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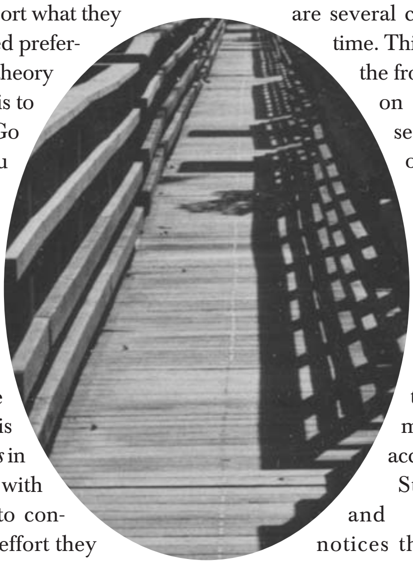
Culture: A Backdoor Approach

Mary Douglas

It is difficult to think about culture because culture is implicated in the thinking apparatus. An elusive idea can only be captured unawares, when it is not looking.

The front door of culture is what people say about their preferences. The next step from the front is what they *do* to support what they say – in economics, 'revealed preferences'. But unless there is a theory about why people prefer this to that, research is blocked. Go in by the front door and you will never know what has been happening. Try entering by the back. Cultural theory goes behind the face of preferences and aversions and tries to fill in the background pressures. Instead of focusing on the individual person this method focuses on the *others* in the social environment with whom the individual has to contend; at centre stage is the effort they each make to promote their own moral and aesthetic preferences against the others.



The technique for the researcher is to set up an abstract model of possible organization forms; this gives a kind of map on which to locate a set of human subjects. The survival of an organization depends on its members to keep it together and allow it to adapt. An organization would dissolve into something else if there were not a will to maintain it in a given form. Its existence over time is a symptom of the pressures exerted by members on each other to conform, and the pressures to articulate distinctive principles to justify to each other why they are pressurizing and conforming.

At the back door the visitor hears a cacophony of voices, arguing, attacking, persuading. What becomes immediately obvious is that there are several cultures extant at any one time. This would not have shown at the front door, where the culture on top opens the door, and seems to have eliminated opposition. We recognize that at any one time any community has several cultures: usually one in control, and the others attacking or resisting it one way or another. Sometimes two are in control. Any theory of culture must take plurality into account.

Standing in the kitchen and listening, the visitor notices that the vociferous arguments are not about moral principles. At face value they are about practical questions: should the route of a new road go round the existing buildings or drive right through them? Should wealth be distributed according to merit, achievement, heredity, or equality? Where should new facilities be sited? The visitor also notices steady patterns of alignment among the wrangles. And by some careful enquiry the alignments can be sorted out according to recognizable institutional preferences.

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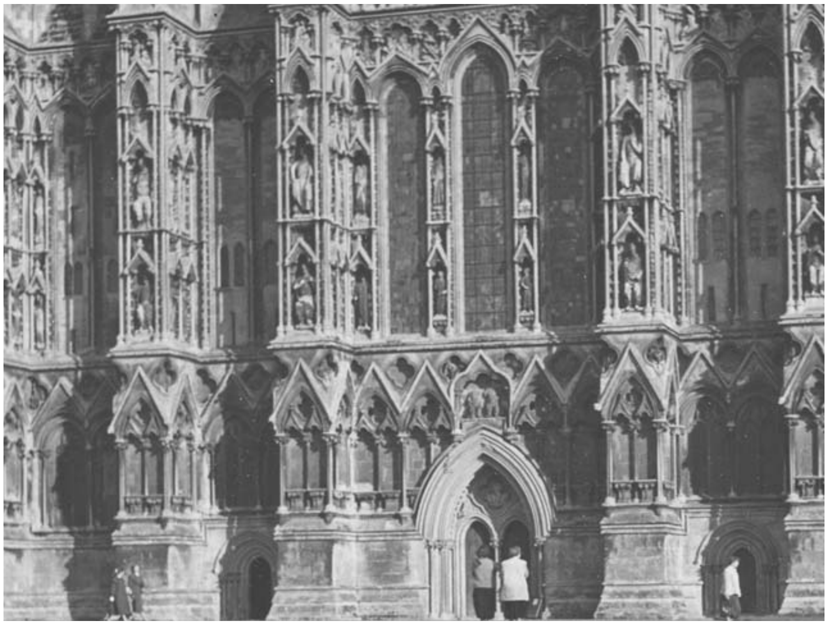
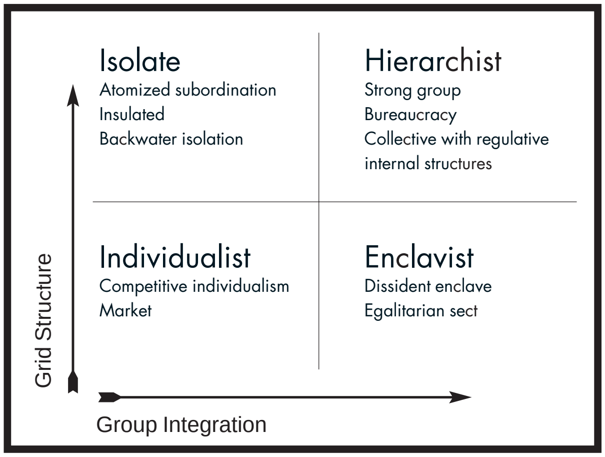


The theory at work here is that a cultural bias is a shared set of principles which are institutionalized. This cannot be emphasised enough. Bias is rooted in work, and routine actions. The moral principles emerge because the upholders of one type of culture have to defend their way of doing things against attacks. Culture is fragile and precarious. People know this; hence their intense anxiety when a cherished way of life is challenged. Cultures defend themselves by attacking each other.

Hurling insults in a shouting match only strengthens the opponents in their views, but change the institutions and the bias will change too. Most of the members of the community may not be all that happy with the institutions they have got, but they know they would be very unhappy with a major shake up. (Though some might love to see all the old institutions swept away and, if they can persuade the rest, it will happen.) It follows from all this that if we want to study culture we need to find relatively stable examples. A stable organization is sustained by a set of strong arguments for the way it does things. So in cultural theory we have tried to find organizational forms that are stable and incompatible with each other. This is how we have arrived at four or five types of culture.

Individuals using logic and calculation to argue with each other are engaged in creating, changing or sustaining their culture. (Rational choice theory and cultural theory are compatible and complementary.) To put the individuals into the background, and the cultures they are making into the foreground, first set up an abstract social field (see diagram below). Then arrange in it all possible kinds of organization along two dimensions. This map of possible cultures gauges social pressures. One axis assesses the integration of individuals into the group (variously called 'group' or 'group solidarity'). The other axis (called 'grid') indicates the amount of regulation which restricts individuals' behaviour. Setting up the two axes is a surprisingly effective technique for classifying organizations and locating individuals in them, and then for asking questions about what kind of cultural bias they are likely to display.



Isolate
Atomized subordination
Insulated
Backwater isolation

Hierarchist
Strong group
Bureaucracy
Collective with regulative internal structures

Individualist
Competitive individualism
Market

Enclavist
Dissident enclave
Egalitarian sect

Axiomatically four (or five) different types of culture are anticipated. They are all available at any time, each in competition with the others, and each ready to dissolve the minute that moral support is withdrawn. This is the background that has to be brought forward. It is not an accident that the individuals seem to be lost in it because the social environment has taken centre stage. But remember that the social environment is made by them, and that they depend on it. Individual human beings are not really lost in this analysis, but backstaged.

Suppose a small town where the democratic process is in full swing, with a lively debate on public affairs. The visiting anthropologist will find that disagreements on principle can be nailed down to disagreements about how the community is to organize itself. On one of our two dimensions, it could be very strictly and minutely regulated, or completely unregulated. On the other dimension, it could have a strong boundary – its dealings with outsiders are controlled – or no boundaries, and, in between those extremes, a number of little groups, more or less well integrated. The method of measurement for any two communities being compared on this map is always a difficult, technical task.

At top right we have a community that is strongly regulated and also strongly bounded and integrated: a hierarchy. It can also be called a positional society, as everyone in it does what they do according to their position in a network of rules. In the diagonally opposite corner, there will be a society relatively free of formal constraints, an 'individualist' environment, where the members can wheel and deal freely, unhampered by rules: everyone looks after themselves, and everyone has to compete for advantages. In the top left corner there are people who are not integrated into any group; consequently they lack support and tend to be marginalized. They are 'isolates'. Diagonally opposite, at bottom right, the equivalent to the individual isolates are the strongly bounded groups or enclaves which have separated themselves from the main community, disapproving of artificial distinctions or rank and class. These are the members of the sects or communes; they are all equal and subject to the same rules.

The more we study the map, the more interesting its properties turn out to be. For example, there is a positive diagonal. The town is run by a coalition of individualists and positionalists. The first take new

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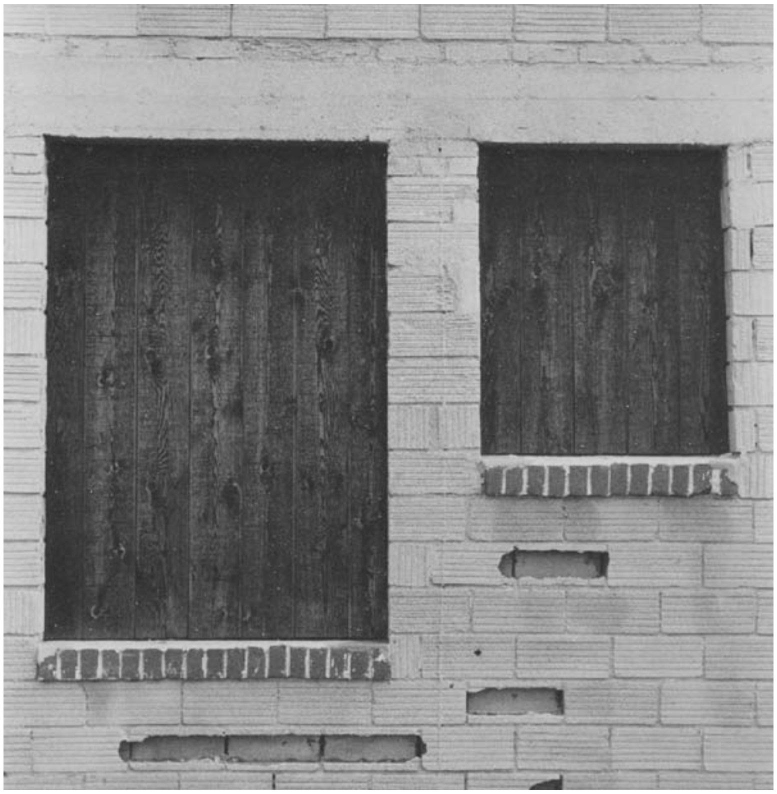
Organised Bias and Social Theory

Michalis Lianos *on the uses of Grid/Group analysis*



Cultural theory', or the 'theory of socio-cultural viability', or simply Grid/Group analysis (GGA), is a well-developed corpus of work. Mary Douglas's founding contributions have been developed by Michael Thompson and other authors into a rigorous and innovative methodological approach. The lively internal debates within the approach show that it has become a shared intellectual universe. Yet, despite GGA being one of the few frameworks to provide a clear and easy map for understanding socio-cultural dynamics, social scientists are, on the whole, reluctant to adopt it. To deepen the paradox, the theory counts most of its followers among political scientists rather than anthropologists and sociologists. This may simply be because sociologists do not like anything to be simple, even when it is helpful. Or is there another reason why sociology does not incorporate GGA into its methodological and theoretical arsenal?

This question is of relevance not merely to the critical study of scientific paradigms. It is central to the issue of the theorisation and analysis of the relationship between culture and society. If culture is part of society, why not deal with society directly? If they are partially independent, why not study them separately and look for a synthesis afterwards? And if culture can be clearly mapped in a simple way across time and societies, as GGA suggests, is social change a mere illusion?

Like many methodological and theoretical approaches, GGA is a victim of its misinterpretations. Because of its atemporal claims and its insistence on limited typologies, it is easily misconstrued as a 'grand theory' that proclaims the immutability of human societies. Thus, the approach lends itself to being seen as the ultimate combination of positivist categorisation and static interpretation of social processes: this is a highly unattractive mix for social scientists who are concerned less with divisions than with the premises underpinning these divisions. It is only beyond this initial stage of misinterpretation that GGA, as an approach to the interactive dynamics of the socio-cultural structure, has something to offer.

It is important to attribute to the fundamental typological matrix of GGA the dynamic depth that it really has. GGA claims that all societies, independently of time and place, can be essentially categorised according to four cultural types: isolates, hierarchists, individualists, and enclavists; these attitudes may have different names according to the type of analysis being undertaken. (See diagram on page 2.) These four proposed quadrants of the social universe are often seen as 'cultures'. They are not. Rather, they are constitutive parts of the irreducible 'requisite variety' of each and every culture and can best be understood as cultural tendencies that correspond to underlying social dynamics, that is, as socially meaningful biases. It is crucial to look at these biases as main 'lines' for producing meaning that have a dialectic relationship with positions in a social environment. They are mental responses to social conditions and change according to an individual's or group's engagement with these conditions. They can coincide in a parallel, unconnected way within the same social participant or the same group if that participant or group is involved in dissimilar ways with different, broader, social environments. It is even possible that one type of bias may induce the 'segregated practice' of another. For example, sect members who become highly paid executives in order to finance the sect with their salaries can shift very efficiently between their extreme egalitarian attitudes within the compound and the individualist world-view of busy financial operators.

A cultural theory, GGA firmly asserts that socio-culture is not the sum of individual options and freedoms. But the premises of GGA are just as opposed to the reduction of culture to social constructionism as they are to methodological individualism and rational choice. Throughout her work Mary Douglas has consistently maintained that meaning is both strategically developed as a social response and, at the same time, is 'self-binding' (as Richard Fardon's recent *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* [1999] clearly illustrates). This birthmark of GGA is stamped on the structure of the matrix of biases; these are all conceived in terms of an orientation towards a larger social structure rather than in terms of self-generated disposition. (Gross and Rayner's *Measuring Culture* [1985] is one of the many works that show what form this takes in the empirical world.) The issue of the fundamental margin of self-determination for the human being is as open in GGA as in the social sciences in general. The fundamental GGA classification is not a static map of social division or a closed description of the fundamental forms of social ontology. On the contrary, it is a limpid representation of the dynamics of social interaction and collectiveness, and of the fundamental role that culture plays in these dynamics.

'GGA can certainly explain how strong communities come to be enclaves of humiliation rather than paradises of solidarity and harmony'

The main benefits of the matrix of cultural biases are connected to the fact that it reminds us that both social organisation and social change are structured around the socially embedded production of meaning. Put differently, the matrix has no meaning until one applies it to a specific social environment and decides on how it is to be applied. It is primarily a heuristic tool. This is why GGA is irreducibly a methodological approach.

A fundamental disciplinary issue needs to be dealt once one has decided to approach GGA as a social theory. Anthropologists tend to think of social environments as universes with unified rules. By contrast, the fundamental sociological prerequisite of modernity is that social contexts are segmented along lines of value and meaning. Political scientists are often quite willing to settle for a conception of society that, except for political diversity, is otherwise undifferentiated. The result of these disciplinary differences is that the relationship between GGA categories and the major established lines of internal social division – such as class, gender, ethnic origin, or age – remains underdeveloped. This is so despite the influence that the typologies of Basil Bernstein have had on the fundamental texts of GGA and the growing preoccupation of sociology with class in the successive refinements of GGA since the early 1970s. There are several good reasons for keeping GGA separate from the polemics of class and class culture, but the price of that prudence has been that GGA now looks much less relevant to social scientists than it would have otherwise. A comprehensive discussion of the correspondence between GGA and social division is indispensable if GGA wishes to beome more relevant; but the motivated sociologist of late modernity can easily map that correspondence, in a rudimentary way, himself.

Cultural differentiation is a function of mental capacity and social coexistence. This is what makes meaning by definition

both communicable and embedded in the specificity of its social environment. Social differentiation is consequently bound to lead to concentrations of meaning that correspond to relative social positions. These concentrations are not random. They are 'organised biases'; they have an origin, a function and, often, a purpose. To systematise them, GGA applies two parameters (see diagram on page 2): Grid, which represents constraint, and Group, which represents bonding (I owe these two definitions to Perri 6). This is an artificial separation of social regulation into two parts: one (Group) more oriented towards the power inherent in the common representation of the group being thrust upon its own members; the other (Grid) more directed to the degree of differentiation resulting from, or tolerated by, that power. This is a highly problematic distinction. Grid inevitably turns out to be a function of Group; in order to separate the two, one often needs to speculate on how reasonable a particular outcome will look on the matrix of organised biases: for example, military regiments tend to have a hierarchical structure, entrepreneurs tend to be individualists, and so on. The problem here is that GGA has not engaged with a critique of power. Had it done so, it would have produced other, more distinctive, dimensions of social co-existence on which to base the matrix of cultural biases.

However, this is also GGA's great strength, as it allows GGA to bypass endless complexity and come to a clear conclusion: when social units (individuals, groups, institutions, organisations) come together, they are divided in terms not only of the influence they have over each other, but also in terms of reactions to that influence. Put differently, power is not experienced uniformly, as social theory often argues. This may well reverse several assumptions about social stratification and social division. It may cast doubt, for example, over the homogeneity of large blocks of social stratification and help lift the taboo on research involving cruelty and domination within these blocks. GGA can certainly explain how strong communities come to be enclaves of humiliation rather than paradises of solidarity and harmony. It can also explain contemporary paradoxes, for example, how women who see themselves as disadvantaged in the job market come to think of the supply of domestic labour by other women as a mere means for achieving their own 'equality'.

GGA can also be developed into an efficient tool for investigating both the continuous redeployment of organised bias in late modernity as well as the relationship of that redeployment to the current restructuring of the class system. It is a paradox that, despite the insights it offers into social differentiation through the production of meaning, GGA has been ignored as a tool for looking at the emergence of contemporary individuation. Perhaps it will only be taken into account when classes as such are entirely replaced by organised biases, and social success or failure will mainly be reflected in one's beliefs and in how one connects to a larger social unit, rather than in one's material possessions. This process is already underway, and there is reason to believe that, in the long run, GGA will become a standard part of social science methodology.

'Grid/Group Analysis provides a crucial benchmark for checking the plausibility of both critical social-control theories and their rational choice rivals'

Finally, a basic question about GGA: beyond its function as a methodological approach, what type of theoretical and investigative potential does it have? It is possible to treat it as a theoretical approach to the production of culture with a clear anthropological origin; but this would do injustice both to the plasticity of GGA and to the rigour of structuralism. Rather, GGA can best be understood as a theory of social control with an emphasis on culture. There are three reasons for arguing this. Firstly, GGA's essential typology is exclusively based on aspects of social control: it regards these aspects as the key characteristics of a group. Secondly, this emphasis on social control interprets power in terms of culture, not culture in terms of power. This probably makes GGA unique among the many theoretical approaches to social control; as such, it provides a crucial benchmark for checking the plausibility of both critical social-control theories and their rational choice rivals. Thirdly, as the products and services of public and private organisations make direct sociality redundant, we are entering a world where control and freedom merge into an unbreakable alloy. This qualitative leap seems to overturn our conception of the social, and points to the possibility of social dynamics being mainly regulated through organised cultural biases. GGA is probably the only approach of social control whose premises are not threatened by this development.

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Between the Local and the Global

Henrietta L. Moore *on methodological and theoretical challenges facing anthropology*

When talking about communities and groups, one cannot avoid discussion of the universal and the particular, or the local and the global. How does difference emerge, what is the ground against which it is judged? This is the critical question of all anthropology.

Problems with conceptualising the relationship between the local and the global seem to require new reflections on methodology and theory. This is largely true, but only if we neglect the history of the imaginary project of anthropology. Anthropology works through a process of contextualisation – things and people make sense in their contexts – the result of which is an implicit and explicit categorisation of differences across space and time. There is a prior commitment to 'wholism' at work here, a vision of the world out of which societies are cut. In simple terms, we might say that intellectually in order to foreground something it is necessary to have a background, so that smaller things are revealed only in relation to and as part of larger ones. Wholes are never available to experience, but neither are the parts. Once communities or societies are identified, it becomes impossible to delineate or describe them in their entirety; yet without a notion of wholism or potential completeness it is impossible to make sense of the ethnography of people's lives and social relations.

Various scholars have thus argued that the global and the local are no more than heuristic devices: they do not exist as empirical realities but are contexts for making sense of data, experiences, and processes. This point is a good one, as far as it goes. But as concept-metaphors the global and the loal have an even more complex nature both within the discipline, and in people's daily lives .

CONCEPT-METAPHORS

Concept-metaphors – 'global', 'local', 'gender', 'self', 'body', for example – are a conceptual shorthand. They are domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange. However, the role of concept-metaphors is not to resolve ambiguity, but to maintain it – to sustain a tension between pretentious universal claims and particular contexts and specifics. They are the 'spaces' in which details, facts and connections make sense. More than this, concept-metaphors open up spaces for future thinking and practical action.

> **'the role of concept-metaphors is not to resolve ambiguity, but to maintain it – to sustain a tension between pretentious universal claims and particular contexts and specifics'**

Concept-metaphors have an indeterminate status, both as theoretical abstractions and as sets of processes, experiences and connections in the world. They are shared – to greater or lesser extents – between practising academics and the individuals who are the subject of academic enquiry. In order to understand how these concept-metaphors inform the imagination and the practice of both academics and non-academics, and the degree to which understandings are shared and diverge, concept-metaphors must be subjected to critical scrutiny. This involves examining both the concepts and their pre-theoretical commitments.

Pre-theoretical commitments are underlying assumptions and principles. Principles are, of course, linked to methods. However, examinations of anthropological methodology are often reduced to a discussion or reassertion of the importance of participant observation. For some anthropologists, participant observation is the defining feature of anthropology, and its easy elision with the ethnographic accounts for much of the anthropological commitment to the local.

In some sense, then, participant observation, the ethnographic and the local make up a 'methodologism': a procedure that is a theory. What this suggests is that the notion of the local is a pre-theoretical commitment, and one that, in spite of recent experimental ethnographies and the critiques of bounded entities, takes much of its analytical and emotive value from earlier pre-theoretical commitments to wholism (society, community, ethnography). The local exists in so far as it is defined in contra-distinction to something that is not local, now commonly referred to as the global.

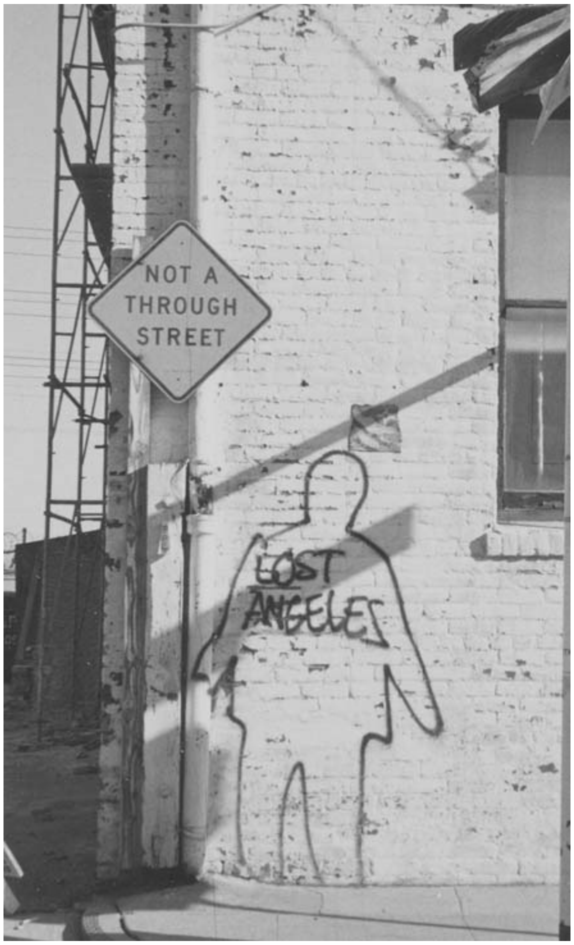
The term global – sometimes refigured as globalisation, globality, globalism – replaces earlier grounding figures, such as world system and centre–periphery. The mutual imbrication of the global and the local are debated within the discipline, both conceptually and empirically. However, in most of the theoretical writing to date, while an ethnography of the local is by definition possible (otherwise how could anthropology exist as a discipline and practice?) an ethnography of the global remains in doubt. The local is thus presented as linked both to empirical detail and the ethnographic perspective in a way that makes it difficult to examine its pre-theoretical commitments.

Instead of simply conceptualising the relation between the local and the global, we should perhaps begin by 'methodologising' their relation: that is, by examining the pre-theoretical commitments that underpin their putative interrelations. In the implicit world-view contained in the local–global distinction, the local is associated with the empirical and the concrete, while the global is seen as more abstract. In point of fact, however, both are abstractions; they are models. As concept-metaphors they act as framing devices, and as such they are perspectival.

It is almost a truism of contemporary anthropology – and certainly part of its ethical commitment – that perspectives and voices are partial, and that phenomena can only be partially described by analytical models. However, reflection on the pre-theoretical commitments of the local–global debate suggests that partiality may not always be truly partial! For every scholar who emphasises that partiality and perspective do not presuppose a totalised and totalising vista just out of view, others seek to understand what is happening to the 'new economy', the 'new feudalism', the 'new world order'.

Consequently, partiality is implicitly part of a part–whole relationship, where comparison will reveal how local situations fit into larger wholes, how new structures are taking particular shape in specific contexts, and how the global connects to the local. In anthropology, this form of pre-theoretical commitment is most evident in the 'resistance and accommodation' theorists who emphasise how the local either resists or adapts to the global.

However, the picture is more complex than this because the local is imagined both as a context – perhaps culture, less often society – just out of view or off the analytical scanner, and as a non-bounded entity, a fictive construct. This ambivalence gives rise to a dominant image: one of fragmentation, of both our lives and even our selves. This fragmentation could be the result of translocal lives, time–space compression and the complexity of knowledge working, consumer choice, and interest group politics, but is this really the case? It seems unlikely that what is imagined as fragmentation actually comes from a world of fragments, any more than the traditional notion of culture or society came from a world that was already a totality. The notion of fragmentation – and the imaginative work it performs within the contemporary social sciences – is intrinsically connected to pre-theoretical assumptions about wholism and the associated notion of the local.



ALTERNATIVE IMAGES OF THE GLOBAL

Many social scientists are trying to make sense of global cultural diversity and to imagine the complex, pluralistic, multifaceted and labile nature of contemporary capitalism. Models based on pre-theoretical commitments to wholism are simply not appropriate for the task. So what kind of concept-metaphors do we have at our disposal to provide a context for thought and action? The local and the global remain the foundational tropes, but in explaining their interconnection authors have developed alternative concept-metaphors. Some try to specify the nature of contemporary or 'late' capitalism (and how it differs from earlier forms of capitalism); others examine the effects of globalisation on the nation-state. These debates are about how the local and the global interact, and how we can understand the process of simultaneous integration and diversification apparently at the core of their interaction.

Partly underlying these debates is an argument about the relative dominance of the 'market' and the 'economy'. One view dominant in many academic disciplines is that cultural production and issues of identity are at the core of a new political economy. Culture has become increasingly commodified, and it has also become the means through which diversification is replicated through globalised processes, experiences and interconnections. As workplaces and organisations become less relevant to identity formation and a sense of place, processes of subjectivity and subjectification become increasingly cultural, bound up with images, aspirations, identifications, lifestyles and forms of consumerism that are based not on locale, but on interconnection and forms of space–time compression. Homogenisation and fragmentation are the product of the transnationalisation of production and the global economy. Economic profit is gained through the commodification of difference, and through the active and conscious production of that difference. Hence the importance of culture.

> **'As workplaces and organisations become less relevant to identity formation and a sense of place, processes of subjectivity and subjectification become increasingly cultural'**

The interpenetration of the cultural and the economic is where the local and the global interconnect. This presents anthropology with a challenge and an opportunity: the production of the global is the production of everyday life. However, the challenge lies in the fact that in this new political economy, the economic, the cultural and the political interconnect, but do not coincide in (a) fixed structural fashion(s). The result is a complex set of interconnections and processes through which meanings, goods and people flow, coalesce and diverge. Recognising this transforms our notions not only of the global, but also of the local. The local is not about

taxonomies, bounded cultures and social units, but about contested fields of social signification and interconnection, flows of people, ideas, images and goods.

A key issue in the re-imagining of identities within global–local relations is the use of language, concepts and images. Hilary Cunningham's study of the Sanctuary Movement in the United States, a church based activist group concerned with illegal immigrants and US government policy towards Central America in the 1980s and 1990s (*American Ethnologist* 26[3], 2000), demonstrates how an interest group defines itself as transnational. Members of the group deployed the Christian imagery of brotherhood to redefine their senses of self, and their relations to family, Church, State and citizenship. Cunningham also documents how the increasing use of information technology and the internet transformed access to information and allowed members to redefine contexts for action as well as knowledge.

Two important points emerge from Cunningham's study of an activist group that is self-consciously part of a global civil society: the first is that the global is about structures and technology as well as symbols, identities, mind sets and beliefs; that is, her work demonstrates the particular nature of the new cultural political economy, and does so brilliantly through detailed ethnographic work analysis. The second important point to emerge is the mingling of academic and popular language and concepts.

SYSTEMS AND DIALECTICS

Anthropology, like the other social sciences, is being reconstituted as it reworks its relationship with the world it studies. Studying the interconnections between the global and the local entails examining this process: the social sciences in the world, as players in a modernising global project. Why, then, does the question 'is an ethnography of the global possible?' cause so much unease? The anxiety seems to arise from the notion that there is nothing – no theory, no appropriate method – between a micro- and a macro-anthropology, between the local and the global: the difficulty appears to be one of scale. But, this perception is itself a consequence of particular pre-theoretical commitments which posit the idea that the local and the global are linked as parts to wholes, as internal divisions to a single holistic entity.

> **'Are we looking for a structural-causal order, or do we need to move beyond historical determinism, and take more account of contingency, improvisation, and non-isomorphism?'**

Two types of pre-theoretical commitment haunt much current work on the interconnections between the global and the local. The first is the notion of a system, and the related possibility of a worldview. This comes into anthropology through, amongst other things, organic metaphors drawn from the biological sciences and early cybernetics. The paradox is that recent commitments to fragmentation, positionality and perspective all reinvoke this notion even as they appear to work against it. The very notion of perspective implies the idea of a totalising view, even if it is one that is constantly substituted for by others – other people's views, other voices, other ways of looking. When we can no longer adequately specify how parts link to wholes, then we produce ideas about fragmentation and disjuncture: perspectives multiply and there is no one way to characterise the system.

The second type of pre-theoretical commitment is the notion of dialectics: the push and pull of convergence and divergence, integration and diversification. Dialectical thinking contains an ultimate implication of synthesis – via thesis and antithesis – and thus connects intellectually to notions of resolution and wholism. It also relates to the notion of contradiction between conflicting forces or ideas as a determining factor in their continuing interaction. This particular idea seems to capture the process that drives globalisation forward. However, perhaps the time has come to ask whether our current models and their pre-theoretical commitments – fragmentation, disjuncture, positionality, perspective, dialectics – serve us appropriately. Do they provide sufficient purchase to understand the complex and rapid set of interconnections, processes and aspirations through which meaning, goods and people flow, coalesce and diverge? Are we looking for some sort of structural-causal order, or do we need to move beyond historical determinism, and take more account of contingency, improvisation, and non-isomorphism?

If so, new concept-metaphors and models (entailing, of course, new pre-theoretical commitments) might be at hand. These may emerge from the biomedical and information sciences. As they do, we will subject them to critical reflection in the way we have always done, by looking at how people deploy them in their imagined and engaged worlds: that is, ethnographically.

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The Future of Democracy in Brazil

Milton Tosto

The transition from military rule to democracy in Brazil has been marked by many corruption and embezzlement scandals. In 1992 Fernando Collor de Mello, the first directly elected president after the period of authoritarian rule, was tried, impeached, and declared ineligible to stand for public office for eight years by the congress. More recently, two consecutive leaders of the senate were forced to resign, as otherwise they would have been stripped of parliamentary immunity and tried in congress. (In the period of military rule there was also corruption, but it was much more difficult for the press to criticize and denounced politicians.) Why has economic liberalization gone hand in hand with political scandal?

Neo-liberalism, as an economical and political doctrine, has exerted enormous influence in the last decade in Brazil. A premise of neo-liberalism is that economic progress and controlled public spending necessarily undermine the likelihood of corruption and political patronage. Because the government has fewer prerogatives in a free market economy, it cannot curtail other people's liberty in favour of its own members and allies. In other words – contrary to the accepted view – neo-liberalism does not promote patronage politics; it curtails it.

Small government and 'open' commerce are the foundations of neo-liberalism. Nothing is expected from government except that it avoid 'evils' such as political patronage. Neo-liberals also stress that they have moral aims. It may be noble to help people find work so that they can escape from poverty; but, liberals assert, doing this can actually have perverse effects that will damage society as a whole. Individuals will help the rest of society, and they will be better off themselves, if they try to realize their own interests by exchanging the products of their labour in the market place. Further, individuals should not concern themselves with politics – which, in the neo-liberal view, is an unproductive activity.

THE MARKET AND DEMOCRACY

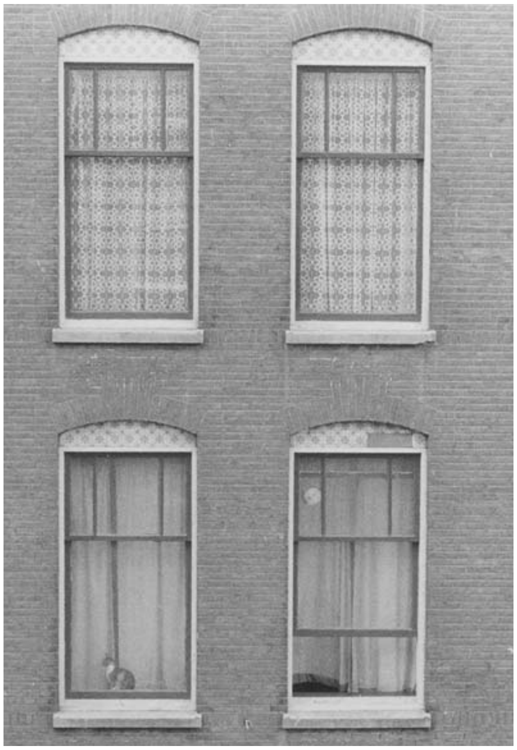
In Europe and the United States the market economy and democracy have, historically, reinforced each other. Countries with established market economies but without a democratic tradition – such as Japan and South Korea – are more susceptible to financial and institutional crisis than are countries whose economies are embedded in a strong democratic tradition. The way to make a market economy and democracy support each other is by introducing constitutional mechanisms that coordinate them. But if the political class uses the constitution to defend its own economic privileges, the constitution becomes an empty piece of paper. This makes it more likely that military coups will try fill the gap left by the constitution.

The history of Brazil has been characterized by attempts to constitutionalize the country. These attempts have failed because the Brazilian political class has neither respected nor adhered to a constitution. In Brazilian political culture, norms are violated and agreements are broken. Rather than representing the best elements of society, and the common good, the Brazilian political class reflects this culture. In Brazil, constitutions have represented the fleeting interests of those in power; they have not underpinned and defended the liberties of ordinary citizens.

The last decade is a case in point. The integration of Brazil's potentially powerful economy into the global economy generated great optimism; this optimism, in turn, helped weaken important safeguards in Brazil's constitution and helped perpetuate 'patronage politics'. There is no reason to doubt the good intentions of neo-liberalism; it cannot be regarded as a philosophy of greedy financial magnates. The shortcomings of neo-liberalism lie elsewhere: it does not accept that commercial liberty encourages political patronage. When trade develops and an economy opens up, a political class can use patronage to maintain its power over the rest of the population. Because political power decreases if governmental economic prerogatives are diminished, politicians, in periods of economic liberalisation, use political patronage to maintain their position. Ignoring the consequences of their actions on the rest of society – political patronage can damage the legitimacy of the regime – politicians back particular policies in exchange for money or political support.

The fact that economic liberalization

Continued on page 14



Democracy – Radical and Plural

Chantal Mouffe *talks about agonism, Carl Schmitt, and the role of passions in politics*

How did you become interested in political philosophy?

My background is in philosophy. I was a student of Althusser in Paris, and, when I taught philosophy at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá in the early 1970s, I dedicated myself to epistemology and philosophy of science (which, as a good Althusserian, I saw as the only kind of philosophy worth doing). But I quickly became dissatisfied with this kind of philosophy. Most of my friends were historians, sociologists, and political theorists. I felt they were able to establish contact with Colombian reality which I – because of my specialization – could not. So, in the mid-1970s, I decided to come back to Europe and study politics in order to get a training more useful in Colombia. Of course things turned out otherwise and I did not go back.

I came to England to do an MA in Politics at the University of Essex. The subject of my MA dissertation was the politics of industrialization in Colombia under Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, a liberal progressive influenced by Roosevelt. But I quickly realized that political science did not satisfy me either. In the end political philosophy provided me with what I was looking for: it allowed me to combine my background in philosophy with politics.

In 1979 you brought out *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. What were you trying to do in this book? How did it shape the development of your work?

My main aim was to show how Gramsci provided the basis for a non-economistic view of Marxism. I tried to show that, through the concept of hegemony, Gramsci was questioning the base-superstructure model in Marxism – that is, economic determinism – and opening the way for a 'revalorization' of politics.

However – as my critics pointed out – I was, in a sense, trying to square a circle. On the one hand, I was trying to present a non-economistic, non-essentialist reading of Marxism; and to show that, for Gramsci, political identities are not constructed on the basis of one's economic position, but that politics plays a role in this process. Yet Gramsci also insisted that only what he called a fundamental class could exercise hegemony – which is an essentialist position. Even in Gramsci there are still elements of essentialism and economism. I had finally to accept that there is no such thing as a completely non-economistic Marxism. That's partly what led to the development of what, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Ernesto Laclau and I call a post-Marxist position.

The first two chapters of *Hegemony* are a discussion with the Marxist tradition and specifically with Gramsci. A further important element in the book is the attempt to apply to the study and practice of politics theoretical insights developed by post-structuralist thinkers; by Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault. This was probably the most influential aspect of the book: many people who were not interested in the Marxist tradition could identify with this. Then, in the last chapter, we developed the project of radical and plural democracy. This was one of our main concerns. We wanted to redefine the socialist project in a way that recognized the importance of pluralist democracy. The book was published in 1985. But it was, of course, written in the years before that date, in a period in which there was a lively debate underway about the future of socialism. Left-wing thinkers in France – Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, among others – were offering a critique of the Soviet Union in terms of the concept of totalitarianism; this influenced us greatly. We understood that it was necessary to stress that socialism did not require a total rejection of the liberal democratic model. We tried to see how an immanent critique of liberal democracy could produce a new, much more radical, understanding of democracy. In *Hegemony* we redefined the socialist project as a radicalization of the ethico-political principles already inscribed in modern democracy, the idea of liberty and equality for all. The socialist project – understood in terms of radical and plural democracy – should not, we argued, be envisaged as breaking with the ideals of modern democracy but as the realization of these ideals.

> 'The socialist project – understood in terms of radical and plural democracy – should not be envisaged as breaking with the ideals of modern democracy, but as the realization of these ideals'

The new social movements – feminism, the gay and the environmental movements, for example – were another important element in our thinking. Both Marxist and non-Marxist traditional socialists had only stressed the importance of the working class movement. But the existence of the new movements indicated that there were other, significant, forms of oppression in contemporary societies – racism, sexism, and so on – as well as struggles against them of which the socialist project had to take account. That's why we insisted that democracy must be radical and plural: the principle of liberty and equality for all had to be radicalized; and democracy had to be plural in order to accommodate the demands of the new social movements.

You have recently developed the concept of 'agonistic democracy'. What is the link between this and the idea of radical and plural democracy?

Since *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* I have been trying to develop the project of radical and plural democracy. We had argued for the need to envisage political identities other than those of class. But what happens once the privileged place of class identities is questioned? Class creates a form of collective identity; and collective identity is essential if a political project is to be viable. I began to wonder if the identification as 'citizen' could not provide the kind of collective identity required by radical and plural democracy. I became interested in the discussion between the civic republicans and the liberals. For liberals, the concept 'citizen' denotes just a legal status, a set of rights one can use to defend oneself against the state; it is not the basis of a collective identity. I felt it was important to revive the idea of citizenship as it had been used in, for instance, the civic republican tradition – as a principle of collective action. Of course, I also was aware of the limitations of this tradition: it allowed neither for a pluralism in forms of citizenship, nor for many demands which, in the 1980s, were linked with the new social movements.

So I tried to reformulate the concept of citizenship in order to make it the basis of a collective identity suitable for the articulation of the democratic demands for which we had argued in *Hegemony.* One of the central arguments in *Hegemony* is that there needs to be a 'chain of equivalence' between democratic struggles: the demands of the working class, for example, need to be articulated with the demands of the new social movements.

However, in thinking about citizenship I began to realize that, if one wanted to take pluralism seriously, it was important to recognize that there were legitimate interpretations of the ethico-political principles of equality and liberty for all *other* than those offered by the project of radical and plural democracy. I came to think of democracy as being an 'agonistic' debate among these various interpretations.

The model of agonistic pluralism, or agonistic democracy, tries to offer a different understanding of how a democratic system should work; and it is situated on a more abstract, theoretical level than is the model of radical and plural democracy. The latter is a position in the agonistic debate; it is a political project. An agonistic debate can take place between – for example – people whose conceptions of citizenship are, respectively, radical and plural, social-democratic, conservative, and neo-liberal.

In developing this approach, I have been arguing not with the liberals and civic republicans but with the two other models of democracy: the aggregative model and the deliberative model. The former views democracy mainly as an aggregation of interests: individuals have interests; they act in the field of politics in order to further these interests; and democracy is a set of neutral procedures which allows these interests to be aggregated and a compromise among them to be reached. The deliberative democrats have criticized this – instrumental – notion of politics, and rightly so: there is more to politics than the pursuit of self-interest. For deliberative democrats people act politically not only in order to realize their interests: they are also motivated by moral, normative considerations; by a search for the common good.

'I'm not in favour of absolute pluralism, of an extreme postmodern approach which says that all differences should flourish'

The main problem with these two approaches, albeit in different ways, is their rationalism. They neglect what I consider to be one of the moving forces of political action, namely 'passion'. I don't mean individual passions but those passions which produce collective forms of identification. Take nationalism: one cannot understand it if one uses either the aggregative approach or the deliberative model. To make sense of nationalism one has understand the role of 'passion' in the creation of collective identities. This requires one to break with the rationalistic approach.

What are links between your work and the project of multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism means different things to different people: it has one meaning in Canada, another in the USA, and still another in Europe. I prefer to think in terms of pluralism. What is at stake when we talk about multiculturalism is this: what kind of pluralism is appropriate for a liberal democratic pluralist society?

I'm not in favour of absolute pluralism, of an extreme postmodern approach which says that all differences should flourish, that there should be no limits to pluralism. Pluralism must have limits. You cannot, in the name of pluralism, question those institutions which are necessary if pluralism is to exist. I do not agree with those forms of multiculturalism which defend legal pluralism – that is, which would allow different juridico-political systems to coexist within one political association. A society cannot allow antagonistic principles of legitimation to coexist in its midst. There must be, at the political level, some agreement – a consensus – about which ethico-political principles are going to be the basis of our shared life. In a liberal democratic society those principles are 'liberty and equality for all' – though they will always be variously interpreted. In my model of agonistic democracy I envisage this consensus as a 'conflictual consensus': consensus about the principles, dissent about their interpretation.

This is the basis of my distinction between the 'adversary' and the 'enemy'. The adversary – with whom one has an agonistic relationship – is someone with whom one agrees about the principles underpinning the organization of society, but with whom one disagrees about their interpretation. The enemy is the person who disagrees about the principles – who argues, say, in favour of a theocratic society. This position has no place in the agonistic debate; it should not be recognized as a legitimate difference. Someone who holds this view should not be allowed to argue their case in an election.

In the debate about political integration in Europe the proposal has been made that citizenship should not be linked to the nation-state. How do you respond to this?

Citizenship, if it is to be exercised, needs to be linked to a *demos*, a political community. But the *demos* should not be based on an ethnic community, an *ethnos.* The *demos* does not, of course, have to be the nation-state. I am very interested in the proposals made by Massimo Cacciari, an Italian philosopher and a former mayor of Venice, who advocates a 'new federalism': federalism 'from below' rather than 'from above'. Cacciari's idea is that key decisions could be made at various levels: not just by states, or at the European level, but by cities and regions, too. There would be a plurality of forms of *demos*, some below, some above the nation-state. This approach – which multiplies the forms of *demos* within which the citizen can exercise his or her rights – is important because it can help us to envisage how the idea of popular sovereignty could be reformulated in the context of globalisation.

Cacciari's approach is much more promising than the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship, about which I am very sceptical. Cosmopolitan citizenship separates citizenship not only from states and nationality but also from the *demos.* In the end it is perfectly compatible with the liberal idea of citizenship as merely a legal status. Under a system of cosmopolitan citizenship we would have a set of rights but we would not be able to exercise those rights; at most we could appeal to transnational tribunals when we felt that our rights had been curtailed by states or groups. Making such an appeal would be merely a defensive act. The exercise of citizenship rights which requires participation in decision-making would be not be possible as decision-making processes that involve the whole planet cannot exist. One can exercise one's rights only in the context of a *demos.*

When you write about the importance of the *demos* you often refer to Carl Schmitt. Why are you interested in his work?

> 'Under a system of cosmopolitan citizenship we would have a set of rights but we would not be able to exercise those rights; at most we could appeal to transnational tribunals'

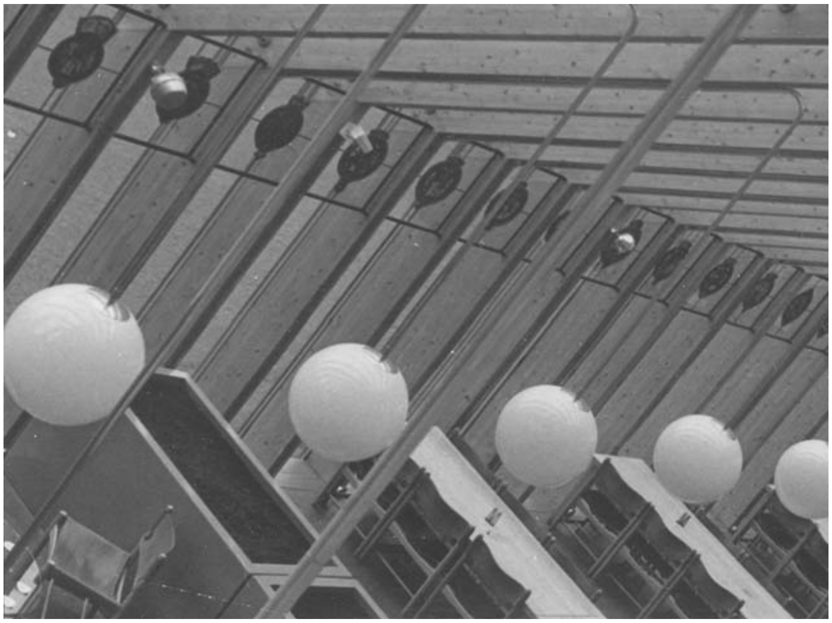
One reason is because he is right to insist that the 'political' concerns the friend–enemy relation – and that liberalism, because of its rationalistic and individualistic framework, cannot grasp this. What I call the 'political' (and which I distinguish from 'politics') is the dimension of antagonism as an ever present possibility in human relations.

In politics, identities are always collective identities, and what is at stake is the creation of an Us which can only exist by the demarcation of a Them. I share this insight with Schmitt, although I came to it in a different way, through post-structuralism and the idea that all identities are relational and imply the determination of a difference. Of course, this Us–Them relation need not be antagonistic, a friend–enemy relation. But there is always the possibility that – under certain conditions – it will become so. This happens when the other, who until now has been considered simply as different, is perceived as putting into question our identity and threatening our existence. Just think of Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats and Bosnians had coexisted without antagonism. It was only after the death of Tito and when Milosevic began to assert Serbian supremacy that the different groups began to see each other as enemies.

What can we do about this? Once we accept that the Us–Them relationship is constitutive of collective identities, it becomes important to construct it so that it does not become a friend–enemy relation. This is the aim of my project of agonistic pluralism. I argue that if conflict can take an agonistic form – one involving adversaries – it is less likely to become antagonistic. One way of doing this is to multiply Us–Them relationships in order to 'divide' passions. So, for instance, if, in a group of three people, A, B, C, A and B are in an Us–Them relationship because of their different religious affiliations, and B and C are in another Us–Them relationship because of their political affiliation, and A and C are in yet another one on the basis of the languages they speak, and so on, it is less likely that antagonisms will emerge. Because the best condition for the emergence of antagonism, of a friend–enemy relationship, is when the Us and the Them are determined in such a way that the Us is ethnically, religiously and linguistically homogeneous, and the Them is different in all these respects.

What is your stance towards the liberal tradition?

I consider myself to be a radical liberal democrat. I have become much more of a liberal than I used to be – a political liberal, of course, not an economic one in the sense of supporting neo-liberalism.



Paradoxically this has happened through my involvement with the work of Carl Schmitt. Studying his writings made me aware of the dangers of envisaging democracy as being in opposition to liberal pluralism. I agree with him about the inability of liberals to grasp the dimension of the political, but I do not believe that this should lead us to reject liberalism in toto. In a sense my aim is to use Schmitt's critique in order to reformulate liberalism so as to make it 'really political' (though not, of course, in the Rawlsian sense). This why I see myself as 'working with Schmitt against Schmitt'.

Modern pluralist democracy – liberal democracy – is the articulation of two different traditions: the liberal tradition, which advocates the rule of law, the defence of human rights, and the respect of individual liberty; and the democratic tradition, whose main ideas are those of equality and popular sovereignty. In *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) I argue that, while these two traditions can never be fully reconciled, they need not be seen as contradictory – as Schmitt would have it – but as the locus of a paradox. Acknowledging this paradox allows us to grasp the real strength of liberal democracy. By constantly challenging the relations of inclusion–exclusion required by the exercise of democracy, the liberal discourse of universal rights keeps alive democratic contestation. On the other hand, it is thanks to the democratic logic that a *demos* can be established and the exercise of rights made possible.

The problem nowadays is that the liberal component of liberal democracy is given too much importance at the expense of the democratic tradition and the dimension of popular sovereignty. Democracy has been reduced to the rule of law and the defence of human rights; what is left aside – when it's not regarded as obsolete – is popular sovereignty, the real exercise of democracy. This is, in my view, the reason for the increasing success of right-wing populist movements. It is often only they who still appeal to popular sovereignty against the political establishment.

'the most pressing task today is not to deepen and radicalize democracy, but to defend the democratic institutions which we once thought were safe but which are being undermined'

The fight against right-wing populism requires a rebalancing of the relationship between liberalism and democracy. The idea of popular sovereignty plays a central role in the democratic imaginary and it is profoundly mistaken to believe that the time has come to discard it. It is vital to imagine new ways in which popular participation could be made meaningful; and this, of course, implies the possibility of there being a real choice between significant alternatives. This is why I argue for an agonistic model of democracy.

What do you plan to work on in future?

Several aspects of my current work need to be developed: for example, the role of passion in politics. Broadly, my ambition is to elaborate what one might call a non-rationalistic approach to politics. Political theory today is too rationalistic and that is why it is so irrelevant to political life. Most political theorists spend their time discussing how the world should be without asking how to get there. I want to try to understand why things are as they are, why people act as they do, in order to envisage how democratic progress can take place.

Many theories that can be drawn on to develop this new understanding of politics. Post-structuralism is one. Psychoanalysis is also important, because it has to do with the unconscious, with desire, and with identification. I am also very interested in Wittgenstein, whose work provides important insights for a non-rationalistic approach.

However, what I feel is really urgent now is to address the immediate problems we face. That is why I have agreed to write a book for a new Routledge series, 'Thinking in Action'. Today, for a range of reasons – the fall of communism, globalization, the lack of any adequate theory – we are unable to think in political terms. There is no real political discourse any more. The current crusade against evil is one manifestation of this. I want to show that neither has politics disappeared, nor are we witnessing the end of politics, but, rather, that politics is being played out in the register of morality. Instead of having political adversaries, we are engaged in a conflict between good and evil. This is dangerous for democracy. So in my new book I will address the following questions: why is politics being played out in this register? What are the consequences of this for democracy? How can we revive a truly political discourse? Unfortunately, the most pressing task today is not to deepen and radicalize democracy, but to defend the democratic institutions which we once thought were safe but which are being undermined.

Chantal Mouffe is Professor of Political Theory at CSD. She was interviewed in November 2001 by Harriet Evans, Paulina Tambakaki, and Patrick Burke.

Continued from page 9

promotes political patronage is the fundamental political issue in Brazil. Neo-liberalism has yet to offer a solution to this problem; it continues to believe, dogmatically, that an open market economy will inevitably decrease the opportunities for political patronage. So far, however, this has not been the case in Brazil.

CARDOSO

In 1994, Fernando Henrique Cardoso was elected president. His leading role in constructing an economic plan that had managed both to control inflation and to sustain a stable currency made his victory a certainty. Nevertheless, despite his promise to preserve democratic institutions, he accepted the argument made by the business community, namely, that the existing (1988) constitution restricted free enterprise and was an obstacle to Brazil's integration into the international market. Intending to maintain a stable currency and supported by business interests, he proposed amendments in the economic clauses of the constitution.

The 1988 constitution, indeed, represented vested interests in a manner that undermined the coexistence between economic liberalization and democratic accountability. However, in order to restrain the power of regional oligarchies and to encourage the rotation of the presidency, the constitution also established a four-year limit to the presidential term, with no possibility of re-election. Cardoso spent his first two years in office trying both to reduce the public deficit and implement economic reform; he felt he needed one more term in office to build a solid coalition with whose help he could pass his constitutional amendments. Because of their diverse aspirations and specific demands, the business class's interests had to be negotiated in congress. Cardoso led Athe negotiations; he used political patronage to build support for his proposal. The partial constitutional revision he introduced not only contributed to the opening of the economy but also promulgated an amendment allowing the president to stand for re-election. If Brazilian political class had fully respected the constitution, this amendment would have been applied only to the next elected president and not to Cardoso himself. In short, Cardoso exchanged the reform of the economic clauses of the constitution (a process that should not affect the basic content of the constitution) for the fulfilment of his desire to stay in power. In 1998, he linked the success of the economic plan to his candidacy and was re-elected in a landslide victory. Towards the end of the decade, economic liberalization continued to encourage political patronage in Brazil, and parliamentary scandals and resignations marked Cardoso's second term; simultaneously, Brazil's currency suffered major devaluations. Like classical liberalism in the nineteenth century, neo-liberalism in twentieth-century Brazil lost its fight against patronage.

> **'Neo-liberalism continues to believe, dogmatically, that an open market economy will inevitably decrease the opportunities for political patronage'**

In 2002 there will be another presidential election. Eryone expects that, this time, Cardoso will hand over to a new president. However, the lack of respect shown for the political safeguards of the constitution, and the persistence of political patronage, complicate the future of democracy in Brazil. In addition, the traditional left, potentially a democratic grouping, is still biased against the international market and is considering the re-nationalization of the country's economy.

The 2002 election should create in the Brazilian political class a commitment to the values of liberal democracy. When the international market ceases to deliver economic growth, only constitutional safeguards can ensure that public resources are spent properly and that political patronage is combated. This should not be the end of another attempt to implement economic and political liberty in Brazil; it should be the birth of a new form of liberalism.

Milton Tosto is a PhD candidate at CSD.

Review

John Keane

In Praise of Meekness. Essays on Ethics and Politics.

Norberto Bobbio.

Translated by Teresa Chataway
(Polity Press, 2000).
Hardback (ISBN 0 7456 2308 5), £50.00;
Paperback (ISBN 0 7456 2309 3), £14.99.

Sadly, these essays by the 90-year-old *mano maestra* of Italian political philosophy may prove to be among his last. Sadder still is the way in which his careless English copy editor has let him down. Bobbio is normally a master of expressive prose in the Italian original; this translation is at times weighed down by dreary passages, moments of awkwardness, and grammatical errors. The overall effect is to touch readers with the hand of melancholia. Bobbio himself reinforces that feeling with some characteristic confessions.

We are reminded that he is a chronic self-doubter, that he finds writing a trying experience, and that he considers himself one of those human beings who is 'never happy'. In these collected essays, which hang together poorly, his preoccupation with faith, meekness and other 'pre-political' virtues compounds the pensive sadness. Yet to conclude from all this that the book is a sorry testament to Bobbio's frailty in old age and his gradual withdrawal from politics would be a mistake.

Patient readers will find *In Praise of Meekness* full of important insights into the ethics appropriate to a civil society, in which non-violent power-sharing among different groups and institutions is routinely practised, under the protection of a democratically elected and publicly accountable government. Heeding Croce's warning that those who engage in politics should learn to respect the power of the non-political, Bobbio insists that democracies require more than respect for the law, freedom of communication and periodic elections in order to function well; they also need democratically virtuous citizens. Virtues may be seen as the substructure of civil society. The point is put persuasively, even if Bobbio's clear-headed reflections on virtue have an old-fashioned feel about them. He is, for instance, oddly silent about virtues that are today among the most controversial in established democracies like Italy, Britain and America. Masculinity and femininity, risk-taking and responsibility, frugality and avarice go unrated. Bobbio instead concentrates on such perennial matters as toleration, evil, secrecy, scepticism, and religious morality. His reasoning strains throughout to be undogmatic, even about reason itself ('there is no worse prejudice than that of believing we have no prejudices', he says at one point, when querying self-righteous anti-racism).

Hence Bobbio's praise of meekness (*mitezza*) as a cardinal virtue. Meekness is a friend of democracy, he says. Although often symbolised by the lamb, it should not be confused with docility or submissiveness. Meekness is normally associated with 'private, insignificant, or inconspicuous individuals . . . the

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CSD PERSPECTIVES

ABDELWAHAB EL-AFFENDI

for a state of peace

conflict and the future of democracy in Sudan

Sudan's problems are many and complex. They include a long-running civil war; deep religious divisions and disputes; and economic decline, widespread poverty, and recurrent famines and other natural disasters. The key symptoms of the 'Sudanese problem' are civil conflict, the periodic collapse of democracy, and dictatorship.

The other face of the collapse of democratic systems (three times since independence in 1956) is the tenacity with which democracy is restored and defended. This paradox – a yearning for democracy and a failure to keep it – is the central question with which this latest title in the *CSD Perspectives* series is concerned.

subjects who will never become rulers, who die without leaving any other trace of their presence on this earth than a cross in a cemetery'. Bobbio concedes that meekness is indeed the opposite of haughty hunger for power over others, and it is for that reason usually considered a weak virtue. But it is not the virtue of the weak. Meekness emboldens; it gives individuals inner strength to act upon the world. It dislikes violence and it shuns showy arrogance and all forms of aggressiveness. Meekness radiates in the presence of others, calmly, and cheerfully enabling them to 'be themselves'. Meekness implies tolerance, and, since it shuns abusive power, it anticipates a better world. The meek live off the simple conviction that the world to which they aspire is better than the world in which they are forced to dwell. Bobbio's praise of meekness is a brave illustration of meekness in action. It rightly points to the political need to think more profoundly about the 'deep' social preconditions of civil society and political democracy, and to do so with our eyes trained upon writers as different as Erasmus and Machiavelli, Locke and Hume. Those who think that talk of virtues is old-fashioned, or as moralising as a killjoy neo-conservative rounding on those who like sex and other freedoms, will think twice after reading this book. Its reflections upon virtue are important, even if only because they force us to consider other virtues – the humble dislike of *hubris*, for instance – that arguably lie much closer to the heart of democratic theory and politics.

Less convincing is Bobbio's particular attachment to meekness. The very word itself (in English and other European languages) has come to have unfortunate connotations of deference. Bobbio emphasises the different Latin roots of meek (*mites*) and mild (*mansueti*), but this tack seems weak, especially since countless sermons delivered to quiet flocks by Christian priests seem through time to have convinced us that meekness is mildness, the patient anticipation of miracles.

Bobbio could, of course, reply that his own defence of meekness calls into question its Christian misuse, in which case a more telling objection looms. The key problem of In Praise of Meekness is not only that it tells us nothing about how politically to cultivate meekness (Bobbio notes in passing that meekness is 'a gift', without telling us from where or by whom it is given). It is that that strategic question is precluded outright, essentially because Bobbio's whole case rests upon the distinction between meekness and politics. Meekness is for Bobbio a cardinal virtue of civil society exactly because politics – the potentially violent struggles for power over others through state structures – is its opposite. But since meekness is 'the most apolitical of virtues', politics cannot be subjected directly to its codes. Meekness is always at the mercy of politics. Bobbio notes that the Hobbesian rule *homo homini lupus est* (man is a wolf to men) must be the starting point for understanding modern politics and international relations. If that is so, then the odd conclusion of these essays is that meekness, when confronted with the wolf of politics, can only be the quiet bleating of sheep.

John Keane is Professor of Politics at CSD.

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Review

April Carter

The Politics of Moral Capital

John Kane
(Cambridge University Press, 2001).
Hardback (ISBN 0 521 66336 9), £40.00; Paperback (ISBN 0 521 66357 1), £14.95.

The purpose of John Kane's stimulating book is to establish the importance of moral judgments in politics and so to refute the view that politics is simply about power or self-interest. To do so he develops the concept of 'moral capital', which is created by favourable moral assessments of individuals or institutions and has political utility. He is not denying the importance of coercion, corruption, or emotional manipulation in many political contexts, but claiming that in politics issues of moral justification necessarily emerge.

Kane begins by establishing his theoretical framework, discussing the link between moral capital and faithful pursuit of justifiable ends, and thus the role of moral capital in providing legitimacy. This does not mean that gaining moral respect will by itself be effective - moral capital has to be accompanied by forms of political capital (resources of organization, knowledge, contacts) and deployed skilfully. The 'prism' for exploring the moral capital is political leadership. Kane suggests that there are four sources of such capital: 1) the goal leaders pursue and the associated values and ideology; 2) the decisions and actions they take and their success in furthering their goals; 3) how far their behaviour exemplifies their values; and 4) use of rhetoric and appropriate symbolism. In each category the perceived character of the leader will be significant – Kane suggests that intrinsic goodness is not necessarily politically relevant and that there will be cultural variations in how goodness is judged. But qualities of fidelity, commitment and courage in pursuing valued goals do have political impact. This framework is then used in case studies of rather different types of leadership.

Two of the leaders Kane chooses to examine in some depth are widely acknowledged moral exemplars, who have gained legendary status through their association with the struggle for democracy in repressive regimes and their commitment and courage in suffering for their ideals: Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. Both were influenced by Gandhi, though Mandela found it strategically necessary to endorse limited armed struggle after 1960. Two others – Abraham Lincoln and Charles de Gaulle – are chosen because of their role in a time of war and conflicts over legitimacy. Whereas 'Lincoln's part in securing the North's moral capital was crucial' (p. 41), he only won personal moral capital after his assassination. De Gaulle, on the other hand, rejected the legitimacy of existing regimes and followed a strategy of building up a unique personal moral capital that twice gave him leadership in France. The final case study is of the American Presidency, and Kane charts the decline in the moral capital attached to this role from Kennedy to Clinton.

'Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi are moral exemplars who have gained legendary status through their association with the struggle for democracy in repressive regimes.'

Of the individual leaders examined, de Gaulle has the least obvious claim to moral authority. He could claim to have genuinely served his country by providing a voice for independent France after German occupation in 1940 and by averting civil war and the threat of a military *coup d'état* after 1958. But the values he embodied were those of French national greatness and he displayed amazing arrogance in identifying himself – like Louis the Fourteenth – with France. Moreover his military role and values, his contempt for party and parliamentary politics in France, the nature of the movement he founded in 1947, and the extensive powers he assumed when in power meant that he was open to charges of having dictatorial or even fascist leanings.

Treating de Gaulle as an exemplar of leadership drawing on moral capital raises questions about Kane's theoretical framework. Whereas Lincoln (at least retrospectively), Mandela and Suu Kyi have not only enormous moral significance in their own countries but also world-wide, de Gaulle's appeal is necessarily nationalistic. Somewhat similar problems are raised by the focus on the moral capital of the American Presidency, which Kane notes is interwoven with 'American pride and virtue'. Whilst moral capital must be to some extent culturally embedded to be effective, if it is to be distinguished from popularity, charisma and myth-making the goals and values associated with it must, as Kane suggests, be open to reasoned justification. Such justification can occur from within a specific political and cultural context. But the term moral capital also suggests a cross-cultural assessment of the values and goals involved. Indeed, Kane notes the political importance of moral capital abroad, for example for Lincoln during the Civil War. There are major theoretical issues at stake here, which are not sufficiently addressed at the outset.

But the focus of this book on individual case studies, which are all persuasively written with awareness of political exigencies, rather than on extended theoretical debate about moral values in politics, is in general one of its strengths. It should interest many involved in analysing, teaching and studying politics.

April Carter is the author of many books, including The Political Theory of Global Citizenship *(Routledge, 2001), and co-editor of* Democratic Theory Today *(Polity, 2002).*

Mary Douglas

Continued from page 2

initiatives and develop enterprise, the others are the bureaucracy with a custodial attitude to the town. They need each other but they disapprove of each other. They come into conflict over using space and time. The individualists are keen on building motorways and fast trains that can rush them to the outside and back. The positional hierarchists are keen to keep their old meeting places, squares and parks; saving time matters less to them. As the debate continues, both will need to contend with other dissenting voices in the town.

They all have different debating styles. Hierarchy will rest its case on tradition first, and then defend tradition as corresponding to the order of the universe. For reducing conflict and promoting efficient coordination it will put its faith in boundaries and buffers that keep different classes of people apart. Individualism will tend to promote more opportunistic, meritocratic and shorter term policies, in the name of freedom and prosperity. Many in the town will not subscribe to either culture: dissidents, some prepared to go it alone (top left), others ready to be recruited to strongly organized dissenting enclaves (bottom right). The enclave members tend to espouse an egalitarian social vision, partly because they are come together in the name of justice to attack the prevailing social distinctions, and to do so in the name of justice gives them the moral high ground.

No matter what the issues are, these will be the four potential points of cultural conflict, likely to be active in any community or workplace. We can call the three politically active cultures entrepreneurial (individualist), traditional (positional-hierarchical), and egalitarian (enclave). The fourth culture, the loners, the non-joiners and drop-outs, will stand apart; they go their own way, often mocking. There is a fifth – Michael Thompson recognizes them as hermits – who have chosen to live alone.

These four quadrants, resulting from applying a two-dimensional matrix to any social situation, provide the back door approach which reveals the dynamic interplay of cultural bias.

Mary Douglas is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at University College London. This is an edited version of the lecture she gave at the 'Encounter with Mary Douglas' at CSD in June 2001.

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Staff News

NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Adam Burgess has joined CSD from the University of Reading to work on the Public Accountability Project with Dr Simon Joss (see below). The author of *Divided Europe* (Pluto Press, 1997), his new book, *Cellular Phones: Public Fears and a Culture of Precaution* (New York: Cambridge University Press), will appear at the end of 2002.

Mark Harrison has joined the Asian Studies programme at CSD. Currently completing a PhD dissertation entitled 'Textual Practice and National Consciousness in Post-War Taiwan', his research area is media and politics in the Chinese context. He has a specific interest in Taiwan and issues of national identity and language practice. In 1999 he was a Visiting Scholar at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. His most recent publications include 'Cable and Satellite Platforms' in M Keane and S Donald (eds), *Media Futures in China* (Curzon, 2001) and 'The Politics of Inalienability: China's Claim over Taiwan', *La Trobe Forum*, Issue 19, December 2001.

Vesselin Popovski joins CSD as a lecturer in International Relations. Formerly with the Bulgarian diplomatic service, he was most recently a lecturer in politics at the University of Exeter. His recent publications include 'The Concept of Humanitarian Intervention', in Dr Peter Siani-Davies (ed.), *International Intervention in the Balkans: A Critical Evaluation* (Routledge, 2002) and *The Princeton Principles on Universal Jurisdiction* (Princeton, 2001).

Richard Stone joins CSD as a Visiting Research Fellow in Racial and Religious Equality. An adviser to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Dr Stone chairs both the Jewish Council on Racial Equality and the Runnymede Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. He is the Mayor of London's Cabinet member for Community Partnerships and Equalities, and is member of the Home Secretary's Race Relations Forum.

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Barry Buzan has been awarded a £83,000 ESRC grant to fund a two-year research project (from February 2002), ' Two Contested Concepts in IR Theory: "World Society" and "Polarity"'.

Simon Joss has been appointed director of the Public Accountability Project, a 1 million Euro (£630,000) European Commission-funded international project examining the accountability of governments, industry, and other policy and decision-making bodies in areas such as transport policy, waste management, and the use of genetically modified foods. At CSD he will be working with Adam Burgess (see above). Partners in other countries include the Centro de Estudos Sociais in Lisbon and the Baltic Studies Centre in Riga.

In Autumn 2001 **John Keane** was the Karl Deutsch Professor at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. An advisor to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Britain's leading centre-left think-tank, he is completing a new book for Cambridge University Press, *Global Civil Society*.

In April **Chantal Mouffe** will take part in the 6th biennial 'Minnesota Forum on German Culture' at the University of Minnesota. On 22 May she gives her inaugural professorial lecture at the University of Westminster.

CSD

The Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) is the postgraduate and post-doctoral research centre of Politics and International Relations at the University of Westminster. Well known for its inter-disciplinary work, CSD is led by a team of internationally recognized scholars whose teaching and research concentrate on the interplay of states, cultures and civil societies. CSD also supports research into all aspects of the past, present and future of democracy, in such diverse areas as political theory and philosophy, international relations and law, European Union social policy, gender and politics, mass media and communications, and the politics and culture of China, Europe, the United States, and Muslim societies. CSD is located in the School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (SBS) on the Regent Campus, and works alongside the influential Policy Studies Institute. It hosts seminars, public lectures and symposia in its efforts to foster greater awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of democracy in the public and private spheres at local, regional, national, and international levels. It offers a number of MAs on a one-year full-time, two-year part-time, basis (see back page for details). CSD's publications include a series of working papers entitled *CSD Perspectives* and this bulletin. *CSD Bulletin* aims to inform other university departments and public organizations, and our colleagues and under-graduates at the University of Westminster, of CSD's research activities. The *Bulletin* comprises reports of 'work in progress' of our research students and staff and contributions from visiting researchers and speakers. Comments on the content of this *Bulletin*, or requests to receive it, should be directed to The Editor, *CSD Bulletin*, 100 Park Village East, London NW1 3SR. As with all CSD publications and events, the opinions expressed in these pages do not necessarily represent those held generally or officially in CSD or the University of Westminster.

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