility to religion in general, as some of my fellow humanists seem to have. Even though some of its uses – from the inquisitions and other religious barbarities of the past to religious terrorism today – have been certainly terrible and we must be vigilant about stopping them; this is, however, not the same thing as being hostile to religion in all its forms. But I have not felt any particular need for religion in my own life. I see the origin of my attitude to this to be related to my early reading of Buddha's conversations, surprising though it may seem (since Buddha became such a Godhead himself in the eyes of his later followers); it was the result of the wealth of intellectual examinations and scrutinies that Buddha generated in me.

With English, fluency in which came later to me than in Sanskrit, I had the joys of reading Shakespeare – still a constant influence on my thought – and the huge English literature, not to mention the translations, from Tolstoy to Dumas. If I was moved by the ideas in fictional writings, I was of course also swayed by not b0079 the reading of non-fictional writings – often coming from abroad, not just from India: Aristotle and Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, and a great many others. It is hard for me to separate out who influenced me most, for they are all there in what became my mental make-up. Most of the influences would be quite mundane to note: Aristotle is not so much a searchlight that comes in flashes, but daylight that is integrated into one's constant vision. But going beyond that, the fact that I tend to recollect lines in Shakespeare when thinking of philosophical problems probably says more about my own approach to philosophy than about the nature of that subject.

FFB: An approach that is no doubt guided by a more complex view of human motivation than the *homo economicus* model that has come to

dominate entire regions of the social sciences today. What is it in your personal and intellectual histories that led you to broader views on the nature of human beings?

AS: There is a long history in the world – in different parts of the world – of intellectuals taking very distinct views of the self-centred nature of human beings.... That debate on the reach of the human mind cannot be resolved once for all. That point of view – that human reasoning must be confined to intelligent self-seeking – has had support in the past and will have it from many people in the future. For those of us who think that this point of view underestimates humanity and our ability to reason in a larger way, the intellectual challenge would continue to exist in the future as well. There is something to discuss here, and we can argue about this, and it is possible to convince many people, who are not instinctively convinced about the reach of the human mind, that they may not have considered all the relevant arguments. The important issue is to bring out the fact that people can reason very well and very hard without accepting that the only kind of reasoning that is acceptable is reasoning from self-interest.

I don't think I am particularly special in taking a broader view of humanity. Even within the economic profession, so did Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Walras, Wicksell, and many others. But I agree that in modern economics the rational choice theorists did become much more dominant than they had been. However, that hold is now breaking. Experimental economics, for example, belongs to a very different tradition, without any strong preconception of the venal nature of human beings. I would say that right now the hold of rational choice theory is much stronger among lawyers of particular schools ('law and economics' in a limited form has many adherents) and political theorists of a specific kind (some are even called 'rational choice political theorists'), than among economists in general.

FFB: Your work over many decades has spanned a great variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. What were your first fields of study? And what was the process by which your interests expanded in new directions?

AS: In my school days, my favourite subjects were mathematics and Sanskrit. I was also much involved with philosophical problems, but the concentration on religious philosophy in the standard philosophical curriculum in those days in India stopped me from thinking about studying that at the university. So I began my post-school education

with physics and mathematics, and soon moved to economics and mathematics. I was already deeply interested in politics, and that made the choice of economics over physics easier, since I was constantly running into economic issues, when thinking about political problems. But it soon became clear that to do economics seriously, one must not only know the relevant kind of mathematics, but a great deal about social studies. The subject of sociology would emerge later in its full glory, but I got some help from anthropology, from history, from politics, and from more broad-minded economics itself (such as Smith and Marx and Mill).

I was also very interested in education as a subject. It was Rabindranath Tagore who had first made me think that most of our deprivations come, in one way or another, from our lack of education. But my conviction about the centrality of education grew as I became a little older. In my school days at Santiniketan, I used to run night schools in collaboration with some fellow students (and a wonderfully inspiring teacher, Lalit Majumdar, who is still very active in his 90s). They were for unschooled rural children around our campus, and much later, when I was lucky to get some money from the Nobel Foundation in 1998, I found resources to start two small Trusts, respectively in India and in Bangladesh, dedicated to basic education, along with basic healthcare and gender equity. So it was not so much that my interest was expanding over time, but it was taking shape in varying ways as I grew older.

FFB: Specifically, how was it that an economist became interested in philosophy – and for purposes here moral and political philosophy in particular?

AS: It is not so much that an economist became, later on, interested in philosophy, but rather that a young man who was very interested in philosophical problems from early childhood decided to study economics at the university, while retaining his interest in philosophy. My first published philosophical essay – on the compatibility of determinism and freedom – was published before I had got my PhD in economics. It was not a great essay – but I thought it might have been cogent enough – and it became better known than it deserved mainly because Isaiah Berlin, who had some disagreement with my conclusions, gave it huge publicity by referring to it – very kindly – no less than four times in the Introduction to his justly famous *Four Essays on Liberty*. In my first decade of work as a young academic I was publishing in

philosophical journals (such as *Mind*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophy*), even as I was writing for the economic journals. So philosophy was not any kind of a seven-year-itch!

FFB: And yet there was a movement later in your career towards ethics.

AS: Yes, what did change was that my primary philosophical interest shifted from epistemology and logic to ethics and political philosophy. At Delhi University, when I was in my early 30s, I lectured on mathematical logic and epistemology – and not on moral and political philosophy – which is primarily what I teach in philosophy these days, at Harvard. That was a shift, but occurred over many years, and it was partly related to the big influence of John Rawls on my thinking, but also of Hilary Putnam who made me understand that the border between epistemology and ethics was much less sharply defined than what I had tended to assume earlier. My interest in mathematical logic was of great use to me in my work on social choice theory, and this kept me very occupied for about two decades – from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. On my other work too, social choice theory – founded in its modern form by Kenneth Arrow – has been deeply influential.

FFB: Your recent book, *The Idea of Justice*, has been called the first great work on justice in the twenty-first century. What most distinguishes your views from those of other moral and political philosophers?

AS: I very much doubt that my book can be called a great work at all, but I did certainly enjoy the opportunity of placing to philosophers as well as to the general public some thoughts on the theory of justice, which have bothered me for quite some time. Like many others in the modern world, I draw a good deal of inspiration from the European Enlightenment, and also from similarly reason-based intellectual traditions – with different degrees of articulation – in other parts of the world, from India, China, Japan, and Korea to the Middle East and Africa. But it is only one part of the flowering of political theories in the European Enlightenment that seem to be dominant in contemporary political philosophy. This is the tradition of 'social contract theory'. There is a substantial dichotomy, which has not received sufficient attention, between two different lines of reasoning about justice that can be seen among two groups of leading philosophers associated with the radical thought of the Enlightenment period.

One approach concentrated on identifying perfectly just social arrangements, and took the characterization of 'just institutions' to be the principal – and often the only identified – task of the theory of

justice. This way of seeing justice is woven in different ways around the idea of a 'social contract' – a hypothetical contract that the population of a sovereign state are imagined to be a party to. Major contributions were made in this line of thinking by Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century, and later by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, among others. The principal theories of justice in contemporary political philosophy, including – preeminently – John Rawls's theory of 'justice as fairness' (but also the theories of Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, and others) draw in one way or another on the social contact approach, and while differing in other respects concentrate on the search for ideal social institutions. This social contract tradition can be contrasted with an alternative line of reasoning that concentrated on enhancing justice in the world (particularly through reducing diagnosable injustices), working for better lives for people, assessed by open public reasoning between people from different background. Adam Smith, the Marquis de Condorcet, and Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century can be seen to be broadly in that 'social choice' tradition. My book on justice is largely in this second tradition.

This social contract approach to the pursuit of justice has three distinct features, each of which is, I think, problematic. First, it concentrates its attention on what could be accepted as *perfect justice*, rather than on ways and means of identifying cases of patent injustice in the world, and directing attention to removing them. Second, in searching for perfection, this contractarian approach concentrates primarily on getting the institutions and arrangements right, and it is not directly focused on the actual societies that would ultimately emerge and on the lives of the people in such societies. The nature of the society that would result from any given set of institutions must, of course, depend also on non-institutional features, such as actual behaviours of people and their social interactions.

The third feature of the social contract approach relates to the voices that are taken to be politically privileged in reasoning about justice. In the social contract tradition, the views that must receive attention have to come from those who can be seen as parties to the social contract. Given the country-by-country and nation-by-nation structure of social contract, powerfully identified by Thomas Hobbes and pursued in mainstream contemporary political philosophy, the contractarian tradition tends to confine the discussion to members of a polity, in particular to the citizens of each country who are engaged in deciding on the ideal institutions and corresponding values for that particular sovereign state. Issues of global justice are difficult – and indeed impossible – to

address within this limited framework. The need for impartiality in the treatment of different citizens within the country are accepted and celebrated, but there is no politically required place, in this formulation of deliberations of justice, to go beyond the citizens of a particular state. This rather 'closed' approach contrasts with Adam Smith's insistence – in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* but also in the *Wealth of Nations* and in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* – on the necessity to pay attention to the views of people from far as well as near. This can be called 'open impartiality'. Smith argued that impartial consideration was essential for a grounded morality and for understanding the demands of justice, and this requires us to go beyond the boundaries of each state and beyond the narrow and possibly parochial perspectives of its membership.

My book is in this second tradition, with its interest in the reasoning of all people (not just the citizens of a particular country), its concern about how the lives of people are going (not just how 'right' the institutions are), and its commitment to making the world better, even short of any kind of perfection (rather than primarily identifying some 'perfectly just' world, which may be far from feasible and on the nature of which there may be no agreement, even within one country).

FFB: One very practical take-away from *The Idea of Justice* seems to be that transcendental modes of thinking about global justice are too often abstracted from the urgency of real-world problem solving. What do you see as the role of philosophy in addressing human deprivation? Or put a bit differently, what is the appropriate relation between theory and practice?

AS: I don't quite see the contrast in that way. It is in the nature of theory that there would be some abstraction from reality, to make systematic conclusions possible. I am no great believer in 'leaping' to practice without theoretical scrutiny and wide-ranging examinations of different theoretical problems that relate to the issues involved in practice.

I have of course learned a great deal from Rawls (I see him, along with Ken Arrow, as something of a 'guru' of mine), and my own philosophical ideas are very much Rawls inspired. Where I disagree with Rawls is not on the need for theory to be, in many cases, at some distance from immediate practice. Rather it is on the kind of theorization we need.

It is not only that Rawls's 'principles of justice' deal with what is 'perfectly right', but that the diagnosis – even if it can be made and can be seen as unanimously adopted – does not yield any way of ranking non-perfect situations against each other. Rawls may say that liberty has lexical priority over all considerations of equity about life opportunities,

but as his argument with Herbert Hart brought out, Rawls does not want to insist that the slightest gain in liberty would wipe out gigantic losses of equity – hunger, disease-infested lives, and so on. The theory has to start with rankings (typically incomplete rankings) – and with luck that may also yield a transcendental best. This contrasts with looking just for the transcendental best (or the transcendentally right), which does not tell us how the various violations of perfection can be assessed against each other. This is where the focus of rankings in social choice has a deep analytical advantage. It is not an advantage that comes from the immediate demands of practice, but one that is related to the robustness of the theory itself.

It is also of course the case that I do not believe that human disagreements can be eliminated completely by eliminating the role of self-interest and what Adam Smith called 'self-love'. Rawls's 'original position' attempts to do that, but even if such manifestations of self-love are tucked away, we may have disagreement on different principles – between (as the last example indicated) the respective importance we would like to attach to the priority of liberty over concerns about equity and deprivation. But even if we do not agree on what is transcendentally ideal, we could have massive agreement on the elimination of some forms of clear injustices. In focusing on that perspective – the need to rely on what is called 'partial ordering' in mathematics – I am not arguing for the priority of practice over theory, but asking for a more articulate form of theory.

FFB: On this relation between theory and practice, many social scientists and philosophers are increasingly frustrated by academic disengagement from the world, from tackling difficult social problems. Entities are emerging to address the disjunction – such as Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP), The Global Justice Network, Justicia Amplificata at the Goethe-Universität of Frankfurt, and the Center on Global Justice that I co-direct at the University of California, San Diego. What can we academics do to help make a better world?

AS: I think the main work of social scientists in the context of the pursuit of justice may be that of bringing more clarity into public discussion. Confused ideas can actually lead to the continuation of terrible injustices, and the emergence of new transgressions. Racists or sexists do not lack reasons of their own, except that those reasons are typically not very good and cannot adequately address the probing questions that can be asked and the scrutiny than can be performed. Similarly, the implicit – and completely unnecessary – assumption that every person

must have one unique identity that trumps other identities which the person may also have has been responsible for many calamities in the world, including international wars related to divisions of citizenship (as in the early part of the twentieth century, for example, in the First World War), and inter-community fights, based on the alleged unique priority of religion (as in faith-based violence and terrorism today). These are just some illustrations of problems in which clarity of ideas would be extremely important.

FFB: Has your familiarity with Indian, European, and American civilizations influenced your thoughts about open impartiality, somehow given you more confidence in the possibilities of pubic discourse and scrutiny?

AS: I have always been struck by the commonality of basic intellectual pursuits across the world, even when people are divided by immediate social beliefs and political – or even religious – convictions. This is not to say that there is nothing to discuss – all people immediately agree to what they instantly see as 'good' ideas. That is not the case at all. Rather, the claim is that it is possible to listen to each other and argue, and then arrive at what may look reasonable to most people, about ways of pursuing justice and reducing injustice in the world. What is needed is not undiscussed agreement, but public discussion, even across borders and regional boundaries, undertaken in seriousness and in an open and interactive way. One of my main claims is that such discussion is possible.

FFB: Many thanks for sharing your thoughts and illuminating your work for us.

12

Approaching Political Theory Historically: An Interview with Quentin Skinner

Raia Prokhovnik

Raia Prokhovnik: Can you tell us first about your personal career trajectory. Where did you start off from intellectually, and which political theorists influenced you most when you were starting out?

Quentin Skinner: I graduated in History at Cambridge in 1962, and almost at once began working on the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. In those days the book on Hobbes that we all had to think about was Howard Warrender's study of Hobbes's theory of political obligation, which had been published in 1957. This was supplemented in 1964 by F.C. Hood's book, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*, which attempted in a similar way to show that for Hobbes our obligation to obey the laws of nature arises from their character as commands of God. Meanwhile in 1962, there had appeared C.B. Macpherson's book, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, a Marxist analysis of English political theory in the period from Hobbes to Locke. These were the studies that set me going, and my first published work in political theory was a review article in *The Historical Journal* of 1964 in which I tried to offer a critical examination of them.

You ask which political theorists influenced me most at this time. There were two historians of political theory whose work had already made a deep impression on me as an undergraduate, John Pocock and Peter Laslett. In 1957, Pocock had published his classic study, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*. I still remember how illuminating I found his way of introducing the legal and political writers he discussed, including such major figures as Edward Coke and James Harrington. In textbooks on political theory at that time, Harrington

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usually figured either as a utopian writer in the mould of Thomas More, or else as a kind of proto-Marxist exponent of the belief that power always follows property – the interpretation that Macpherson was to revive. Pocock instead presented Harrington as a thinker deeply enmeshed in a number of specific legal and constitutional debates of his time, especially about the character of feudal tenures and the nature of absolute monarchy. To me this was a revelation: it gave such a credible account of what might have prompted Harrington to write *Oceana*, and why his work had its specific shape and character.

I was similarly impressed by Laslett's success in furnishing a political and intellectual context that made sense of Locke's project in his *Two treatises of government*. Laslett showed that the book was written in the early 1680s, not as a celebration of the revolution of 1688, and that it was designed as a contribution to the debates about the possibility of excluding Charles II's heir from the throne. Rather than appearing, as Locke always did in the textbooks of the period, as the founder of liberalism, or as the inventor of government by consent, Laslett placed him within an historical setting that convincingly explained why he wrote as he did about freedom, consent, and arbitrary power.

Armed with these insights, I found myself writing a severe critique of Macpherson, Warrender and Hood in my article of 1964. I was troubled by Macpherson's approach, in which political theory was treated as a mere epiphenomenon of allegedly more real historical processes, but I didn't manage properly to formulate what I felt was wrong with it. I concentrated on castigating Warrender and especially Hood for examining Hobbes's theory of obligation in isolation from the political questions of its time. While their interpretations might be exegetically defensible, I argued, they deserved to be rejected on the grounds of their historical implausibility.

Laslett's and Pocock's work must have given me a kind of *a priori* confidence that some immediate context must likewise help to explain how Hobbes arrived at his distinctive theory of political obligation. It is Hobbes's contention that we are politically obliged if and only if we are protected, and he proclaims at the end of *Leviathan* that he composed the book 'without other design' than to establish the mutual relationship between protection and obedience. But what prompted him to place so much emphasis on this particular concept and on this particular way of analysing it? These questions, I felt, had never received the attention in the critical literature that they deserved, and I set out to remedy this deficiency. I was greatly helped in doing so by John

Wallace's pioneering work on the so-called Engagement controversy, the controversy that arose after the foundation of the English commonwealth in 1649 over whether it can ever be lawful to obey a usurping regime. The outcome of my reading was that, between 1965 and 1969, I published my first body of research, a sequence of articles in which I argued that Hobbes's theory of political obligation in *Leviathan* is best understood as a contribution to the debates that were then raging about the usurpation of sovereignty and the relations between conquest and consent.

RP: You began not merely with this work on Hobbes, but also with your ground-breaking methodological work on meaning and interpretation. Can you say how these two projects were linked, and what were the main influences on your philosophical work at this time?

QS: While thinking about the critical literature on Hobbes, I decided that it might be worth trying to write something in more general terms about the idea of interpretation, if only to identify what seemed to me wrong with prevailing approaches to the study of political philosophy and its history. I was greatly influenced at this stage by my contemporary, John Dunn, who published his inspiring article 'The identity of the history of ideas' in 1968 and his classic monograph on John Locke a year later, which was prefaced with a defence of studying political theory in a more historical style.

I was also much influenced by two major philosophers whom I studied intensively around this time. One was R.G. Collingwood, whom I had originally read at school, and whose work struck me with the force of an epiphany. From his *Autobiography*, I took the suggestion that we should think of all texts as answers to questions, treating the interpretative task as that of seeking to identify the problems that particular texts were attempting to solve. The other big influence on me was Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, together with J.L. Austin's *How to do things with words*, which appeared in 1962. Wittgenstein I treated as a theorist of meaning, someone who had told us not to ask about the alleged meanings of words, but rather to examine the different ways in which they are put to use. Austin's work I treated as an appendix to Wittgenstein. The latter had asked us to focus on what can be done with words, whereas the former had gone on to ask in much greater detail what it might mean to speak of the use of words as a form of social action. I was particularly taken with Austin's distinction between meaning and speech acts as two separable dimensions of language. He seemed to me to be enunciating a doctrine reminiscent of

Collingwood's logic of question and answer: that the task of understanding any utterance must involve the identification not merely of the meaning of what is said, but also what the speaker may have meant by saying it.

These developments in the philosophy of language emboldened me to put forward the general claim that in studying texts in the history of philosophy we should treat them not so much as statements of belief, but rather as interventions in the intellectual disputes of their time. We should try, in other words, to recover what their authors were *doing* in putting forward their arguments, what sort of interventions they were trying to make. This led to my second body of published work. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s I produced a number of papers on interpretation and speech acts. Some were detailed discussions that appeared in philosophical journals, but I also attempted in my article 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas' in 1969 to generalize my argument and use it to criticize prevailing ways of writing the history of philosophy. Perhaps a little humiliatingly, this youthful effort of mine remains the most widely cited piece of work I have ever published.

RP: You said that you were troubled not merely by the assumption that works of political philosophy can be interpreted without regard to their context of writing, but also by the belief that such texts are mere epiphenomena of allegedly more real historical processes. Did the alternative approach you have now sketched resolve this second doubt as well as the first?

QS: No, it didn't. My essay, 'Meaning and understanding', offered a critique of both positions, but my discussion of the second was muddled. The specific principle I wanted to contest was that political theories are *ex post facto* rationalizations, and accordingly have no independent role to play in the explanation of political change. This purportedly hard-headed view was very prominent at the time: it was endorsed by political historians of the Namierite school as well as by Marxists like Macpherson. I only came to see how to respond to it when I began to read more widely in the philosophy of social science. I was much taken with Max Weber's work on legitimation, but I was still more influenced by the work of Stuart Hampshire, Alasdair MacIntyre, and others who were engaged at the time in applying a number of Wittgensteinian insights to the project of social explanation.

The argument I went on to develop was based on the Wittgensteinian assumption that we can only do what we can describe, and that in

normative debates we can usually only do what we can legitimize. As I stressed, however, the vocabulary in terms of which we can hope to legitimize what we are doing will always, and necessarily, be a socially established one. This being so, the capacity to get what we want while legitimizing what we are doing will generally depend on our ability to bring what we are doing under some broadly accepted normative description. But this in turn means that we are constrained to tailor our projects in such a way as to fit prevailing moral vocabularies that can plausibly be invoked to describe them.

What I argued, in sum, was that the requirement of legitimation sets limits to social change. This in turn means that if we want to explain why certain courses of actions are followed our explanations will have to refer to the principles for the sake of which they were professedly undertaken, even if those principles formed no part of the motivation of the actions involved. I finally worked this position out in some articles I wrote in the early 1970s. The conclusion I reached was that political history, so far from being isolated from the history of political theory, is better seen as nothing more than political theory in practice.

RP: What has been the logic of the development of your thinking, from your point of view, since this early work?

QS: By the early 1970s, I had arrived at the commitments I've now described, and at that point I decided to try to write a book in which my philosophical position (if I may so dignify it) would be exemplified. I had already been trying out various drafts in my lecture courses at Cambridge, but I was able to settle down to the task only after I moved to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton in 1974, where I stayed for four years. There I had the privilege of being able to work uninterruptedly on my manuscript, which was published in 1978 as *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

My book appeared in two volumes, the first of which centred on the political theory of the Renaissance. The scholars who, in my judgement, had been producing the most interesting work in this area were Felix Gilbert, John Pocock, and Nicolai Rubinstein, all of whom had emphasized the importance of classical ideals of republican self-government and active citizenship in the formation of Renaissance political thought. I largely followed their line of argument, but I also began to investigate in greater detail the nature of the rhetorical culture within which these ideals were embedded. Doubtless I was influenced by post-modernist fashions of the time, but I became particularly interested in the Renaissance vision of politics as a public dialogue in which it is always possible

to argue on both sides of any case. The second volume of my book was concerned with the era of the Reformation and the struggles between absolutist and constitutionalist forms of government to which it gave rise. Out of these struggles, I argued in Weberian vein, there crystallized the modern concept of the state, and I brought my narrative to a close with a discussion of the state as a site of sovereignty distinct from both rulers and ruled.

RP: How did this work in turn feed into your subsequent writings about freedom and the state, and what are the connections between these interests and the next large-scale book you published, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*?

QS: My *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* provided me with a research programme that lasted for more than 20 years. I became haunted by the concept of the state, the explication of which had formed, as I've mentioned, the culmination of my book. I came to feel that I hadn't properly grasped the concept, and wrote several further articles trying to extend and clarify my argument. One problem was that I hadn't properly understood the implications of the Hobbesian contention that the state is the name of a distinct person, a person capable of action (in spite of being a mere fiction) in consequence of there being natural persons who can be authorized to act as representatives in its name. I was helped to refine and elaborate this part of my argument by David Runciman, who began to write on the same subject in the 1990s, and with whom I had a debate in print about the nature of state personality. I felt that I lost this argument, which was what prompted me to return to the topic yet again.

A further weakness in my original case was that I had been looking in Weberian vein for *the* concept of the modern state, and had been searching – in unduly teleological mood – for the moment at which it arrived on the political scene. Here I managed to improve my argument as a result of many discussions with Raymond Geuss, whose work on the concept of genealogy helped me to see that the best approach to examining our talk about the state depends on recognizing that there has never been any agreed concept to which the term has referred. In my monograph 'A genealogy of the modern state' (published by the British Academy in 2008), I finally managed to get these issues as clear as I can hope to do, and since then I have at last ceased to be haunted by this troublesome revenant.

It was, however, from the first rather than the second volume of my *Foundations* book that my subsequent research mainly stemmed. I wrote

more about the republicanism associated with the Italian city-states, first in my book on Machiavelli, which appeared in 1981, and then in some articles on early Renaissance political painting, which I eventually published as a book. I focused in particular – in my Tanner Lectures at Harvard in 1984, and in a number of associated articles – on the vision of political liberty associated with the Renaissance city-republics, and especially on the seemingly paradoxical claim that the preservation of our own liberty depends on our willingness to engage in a life of active public service. But I tried above all to deepen my understanding of the rhetorical culture of Renaissance humanism. I wanted to understand more about the conception of moral and political argument as essentially dialogical in character, and about how this assumption came to be replaced by the ideal of a science of politics, the aim of which was to lay down principles that it would be irrational to contest. As you have rightly noted, the outcome of this research was my book, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, in which I contrasted these two rival visions of political argument and tried to show how the second came to supersede the first. As always seems to happen to me, it took far longer to get clear about the issues than I had expected, and the book did not appear until 1996.

RP: How did you come to focus on questions about republican liberty?

QS: After completing my *Reason and Rhetoric* book I planned to do some further research on Renaissance rhetorical culture. But I was prompted to reconsider my plans as a result of a seminar I taught with Philip Pettit at the Australian National University in 1994. Philip was at that time beginning to write his path-finding book, *Republicanism*: *A Theory of Freedom and Government*, which was first published in 1997. He persuaded me that, although my work about freedom in the 1980s had been along the right lines, I had failed to mark with sufficient self-consciousness a separation between two distinct concepts of negative liberty: the liberal view that freedom essentially consists in the absence of interference, and what Philip wanted to call the 'republican' view that liberty consists more fundamentally in the absence of domination, in not having a master.

This insight enabled me to restate the distinctions I had been stumbling to articulate in my earlier work. Re-reading the sources, I eventually phrased the distinctions rather differently from Philip. I placed more emphasis on the idea of unfreedom as a matter of dependence upon the will of others, drawing a contrast between this state of subjection and the condition of the *liber homo* or 'freeman' whom we encounter at the

beginning of the *Digest* of Roman Law and again in Magna Carta. Like the jurists, I regarded the idea of freedom more as the name of a status than as a predicate of actions. Nevertheless, Philip's extraordinarily perceptive work undoubtedly redirected my attention towards the theory of individual liberty, and I went on to publish a further series of articles on the subject, as well as my book *Liberty Before Liberalism* in 1998.

I also became interested, as in my work on Renaissance rhetorical culture, in trying to establish when this republican understanding of freedom was successfully challenged and superseded. I came to see Hobbes as one of its most formidable enemies, especially with his insistence in *Leviathan* that freedom cannot signify anything more than absence of external impediments to motion. It took me more time than I expected to work out the shape of this story, but I eventually managed to do so in *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, which was published in 2008. The appearance of this book likewise laid to rest a question that had been haunting me for a very long time.

RP: Do you have plans to develop this work on liberty any further? To what extent are you interested in the contemporary as well as historical significance of the 'republican' view of liberty?

QS: No, I do not expect to write much more about this theme. As I say, it has ceased to haunt me. Besides, when I contributed to the collection edited by Cécile Laborde and John Maynor entitled *Republicanism and Political Theory* (which, by the way, seems to me by far the best introduction to the subject), I felt that I was already in danger of repeating myself. However, I remain deeply interested in questions about republican liberty, and especially their contemporary resonance. The more I observe the operations of the labour market under de-unionized conditions, and the more I read about the extent of domestic violence in our society, the more it seems to me that we need to place far more emphasis on the republican insight that living in dependence on the will of others serves in itself to undermine our liberty. I also believe that if in the United Kingdom we were to take this claim seriously, we would come to see that our present constitutional arrangements are urgently in need of reform.

Since you ask about the contemporary significance of the republican view of liberty, let me enlarge on that latter point. According to the republican view, if your actions are not under the control of your own will, then you are bereft of liberty. But if you now think, for example, about the extent of the controlling power attached to the office of the Prime Minister, you can readily see how urgent is the need for

constitutional change in the name of liberty. Currently, there are no democratic controls over who becomes Prime Minister: it remains possible simply to succeed to the job. Nor are there any democratic controls over the Prime Minister's power to form a government: the elected representatives of the people have no say in the making of ministerial appointments at any stage. Furthermore, the Prime Minister as head of the executive has charge of the royal prerogative, which embodies many discretionary powers surviving from pre-democratic days. Some of these stem from the duty of the crown to guard the boundaries of the realm. They currently include the right to grant and withhold passports, to expel foreign nationals, to prevent them from entering the country, and to judge whether the country is in a state of emergency. Others stem from the historic right of the crown to regulate relations with other states. These include the right to deploy the armed forces, to ratify the terms of treaties, and until recently to declare war and peace. What the republican theory of liberty tells us is that, to the extent that we lack democratic control in these areas, we lack political liberty. But the upholding of our liberty, everyone agrees, is one of the main obligations of democratic governments. If we take this principle seriously, our constitution will have to be radically changed.

RP: Can you identify one piece of work that you are most pleased to have written?

QS: I tinker incessantly with what I write, and if I am asked to republish anything I always find myself altering and revising it. So there are very few pieces of my work that exist in a form that currently pleases me. But perhaps there is one exception. As I mentioned earlier, one of the arguments which I kept facing in my early work – and I faced it with incoherent feelings of hostility – was that political theories rarely function as anything more than *ex post facto* rationalizations, and hence have no independent role to play in the explanation of social change. The work I'm most pleased to have written is the article in which I finally managed to my own satisfaction to explain what seems to me wrong with this approach to the theory of ideology. My article examined one particular instance of the interplay between professed principles and political practice, and tried to show that, even if principles never serve as motives, we cannot hope to explain why particular lines of conduct are followed if we fail to invoke them. The piece to which I am referring was first published in 1974, but I included a revised version of it in the second volume of my *Visions of Politics* in 2002, and in that form I recently re-read it with some pleasure. I should add that in general

I cannot endure the thought of re-reading anything I have published, so for me this is an exception of some significance.

RP: What are you working on now and how does it relate to previous work you've done?

QS: I am trying to write a third instalment of my work on the rhetorical culture of the Renaissance. As I mentioned earlier, the suggestion that it is always possible to argue on either side of any question first caught my attention when I was writing my book on Renaissance political theory in the 1970s, and I returned to it at length in my *Reason and Rhetoric* book in 1996. There I took the case of moral and political reasoning, illustrating the rhetorical techniques of persuasion and redescription recommended by the classical rhetoricians, and contrasting them with Hobbes's attempt to produce a demonstrative moral science. I now want to explore the role of dialogue and especially forensic styles of reasoning in Renaissance literature. The drama is obviously the genre in which rival perspectives on moral and political questions are most frequently held up to scrutiny, often without any closure, and this phenomenon has been much discussed in these post-modern days. What has been less studied, however, is the specific ways in which the classical rhetorical tradition informed and inflected these debates, especially in the age of Shakespeare. The role of classical rhetoric in Renaissance dramaturgy is what I now want to explore.

To anyone who objects – as some of my colleagues have done – that this seems a strange departure for someone who has spent their life studying political theory and its history, I can only offer two excuses. One is that this preoccupation with rival styles of argument has been bubbling away in my work all the time. The other is that, since leaving Cambridge in 2008 to take up a Chair in the Humanities at Queen Mary, University of London, I have felt liberated from any need to uphold my professional identity as an historian of political thought. I've sometimes found this identity constricting in the past, and I'm determined not to let it inhibit me from following my bent in what will undoubtedly be (let's be realistic) the final phase of my research.

RP: Where do you think contemporary political theory is going more broadly, especially in terms of the separation/links between the Anglo-American analytical tradition, continental traditions, and the history of political thought?

QS: I have never felt much confidence in answering questions about the relations between different intellectual traditions, although I recognize

that it is important to ask them. But I should certainly like to say a word about the place of the history of political thought as a sub-discipline within contemporary political theory. You ask about the prospects for this kind of study, and they seem to me bright. I continue to sit on the editorial board of the Cambridge University Press series, *Ideas in Context*, which has acted since the mid-1980s as a major outlet for research in the history of political thought. I am happy to report that we have never had so many outstanding submissions as we have received in recent years. It is true that the publishing of monographs on historical and philosophical topics is nowadays beset with mounting difficulties, but I am also happy to report that the Press continues to give this series its wholehearted support. We shall be publishing our hundredth volume in the series in the course of 2011.

RP: Do you think that the increasing awareness and sensitivity to diverse and plural traditions of political theorizing around the world is a welcome sign? Or does this trend represent a dangerous move towards relativism, the entrenching and fixing of cultural intellectual differences, and the end of the project to build on shared principles (freedom? equality?) across different theoretical traditions?

QS: Whether or not the trend you identify is welcome or dangerous, it is simply a fact that we live in a world of many cultures, and that most of us live in communities that have become far more multicultural in recent years. We have reached a point at which it is (or ought to be) the merest civility to exhibit some sensitivity towards the different values and cultural traditions by which we are surrounded.

Admittedly, I see serious tensions between upholding this kind of open-mindedness and ensuring that the legal rights of citizens are equally respected and enforced. Where cultural traditions challenge such rights, the resulting collisions are often very hard even for the most liberal states to adjudicate. However, I do not see much to fear in the alleged spectre of relativism. To accept that alien traditions of moral and political thinking can be rationally defended is not to be a relativist. Relativism is a thesis about the nature of truth; it is the thesis that there is nothing more to truth than rational acceptability within a form of life. But those who plead for a measure of tolerance for alien social and political beliefs are not necessarily committed to this position at all. They are not saying that these beliefs should be tolerated because they are true for those who hold them, even though they may not be true for us. They are not necessarily talking about the truth at all. They may only be saying that each system of belief may be rationally defensible. Such

people are pleading for dialogue, for a continuation rather than a closing down of debate, and in the hands of a philosopher like James Tully this commitment can even provide us – to invoke the title of Tully's latest book – with a public philosophy in a new key.

RP: Do you think the greater attention paid by political theorists to international relations over the past few years is a valuable trend? Or are political theorists tending to move into a separate field without understanding its particular presuppositions? Are they colonizing international theory with moral rather than political questions?

QS: Yes, I think it is a valuable trend, and I have even joined it myself. My most recent book, which I edited with Hent Kalmo, and which was published by Cambridge in 2010, is entitled *Sovereignty in Fragments*. One of the questions we raise is one that you yourself discuss in your recent book, *Sovereignties*: how far the concept of sovereignty remains useful, and how far it has become disjoined from the theory of the state. With the rise of quasi-federal structures such as the European Union, and with the continuing growth of international corporations that, by setting the terms of investment and employment, are able to challenge the powers of individual states, these issues will surely continue to grow in importance, and it is good to see them being so widely addressed.

If I have a worry about this development, it is precisely the one to which you allude. There is undoubtedly a danger that the kind of political theory associated with the establishment of modern liberal states may be applied overenthusiastically to the international sphere. For example, the concept of natural rights on which liberal states have traditionally been grounded has recently been extended in such a way as to legitimize forcible intervention in the internal affairs of allegedly tyrannical states. The aspiration may be noble, but it is all too prone to look like imperialism decked out in more appealing modern dress.

I worry too that the increased emphasis on the international dimension in political theory may be encouraging what I see as a dangerously naive tendency to underestimate the continuing salience of individual states. We have repeatedly been assured in recent years that the nation-state is in terminal decline and that the very concept of the state, to quote one eminent authority, is now fading into the shadows. This view about the alleged implications of globalization strikes me as one-sided to the point of inattentiveness. The world's leading nation-states remain the principal actors on the international stage, and the ideal of humanitarian intervention has yet to be invoked in such a way as to challenge the sovereignty of any major state. Furthermore, individual

nation-states remain by far the most significant political actors within their own territories. They have become much more aggressive of late, patrolling their borders with increasing attention and maintaining an unparalleled level of surveillance over their own citizens. Meanwhile they continue to print money (more and more of it), to impose taxes, to enforce contracts, to engage in wars, to imprison and otherwise penalize their errant citizens, and to legislate with an unparalleled degree of complexity. My point is not merely that individual states continue to act in these ways; what needs emphasizing is that that no entities in the world except states act in all these ways.

The modern nation-state hardly seems to me, in short, to be an entity in danger of fading into the shadows any time soon. Indeed it is we, the denizens of the leading capitalist states, who might well have faded not merely into the shadows but into something much more like Hobbes's state of nature if the governments of individual nation-states had not come forward with so little hesitation in the closing months of 2008 to take on the responsibility of acting as lenders of last resort. It was the American government that kept the banks open for business in America, the British government that did so in Britain. I sometimes feel that many political theorists and political commentators have been almost as slow as the bankers themselves to wake up to the overwhelming significance of this fact, and what it tells us about the continuing power of individual nation-states to shape our lives for good and ill. Meanwhile, what do the people of southern Sudan want if not to become a separate nation-state? And what did the people of Kosovo want when they declared their independence in 2008 if not the same thing?

RP: Are there burning contemporary issues in politics that you think political theorists should be/are/aren't addressing?

QS: The closest to a burning issue in political theory in the literal sense is the question of what should be done in the face of climate change, and I find it heartening that so many philosophers are now examining the relevant questions about the responsibilities of corporations, the place of future generations in our present calculations, and the overarching ideal of global justice.

Among the metaphorically burning issues that need more attention, I would single out questions in feminist theory, which seem to me to have lost prominence to a surprising degree. No doubt we have all managed to internalize the basic idea that the personal is the political, but we can hardly leave the story at that point. The structures of our society have proved shockingly unresponsive to specific demands for equality

of opportunity and treatment, and I do not understand why this is not a subject of more comment and criticism.

I cannot forbear adding that the study of republican liberty seems to me a topic worthy of far more attention and research than it has yet received. So far the historiography of the subject, as I know to my cost, has moved through two unhelpful phases. First the defenders of republican liberty were told that what they were saying was simply mistaken. Then they were told that maybe it wasn't mistaken after all, but only because what they were saying was already part of the liberal understanding of freedom. Now that it is widely acknowledged that the republican theory constitutes a distinct tradition of thought, and one well worth reconsidering, the time has come to build on the basic republican insight that freedom is limited not merely by acts of interference but also, and more fundamentally, by relations of domination and dependence. If this is so, what institutions will need to be built if this more exacting understanding of freedom is to be accommodated? What changes will need to be made to our system of international relations if we are committed in the name of liberty to limiting the dependence not merely of individuals but of states? These are large and important questions, and I very much hope that more attention will be paid to them.

RP: Are you surprised/pleased/disappointed when you look back at how political theory, political philosophy, and the history of political thought have developed over the past 60 years?

QS: I try not to feel disappointment: it does no good. But I confess to feeling slightly irked by the fact that political theory and its history are still widely stigmatized as 'elitist' subjects, especially in the United States. Those of us who specialize in the history of political theory, and more generally in intellectual history, are apt to be assailed by a particularly philistine version of this criticism. We are always being asked to say how many people ever read the books we study, on pain of being dismissed as elitist if we concede that, for example, few people have ever seriously studied Plato or Hobbes or Rousseau, and fewer still have understood them very well. But this is only a criticism if the value of a work of philosophy depends on its popularity, and surely no one believes that. The attack on elitism is usually presented as democratic, but when it comes to the question of what is worth teaching our students it sometimes looks condescending. Often our students are most of all fired up by ideas, and we must not allow ourselves to be bullied into discouraging them.

You ask what has surprised me, and I must admit that I would never have predicted the growing challenge to the assumption that modern societies are secularized and disenchanted places. Political demands are again being made in the name of religious confessions, while philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor lament the loss of spiritual values attendant on the decline of religion in modern life. While I try to be a pluralist, I can't pretend that I am pleased by this development. No doubt we need to respect and negotiate with those whose religious commitments ground their social philosophies. But I confess to finding it offensive when I am asked to accept some equation between the holding of religious beliefs and the capacity to follow a spiritual way of life. I have known atheists who have struck me as genuinely spiritual people, and I have known religious believers who have lacked any spirituality at all.

Let me end on a more cheerful note by replying to your question about what pleases me when I reflect on the changes that have overtaken the study of political theory in the past 60 years. The period began with the proclamation of the death of the discipline, but we have come to see that ideologies can never end, and that those who wrote about the end of ideology were engaged in an ideological debate. I am pleased that in the present generation greater efforts have been made to bring the techniques of analytical philosophy to bear upon the analysis of moral and political issues, and I am also pleased that, more recently, the tendency to see political theory as little more than a subspecies of moral philosophy has been effectively challenged. Above all, I am pleased that the historical study of political theory has risen to a position of so much greater prestige. This seems to me as it should be, for the study of the past offers us an irreplaceable means of acquainting ourselves with unfamiliar ways of thinking about familiar concepts, and of introducing us at the same time to unfamiliar concepts that it may be useful to understand.

RP: Thanks so much for sharing these illuminating reflections on your life and work as a political theorist.

13

The Political Theory of Boundaries and the Boundaries of Political Theory: An Interview with R.B.J. Walker

Raia Prokhovnik

Raia Prokhovnik: Can you tell us about how you first became interested in political theory? Where did you start from intellectually, and which political theorists influenced you most when you were starting out?

Rob Walker: You start with what is for me a very tricky question. I cannot say that I have a straightforward answer. Much obviously depends on what one means by political theory. This depends in turn on where and what politics is taken to be and how distinctions between politics and anything else come to be authorized. I should admit upfront that while political theory is certainly the scholarly category with which I feel most comfortable, not least because it is one that names a very privileged vocation, I also feel uncomfortable with much that is done under this name. Indeed, much of my work has turned on a critique of the narrowness and parochialism of its most influential contemporary forms. I would also say that I am more interested in how political theory has been enabled, authorized, and put to work in its prevailing forms than in defending any specific tradition.

In any case, the response I can give with the benefit of hindsight is doubtless different from what I might have thought I was doing when I made choices to go in some directions rather than others. I am acutely sensitive to the structured contingencies of personal trajectories. I remember being aware of Oakeshott, Wittgenstein, and even the very young Quentin Skinner as influences shaping my first formal courses in political theory in Swansea. On the whole, however, I have been able to

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pursue problems and literatures without worrying too much about the tradition, field, discipline, or method to which I should formalize my allegiance.

I already had a fairly clear sense that I was attracted to both politics and theory while still at school. The fact that the school in question was neither fee-paying nor meritocratic meant that I had a lot of time to explore on my own, not least in a decent second-hand bookshop – a crucial resource and inspiration. The politics came partly from what seemed like the dramatic events of the early 1960s in Britain, especially mobilizations around nuclear weapons. Given that I grew up in Reading, less than a day's walk from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston, I developed an early sense of the close conjunction between the immediately local and the potentially global, as well of the very different positions that could be framed as leftist or progressive. It came partly from an innovative (and I think short-lived) school curriculum in social and economic history that, among other things, gave me the life-long illusion that all political analysts have a basic background in political economy and the mechanisms of social reproduction.

I also grew up in a particular social world in which I experienced both the promises of radical cultural rupture and the continuing grasp of Edwardian and even Victorian ways of life, and family connections to the mining communities of South Wales gave me some sense of class politics and the immediacy of colonial relations. My understanding of politics is closely shaped by this sense of historicity, and of the stakes involved in contested historiographies. By contrast, my concern with the politics of spatialities, which is more explicit in my work, was probably shaped much more by my experiences in Canada, to which I moved in my early 20s to avoid options that felt more like closures.

The theory came from literary, cultural, and musical sources, especially as these were being reshaped through figures like Marcel Duchamp. Badly digested though they may have been, I would still say that these sources have influenced me more than any formally identifiable tradition of political theory. Indeed, I only reconciled myself to this particular identity when I started teaching political theory on a permanent basis when well into my 30s; and it did not take long before I helped create an interdisciplinary graduate program in cultural, social, and political thought in order to broaden the horizons beyond the institutional demands of an Americanizing political science. While I had recognized early on that I felt comfortable doing political theory, I had an equally strong sense that political theory could be pursued in

many settings. With a few other twists of fate, I could have pursued it as a sociologist, cultural theorist, geographer, or, the identity I still sometimes assume when not in teaching mode, theorist of international relations.

Having said this, however, an alternative response to your question would simply be to mention the name of Hobbes. I collided with his texts as an undergraduate with W.H. Greenleaf, was stunned that anyone could write so methodically about politics, and have been both fascinated and appalled by his presence ever since. I was never particularly taken with any of the standard political theory readings of him, except as heterogeneous examples of what it means to engage in rigorous and historically informed scholarship. I was more interested in discovering where his way of thinking came from – what allowed him to say *that* – but in a rather different, more philosophical mode than Skinner. This is what shaped my interest in the history and philosophy of science, which developed more seriously a few years after moving to Canada. This interest was helped along by my attempt to get some historical and philosophical perspective on the politics of claims about systems theory. This was a consequence of taking classes with both David Easton and Alastair Taylor, two entirely different thinkers invoking systems as a way of thinking about politics, one narrowly economistic and one, which I preferred, expansively historical and metaphysical. This relationship between scientific and political thought occupied much of my graduate work. It has shaped both the underlying substance and the procedures of most of the work I have done ever since, although I have preferred to write about other things.

Even while I was rapidly devouring broad literatures on the history and philosophy of early-modern science, I was simultaneously trying to get a grip on contemporary events and transformations. I was already persuaded that the resources and possibilities preoccupying Hobbes and his successors were not especially useful for thinking about the world I saw around me. The really hard questions seemed to me to fall under the scholarly jurisdiction of international relations, a jurisdiction that unfortunately had little tolerance for transgressions of Cold War orthodoxy and an increasingly strong taste for trite categorizations and the more dogmatic forms of socio-scientific method. Given that most political theorists remained and still remain resolutely statist, there was scarcely anyone to follow in this direction, although I did receive encouragement from people like W.B. Gallie, Hedley Bull, John Vincent, and quite a few interesting figures in international law and peace

research. It also eventually dawned on me that Kant, whose account of the problem of epistemology within a specific spatiotemporal frame was gradually becoming the core of an eventually abandoned book on the philosophy of social science, had also effectively identified international relations as a problem in ways that remained provocative. It was through Kant that I found a way to link my more philosophical-theoretical concerns with my frustrated attempts to think about international relations as if it could be a site for doing political theory. Ernst Cassirer was probably my primary guide in this respect, although I was more persuaded politically by the various Hegelian, Weberian, and Marxist currents shaping the most interesting fashions of intellectual life in the early 1970s, and subsequently by the early work of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze, which led me to rethink the rather Hegelianized Kant I had come to know through Cassirer.

So I have had both the disadvantage and great advantage of not coming through a specific school of political theory. Much of the advantage has come from being left alone to follow my nose back to early modern European struggles over faith, reason, language, space, and time, including the (mainly French and German) debates about the origins and continuities of modernity. Much of my affinity with Foucault, for example, comes from figures shadowing his early work, such as Bachelard, Canguilheim, and Pierre-Maxime Schuhl. Indeed, I am probably shaped even more by the French historians of science such as Duhem, Koyre, and, in a different way, by Michel Serres, than by the now mythologized generation of Paris 1968; and more by the early texts of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze that express this heritage than by their later work. Much of the disadvantage has come from the way political theorists assume that I am really a theorist of international relations while theorists of international relations tend to think I am far too much of a political theorist, to put it politely. In any case, I will admit my longtime addiction to Hobbes and Kant, but in retrospect I am very happy that I managed to resist the label of political theorist until I had already read an enormous range of intellectual histories, and historical geographies, and learned to be deeply suspicious of claims about intellectual histories and naturalized geographies.

RP: Several political theorists from the canon, especially Hobbes and Kant perhaps, figure strongly in the case you make about the nature and effects of the constructed boundaries between the 'state' and 'international' as political spheres. What is it that such theorists especially offer you in your thinking? Is it something about the continuing relevance

for current theory and practice of their position in relation to the idea of modernity?

RW: I have gradually learned the wisdom of the adage that one should never argue with a fool. Hobbes and Kant are certainly not fools. As you say, Kant is important to me as a thinker of limits and boundaries. I would cast Hobbes more as a thinker of origins, which is nevertheless a way of saying that he has a lot to say about how we have come to shape a certain kind of bounded politics. Both retain enormous presence in the ways we think about modernity, whether affirmatively or critically. I think that it is important to appreciate the extensive force of this presence, mainly because I think it is a force that needs to be resisted if we are to do more than repeat the tired and decreasingly plausible cliches of progressive politics.

Hobbes startled me as an undergraduate, as I have already noted. I had been following various combinations of an emerging 'new left' in politics and an 'avant-garde' in theorization when along came a tough-minded defender of what I would prefer to call the modern project rather than just the modern state. I have never really thought him to be especially important for the 'inside/outside' or 'state/international' problem; in my view, that honour is better pinned on Kant. I do think Hobbes constructs a spatiotemporal externality to the singular political jurisdiction that sets up the discursive condition of possibility for the international, which certainly makes him a central figure for contemporary thinking about the possibilities of some kind of world politics. In this context, however, Hobbes speaks precisely to prior problems arising from the way we imagine ourselves in relation to the world, a world knowable only through language and not through essence. He constructs the world of 'nature' *within* the world of (modern) 'culture', leaving any world as such somewhere beyond human reach. He expresses a common pattern in this respect, one subsequently formalized in Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena, and I don't think it very helpful to try to focus on what he may have said about either the state or some international without seeing how he frames the conditions under which one must think about anything at all in the wake of Galileo, Descartes, and so on.

What I especially like about Hobbes is his sense that what must be put together in a certain way can so easily fall apart. Resist the first half-dozen or so chapters of *Leviathan* and much of the rest loses its force, or at least its claim to necessity. He can be read as his own best critic. This appeals to my (Kantian) sense of the immanence of critique, but

it also pushes me to wonder whether I really do want to resist those early chapters. Perhaps more than this, Hobbes both poses questions that still require responses, even if not in his terms, and sets up ways of thinking about these questions that remain difficult to resist, for reasons that remain under-appreciated. Thus, compared with many of the tendencies of our own day, Hobbes's affirmation of a principle of equality, qualified though it may be, seems positively enlightened. But the way we still think about sovereignty as an absolutist matter of presence or absence speaks to the way we keep reproducing the before/after and reason/nonsense binaries through which he sets up a sovereign narrative about what sovereignty must be.

In my *After the Globe, Before the World*, I explicitly argue that while Hobbes articulates an account of the spatiotemporal conditions of possibility for the modern international, it is Kant who has the clearest sense of what the modern international involves. Where Kant is so often set up as some sort of solution to the problem of the modern international understood in supposedly Hobbesian terms, I think Kant identifies the international as a problem to which there is no realizable solution. Many contemporary thinkers still want to believe that Kant offers positive prescriptions for the problems of the modern international, whereas I think he only offers some clarity about what these problems are. He does so because he tries to imagine the unfolding of a universalizing *telos* within modern subjects while acknowledging that individualized modern subjects depend on the external conditions provided by sovereign states, the potential autonomy of which depends in turn on the external conditions of possibility provided by the system of states. Many if not most commentaries on Kant's political writings tend to privilege one of these three sites of political subjectivity, thereby losing a sense of Kant's appreciation of the aporetic relationship that must exist between them.

Kant thus offers an analysis of the contradictions that are lost when modern political analysis is split into a statist political theory and an international theory, with an individualized ethics of self, whether self-determining or cosmopolitan, thrown in for good measure. Many thinkers now advise greater attention to aporetic relations, but Kant does so in a way that grasps how they are supposed to work within a scalar order stretching from small to big, and while simultaneously affirming principles of freedom and equality. So for me, Kant offers a very traditional way of engaging the institutionalized dualisms that force us to shy away from the hard questions arising from the undecidable location of sovereignties claimed in the name of

individualized people, collectivized statist peoples, and collectivities of collectivized/individualized peoples/people.

Where Kant has been used to affirm either principles of national self-determination or some kind of international, supranational, or cosmopolitan order (and crucial distinctions between these terms often turn very cloudy in the prevailing literatures), I would say that he points to the impossibilities inherent in the way the choice is usually framed. Where a Habermas seems to think that Hans Kelsen offers an effective response to Carl Schmitt, I would say that Kant can be found in both Schmitt and Kelsen, and that it is their co-presence as markers of the limits of so much contemporary debate (along with Walter Benjamin's appeal to a 'divine violence') that defines many of the problems we ought to be engaging. Where Kant is sometimes claimed as one of the many beacons guiding attempts to articulate a republican alternative to prevailing liberalisms, I would say that Kant is far more acutely aware of the need to think about the international context of modern political forms, whether liberal, republican, or something else. Where so much political theory wants to believe that we are confronted by a choice between a universalizing claim about humanity as such and a particularizing claim about citizenships within statist jurisdictions, Kant recognizes the continuing force of constitutive antagonisms between claims to humanity and claims to citizenship that have shaped European/Western political theory at least since the days of Machiavelli. So I see Kant as a very effective critic of much contemporary political theory, especially forms that claim to be pursuing Kantian principles in order to articulate more progressive alternatives.

More worryingly, however, while Kant does celebrate the possibilities of a politics of a universalizing humanity, his is a fatally qualified version of humanity. As with Hobbes, what I ultimately find interesting about Kant is the way he performs a conditionality of inclusion and exclusion in order to articulate a narrative about the necessities and possibilities inherent in a formalized structure of inclusions and exclusions. In this context, and again as with Hobbes, I would say that it is especially important to come to terms with the effects of his concern with human finitude: the finitude that is understood against both mathematical and theological conceptions of infinity. For both Hobbes and Kant, universality is envisaged *within* a world of human finitude, leaving open the possibility that there must be something beyond whatever finite universals humanity might achieve. I would say that this particular heritage (which might be traced to Zeno and especially Euclid) has had enormous

influences on the way we think not only about limits in the Kantian philosophical sense but also about borders and boundaries in legal, geographical, and sociocultural senses. Given that I do not see borders and boundaries as either in the process of disappearing or as fixed for all eternity, I find it useful to think about Hobbes and Kant as having a very good grip on the resources encouraging us to think that boundaries must be either disappearing or cast in some kind of Parmenidean permanence. At the same time, while I do not see how we can simply abandon concepts such as boundary, limit, critique, or sovereignty, I also do not see that we can keep reverting to Hobbesian/Kantian interpretations of what these concepts must mean.

RP: What has been the logic of the development of your thinking from your point of view? Is it that you have tried to do political theory through 'IR' and 'global development' rather than through the state? How did you come to focus on this approach?

RW: I suppose there is something to the claim that all scholarly work is somehow autobiographical. In my case, I write a lot about dualisms, dualities, aporias, and so on, and I am always conscious of doing so in two primary modalities, intuitive and logical. I don't do the empirical very well, except as a kind of magpie looking for shiny treasures: the exemplary instance or some shadowy pattern of novel events.

I was already convinced of the importance of the finite/infinite relation and its significance for modern conceptions of temporality while still a teenager. I have no idea why. Nor could I have identified this intuition, to which I kept returning in various forms, until I was starting graduate work. It was an intuition that I had initially sensed in musical terms, the terms in which I still understand the politics of scale and my scepticism about the constant resort to a hierarchy of levels as a solution to problems of spatial extension. I only began to make sense of it by working through many histories of the concept of space, starting with Cassirer, Whitehead, Max Jammer, and some teaching I did on the philosophy of geography. This gradually came to be the one big idea that permitted me to flit here, there, and everywhere, distilling many things into structural logics that I also knew had to be historicized and sociologized. These logics tended to have a lot to do with what we call subjectivity, sovereignty, epistemology, the state, the international, and, perhaps most importantly, development. Much of my work has tried to understand the production of specific relations among these logics, and to deduce from there what kind of empirical claims might be interesting, or not.

I was also very fortunate in the company I kept. While I remained rather obsessed with a small number of more or less philosophical themes involving claims about finitudes and spatiotemporalities, I also engaged with and wrote about material that seemed to me to be both interesting and, unlike finitudes and spatiotemporalities, open to some kind of intelligible research and writing. Opportunities came, and I followed my nose.

My interest in international relations in particular goes back a long way, and I have sustained a strong interest in substantive problems of military strategy and security, patterns of systemic transformation, and international law. But I have been most taken with the formation of international relations as a set of claims about the world, and especially as an institutionalized discipline that works to affirm a particular set of normative claims. Yes, I know that it is better known for its claims to 'realism', but such claims only make sense insofar as they express a particular understanding of what the formal structure of modern political life *must* be. Reading the discipline as a political practice affirming the formal claims of modern sovereignty as an ideal, both statist and systemic, I found it possible to engage with various debates that were beginning to find some purchase within the discipline itself.

It took quite a long time to make sense of an intuition that the discipline must be understood in reverse, so that the dominant traditions are better understood as idealisms rather than realisms. The contrary position was repeated so often, even by more critical thinkers, that it seemed perverse to think otherwise; but otherwise it is. If one affirms normative commitments to, say, the state, even as an empirical claim that these are the prevailing commitments that have been made, then one may assess their consequences in arguably realistic terms, but the realism is consequential upon the ideal. If one starts from the premise that realism is the place to start, as is almost invariably the case, one will end up responding to the wrong questions.

I initially formulated this problem in terms of ethnocentricism, the also obvious but more or less unmentionable way in which the modern international arises from one part of the world but is articulated as the container of humanity as such. Even though this was never a problem that many took seriously, I was fortunate to have had extensive engagements about it with a range of very interesting thinkers: Hedley Bull, John Vincent, Richard Falk, Ashis Nandy, Rajni Kothari, Dhirubhai Sheth, Mohammed Sid-Ahmed, Lester Ruiz, and Joseph Needham, among others. It was from these engagements, as well as from the debates responding to Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, the

colonial inheritances of anthropology, and postcolonial engagements with emerging feminisms, that I concluded that it would be better to examine how worlds beyond the modern West had been constructed as alterities within the modern West and to avoid trying to isolate different ways of thinking about world politics from different cultural traditions. This was again in keeping with my sense of the immanence of critique.

This was also the moment in which I concluded that while international relations was most obviously framed as a spatial problematique, as a problem of plural powers distributed in territorial space, it also works to affirm a specific – modernizing – philosophy of history. I still think that this is a crucial issue. In its canonical forms, international relations theory affirms an account of modernization and development as not only inevitable as an unfolding teleology but also as an already achieved condition. From this it was a fairly simple move to link the idealisms that generate realisms and the spatial forms that affirm the necessity of specific temporal processes with the fate of Max Weber as a depoliticized political theorist. And from there it was also an easy move to appreciate the significance of the kinds of post-structural critiques that finally provided some convenient hammers to knock a few holes in the bastions of what had become an extraordinarily dogmatic academic field. I remain proud of the openings I helped make with Richard Ashley, Michael Shapiro, Michael Dillon, and others in this context, although the way in which I have since been canonized as an archetypal 'postie-IR theorist' is not exactly helpful.

Still, international relations was far from the only site at which I worked. Much of my thinking was shaped by trying to make sense of politics in the far western part of Canada, a place in which the idealized visions of statist political theory were not exactly persuasive. Much was also shaped by teaching a very traditional set of undergraduate courses on the canonical thinkers involving close readings of original texts. In both contexts, I have been extremely fortunate to work for many years with Warren Magnusson, an urbanist as well as a political theorist and also a brilliant teacher, playing out the antagonisms between assumptions that have come to seem canonical and all kinds of claims to novelty and historical-structural transformation. More recently, Jim Tully and Arthur Kroker joined us, and the now-thriving political theory community of graduate students at UVic has provided an unusually supportive and challenging place at which to think about political theory in innovative and interdisciplinary ways.

I was also lucky to be involved in many workshops and meetings in very different geographical locations with many of the people who

shaped influential concepts of globalization, new social movements, global civil society, and so on. This was how I initially took responsibility for the journal *Alternatives*, which I have since run as a site of convergence between political theory and critical theories of both development and international relations.

In all these contexts, and despite many differences, I came to feel sympathetic both to certain strains of American political theory associated with Sheldon Wolin, William Connolly, and Wendy Brown, to French writers like Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, and Jean-Luc Nancy, and to very independent and logically minded thinkers like Barry Hindess. On the other hand, I could never generate any urgent desire to engage with the liberalisms that have been shaped by figures like Rawls and Habermas. Even when productive in some contexts, I have learnt that political theories do not automatically travel well, and that political theories that try to avoid politics at all costs, as such liberalisms do, travel especially badly.

So I do not explicitly try to do political theory through international relations and development in the sense of applying concepts from one to the other. Rather, I assume that international relations and development have been the conditions under which certain forms of politics and political theory have been possible; that most forms of political theory have been wilfully oblivious of these conditionalities; and that as these conditionalities show ever more signs of significant transformation, political theorists can ill-afford to remain oblivious.

RP: In *Inside/Outside. International Relations as Political Theory* you develop a powerful analysis and timely critique of twentieth-century theories of international relations, disclosing their ideological indebtedness to the modern state, and demonstrating how they operate as expressions of, rather than explaining, contemporary international politics. In doing so you challenge the naturalization of constructed boundaries, borders, and limits for the individual subject, the polity, and the international. Is this a fair summary?

RW: I wish I could say that my argument was as clear as that! Yes, I do read most contemporary theories of international relations as expressions of statist understandings of how political life must be organized. In this guise, they can be very illuminating, although as claims to explanation they offer a very mixed bag. And yes, I was trying to challenge the naturalization of constructed boundaries, although I was thinking more about the boundaries of states than of individual subjects or of the international (which is much more explicitly the focus of more recent work).

I was also playing out an argument about history and structure, partly so as to get a grip on the many different claims that were being made under the label of political realism, partly to subvert the pretense that all philosophical and political questions could be reduced to claims about epistemology (at best) or method (all too often), and partly to force theorizations that constantly default to spatialized structuralist assumptions to confront the temporal sensitivities of Machiavelli, who after all was supposed to be a founding father of the trade. This book was also where I worked out that sovereignty could not be understood in terms of the standard stories about centralized or highest forms of authority, and thus why Hobbes and Kant had to be re-engaged more directly as theorists of origins and limits.

It may be worth noting that when putting that book together I was becoming highly conscious of the significance of Carl Schmitt. This was well before his name started sprouting up everywhere, and I did not know how to put him explicitly into the picture. I did have a draft chapter on Weber, which in retrospect I wish I had included as it might have enabled me to put a much sharper sting into the conclusion. Still, while I had a pretty good sense of why the Weber–Schmitt connection was important to what I was trying to do, it was a sense that remained more intuitive than worked through, and I had already found the effort to recover Weber from the Anglo-American sociologists more than enough to be going on with.

Inside/Outside eventually became quite an influential book, but I am still not sure what its influence has been. To begin with, at least, it was cited mainly as the place to go to find an analysis of two distinct discourses about political theory and international relations, whereas I thought I was demonstrating that these were two moments of the same discourse, more or less on the model of Schmitt's understanding of the mutually constitutive relation of norm and exception rather than of an essentialized difference between friend and enemy. So, denaturalization of borders and limits, yes; but also an attempt to show how the politics enacted at those borders shape practices far beyond those borders.

RP: A strong and characteristic feature of your work as a whole, it seems to me, is the broad canvas you work on and the linkages you make so forcefully and profitably – between politics in the state and international spheres and transformations in them; profoundly critiquing political categories such as inclusion and exclusion; across a huge spectrum of mainstream and radical philosophy and political and social theory; encompassing the scope of the spatiotemporality in modern

politics; reconceptualizing the relationship between modern forms of subjectivity and sovereignty; and rethinking meaning and explanation in the social sciences. Working with this broad canvas makes your work particularly illuminating and exciting. Has your thinking always been temperamentally disposed to making connections in this way?

RW: Yes, I respond well to E.M. Forster's motto: 'only connect'. And like Michel Serres, I have a soft spot for Hermes, messenger of the gods and crosser of boundaries. As I have tried to suggest already, I have always worked on a very broad canvass, and feel quite at home working with very dense abstractions, but always in relation to a relatively restricted repertoire of core problems. This may be partly a matter of temperament. It is also partly a matter of both good fortune and conscious decisions in the way my career worked out. I had already managed to teach courses on international relations, Canadian politics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and cultural studies in order to keep body and soul together before permanent teaching positions started opening up. I would have a very hard time working in places with strong pressures to reproduce disciplinary jurisdictions. I am also impressed by the authority of cartographies, and in some ways I would admit to being something of a critical cartographer. The downside, of course, is a tendency to overgeneralize and a dissolution of specificities into disembodied abstractions. I used to worry about this. Then I became more and more impressed by the force that abstractions and generalizations can carry – another Hobbesian or perhaps Platonist theme.

RP: You published *After the Globe, Before the World* in 2010. In that book you move further in exploring the illegitimacy of thinking in terms of essentialized differences, and challenge the seductiveness of appeals to a world of politics outside or beyond the international. What is the core idea or problem that you expressed in that book? Do you have plans to develop this work further?

RW: *After the Globe* is by far the most ambitious and perhaps most risky thing I have done. It tries to situate a critique of the constitutive categories expressed in the aporetic relation between statist claims to sovereignty and the sovereignty of the system that enables any state to claim sovereignty in relation to longstanding debates about modernity as a spatiotemporally specific culture predicated on claims about subjectivity and thus an irresolvable rift between man and world. Or, in an ever denser formulation, it tries to frame a question about how we might try to think differently about the relation between claims to citizenship and claims to humanity that we are told have been resolved in a territorial

yet scalar order of individuals within states within a system of states while simultaneously coming to terms with the many ways in which the man-world opposition that enables modern conceptions of both human and citizen is unsustainable. Or, more bluntly, it tries to ask what would be involved if we were serious about doing political theory in relation to claims about humanity as such, or to a planet that is clearly in some peril.

To the latter question it responds by showing how most of the standard stories about cosmopolitanism, global justice, and so on have very little to say because they completely ignore the international and thus keep reproducing a meaningless opposition between national and cosmopolitan/global. The critical force of the analysis is directed against many forms of political theory and practice, which simply assume that we need to move from a parochial particularism to a cosmopolitan universalism, forgetting that modern politics has been orchestrated as a relation *between* particulars and universals and that prevailing understandings of universality have already shaped the parochial particularities that are said to be problematic. Political theorists confront some very daunting problems, but all too many are content to respond with simplistic stories about the need to move from state to globe, or equally simplistic stories about states going on forever. I try to show how neither of these all too familiar options should be taken seriously; they are the alternatives that prevent us from thinking productively about alternatives. Otherwise, the book counsels greater attention to the spatiotemporal rearticulation of sovereignties and boundaries in ways that resist the standard Hobbesian and Kantian stories but may usefully build on things that might be recoverable from both Hobbes and Kant, among many others, and among many other kinds of political analysis.

The main idea holding a diverse array of themes more or less together is that international relations can be understood as both a synonym and an antonym for a world politics, and that as a consequence we will always express a politics of desire to go beyond the international to a politics of the world that is fated to collapse back into an affirmation of statist/inter-statist authority. Read in a certain way, it can be a depressing analysis – if one is persuaded by the standard cliches. International relations was always a depressing subject, unless one was somehow attracted to war and mass violence or immune to the arrogance of hegemonic powers, but at least one could opt for idealism rather than realism. But I read idealism, and the idealization of specific forms of universalism, as precisely the problem, and thus as no consolation. It all smells a bit like Weber's iron cage. But unlike Weber, I have no desire to hold on

to a liberal nationalism, or a quasi-Lutheran existentialism, still less the narratives about the one-way street of modernization that are at play in prevailing claims about both international order and globalizing alternatives to it. In any case, I suppose the central idea might be characterized as a claim that we need to think very carefully about the international and developmental limits shaping the procedures through which modern political life affirms, reproduces, and encourages us to transcend our political limits in ways that largely reproduce these limits. But it might also be characterized as an attempt to understand what kinds of question are being posed when we are told that we need to think more creatively about a politics of the world or a singular humanity.

I am currently trying to put together a collection of essays in which I have worked through some themes more thoroughly than in *After the Globe*. It focuses especially on how we might understand many constitutive political practices as working within the complex spatiotemporalities of boundaries themselves rather than as naturally arrayed on either side of them. It is also an elaboration of the way I read sovereignties in terms of claims about and practices of producing the beginnings and ends of things that subsequently produce an apparent middle ground. Like *After the Globe*, it seeks to resist Euclidean topologies of point, line and plane and to encourage the idea that there is no easy middle ground between intolerable extremes. And yes, I do have plans to develop these analyses further, with more stress on the temporal than the spatial, but I am still thinking about how this might be done, or indeed when I might have time to do it.

RP: Can you identify one piece of work that you are most pleased with?

RW: Please permit me to claim two as one, a closely related pair, two pieces in which I managed to identify and sketch out the basic contours of what I still think are important themes and which have guided much of what I have done since. One is the article 'World Politics and Western Reason', in which I insist on the ethnocentric status of international relations theory but also the orientalist character of most attempts to respond to this ethnocentricism; and one is the article 'The Territorial State and the Theme of Gulliver', subsequently included in *Inside/Outside,* in which I identify the contradictions that arise when appeals are made to spatialized accounts of hierarchical levels in order to respond to claims about temporal transformation. The former was published in 1981 and the latter in 1984 but both were drafted in the mid-1970s. Neither are more than sketches, like all too much of my work in fact, but for me these were especially fertile sketches. In terms of more

sustained pieces, again taking a closely related pair, there is very little I would change about *Inside/Outside* beyond making the Weber–Schmitt connection more explicit; and although I think it will be slow to find its audience, I am still very happy with the way *After the Globe* poses questions in a way that avoids a lot of debilitating even if comforting cliches.

RP: Where do you think contemporary political theory is going more broadly, especially in terms of the separation/links between the Anglo-American analytical tradition, continental traditions, and the history of political thought?

RW: I don't have any idea really, but four points may be worth noting. One is that there is no shortage of very smart people doing political theory in one way or another, and more good political theory is being published than I can read. Yet much of the assault on scholarship in general that has resulted from neo-liberal celebrations of market rationality, with the United Kingdom leading the way, seems likely to re-enforce many prejudices against the value of political theory in particular.

Second, and partly as a consequence, many very good political theorists will increasingly be forced to work explicitly in other fields. This has been a matter of professional necessity for some time. There are more academic positions in, say, American politics or international relations than in political theory, and most younger scholars are very well attuned to the survival skills required to reconcile professional success with scholarly integrity. There are potential benefits from this for the way these other fields are taught and researched, and the range of relevant problems engaged by political theorists might also become broader. Still, it is not difficult to imagine that the institutional advantages that political theory has enjoyed as a site of legitimate critique and normativity will be increasingly difficult to sustain.

Third, I would say that your three-fold classification of approaches to or styles of political theory speaks to a specifically British context, even though it does have resonances elsewhere. The American scene is more complex; I'm not sure, for example, that one can say that either the Arendtian or Straussian inheritances are simply 'continental'. Canada is different again, with strong connections to a specific tradition of political economy as well as a focus on both multiculturalism and indigenous politics. If I think about other societies in which I have had some experience – India, for example, or Brazil more recently – the three traditions you mention would be recognizable, but as a bit out of place. In fact, we need to ask whether we have any clear sense of what it means to do

political theory in different societies. I certainly don't think that we can keep assuming that Europe and North America are the primary places in which political theory is now pursued, or that formally identified political theorists have any monopoly on the practice of political theory. Even staying with your three-fold classification, however, it is worth remembering that each category names a broad array of possibilities, some interesting to me, some not.

Finally, in all these contexts, your question suggests the need for some kind of political sociology of knowledge to understand what is involved in treating the categories you identify as scholarly options in different spatiotemporal settings.

RP: Do you think the greater attention paid by political theorists to international relations over the past few years is a valuable trend? Does it mean that theorists are now addressing the relationship between politics within states and politics between states? Or are political theorists tending to move into a separate field without understanding its particular presuppositions and character? Are they colonizing international theory with moral rather than political questions?

RW: I think the record is very mixed, as your question seems to imply. It is indeed the case that political theorists have begun to examine politics between as well as within states. The political theory of international relations has become something of a minor industry, one that was certainly not in operation 20 years ago except as a branch of applied ethics. But there are clearly many problems. Precisely because political theory has so often been constructed by ignoring and yet assuming the international conditions of its very possibility, there will be difficulties trying to apply it to the international. Related problems arise in attempts to apply political theory in other contexts that have been simultaneously excluded yet included, especially in relation to cities, ecologies, and genders.

This is one reason why there is such a strong tendency in this literature to desire some sort of move up the scale from the state to the globe, in ways that are oblivious to the difference between claims to universality and the kind of singular imperium against which modern forms of politics were constructed within a system of states. This tendency is amplified by revivals of the old trick of applying ethics, as understood by moral philosophers rather than political theorists, to politics by extending it to the supposedly global. On the other hand, there are many interesting attempts to use many of the more pressing challenges of our time to try to think about other ways of thinking about claims

to humanity and claims to citizenship without affirming the standard nationalist and internationalist narratives or running away from politics as fast as possible. So ultimately, yes, it may be a valuable trend; but good intentions, a good training in ethics, attachments to a whiggish teleology, hollow claims about the universality of specific forms of democracy, and assumptions that we now have some capacity to speak politically about a humanity as such are all inadequate resources for the challenges involved.

RP: Do you think the increase in awareness of the cultural specificity of different political theoretical traditions, attempts to be sensitive to cross-cultural intellectual differences, and attempts to broach debate between different traditions, are welcome signs? Are or can they be a genuine form of post-colonialism? Or do these trends represent a dangerous move towards relativism, the entrenching and fixing of cultural intellectual differences, and a futile and misconceived project to build on shared principles (freedom? equality? justice?) across different theoretical traditions? Or are such trends perhaps a mask for further colonial ambitions by a dominant universalizing Western tradition?

RW: I would say all of the above, except for the form of relativism that is identified as the negation of some presumed but in fact particular universalism. Yes, greater awareness is to be commended, but this is never easy. Essentialisms are always a possibility. Recognition, like multiculturalism, can always turn into new forms of domination and exclusion. And so on. We are talking politics here, not a philosophy that can be deployed from on high. As Machiavelli might say, it depends on circumstances. As Weber might say, beware of the unintended consequences of good intentions. As quite a lot of historians would say, be careful about the assumption that there is a universalizing tradition that comes from the West alone when much of 'the West' was imported from all over the place. The insidious superstitions put about by figures like Samuel Huntingdon speak precisely to how not to think about questions of this kind.

But it is as well to remember that even as an archetypal 'Western' (though I prefer 'modern') achievement, international relations already tells us how we ought to deal with cross-cultural differences: all states must accept the form of modern sovereignty and much that come with that form, but all states may then fill the form with substantive cultural content that may or may not be modern. It is then an open question how far form and substance must be made consistent; how far, for example, modern formalist understandings of democracy can be

imposed on traditional forms of domestic authority. This is the legacy embedded in the highly problematic but effectively naturalized term 'nation-state'.

It is also as well to remember that although the most popular versions of international relations have been shaped by extremist claims about radical differences between states (as a Schmittean exceptionalism translated into a normalized American social science), other accounts stress the complex politics of diplomatic negotiations and relative autonomies that have enabled modern politics to be organized precisely as a relation between some even if minimal sense of shared universalities and commitments to differentiated and even incompatible principles. It is far from being a perfect model for any sustainable future, but it ought to give pause to those who insist on playing out ahistorical claims about enlightenment and its alternatives. It is quite striking in this context how political theorists, as specialists in reading texts politically, have had almost nothing to say about the UN Charter, a key expression of the profoundly contradictory character of modern political principles and the possibilities of negotiating the contradictions.

I certainly think negotiations over shared principles must be and already are crucial. The biggest difficulties in this respect arise not from any abstract relativism but from the way (Kantian?) principles of national self-determination still enable key states to refuse to negotiate or to simply presume their own imperial superiority; to enact the solipsism that is still the tacit ground for so much contemporary political theory.

RP: Are there urgent contemporary issues in politics that you think political theorists should be/are/aren't addressing?

RW: Well, there are obviously many pressing problems. We may file them as international, urban, climatic, or ecological, as exemplified by refugees of many different kinds or by the promises and hazards of new biotechnologies, and so on. Most seem to be attracting the interest of political theorists, at least in a broad understanding of what this means. There is far too much to keep up with. Still, my sense is that two themes, two very large elephants in the room, ought to be attracting far more sustained attention.

One concerns the way we ought to be thinking now about the kind of sovereign authority we have associated with states in a system of states and the kind of sovereignty we associate with the capacity of capital to impose price as the ultimate political value. Even to use the term

sovereignty in relation to capital now seems odd. Yet, to take a very current example, it seems even more odd to use the term sovereignty in references to Greece but not to the financial powers that have forced Greece to take difficult emergency measures. There may be many reasons why political theorists seem to have abandoned any attempt to engage with political economies, but the consequences have not been positive.

The other concerns the degree to which patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and relations between claims to citizenship and claims to humanity, are being rearticulated in ways that do not conform to the expectations of states within a system of states. Political theory tends either to assume those expectations or to propose some kind of universalizing principle that would privilege claims to humanity. Yet if emerging patterns of inclusion and exclusion come to look more and more like the organization of the biggest cities, with extreme wealth and extreme poverty following a generalizable pattern across most societies rather than the friend–enemy model of statist citizens in a system encompassing a decentralized humanity, political theory is likely to have very little to say. Much has been said about how we might get our act together as a common humanity (and let me add that I favour this ambition, even if not the ways we seem to be going about it), but much less has been said about our apparent willingness to tolerate some kind of distinction between humans who can partake of a common humanity and those with decreasing resources for doing so. This distinction is already expressed by Kant as well as by the social Darwinians of our own time, and it is not inconceivable that this is a distinction that will become even more pressing than the distinction between friends and enemies in a system of states.

RP: Are you surprised/pleased/disappointed when you look back at how political theory, political philosophy, and the history of political thought have developed over the past 60 years?

RW: I expect to be surprised, and I sometimes am, but it is rarely any great surprise, so I feel only mild annoyance that I'd missed the tell-tale signs beforehand!

I may be most surprised and annoyed about the way in which so many political theorists still willingly reproduce populist notions about the irrelevant ivory-tower character of what they do rather than insist on the way they have a grip on the authorization of judgements that are at the heart of all forms of political power. To the extent that I am pleased or

disappointed, I wouldn't know how to assign responsibility to political theory as such rather than the broader dynamics that enable and limit what political theorists can do. I may be most pleased that it has been possible for me to build extensively on European as well as Anglo-American resources; but most disappointed that so many European and Anglo-American theorists are still so willing to speak for humanity and the world as a whole, even when invoking claims about difference. This tendency gives cosmopolitanism a bad name when it is becoming ever clearer that political theory needs to be asking questions about what it means to be cosmopolitan given that the international is unsustainable, the imperial is undesirable, and pressures to legitimize new and very dubious distinctions between the acceptably and unacceptably human are becoming so pervasive.

RP: Thanks so much, Rob, for this broad-ranging insight into your thinking.

Index