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Multi-disciplinary Quarterly Journal

# STUDIA HUMANA

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UNIVERSITY of INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGY and MANAGEMENT  
in Rzeszów, POLAND

Editorial Office: University of Information Technology  
and Management in Rzeszów, Poland

2 Sucharskiego Street  
Rzeszów 35 - 225



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## **Thymology, Praxeology, Demand Curves, Giffen Goods and Diminishing Marginal Utility**

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### *Abstract:*

Austrian economists have been criticized for several logical inconsistencies. On the one hand, they support the law of downward sloping demand, but given that, the Giffen good serves as a refutation. On the other hand, the praxeological school embraces diminishing marginal utility but rejects indifference; yet, how can utility diminish (or increase or even remain constant, for that matter) as equally serviceable units are utilized? For this to happen, there must be equally serviceable units in the first place, and this constitutes nothing but indifference, rejected by Austrians.

The present paper is an attempt to shed light on these issues, and to demonstrate that there is no contradiction in, nor even intellectual discomfort for, the praxeological school of economics in any of these matters.

### **1. Introduction**

Section II addresses thymology; section III discusses praxeology; section IV focuses on demand curves and the law of demand; the subject of section V is the supposed Giffen good refutation of the Austrian analysis of the law of demand; in section VI we explore the status of the law of diminishing marginal utility; indifference is subjected to withering criticism in section VII; we conclude in section VIII.

### **2. Thymology**

What is thymology? Sunwall (2005) defines thymology “as any psychology appropriate to free and rational beings.” This, to be sure, captures the meaning of the word as used by many, but will not help in the present regard. Lavoie and Storr (2001) distinguish the “psychological aspects of understanding (thymology) from the “science of action” (praxeology).<sup>1</sup> ... thymology, (consists of) ... attempts to understand concrete human purposes in their specific contexts.” This comes closer to the use of this word we will make, but still differs from it. Greaves (1974) defines a thymology as psychology, and says this of the latter:

“Psychology is concerned with the minds of men. It has two major meanings. The sciences of human action are not primarily concerned with the physiological meaning, sometimes known as natural or experimental psychology. Whenever Mises refers to psychology in economic studies, he has in mind what some call “literary psychology” and which he has called “*Thymology*” in *Theory and History* and *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*. In this sense, psychology “is on the one hand an offshoot of introspection and on the other a precipitate of historical experience. It is what everybody learns from intercourse with his fellows. It is what a man knows about the way in which people value different conditions, about their wishes and desires and their plans to realize these wishes and desires. It is the knowledge of the social environment in which a man lives and acts.

“It signifies the cognition of human ideas, emotions, volitions, motivations and value judgments which are an indispensable faculty of everyone. It is the specific understanding of the past which gives men an insight into the minds of other men. Psychology, like economics, starts with the individual. It concerns the internal invisible and intangible events of the mind which determine man's value scales which result or can result in action. *Economics* begins at the point psychology leaves off.

What had Mises to say about all this? In his view, thymology is a “branch of history” that “deals with the mental activities of men that determine their actions.”([1962] 1978: 47-8). It is “what everybody learns from intercourse with his fellows” (Mises [1957] 1969: 266). This term denotes “what a man knows about the way in which people value different conditions, about their wishes and desires and their plans to realize these wishes and desires.”<sup>2</sup>

In the present paper we shall use thymology in somewhat of a different although related manner. For our purposes it will depict economics that is not praxeological; that part of the dismal science which is roughly, usually, typically, almost always true, but not necessarily so; for example, the claim that demand curves always slope in a downward direction. This claim is belied, for example, by the Giffen good. Into this category will also be placed a whole host of heuristic devices, which serve as (important) approximations of praxeological insights, but which break down upon scrutiny. For instance, the triangle, used to illustrate Austrian business cycle theory (ABCT).<sup>3</sup> Another example we place into this category is demand curve (and also supply curve) analysis, to be explained below.

Why use the word “thymology” to depict rough approximations of economic truth, when this is not exactly, and precisely, what it means in the Austrian literature? For three reasons. First, as we have seen, this expression has no one precise narrow meaning. Rather, different commentators employ it in slightly different ways, as do many given economists themselves, such as Mises. Second, our meaning falls under the same general rubric as does most of theirs. Thymology, in our view, connotes that part of economics that is not necessarily true, although it often is. Historical insights, too, are like this. Third, we respect parsimony in language; why invent totally new verbiage when tried and true words will suffice?

### **3. Praxeology**

Praxeological statements in economics are those that are necessarily true, cannot be denied except upon pain of logical contradiction, and, yet, give us insight into the operation of the real world of economics.

Instances of praxeological statements include the following:<sup>4</sup>

“Whenever two people A and B engage in a voluntary exchange, they must both expect to profit from it. And they must have reverse preference orders for the goods and services exchanged so that A values what he receives from B more highly than what he gives to him, and B must evaluate the same things the other way around.”

“Or consider this: Whenever an exchange is not voluntary but coerced, one party profits at the expense of the other.”

“Or the law of marginal utility: Whenever the supply of a good increases by one additional unit, provided each unit is regarded as of equal serviceability by a person, the value attached to this unit must decrease. For this additional unit can only be employed as a means for the attainment of a goal that is considered less valuable than the least valued goal satisfied by a unit of such good if the supply were one unit shorter.”

“Or take the Ricardian law of association: Of two producers, if A is more productive in the production of two types of goods than is B, they can still engage in a mutually beneficial division of

labor. This is because overall physical productivity is higher if A specializes in producing one good which he can produce most efficiently, rather than both A and B producing both goods separately and autonomously.”

“Or as another example: Whenever minimum wage laws are enforced that require wages to be higher than existing market wages, involuntary unemployment will result.”

“Or as a final example: Whenever the quantity of money is increased while the demand for money to be held as cash reserve on hand is unchanged, the purchasing power of money will fall.”

To let the cat out of the bag preliminarily, it is our contention that the quagmires, seeming contradictions, puzzles, objections to Austrian theory arise because of insufficient attention paid to the distinction between praxeology and thymology, and can be resolved to a renewed focus on this distinction. To wit: the law of demand, contradicted by the Giffen good case, is thymological, not praxeological, and thus fails to constitute a refutation of Austrianism; in contrast, the law of diminishing marginal utility, as separate and distinct from the law of downward sloping demand, although not unrelated to it, is indeed a praxeological claim.

#### **4. The Giffen good**

Here, the price of a good, e.g., potatoes, falls. One would think that everyone would purchase more of them at this new lower price, than before at the previous higher price, *ceteris paribus*. In the example under consideration, this is not so. For here potatoes make up a large part of the budget of a poor man, and the income effect of the lower price (he is enriched) outweighs the power of the substitution effect (in the direction of buying more of cheaper products); the price decreases, and yet he buys fewer. His wealth has increased, and he can now afford more of the luxury good, meat. Or, take this the other way around. The price of potatoes rises. The poor man who spends a large proportion of his income of this product is now impoverished by this alteration in the terms of trade. As such, he has to cut back on his purchase of meat, the luxury good. For this income effect again outweighs the ordinary substitution effect, against of the now more expensive good, potatoes.

The Giffen good, of course, is not the only exception to the “law” that demand curves are negatively sloped, and supply curves slope in the opposite direction. There is such a thing as the backward bending supply curve of labor (BBSCL). Here, as is also well known, this “law” is violated. In contrast to the Giffen good, the BBSCL is endemic for virtually all people, at rather modest pay scales. Since there are only 24 hours in the day, and people, all people, must rest for a few hours per day or die,<sup>5</sup> at high enough salaries, this supply curve must of necessity bend backwards. Usually, it is thought that the BBSCL applies only to individuals; for the market supply curve, new workers continue to enter the field as wages rise. However, this presumption rests on the size of the labor market in question. If it is small enough (e.g., chess grandmasters; technical specialists), this can, also, apply to groups of people.

#### **5. Demand curves**

The so-called law of demand is that demand curves slope in a downward direction. In our view, this is not a law at all, at least not of the praxeological variety. Rather, it is an empirical generalization, which is true either all of the time, or, at least in the overwhelming majority of cases. The only exception to this rule is the Giffen good.<sup>6</sup>

But this constitutes no embarrassment to the Austrian school of thought. It is not part of the praxeological edifice that demand curves must always and ever slope negatively.

Garrison (1985) takes a different view of this matter. According to him, “the most basic law of economics, (is) the Law of Demand.... It fails to allow for the theoretical possibility of a Giffen

good.” This implies that the most basic law of economics is false, an embarrassment for the dismal science. One wonders how the most basic law in a discipline can have any counterexample, let alone such an easily available one.

In contrast, in our view, the most basic laws of economics are all praxeological, not thymological.

But this only begins to document the difficulties with this supposed basic law of demand. There is also the Veblen or so called “snob” good. In this case, the price of a commodity rises, for instance, an automobile. Some people, snobs, take this as an indication that either the quality of the car has risen, or that other people will think it has, and thus be more impressed than otherwise by people who have bought it. Thus, the marginal market participant, at least of this variety, will increase his purchases: a higher price will call forth a boost in sales, not a diminution, and again we will have an upward sloping demand curve. Ditto for a fall in price leading to fewer sales on the basis of this motive.

The downward sloping “Law of Demand” is thus subject to both of these refutations. Some “Law.”<sup>7</sup>

There is even a more serious criticism of the “Law of Demand.” This stems from the praxeological fact that all choice is essentially binary. That is, at any given time, the economic actor is faced with a stark choice: do A or B, where A is the chosen alternative, and B is the next best opportunity foregone. All of the other seeming options, C, D, E, etc., do not really count; they have already been rejected in favor of B, the one next best option.<sup>8</sup>

How does the demand (or supply) curve stack up against this primordial, elemental basic fact? Not too well. For this conventional neoclassical<sup>9</sup> tool of analysis is not at all compatible with singularism, the notion that actual human choice can always be rendered as a decision between A and B, between this and that. In contrast, the demand curve is a locus of an *infinite* number of points, depicting alternative prices and quantities. This is entirely incompatible with praxeological considerations, and must be rejected on that ground.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, it cannot be denied, the demand (and supply) curve has a positive role to play as a matter of thymology. It is a useful heuristic device. It helps most of us, certainly those of us who have been weaned on supply and demand analysis, to think more clearly about economic reality. But, when the Giffen good, or the Veblen snob good, or the BBSCL for the supply curve, is offered as a counter example to the law of demand (supply), this criticism goes only so deep. It reaches thymology, yes, but not praxeology.

## 6. Diminishing marginal utility

Diminishing marginal utility is a far different matter. Now, we are in the realm of praxeology, not thymology. A successful criticism here, would be telling indeed. But, before we fend off objections on this ground, let us rehearse the differences between the mistaken views of our neoclassical friends, and those of Austrian economics on this matter.

In the latter case law of diminishing marginal utility has it that marginal utility necessarily diminishes, as more and more of the good or service in question is utilized. This stems from the praxeological insight that always and ever prefer greater satisfaction to lesser. Suppose a man has 5 gallons of water; he uses them in the following order:

1. drinking
2. washing food
3. bathing
4. watering his crops
5. watering his flower garden

Whereupon the precise gallon of water he had earmarked for his most important use, drinking, is stolen or spilled. Does he forego his most important use of water? Not a bit of it. He

rearranges matters so that his flower garden wilts, but he does not die of thirst.<sup>11</sup> That is, marginal utility *necessarily* declines: the 5<sup>th</sup> best use of water is ranked lower than the 4<sup>th</sup>, and the 4<sup>th</sup> lower than the third, etc.<sup>12</sup> Note that all these rankings are just that, rankings. We are now in the praxeological realm of ordinal utility, not the cardinal variety.

In the former or mainstream case, the “law” of diminishing marginal utility, is a matter of thymology. Marginal utility *tends* to decrease with greater usage; it is a mere presumption. There is no *necessity* that it do so. Most of the time it does, sometimes it does not. It is all a matter of psychology, and cardinal utility. For example, you might drink your first beer too quickly. It goes down so fast, you hardly enjoy it. The second one is much better; you are now “primed” for the taste, and appreciate it even more. Ditto for the third; it too is “better” than the second, which was, in turn, more enjoyable than the first. But, by the fourth beer, diminishing returns have now set in, and the utils derived from it finally decrease.

As nonsensical as this all is from the perspective of technical or praxeological economics, it makes a certain sense from an informal, thymological or non technical economic vantage point. There is a certain low cunning to these insights. We have all experienced just this sort of thing. We all understand the previous paragraph. Of course, when we consider the cardinal utility implications, a lot of this vanishes. None of have seriously claimed that the second beer was exactly twice as good as the first, or that the diminution of enjoyment between the third and fourth brew was anything like 12.67%. When mainstream neoclassical economists place utility on the vertical axis, this is precisely the fallacy of which they are guilty.

## 7. Indifference

In one of the funniest skits ever to appear on television, Chappelle says that he knows “better than to get in between a n\*gg\*r and his pork.” Well, in much the same way we can say that he who attempts to keep a non Austrian economist from his indifference concept, had better watch out, too.

Indifference is simply *beloved* of the traditional economist. He eats, breathes, lives and sleeps indifference. He also uses it as a stick with which to beat up on Austrians.

Before we consider that attack and its refutation, let us first cast a few aspersions on this entire concept. First, it is thymological, not praxeological. That is, indifference is a perfectly good word in the English language, and has a clear referent. We all know how to use the concept. As a matter of psychology, ordinary language, thymology, it is unobjectionable.<sup>13</sup> But as a matter of technical economics, praxeology, it is highly problematic.

First, it is incompatible with human action, choice, decision-making. As a matter of exact language, if one were truly indifferent between two options, there would be no justification for choosing one of them over the other. Yet, we do choose, all of the time. Hence there is no room for indifference in our intellectual armament.

Second, it implies the fallacious cardinal, not the legitimate ordinal, utility. This may be seen easily by contemplating the point at which a budget line is tangent to an indifference curve. At this point, the following equation<sup>14</sup> supposedly holds true:

$$1) \text{ MU}_a/\text{P}_a = \text{MU}_b/\text{P}_b$$

But what does it mean to divide one number by another, as in  $\text{MU}_a/\text{P}_a$ ? This necessitates all such figures being cardinal, not ordinal. For it would be *impossible* to divide an ordinal number by anything. For example, 16<sup>th</sup> divided by 2 is *not* equal to 8<sup>th</sup>. Rather, it is a meaningless calculation.

What, then, is the neoclassical attack<sup>15</sup> on the Austrian position? It consists of the claim that indifference is required if we are to be able to make sense of the *law* of diminishing marginal utility. That is, the *law* of diminishing marginal utility is logically incoherent without indifference. And,

since Austrians eschew the latter, they must cease and desist from defending the former, on pain of self contradiction.

At first glance, this does indeed seem like a telling blow against the Austrian edifice. After all, if we use more and more of a stock, or a supply of a good, the law of diminishing marginal utility tells us that we necessarily value each succeeding unit less than the one before. But, if this law is to make any sense at all, we have to have a stock, or a supply of a good in the first place; what else is there as a candidate for us for the value thereof to diminish? But if we have a stock, or a supply of a good for this purpose, we must be indifferent between each every unit of it, otherwise, it does not constitute a stock, or a supply of a good. Rather, we have, necessarily, different goods, and the law of diminishing marginal utility, seemingly, *cannot* apply. So, if we want our law of diminishing marginal utility, we must, accept, perforce, also, indifference. If we cavil at the latter, then, it is not so much that the law of diminishing marginal utility is wrong; it is that, rather, that it cannot apply at all. If the world is filled with totally heterogeneous goods, and there are no stocks or supplies of any good at all, then this law is inapplicable.

What is the flaw in this argument? It commits the fallacy of not distinguishing between that which is physically indistinguishable, on the one hand, and that which is equal serviceable, on the other.

Consider water. One gallon of this liquid has pretty much the same chemical ingredients as any other. Apart from impurities, which we shall ignore, they are identical. But are they equally serviceable? Not at all. It is clear that the fifth gallon of water mentioned above is not at all equally serviceable as the first one. That is what the law of diminishing marginal utility is all about. So, yes, if the water is “equally serviceable,” if that is how the supply or stock of water is defined, then Austrians have a problem. For, “equally serviceable” is exceedingly difficult to distinguish from “indifferent between.” But this is not at all how praxeologists would define the matter. For Austrian economists, the water, or the beer, or the copper, is physically or chemically indistinguishable from any other unit of these goods. But, we of course need not be indifferent, or, consider equally serviceable, these different units.

## **8. Conclusion**

Austrians have no dog in the fight over whether Giffen goods (and BBSCLs) can exist, thus implying upward sloping demand curves (downward sloping supply curves). The “law” of demand (demand curves have a negative slope) is itself merely a matter of thymology, not praxeology; it is at best a useful heuristic device, for some, as is the triangle for ABCT. If the Giffen good exists, it is at no cost to the Austrian school of economics. Praxeologists do indeed see diminishing marginal utility as a legitimate and basic law of economics. And, the way to interpret the supply of goods, so as not to be open to the charge of logical inconsistency regarding indifference, is in terms of physical or chemical indistinguishableness, not as equal serviceability. The latter lead straight to the legitimacy of indifference.



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## Notes

1. These authors state that “there is no need to dichotomize them (praxeology and thymology) from one another in the way Mises sometimes did.” The present author sides with Mises on this matter.
2. See also Mises, [1933] 1981, 152-155, 183-202; [1949] 1966,12,123-127,486-488; [1957] 1969, 264-284; [1962] 1978. 47-48.
3. See on this Barnett and Block, 2006.
4. Source: Hoppe, 1988; see also Hoppe 1992, 1995; Selgin, 1988.
5. This is a thymological, psychological or historical claim.
6. For a critique of this concept, see Block and Barnett, forthcoming.
7. While it is thymologically possible to distinguish the Giffen from the Veblen good, this cannot be done so praxeologically. All we can know from the latter perspective is that price rises and demand increases, or, price falls and so does demand. We cannot as praxeologists peer behind the veil of human motivations to discern the cause of such behavior.
8. For an elaboration of these considerations, see Barnett and Block, 2008, 2009.
9. There is not a single solitary demand curve that appears in Mises, 1949.
10. This applies, too, to Menger, 1871, and Rothbard, 2004, both of whom make use of hierarchies between horses and gold ounces. If all choices are binary, then, strictly speaking, this mode of analysis is invalid.
11. See on this Rothbard, 1956; also Gordon, 1993 and Herbener, 1979.
12. Does this statement contradict our singularistic criticism of the demand curve, to the effect that the economic actor chooses only between *two* alternatives, that which is picked, and the next best alternative foregone? A superficial reading of the text would indicate that it does. After all, we posit not two but rather five opportunities. But the answer is No. At any one time, the owner of the water *always* chooses one option, and sets aside all others, and the latter, no matter how many of them there are, fall under the rubric of rejected choices.
13. For a neoclassical-Austrian debate on indifference, see Block, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007; Caplan, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003; Callahan, 2003; Carilli and Dempster, 2003; Hulsmann, 1999.
14. Who says Austrian economists cannot deal with highly technical mathematical equations?
15. See on this Nozick, 1977; for a refutation, see Block, 1980.

## **In Praise of Passivity**

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*Abstract:*

Political actors, including voters, activists, and leaders, are often ignorant of basic facts relevant to policy choices. Even experts have little understanding of the working of society and little ability to predict future outcomes. Only the most simple and uncontroversial political claims can be counted on. This is partly because political knowledge is very difficult to attain, and partly because individuals are not sufficiently motivated to attain it. As a result, the best advice for political actors is very often to simply stop trying to solve social problems, since interventions not based on precise understanding are likely to do more harm than good.

### **1. Introduction**

In 1799, America's first President, George Washington, fell ill with what is now thought to have been an infection of the epiglottis in his throat, a rare but serious condition that can lead to blockage of the airway and eventual suffocation.<sup>1</sup> His good friend and personal physician attended him, along with two consulting physicians. Medicines and poultices were tried, along with five separate episodes of bloodletting that together removed over half of Washington's blood. As one contemporaneous account explained, "The proper remedies were administered, but without producing their healing effects." [10] The former President died shortly thereafter. Needless to say, his treatment either had no effect or actually hastened the end.

Washington's doctors were respected experts, and they applied standard medical procedures. Why were they unable to help him? Put simply, they could not help because they had no idea what they were doing. The human body is an extremely complex mechanism. To repair it generally requires a detailed and precise understanding of that mechanism and of the nature of the disorder afflicting it—knowledge that no one at the time possessed. Without such understanding, almost any significant intervention in the body will be harmful.

Voters, activists, and political leaders of the present day are in the position of medieval doctors. They hold simple, prescientific theories about the workings of society and the causes of social problems, from which they derive a variety of remedies—almost all of which prove either ineffectual or harmful. Society is a complex mechanism whose repair, if possible at all, would require a precise and detailed understanding of a kind that no one today possesses. Unsatisfying as it may seem, the wisest course for political agents is often simply to stop trying to solve society's problems.

My goal in what follows is to explain and defend this point of view. In the following sections, I discuss the extent of our political ignorance, the reasons for our ignorance, and the

practical recommendations that flow from a recognition of deep and pervasive human ignorance about social issues.

## 2. What Don't We Know?

### 2.1. *Public Ignorance of the Political System*

Many observers have found citizens in modern democracies woefully ignorant of the political situations in their own societies. In the United States, for which the most plentiful data are available, most citizens cannot so much as name their Congressman, let alone describe his voting record. Many are ignorant of basic institutional facts, such as the lengths of legislators' terms.[6, p. 8] Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter give the flavor of public political knowledge in America:

The most commonly known fact about George [H.W.] Bush's opinions while he was president was that he hated broccoli. During the 1992 presidential campaign 89 percent of the public knew that Vice President Quayle was feuding with the television character Murphy Brown, but only 19 percent could characterize Bill Clinton's record on the environment. Also during that campaign, 86 percent of the public knew that the Bushes' dog was named Millie, yet only 15 percent knew that both presidential candidates supported the death penalty. Judge Wapner (host of the television series "The People's Court") was identified by more people than were Chief Justices Burger or Rehnquist.[12, p. 101]

International data indicate that Americans' political knowledge is no more than moderately below average.[12, p. 89 – 2]

Voters often harbor absurd misperceptions of current and recent policies. In one survey, Americans were asked to pick the two largest items in the federal budget, from the following list: Social Security, welfare, health care, interest on the debt, the military, and foreign aid. Foreign aid (by far the smallest of the categories listed) was the most commonly selected.[6, p. 79 – 80] On average, Americans estimate foreign aid spending at one quarter of the federal budget; the correct figure is less than one percent.[25]

In America, it used to be common to hear remarks either of praise or of criticism directed at the drastic cuts that President Reagan made to government social welfare programs in the 1980's. This was among Reagan's most famous policies—despite the fact that publicly available statistics show federal welfare spending *increasing* by 40% during the Reagan years.[7] In a similar vein, the George W. Bush administration has often been derided for its supposed drastic deregulation, despite large increases in total spending, regulatory budgets, regulatory staff, and the sheer volume of regulations during the Bush years.[11]

### 2.2. *Descriptive Social Theory: The Neglect of Expert Knowledge*

Fortunately, in some areas of social theory, one can find a clear, policy-relevant consensus among the experts. Unfortunately, this consensus is often boldly defied by both political leaders and the general public. I mention two examples here. The first is protectionism. This is a policy whereby governments attempt to protect domestic industries by erecting barriers to foreign trade, typically in the form either of tariffs or of quotas on foreign goods. These kinds of measures are often popular among political leaders and the general public—not just among members of protected industries, but even among consumers who are harmed by the import barriers. We cannot discuss the arguments surrounding free trade and protectionism here; here I will simply rest with an appeal to authority. The vast majority of economists—the people whose profession is to study these kinds of things—oppose protectionism and believe that it harms the domestic economy.<sup>2</sup> As Paul Krugman, the Nobel-prize-winning economist and *New York Times* columnist, puts it, "If there were an Economist's Creed, it would surely contain the affirmations, 'I understand the Principle of Comparative Advantage' and 'I advocate free trade.'"<sup>3</sup>

In my experience, observations of this kind often call forth derision from extremely confident anti-free-trade ideologues, who with no sense of irony dub the supporters of free trade “market fundamentalists”, essentially ascribing the expert consensus to a right-wing ideology into which economists are inducted.[22, p. 220 – 21] This makes it hard to understand why even left-wing economists such as Paul Krugman, famous for advocating government management of the economy,[21] have signed on to this consensus. When experts from opposite sides of the political spectrum converge on a given position, in contradiction to conventional opinion, who is the more likely victim of a cognitive bias: the community of experts, or the uneducated masses?

A second example is provided by the issue of terrorism, which has loomed large in American political discourse over the past eleven years. Of particular interest is one simple factual question: what motivates most terrorists? Experts whose careers center on the study of terrorism generally agree that terrorism functions as retaliation for specific government policies, especially for foreign military occupation of territories that the terrorists prize.[27, p. 9 – 10, 1, pp. 53 – 4, 55 – 6, 114 – 15, 290] Thus, in his fatwa against the United States, Osama bin Laden wrote:

The people of Islam awakened and realised that they are the main target for the aggression of the Zionist-Crusaders alliance. [...] The latest and the greatest of these aggressions [...] is the occupation of the land of the two Holy Places [Saudi Arabia] [...] by the armies of the American Crusaders and their allies.[2]

Political leaders in countries subject to terrorist attacks, however, typically blame the attacks on fundamental and irreconcilable clashes of values, on the moral virtue of their own country and the sheer evil of the terrorists. Thus, shortly after the infamous 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush explained the event as follows:

They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. [...] These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. [...] This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.[5]

The next American President, Barack Obama, would blame the attacks on a dearth of emotions and values:

Nor do I pretend to understand the stark nihilism that drove the terrorists that day and that drives their brethren still. My powers of empathy [...] cannot penetrate the blank stares of those who would murder innocents with abstract, serene satisfaction.[26]

Thus, the preferred explanation for why one’s own country should come under attack is that the enemy either has no values or has fundamentally evil values. The self-serving nature of these explanations is as evident as are the unfortunate implications of this attitude for the prospects of resolving international conflicts peacefully.

The cases of protectionism and terrorism are simply two illustrations of a general problem. Even when experts know the answer to a political question, that knowledge will not help society if—as is often the case—lay people and political leaders stubbornly ignore what the experts know.

### *2.3. Descriptive Social Theory: The Limits of Expertise*

In light of the ignorance of typical political leaders and members of the general public, we might be tempted by the idea of *rule by experts*, as in Plato’s Republic.[28] [4] Unfortunately, when it comes to descriptive social theory, even the experts’ knowledge is unimpressive, as demonstrated recently by the social psychologist Phillip Tetlock. Tetlock conducted a fifteen-year study in which he collected tens of thousands of predictions from hundreds of political experts concerning matters within their areas of expertise (for example, would the economy slide into recession, would the

Soviet Union survive, who would win the next Presidential election, and so on). Tetlock's finding, in brief, was that the best experts did only slightly better than chance at predicting outcomes. When asked to assign probabilities to their predictions, experts proved systematically overconfident; for example, events predicted with 100% confidence happened less than 80% of the time.[34, p. 49 – 55]

What the experts *were* good at was rationalizing their failures. Tetlock lists a number of belief-system defenses commonly offered by experts to insulate their core beliefs from disconfirmation by failed predictions. Experts would often claim that their underlying beliefs were not disconfirmed, because their prediction *almost* came true, because the prediction failed due to sheer bad luck, because they were only off on the timing (the predicted event was still going to occur in the future), because a policy failed to produce the anticipated effects only because it was poorly implemented, and so on. Tetlock noted that no one ever explained away their *successful* predictions in analogous ways. No one ever said that a successful prediction failed to support their underlying beliefs because the prediction almost failed, because it came true due to sheer luck, or because a policy produced the expected effects only due to poor implementation.

Tetlock could only study the accuracy of certain kinds of beliefs—predictions that would, within a fixed time frame, be definitively settled. For instance, one can objectively test experts' reliability in predicting the outcomes of elections. There are many other beliefs that could not be tested. We cannot test predictions with indefinite or extremely long time frames, such as "the world will one day run out of oil" or "the European Union will collapse in 200 years". We cannot test vague or subjective predictions, such as "the next President will be worse than the current one". We cannot test claims that refer to unobservable events, as in "the economic stimulus will make the recession longer *than it would otherwise be*". And other claims are very difficult to resolve for a variety of reasons, such as "World War II was chiefly caused by resentment over the Treaty of Versailles" or "an anarcho-syndicalist society would be superior to any governmental society".

Might it be that experts have highly reliable beliefs about these untestable matters? There is no reason to think so. Typically, if a person proves unreliable whenever you actually test that person's claims, it is reasonable to assume that that person is also unreliable with regard to the claims you did not test. If anything, the untestable claims would seem *harder* to get right, due to large elements of subjectivity and the difficulty of learning to calibrate one's judgments over time. Thus, experts are probably even less reliable when it comes to these untestable matters.

## 2.4. Evaluative Knowledge

The final type of knowledge we need for political decisionmaking falls under the purview of philosophers: evaluative knowledge. This type of knowledge, too, is difficult to test; indeed, it may be impossible in principle to test. (I of course do not refer to testing whether some policy has desired outcomes, but testing whether an outcome counts as good, just, or the like.) How reliable are we with regard to these questions?

There is no generally accepted theory—either among ordinary people or among experts—for any of the central evaluative categories of moral or political philosophy. There is no generally accepted theory of the good, the right, justice, authority, human rights, equality, or liberty. Thus, while philosophers generally agree that there is *some* sense in which equality is an important political value, they cannot agree upon what this means. Does it mean a social system should strive to equalize wealth or opportunities? Does it mean merely that a social system should give equal consideration to each person's interests? Or that a social system should recognize the same rights for everyone? Likewise, while everyone agrees that society must pursue justice, we cannot agree upon such basic questions as whether justice requires retribution for wrongdoing and whether it requires giving priority to the least-advantaged members of society. Most philosophers endorse the notion of human rights, though the most prominent systematic moral theory, utilitarianism, rejects

the idea. Among those who believe in rights, there are fundamental disagreements over what rights there are and who has them. The sheer prevalence of disagreement in political philosophy establishes that human beings—even the most educated, intelligent, and epistemically well-positioned experts—are highly unreliable about political philosophy.

We may be tempted to argue that while *other* people are unreliable about evaluative questions, we ourselves have the correct values. We could bolster this contention with philosophical arguments—exactly the sort of philosophical arguments that philosophers present in books and articles in the ethics and political philosophy journals. Of course, I cannot refute this sort of contention, since to do so would require a series of philosophical articles refuting almost every argument in the ethics and political philosophy literature. Nevertheless, I would suggest that we ought to be very suspicious of any attempt to treat ourselves as special, solely on the grounds of the sort of arguments that regularly appear in the philosophical literature and that convince only a minority of experts. One could say, for instance, that one’s own political views are unusually reliable, because they would be endorsed by parties deliberating behind the “veil of ignorance” (to invoke a Rawlsian methodology).[29] This would be to appeal to a form of argument that only some experts find convincing, and other experts could appeal to other forms of argument leading to varying conclusions. If we have no independent reason to expect our own philosophical judgment to be superior to that of other experts (for instance, we are not evidently more intelligent, informed, or rational than others), then we should assume that we ourselves are subject to the same factors, whatever they may be, that render others unreliable in the realm of political philosophy.

## 2.5. *What We Know*

I do not deny that we have important political knowledge. I think we know that slavery is unjust, that democracy is superior to dictatorship, that torture is almost always wrong, that free markets work better than communist planning. Each of these is an extremely important piece of knowledge; each has rendered human beings vastly better off today than they were in the past. My point has simply been that our political knowledge is very limited. There are a great many things we do not know that people often act as though they knew. People often vociferously defend a policy while having no awareness of the literature on the subject. We often boldly predict the future, or vote on the basis of our predictions, in areas where the future is really unpredictable. We defend ideological positions on the basis of vague and controversial evaluative assertions. Experts, leaders, and lay people know something about politics, but not nearly as much as they think they do.

How can we recognize genuine political knowledge? I cannot offer a precise or complete answer to this question. Nevertheless, we can identify some general tendencies. Genuine political knowledge tends to be:

1. *Simple*. For example, “Demand curves slope downward.” The more complicated a theory is, the more ways there are for it to go wrong.
2. *Accepted by experts*. For example, there is a broad consensus in economics that protectionism is undesirable. If a theory is well-justified, then the great majority of reasonable and intelligent people will usually come to accept the theory, once they understand the arguments for it.
3. *Non-ideological*. Theories that have an ideological flavor and that call forth strong emotions tend to be pseudo-knowledge—for example, the theory that behavioral differences between men and women are entirely due to socialization. Reality is unlikely to conform to ideology.
4. *Weak*. For instance, we do not know that free markets are always perfectly efficient. We can say only that free markets are *usually approximately* efficient.
5. *Specific and concrete*. We can be much more confident in a concrete claim such as “Ted Bundy’s murders were wrong” than in an abstract theory such as “It is always wrong to initiate violence against another person.”
6. *Supported by appropriate evidence*. For example, the claim “violent entertainment increases



violent crime” cannot be known without empirical evidence. In this case, a study based on a large, random sample would be appropriate, rather than, say, a few anecdotes.

7. *Undefeated by counter-evidence.* If there is a large quantity of evidence against P, or if one does not know whether there is such counter-evidence, then one does not know that P. For example, if one has read several studies supporting gun control while having read none of the literature on the other side, then one cannot claim to know whether gun control is desirable.

Consider now the claim that democracy is better than dictatorship. This claim fares reasonably well with respect to the above list. It is a reasonably simple idea. Virtually all experts in political theory accept it. It is supported by a good deal of experience with democracies and dictatorships.[31, ch. 6.] And there is little or no counter-evidence. Admittedly, the claim fares poorly on some items: it is a fairly ideological, strong, general claim. As this case illustrates, genuine knowledge does not always exhibit all of the above characteristics; nevertheless, there is some tendency to find each of those characteristics in a genuine item of knowledge.

### 3. Why Don't We Know?

#### 3.1. *Rational Ignorance and Irrationality*

Most of the time, people are instrumentally rational. That is, they make only those choices for which the benefits exceed the costs (according to their own values and assessments of the probabilities). Therefore, we should expect people to be politically knowledgeable only if the benefits of political knowledge exceed the costs.

The benefits of political knowledge are dubious. For the overwhelming majority of individuals, political knowledge makes no practical difference to how their lives go, since the probability of their causing a change in public policy is approximately zero. Only if one places intrinsic value on knowledge can one anticipate any non-negligible reward from pursuing political knowledge.

The costs of political knowledge, however, can be enormous, beginning with the costs in sheer time and effort. One must look up government officials, read about their voting records, read about the bills they voted on, and read background facts and arguments about numerous individual political issues. In most cases, becoming informed about individual issues requires difficult and tedious reading in the academic literature. If one spent every waking moment on such research, one might then be well-informed about most of the prominent issues.

There is a second, less tangible cost. Acquisition of the most important items of political knowledge—such as knowledge of whether gun control laws are good, whether capital punishment is just, or whether fiscal stimulus helps the economy—requires careful cultivation of habits of epistemic *rationality*. One must work at identifying and overcoming one's biases. One must seek out information and arguments that run contrary to one's existing opinions, and strive to listen to these arguments with an open mind. Often, rationality demands that one admit that one's former opinions were wrong, or that one simply does not know the answers to important questions. If one is committed to rationality, one's desires will often be frustrated, as one cannot simply believe what one wants to believe.

All of this leads to the following rough reasoning:

1. People act only when the benefits exceed the costs.
2. The benefits of acquiring political knowledge are minimal.
3. The costs of acquiring political knowledge are substantial.
4. Therefore, people will not acquire political knowledge.

Of course, this greatly simplifies matters. Sometimes people are instrumentally irrational; some people may attach high intrinsic value to political knowledge; and a few (such as prominent politicians and wealthy campaign donors) have a serious chance of altering public policy. Despite these exceptions, I think the above reasoning provides a basic insight into the low levels of political knowledge found among the public.<sup>4</sup>

What about the political leaders and campaign donors who, as I have suggested, really can influence public policy—do they have strong incentives to acquire political knowledge? Yes and no. They have strong incentives to find out which policies are *in their interests* to promote. A politician may have strong motives to discover which positions are popular among voters and campaign contributors. But this is quite a different matter from discovering which policies are truly best. Suppose, for example, that immigration restrictions are unjust and harm the domestic economy, but that most voters support them.<sup>5</sup> A politician who endeavors to repeal immigration restrictions can, if successful, look forward to slightly increased prosperity for his country, as well as a more just world—but perhaps at the price of losing his job. A vote to repeal immigration restrictions is very unlikely to pay off in self-interested terms. Knowing this, a politician has little incentive to find out whether immigration restrictions are unjust or harmful in the first place.

### 3.2. *Who Cares about the Good of Society?*

Those with strong political opinions, including voters, activists, pundits, and political leaders, typically think of themselves as working for admirable causes—social justice, the welfare of society, moral virtue, and so on. Most see the promotion of their own ideologies as part of a noble and selfless pursuit. This is true of people in all corners of the political world, whether conservative or liberal, socialist or anarchist. I suspect, however, that this is mostly a self-serving delusion. Very few people care very much about social justice, the good of society, and the like. Nearly everyone cares about these things a little bit, and a few people care about them a great deal. But most of those who think of themselves as deeply moved by high ideals are not in fact so moved.

This may seem a surprising claim. How can one explain those who devote their lives to public service? Or the activists who spend most of their free time sending out messages promoting a cause, organizing protests, and so on? I suggest that these individuals are chiefly moved, not by a desire for some noble ideal, but by a desire *to perceive themselves as working for* the noble ideal—not, for example, by a desire for justice, but by a desire to see themselves as promoting justice. These two potential desires are closely related, and at first glance one might think them practically indistinguishable: if I want to see myself as working for justice, what I have to do is work for justice; but this is the same thing I will do if I simply want justice.

But there is at least one way of distinguishing the desire for X from the desire to perceive oneself as promoting X. This is to observe the subject's efforts at finding out what promotes X. The basic insight here is that the desire [to perceive oneself as promoting X] is satisfied as long as one does something that *one believes* will promote X, whereas the desire for X will be satisfied only if one successfully promotes X. Thus, only the person seeking X itself needs accurate beliefs about what promotes X; one who merely desires the sense of promoting X needs *strong* beliefs (so that she will have a strong sense of promoting X) but not necessarily *true* beliefs on this score.

So, on the assumption that people are instrumentally rational, we can make the following theoretical predictions. If people are seeking high ideals such as justice or the good of society, then they will work hard at figuring out what in fact promotes those ideals and will seek out information to correct any errors in their assumptions about what promotes their ideals, since mistaken beliefs on this score could lead to all of their efforts being wasted. If, on the other hand, people seek the mere *sense* of promoting high ideals, then they will exercise little care in adopting beliefs about what promotes their ideals, and they will avoid gathering information that might undermine those beliefs. They will adopt habits that lead to their having strong beliefs that are very difficult to

overturn.

Which hypothesis better matches our observations? It seems to me that most people who expend a great deal of effort promoting political causes expend very *little* effort attempting to make sure their beliefs are correct. They tend to hold very strong beliefs that they are very reluctant to reconsider. When presented with new information conflicting with their existing beliefs, these individuals are much more likely to react with anger, as one under attack, than with gratitude. Admittedly, these impressions are anecdotal. But I frankly think that my experience here is so common that very few will dispute these observations. The evidence thus suggests that politically committed people are motivated more by a desire for a sense of promoting political ideals than by a desire for those ideals themselves.

### 3.3. *Social Theory Is Harder than You Think*

There is another reason why human beings are terrible at figuring out political issues: it is a lot harder to figure things out than it appears. This is true of nearly all fields of inquiry, though some fields (not including politics) have developed disciplines for thinking in reliable ways.

Let me give a few examples. From ancient Greece through the middle ages, the received view in (what then passed for) science was that the physical world was composed of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The received medical theory was that diseases were caused by imbalances among the four bodily fluids, namely, black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. For instance, a fever was caused by an excess of blood, which therefore needed to be treated by draining the patient's blood. The ancient and medieval theory of the cosmos located the Earth at the center with the sun and planets orbiting the Earth. The fixed stars were points of light on a large spherical shell encompassing the sun, Earth, and planets.

We now know that all of these theories are utterly wrong, not even close to the truth. Yet all were widely accepted by the experts for centuries. These are just a few examples; the student of the history of ideas will find many more. Over human history, the overwhelming majority of theories that we have come up with to explain our world have later been proven false.<sup>6</sup>

This might seem puzzling at first glance. It is no surprise that we are *sometimes* wrong; we could not expect infallibility. But unless we were actively *trying* to get things wrong, how could we manage so systematically to avoid hitting on the truth?

There is a basic philosophical explanation, which begins with the fact that the number of possible theories of any given phenomenon is enormous, if not infinite. Of these, all but one are false. So given just the information that T is a theory, the probability that T is correct is approximately zero. However, naive thinkers have often failed to realize this, because the theories that a typical human being can think of to explain a given phenomenon (and that will seem plausible to that person) are typically very few in number. It is not that we consider the truth and reject it; in the overwhelming majority of cases, when we first start thinking about how to explain some phenomenon, the truth is not even among the options considered. The ancient Greeks, for example, did not reject quantum mechanics; they just did not and could not have considered it.

That is one basic reason for human unreliability. Another factor is the widespread phenomenon of *confirmation bias*: when we think about a hypothesis, our natural tendency is to look for evidence supporting the hypothesis, not to look for ways of *falsifying* it.<sup>7</sup> A theory that starts out seeming somewhat plausible can come to seem more and more incontrovertible, as we collect supporting evidence and overlook disconfirmations. When we add the fact that in most theoretical questions, people are motivated more by the desire to find some belief to cling to than by a desire for the truth, the chances of winding up with erroneous beliefs are all that much higher.

Fortunately, modern science has evolved techniques for greatly improving our reliability. We now test hypotheses experimentally, making serious and explicit efforts at falsification. But when it comes to political ideology, no such techniques have been developed. The political realm

often seems impervious to scientific reasoning, with the result that our political theorizing is about as reliable as all theorizing was before the advent of modern science.

Why can't we apply the methods that have been so successful in natural science to political questions? Some of the questions to which we need answers just seem in principle non-empirical. For instance, by what experiment can we test whether justice demands that society redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor? Other questions are difficult to investigate because of the unavailability of controlled experiments. If we want to test whether fiscal stimulus cures recessions, we cannot prepare two identical societies, with identical recessions, and then apply fiscal stimulus in one society but not the other. Nor can we take a large collection of societies with recessions and randomly assign half to receive fiscal stimulus and half to receive no fiscal stimulus. Social scientists do not have the power to experiment with societies as natural scientists can experiment with inanimate objects in their laboratories. Finally, social phenomena are *vastly* more complex than the phenomena studied by physicists and chemists. Societies contain thousands or millions of individual human beings interacting with each other in myriad complex ways. And each of these human beings is himself an extremely complex entity, much more complex than the typical inanimate object.

As an example of the relative tractability of inanimate behavior, in the seventeenth century, Johannes Kepler, by examining data on the observed positions of planets in the night sky, was able to induce three simple mathematical laws regarding the orbits of the planets:

1. The orbit of every planet is an ellipse with the Sun at one focus.
2. A line joining a planet and the Sun sweeps out equal areas during equal intervals of time.
3. The square of the orbital period of a planet is proportional to the cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit.

Why have we not, similarly, discovered the simple mathematical laws of human behavior? Probably because there *are no* such laws. Generalizations about human behavior almost always contain "ceteris paribus" clauses. Almost any factor influencing our behavior can be amplified or moderated by numerous other factors. When we move to the behavior of an entire society, matters are only that much more complicated. If there are laws of social evolution, they are no doubt incredibly complex.

We might hope that social theorists who make mistaken predictions will be suitably chastened by reality and will thus correct their underlying theories. But as Tetlock found, this rarely happens; most experts prefer to explain away their errors in ways that preserve the experts' theoretical beliefs. We might be tempted to dismiss these explanations as mere rationalizations. The problem is that we usually cannot *prove*, in any given case, that the explanation is not actually correct. It might in fact be *true* that a prediction almost came true, and that the expert's underlying theory is still basically correct despite a failed prediction. A policy's failure to produce expected results might really be due to poor implementation, or sheer bad luck. In the social world, nothing that happens ever provides an ideal test of anyone's theory. Thus, it is hard to prove that a given ideologue is actually being irrational in refusing to revise his beliefs; most often, it is a judgment call.

#### 4. Practical Lessons

If, as I have suggested, political knowledge is very limited and political actors are seldom motivated chiefly by political ideals, what ought we to do? It might seem that no specific political recommendations can be derived, because for any policy we might recommend as a response to political ignorance, we ourselves will be ignorant as to the value of that policy. This would be true if my thesis were a radical, "philosophical" skepticism, according to which no one possesses any politically relevant knowledge whatsoever. Fortunately, however, we are not *completely* ignorant, and we can derive some plausible recommendations for political agents.

#### 4.1. *Don't Vote*

In modern democracies, election seasons are often accompanied by public-service campaigns designed to encourage citizens to turn up at the polls and vote; regardless of one's political leanings, it seems, it is important that one votes for *something*. In some countries, governments go so far as to legally require voting.

These campaigns are a terrible idea. Most voters have no idea what is going on—they may not even know who their leaders are, and certainly do not know who is the best candidate. Imagine that someone asks you for directions to a local restaurant. If you have no idea where the restaurant is, you should not make it up. You should not tell the person some guess that seems sort of plausible to you. You should tell them you don't know and let them get directions from someone more knowledgeable.

Ignorant voting is even worse than ignorant giving of directions, because voting is an exercise of political power (albeit a very small one)—to vote for a policy is not only to make a recommendation, but to request that the policy be *imposed on others by force*. Collectively, the majority imposes policies or personnel choices on the rest of society. To be justified in participating in any such imposition, one must have some strong justification for thinking that the policy or personnel choice is beneficial. This justification is almost always lacking for the great majority of voters. In the great majority of cases, therefore, voting not only fails to qualify as a civic duty; it is positively immoral.

One might suggest that citizens have an obligation to become informed, and *then* vote. But becoming sufficiently informed to know who is the best candidate in a given election is typically extremely difficult. Indeed, it is not implausible to think that for most people and most elections, the task is actually impossible—no matter how much they study, most voters still will not *know* who the best candidate is, and may not even attain a reasonably high-probability guess. Even if it is not impossible, discovering who is the best candidate is clearly very onerous. It is therefore unreasonable to demand that an individual undertake the enormous costs of acquiring this knowledge, merely to secure a probability of, say, one in ten million of producing a modest benefit for society.

In short, it is most plausible to say that individuals have no obligation to vote, and that if they are ill-informed (as nearly all citizens are), they are obligated *not* to vote.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.2. *Neglect Social Problems*

Society suffers from innumerable problems which the government is regularly called upon to solve. In light of widespread political ignorance, however, in most cases the government is better advised to do nothing than to attempt to solve the problem. Consider for example the problem of recreational drug use, which leads to health problems, addiction, and general deterioration of the lives of drug users and their families. Perhaps there is something government could do to solve the problem. But given the ignorance of political leaders, activists, and the public, a government *attempt* to solve the problem is unlikely to succeed.

Now, one might think that, if we were *completely* ignorant, our policies would be as likely to increase as to reduce the problem; but as long as we have *some* relevant knowledge and understanding, and we are aiming at a reduction in the problem, we should be at least slightly more likely to alleviate the problem than to exacerbate it. Thus, even if the government does not *know* what will solve or alleviate the problem, the government can and should at least make an educated guess, and then implement that guess.

There are at least four reasons why this is wrong. First, any government policy that imposes requirements or prohibitions on citizens automatically has certain costs. One cost is the reduction of citizens' freedom. Another is the suffering on the part of those who violate the law and are subsequently punished by the legal system. A third is the monetary cost involved in implementing

the policy. Thus, in the case of laws against recreational drug use, individuals are denied the freedom to do as they wish with their own bodies; those who violate the laws and are caught suffer for months or years in prison; and all taxpayers suffer the costs of enforcing the drug laws.

Second, there is a kind of moral presumption against coercive interventions. Laws are commands backed up by threats of coercive imposition of harm on those who disobey them. Harmful coercion against an individual generally requires some clear justification. One is not justified in coercively harming a person on the grounds that the person has violated a command that one merely *guesses* has some social benefit. If it is not reasonably clear that the expected benefits of a policy significantly outweigh the expected costs, then one cannot justly use force to impose that policy on the rest of society.

A third, related point is that when the state *actively intervenes* in society—for example, by issuing commands and coercively harming those who disobey its commands—the state then becomes responsible for any resulting harms, in a way that the state would not be responsible for harms that it merely (through lack of knowledge) fails to prevent. Imagine that I see a woman at a bus stop opening a bottle of pills, obviously about to take one. Before I decide to snatch the pills away from her and throw them into the sewer drain, I had better be very certain that the pills are actually something harmful. If it turns out that I have taken away a medication that the woman needed to forestall a heart attack, I will be responsible for the results. On the other hand, if, due to uncertainty as to the nature of the drugs, I decide to leave the woman alone, and it later turns out that she was swallowing poison, I will *not* thereby be responsible for her death. For this reason, intervention faces a higher burden of proof than nonintervention. Similarly, if, due to uncertainty as to the effects of anti-drug laws, the government were to simply leave drug users alone, the government would not thereby be responsible for the harms that drug users inflict upon themselves. But if the government maintains anti-drug laws, and these laws impose enormous cost on society, the government is morally responsible for those costs.

Fourth and finally, a policy made under conditions of extreme ignorance is not equally likely to be beneficial as harmful; it is much more likely to be harmful. The famous economist Ronald Coase, who edited the *Journal of Law and Economics* for eighteen years, was interviewed in 1997. Among other things, he reported that his journal had published a series of studies of the effects of regulations in various areas. When asked about which regulations were bad, Coase replied:

I can't remember one that's good. Regulation of transport, regulation of agriculture—agriculture is a, zoning is z. You know, you go from a to z, they are all bad. There were so many studies, and the result was quite universal: The effects were bad.[16]

How can this be? Even if we don't know much, shouldn't we at least create *some* net benefit *most* of the time?

It is here that we must recall the case of George Washington. Washington's doctors, ignorant of the germ theory of disease and lacking in antibiotics, had no chance of curing Washington's infection. The human body is a complex mechanism with parts that work together in specific ways. Nearly all things one might add to or take away from the body, and nearly all ways in which one might rearrange the parts of the body, will interfere with that mechanism. Indeed, almost all *large* changes in the body are *fatal*. Thus, given their state of ignorance, almost any treatment the former President's doctors prescribed could be expected to be harmful.

Society can be viewed as a vast mechanism, whose parts (individual human beings), like the parts of an organism, work together in extremely complex ways.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, therefore, most possible interventions in society disrupt the functioning of that mechanism and thus are socially harmful. If the government does not know what it is doing, it is more likely to worsen than to improve matters.

Of course, I am not arguing that states should never intervene in society. Some interventions are clearly justified. For instance, prohibitions on murder, theft, and assault are justified. What differentiates these from, say, a prohibition on recreational drug use? A number of differences

might be cited,<sup>10</sup> but what is most relevant to this paper is the difference in the state of our knowledge with respect to these prohibitions. We know that prohibitions on murder are beneficial—there are no real counter-arguments to the claim, and all experts agree. But one simply cannot claim to know that drug prohibition is beneficial; indeed, that claim is hotly disputed. Rather than recommending universal non-intervention, I am advocating a strong burden of proof for those who advocate legal demands or prohibitions. If the experts are divided on whether a government intervention is beneficial, it should generally be rejected.

The same lesson applies to many other controversial issues, such as gun control, fiscal stimulus, the minimum wage, immigration, and so on. In each of these cases, the benefits of government intervention are at best controversial among the experts; in some cases, expert opinion opposes intervention. Thus, the government ought not to restrict gun ownership, attempt to stimulate the economy, mandate a minimum wage, or restrict immigration, any more than it ought to prohibit recreational drugs.

#### 4.2. *Weaken Democracy*

Democracy works well for issues whose answers are obvious—for instance, I would be entirely comfortable with putting the prohibition on murder up to a popular vote. Democracy is superior to dictatorship mainly because dictatorships have a tendency to do things that are obviously, uncontroversially bad—such as murdering millions of people. But for issues that are controversial or require careful reasoning or specialized knowledge, democracy is about the equivalent of drawing policies out of a hat. The ignorance and irrationality of the electorate frequently delivers harmful and unjust policies.

When an issue is controversial, the best solution is not to simply take a vote; the best solution is to remove the issue from the political arena—that is, to prohibit the state from intervening. The reason for this is simply the recommendation of section 4.2, that there should be a high burden of proof for all state interventions in society. For instance, if the benefits of gun control are controversial, we should not therefore vote on whether to restrict private gun ownership; we should rather prohibit the government from restricting private gun ownership.<sup>11</sup> This is just what the U.S. Constitution intended to do in its second amendment. Many provisions of that Constitution are designed, wisely, as restrictions on democracy—for example, the government cannot prohibit the practice of Islam *even if* the majority of voters want the government to do so.

It is perhaps infeasible for a Constitution to include prohibitions on all the policies that would be controversial or whose effects would be unknown. A reasonable proxy would be to require large supermajority votes for the passage of any law. For example, a state could be designed in which a 70% vote of the legislature would be required to pass any new law, while a 30% vote would suffice to repeal any existing law. This sort of rule would not be perfect, but it might well eliminate most of the state's harmful laws, while still allowing those laws that are clearly needed. We need not fear, for example, that 30% of any legislature would vote to make murder legal.

#### 4.3. *Don't Fight for What You Believe In*

When it comes to political issues, we usually should not fight for what we believe in. Fighting for something, as I understand the term, involves fighting *against someone*. If one's goal faces no (human) opposition, then one might be described as *working* for a cause (for instance, working to reduce tuberculosis, working to feed the poor) but not *fighting* for it. Thus, one normally fights for a cause only when what one is promoting is controversial. And most of the time, those who promote controversial causes do not actually know whether what they are promoting is correct, however much they may think they know. As suggested in section 3.2, they are fighting in order to

have the experience of fighting for a noble cause, rather than truly seeking the ideals they believe themselves to be seeking.

Fighting for a cause has significant costs. Typically, one expends a great deal of time and energy, while simultaneously imposing costs on others, particularly those who oppose one's own political position. This time and energy is very likely to be wasted, since neither side knows the answer to the issue over which they contend. In many cases, the effort is expended in bringing about a policy that turns out to be harmful or unjust. It would be better to spend one's time and energy on aims that one *knows* to be good.

Thus, suppose you are deciding between donating time or money to Moveon.org (a left-wing political advocacy group), and donating time or money to the Against Malaria Foundation (a charity that fights malaria in the developing world). For those concerned about human welfare, the choice should be clear. Donations to Moveon.org may or may not affect public policy, and if they do, the effect may be either good or bad—that is a matter for debate. But donations to Against Malaria *definitely* save lives. No one disputes that.<sup>12</sup>

There are exceptions to the rule that one should not fight for causes. Sometimes, people find it necessary to fight for a cause, despite that the cause is obviously and uncontroversially good—as in the case of fighting to end human rights violations in a dictatorial regime. In this case, one's opponents are simply corrupt or evil. Occasionally, a person knows some cause to be correct, even though it is controversial among the general public. This may occur because the individual possesses expertise that the public lacks, and the public has chosen to ignore the expert consensus. But these are a minority of the cases. Most individuals fighting for causes do not in fact know what they are doing.

## 5. Conclusion

Popular wisdom often praises those who get involved in politics, who vote in democratic elections, fight for a cause they believe in, and try to make the world a better place. We tend to assume that such individuals are moved by high ideals and that, when they change the world, it is usually for the better.

The clear evidence of human ignorance and irrationality in the political arena poses a challenge to the popular wisdom. Lacking awareness of basic facts of their political systems, to say nothing of the more sophisticated knowledge that would be needed to reliably resolve controversial political issues, most citizens can do no more than guess when they enter the voting booth. Far from being a civic duty, the attempt to influence public policy through such arbitrary guesses is unjust and socially irresponsible. Nor have we any good reason to think political activists or political leaders to be any more reliable in arriving at correct positions on controversial issues; those who are most politically active are often the most ideologically biased, and may therefore be even less reliable than the average person at identifying political truths. In most cases, therefore, political activists and leaders act irresponsibly and unjustly when they attempt to impose their solutions to social problems on the rest of society.

Perhaps the most dramatic example is that of Karl Marx, who famously commented that “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”[24, p. 145] Marx's greatest legacy is the practical demonstration, through twentieth-century history, of the consequences of changing a world that one does not understand. This is not the place to detail his misunderstandings, which have been discussed at great length by others. Let it suffice to say that despite the seriousness with which generations of intellectuals around the world have studied his works, Karl Marx's understanding of human beings and of society was minimal.<sup>13</sup> His influence on the twentieth century world, however, was unparalleled—and, as most observers now recognize, almost unbelievably malignant.<sup>14</sup> This is no mere accident. When one lacks a precise and detailed understanding of a complex system, any attempt to radically improve that system is more likely to disrupt the things that are working well than it is to repair the system's



imperfections. Marx's failure to improve society should have been about as surprising as the failure of George Washington's doctors to cure his infection by draining his blood.

Perhaps, one may hope, human beings will one day attain a scientific understanding of society comparable to the modern scientific understanding of most aspects of the natural world. On that day, we may find ways of restructuring society to the benefit of all. But we cannot now predict what that understanding will look like, nor should we attempt to implement the policies that we guess will one day be proven to be beneficial. In the meantime, we can anticipate many pretenders to scientific accounts of society, after the style of Marxism. These will be theories resting on dubious premises that only certain political ideologues find convincing. These ideologues may, as in the case of the Marxists, adopt the quintessentially unscientific attitude of regarding those who question the ideology as enemies to be suppressed.

Political leaders, voters, and activists are well-advised to follow the dictum, often applied to medicine, to "first, do no harm." A plausible rule of thumb, to guard us against doing harm as a result of overconfident ideological beliefs, is that one should not forcibly impose requirements or restrictions on others unless the value of those requirements or restrictions is essentially uncontroversial among the community of experts in conditions of free and open debate. Of course, even an expert consensus may be wrong, but this rule of thumb may be the best that such fallible beings as ourselves can devise.

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## Notes

1. The account in the text derives from Vadakan 2005.
2. See Caplan 2007, pp. 50-1, on the popularity of protectionism among the public and its unpopularity among economists.
3. Krugman 1987, p. 131. Krugman goes on to criticize standard free trade arguments, but nevertheless concludes that free trade is probably desirable overall.
4. For further defense of this kind of theory, see Downs (1957 , pp. 244-5) and Caplan (2007).
5. See my 2010; Simon 1999.
6. See Lindberg's (1992) history of ancient and medieval science.
7. This tendency is well-documented in psychology; see Gilovich 1991, chs. 3-4.
8. See Brennan 2011a, ch. 3, for a more thorough defense of these points.
9. This point is brought out most vividly by Read (2008); cf. Hayek 1945.
10. For discussion of the injustice of drug prohibition, see my 2009.
11. For fuller discussion of this issue, see my 2003.
12. See [www.againstmalaria.com](http://www.againstmalaria.com). As of this writing, GiveWell (a well-known charity review organization) rates this as the most cost-effective charity (see [givewell.org/international/top-charities/AMF](http://givewell.org/international/top-charities/AMF), accessed March 28, 2012).
13. See von Mises 1981 for an extended critique of Marxism and socialism.
14. Courtois et al. (1999) document the staggering atrocities of Marxist regimes in the twentieth century.

## Judgement in Politics: Responses to International Insecurity from Hannah Arendt and Immanuel Kant

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*Abstract:*

My paper compares a few of the key issues of Hannah Arendt's and Immanuel Kant's account on IR by revisiting the controversial reading she offered on § 40–41 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. It claims that by focusing closely on their parallel insights concerning the insecurity inherent to the supranational level of politics which was called by Arendt "the world" and by Kant "the cosmopolitan community of mankind", one can argue for her thesis on the high political relevance of the theory of judgement based on what Kant labelled as *sensus communis* in his aesthetics.

Kant held that political stability in national political communities is part and parcel of the upcoming emergence of an overall rule of the law on the global scale, while Arendt convincingly proved that totalitarianism (the formative experience of her thinking on human co-existence whatsoever) is a completely new and unprecedented form of government which substantially differs from other forms of governance. She also pointed out that this qualitative difference does not create a different world. The vulnerability of other, more traditional forms of governance is heightened by the advent of totalitarian politics exactly because of this unity in humans' world.

### 1. Introductory remarks

"The *Critique of Judgment* is the only [one of Kant's] great writings where his point of departure is the World and the senses and capabilities which made men (in the plural) fit to be inhabitants of it. This is perhaps not yet political philosophy, but it certainly is its *sine qua non*. If it could be found that in the capacities and regulative traffic and intercourse between men who are bound to each other by the common possession of a world (the earth) there exists an *a priori* principle, then it would be proved that man is essentially a political being." [1, p. 141—2]; quoted in [9, p. viii].

As this quote from her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* shows, the essence of Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Kant's political teaching is that the foundation of politics rests on the disinterested glance embracing the shared world. This principal idea discovered in Kant was consistent with her theory.

I aim to show in this paper that her interpretation is one of the most convincing attempts to apply Kant's pre-modernistic view on society and politics to a context after modernism. In Arendt's view, the main difference between Kant and the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal mainstream consisted in their attitude towards the world. 19<sup>th</sup> century liberals had a 'tactile' eye which expressed their basically appropriative attitude in relation with the world which resulted in the subordination of politics to the general system of appropriations, that is, to economics as Hegel and Marx described it. The acquiring-annihilating attitude, as Hegel pointed it out, is a more authentic one than the cultural-contemplative one, "the transformation of appetite itself into thought" [6, p. 53]. It was the

oeuvre of Marx that opened Arendt's eyes to the human being as "a consuming being" who, as Bikhu Parekh wrote it, "builds the world only to dismantle and recreate it to suit his constantly changing needs." [27, p. 75] Unlike them, Kant insisted on what he called in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* 'disinterestedness' and in his essay on *Perpetual Peace* 'the right to visit' as a desirable and conceivable foundation of any intersubjectivity.

Thus, a thesis complementing the sympathetic readings of the Arendtian interpretation of Kant can be as follows: if humans' world is constituted principally by political action, then it would be possible also on the basis of Kant's proto-liberal premises and of his view on history and on public sphere to offer a theory of action which is not interest- and appropriation-oriented, irrespective of the fact that Kant actually chose another foundation of his political theory in the thesis on the individuals' autonomy. Arendt noticed that the theory of the relation between humans and their world offered by Kant comprised also a theory of the communicability of this very same relation which is based on the contemplation instead of the appropriation of the world – that of the aesthetic glimpse. [10, p. x] The opposition between the 'beautiful' and the 'I like' as a manifestation of the rights of a non-possessing eye has one single function, that is the appellation to judgement and consent.

Arendt's views on culture prove that the opposition between appropriative and disinterested attitude intrigued her. This conceptual opposition is a central notion of Arendt's philosophy of culture: in her *Crisis in Culture* she distinguished between consuming and non-consuming attitude towards culture. She saw 'bad' politics, mass society, and culture of consumption interconnected with a possible antithesis of 'good' politics, healthy society, and non-appropriative enjoyment of culture. The reason behind is that the enjoyments of mass society are destined only to "while away time" [2, p. 9], that is to say, free time, which should be the basis of any political action, loses its central role in the life of individuals:

"Mass culture comes into being when mass society seizes upon cultural objects, and its danger is that the life process of society [...] will literally consume the cultural objects, eat them up and destroy them. Of course, I am not referring to mass distribution. When books or pictures in reproduction are thrown on the market cheaply and attain huge sales, this does not affect the nature of the objects in question. But their nature is affected when these objects themselves are changed – rewritten, condensed, digested, reduced to kitsch in reproduction, or in preparation for the movies." [2, p. 10]

This diagnosis of the culture-destroying, consuming mass society makes clear that Arendt intended to grasp the meaning of cultural 'consumption' in its outer, reified appearance and not as fundamental characteristics of a civilisation. On the contrary, true culture, which is durable and not characterized by its functionality, belongs to the world. She established an analogy between cultural and political dichotomies by saying that culture isolates itself from the world of consumption like public sphere from that of the needs. Arendt's statement that the common feature of art and politics is their public visibility appears together with her claim of regarding Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* as his real political philosophy. This shows the way she connected aesthetics to politics, with laying less stress, as Ronald Beiner put it, on the Kantian common denominator of these spheres, namely autonomy. [8, p. 95 – 6]

She was of the opinion that the fate and future of morality in the world is doubtful, though preserving disinterestedness may shelter humankind from totalitarian rulers. Concerning the relation between politics and morality, Arendt thought that it is desirable that the morality of politics should be an 'inner' morality [31, p. 14] in a sense that it cannot be driven by self-interest affecting the use of the public space. According to Arendt's view, the agents appear in the public sphere without taking advantage of it (with symbolic politics). Still, it is hard to believe that Arendt did not know that Greek politics was also tainted with aim-rational morality and that she entertained illusions about the symbolic occupation of public space in modern politics. Nonetheless, it is plausible to argue for her efforts to safeguard, at least a part of the public sphere as a playground of the

expression of 'inner' morality, as a place of freedom where the 'disinterested' spectator can become visible. Without this reserve for 'inner' morality the symbolic, appropriative use of the political sphere threatens becoming total and in this threat Arendt could recognize one of the first steps leading to totalitarianism. She was not longing for the comeback of Greek democracy but she warned that by the destruction of this normative playground modern democracy takes the first step towards self-destruction.

Arendt did not deny the possibility of a political consensus concerning the use of the public space along the interests and aim-oriented moral principles, although she never ceased to emphasize the importance attached to that part of the public sphere where consensus is not reached on the basis of interests but on that of judgement. This kind of use of the public sphere does not aim its appropriation but reflects on politics while leaving it intact and, moreover, confirm its autonomy. This may be termed the 'aestheticization of politics' if reflection is the action of a disinterested gaze but it proves also that this 'aestheticization', in opposition to Dana Villa's claim, goes far beyond a broader use of the metaphor of the 'theatrum politicum'. [29, p. 12]

There is no proof of whatsoever that Arendt seriously considered the possible role of this disinterested gaze in politics. Her return to Kant is decisive as she forwarded the question to Kant: if disinterested pleasure is possible in aesthetics, it may be possible in politics, too. The answer to the question depends, of course, on the interpretation we attribute to the concept of judgement. Many think that the nature of our judgements is not similar to the judging reflection of an impartial mind confronted suddenly with its object. This attitude which is by no means alien to Kant is perhaps all too much attached to a presumably ideal psychology of art enjoyment.

The outcome of disinterestedness is a shared world instead of a divided one: Arendt and Kant agreed on this point. The unrestricted communication is a prerequisite of the suppression of 'sensus privatus' and of the public, that is intersubjective, reason's authority.[26, p. 74] This is the main issue of Arendt's reading of Kant: the safeguarding of a common, shared world without having to postulate an 'objective' human nature. [8, p. 92] The basic idea which shaped the attitude of the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism, the interwar period, and the Cold War was that of the originally divided world instead of a shared one. In Arendt's eyes, Kant's account of judgement is not embedded in the theory he drew in his essay *Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* but is enveloped in a broader theory. [29, p. 65]

## **2. Hannah Arendt – a Thinker after Totalitarianism**

In this part of the paper I shall argue that Arendt's way, eventually reaching her conclusions, began with the personal experience of totalitarianism. I consider Hannah Arendt as a thinker whose theory was not so much 'about' but rather 'after' totalitarianism. [31, p 4] First of all, I am interested in the way the experience of totalitarian regimes penetrated her thought to its aims, subject matters, and methods. Then turning to totalitarianism itself as a historical phenomenon one can state that it is the total negation of the changeability of the world, i.e., of the action. However, it is, at the same time, the phenomenon that spurs the individuals to action by awakening their sense of morality. My aim is to show that Kant's teaching, in Arendt's interpretation, might prove helpful in these borderline situations. The exposure to the totalitarian dictatorship prompted Arendt to turn to the question of judgement, what, alongside with the idea of disinterestedness, led her way to the third Kantian *Critique*.

Dictatorship remained a recurrent theme of Arendt's writing. Her key moment came with the trial of Adolf Eichmann when she turned towards the problem of judgement. [7, p. 99, 11, p. 75] Her essay on *Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship* sheds light on her path from the personal experience of totalitarian regimes to the reflections on the nature of judgement in politics. The complete lack of judgement is unacceptable and the same applies to any kind of collective judgement (as for example the idea of collective guilt of Germans "from Luther to Hitler" [4, p. 21] because judgement belongs exclusively to individuals:

“Which in practice turned into a highly effective whitewash of all those who had actually done something, for where all are guilty, no one is. [...] There is no such thing as collective guilt or collective innocence; guilt and innocence make sense only if applied to individuals”. [4, p. 29]<sup>1</sup>

One can add that the notion of collective guilt seems to presuppose collective judgement and therefore endeavours to create an otherwise not necessarily existing social consensus or prejudice. However, judgement is, and indeed should be, in every aspect an individual mental act: individuals have to judge on the deeds of individuals but so that their judgement should form a communicable and morally coherent structure. This insight has not only a retrospective significance: the impersonality of collective judgement threatens to reproduce that faceless mass society whose appearance had led to the catastrophe. Thus, regaining and using their faculty of judgement enable the individuals to pose the question of responsibility. [4, p. 30 – 1]

Arendt’s narrative of the process of annihilating the power of judgement is based on her experience in National Socialist Germany. The first step was „the intrusion of criminality into the public realm” [4, p. 24] but the moral problem was posed by the presupposed ‘hindering’ of historical *telos*: „this very early eagerness not to miss the train of History”. [4, p. 24] The majority of the Germans, she wrote,

„were not responsible for the Nazis, they were only impressed by the Nazi success and unable to pit their own judgment against the verdict of History, as they read it. Without taking into account the almost universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal *judgment* in the early stages of the Nazi regime, it is impossible to understand what actually happened.” [4, p. 24]

Her *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* connected the Kantian themes – disinterestedness and judgement – with that of despotic regimes. She linked the experience of totalitarianism with the fact that others’ behaviour becomes utterly unpredictable, as she highlighted: “if you go through such a situation [as totalitarianism], the first thing you know is the following: you *never* know how somebody will act.” [1, p. 115] Thus, one of the first consequences of totalitarianism is the undermining of sociability. This also explains why Arendt applauded the signs of social solidarity in the Hungarian upheaval 1956. [13]

A clear consensus exists between Arendt and Kant the philosopher of history on the necessity of taking a judging position differing from the routinely used one which nevertheless remains inside of historicity. Judging spectators should not apply a timelessly moral perspective to certain processes in history. Arendt rejected this Kantian solution as Kant himself rejected it at the end of long decades of reflecting on the relation between morals and politics. The point is that judging individuals have to choose another historical perspective to apply to these events: different in several aspects (chronological scale, point of observation) from their everyday perspective. Then, this different perspective, which is the result of abstraction and as such the essence of the autonomous judgement, has to be shared with others. This is an eminently Kantian problem and also a major argument justifying the opinion that Arendt’s critical interpretation based on the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* was not directed against the whole written political doctrine of Kant but only against its utopian conclusion.

That is the reason why Arendt asked: „How can you think, and even more important in our context, how can you judge without holding onto preconceived standards, norms, and general rules under which the particular cases and instances can be subsumed?” [4, p. 26] It is just everyday historical experience that provides us with these „preconceived standards” and just the abstraction from these standards has to be presupposed and this is why Arendt’s answer is as follows:

„For only if we assume that there exists a human faculty which enables us to judge rationally without being carried away by either emotion or self-interest, [...] can we risk ourselves on this very slippery moral ground with some hope of finding a firm footing.” [4, p. 27]

The adjective ‘preconceived’ seem to make reason historical, as if the categorical structure of our concepts of understanding would be a matter of habit:



“In the light of these reflections, our endeavouring to understand something which has ruined our categories of thought and our standards of judgment appears less frightening. Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume that particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Arendt emphasized the prudential side of Kant’s theory: she considered it the frame of his real political philosophy in opposition with his written doctrine on morality. Arendt also suggested that because of the impossibility of achieving morality humans have to be reconciled with a prudence-based coexistence instead. (A community on the basis of moral principles would be, according to Kant, a religious community: Arendt put this possibility aside and instead accentuated of the private essence of religion. [14]) With her thesis on the unwritten Kantian political philosophy Arendt suggested that Kant’s intention was to find a community based on prudence but she also suggested that his written political philosophy intended something else, namely the community based on morality.

Arendt’s reading laid stress on a special feature of politics, namely, that the actor and the spectator are intermingled so as that they cannot be separated completely. [17, p. 97] According to Arendt, something similar happens to the life of individuals under totalitarian rule, namely, that no one can avoid becoming a part of the system nor can they beat or bypass it any way. Kimberly Hutchings directed attention to Arendt’s reading of Kant’s concept of the spectator judging history:

“Arendt bases her claim as to the essentially political nature of judgment on her reading of the role of the *sensus communis* in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, and on her reading of the figure of the spectator or philosophical judge which emerges from Kant’s essays on enlightenment, peace, history and the contest of the faculties”. [17, p. 93]

### 3. Judgement and Social Communication in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement*

Although in the third *Critique* Kant discussed the qualities of taste – individual or social, Arendt claimed having found the germ of his political philosophy in there, namely, in the §§ 40–41. In the next part of my paper I put under scrutiny Arendt’s proposition by a close reading of the §§ under question.

The prominence given to the collective thinking about sociability and to the digressive nature of these paragraphs supports Arendt’s thesis. These two paragraphs are an evident digression in the text and what is even more they contain a great number of further digressions which, of course, may indicate to an even less clear-eyed reader than Arendt that something of utmost importance must be discussed there if Kant kept returning to it despite its apparent irrelevance to his principal subject-matter. Indeed, there is politics in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, even if only marginally and it is contained in the digressions of these two paragraphs.

First of all, I shall explore the Kantian idea of *sensus communis* to evaluate correctly Arendt’s interpretation. Arendt must have noticed that Kant, for whom thinking is normally a solitary activity, while regarding it in the *Critique of Judgement* as a social activity, had to presuppose that thinking in company can take place only in a shared world – in a divided world the possibility of co-thinking is denied to the humans.

According to § 40 of the *Critique of Judgement*, *sensus communis* is not a higher cognitive faculty but a way of thinking: a faculty to form judgement from a universal point of view. As the title of the § indicates, Kant regarded taste as “a kind of” [24, p. 173] *sensus communis*: he drew a loose analogy between them. Kant’s seemingly purposeless insistence on finding moral analogies to *sensus communis* indicates the importance of attaining this universal point of view. The parallel between the sense of community and the sense of justice leads towards a universal point of view by leaving behind the personal perspective of what is just or likeable. Kant’s claim is similar to that of Arendt: overriding the selfish perspective and putting yourself in your neighbour’s shoes help to

reach this universal viewpoint: “putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our judging”. [24, p. 174] This position means nothing else than abstraction of the limits and contingencies of our position: in a word, the abstraction of our interestedness.

Further, he dealt with common sense in the sense of “common human understanding”. [24, p. 173] There Kant spoke about the feasibility of putting yourself into someone else’s position by keeping your open-minded attitude: this propaganda of the Enlightenment clearly reiterates the point of his political writings and mirrors his written doctrine. Common sense means taking another individual’s position, that is to say: trying to foresee other peoples’ actions. Through a series of analogies Kant elucidated the similarity between taste and common sense: “One could designate taste as *sensus communis aestheticus*, common human understanding as *sensus communis logicus*.” [24, p. 175] They are universal, they are communicable, and they are embedded in sociability, only the former belongs to the power of judgement while the latter to the understanding.

Concerning the digression itself, the last section at AA 5: 293 makes clear that the author was aware of digressing from his main point: “The following maxims of the common human understanding do not belong here”. [24, p. 174] After debating the meaning of common sense Kant offered the following conclusion: the taste can be called common sense with more right than common sense as such, presumably because the shift of positions is only one of the characteristics of the latter, while it is the only and principal one of the former. Consequently, the definition of taste pivots around communicability: “Taste is thus the faculty for judging *a priori* the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation (without the mediation of a concept).” [24, p. 176]

In § 41, Kant first dealt with the interconnectedness of taste and sociability. Taste, according to Kant, has a lot in common with social communication, refinement, and humanity: hence, taste belongs to the sphere of ‘impure ethics’. [25] Kant even identified taste with refinement. [24, p. 171] But it is still a long way from politics: there Arendt has to assist us in bridging the gap between impure ethics and politics. This leap is understandable if we take into account Arendt’s special personal experience, that is, the emergence of the sphere of the social, its connection with the political as well as with the mass society (a phenomenon unknown to Kant) in the public sphere, and the appearance of irrationality in politics. But all this is just another digression on Kant’s part, since the relation of taste to sociability is of empirical nature and therefore touches the matter, that is, *a priori* judgements of taste, only indirectly. The transition from the agreeable to the good is labelled as “ambiguous” [24, p. 171], just with regard to the impure ethics of refinement which takes also the inclinations into consideration.

Later on, Kant articulated the idea that judgement of taste enabled humans as social beings to share their feelings equally with their thoughts. Sociability from this point of view means a very narrowly conceived community of communication with an overall agreement. This is a corollary of disinterestedness and its consequence is a surprisingly ‘social’ sociability of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*: while, unsocial sociability begins where interests and competitive society take over the communion of socializing humans.

Then § 41 offers an account on the genesis of culture. Kant argued that the social aspects of taste can be investigated only by taking the “empirical” interest into account. [24, p. 176] He elaborated the answer to the question why a community of taste, from this perspective, was necessarily a community of communication. Because, says Kant, it creates a sort of original contract, that is, a step preceding the *pactum associationis*: taste enhanced by interest is the necessary foundation of any civilisation and refinement. This reflection is, however, conspicuously termed a digression:

“However, this interest, attached to the beautiful indirectly, through an inclination to society, and thus empirical, is of no importance for us here, for we must find that importance only in what may be related to the judgment of taste *a priori*, even if only indirectly.” [24, p. 177]

There are further arguments for the political reading of the third *Critique* but Arendt who never evinced any interest in the eminently aesthetical problems of the sublime and the beautiful chose not to explore them. Neither the beautiful nor the sublime has anything to do with her thinking, she neither regarded works of art as essential parts of the world, nor corresponded her concept of the world with that of a limitless nature: her world is the Globe inhabited by humans. Kant, on his part, generally mistrusted political rhetoric which uses the beautiful prudentially, in order to achieve (one's own) goals. [24, p. 205] In the methodological chapter, his reflections on a "lawful society" refer to eventual political connotations. [24, p. 229] Moreover, he used political metaphors in the analytic of the sublime. In the case of the dynamically sublime the nature shows strength and it is sublime because it awakens humans to their vocation over nature: "Thus nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to the point of presenting those cases in which the mind can make palpable to itself the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature." [24, p. 145] This is why the General, and not the Statesman, is the right metaphor of the aesthetic judgement: "war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it". [24, p. 146]

To sum up: Arendt's opinion that the main theme of the §§ 40–41 is the co-thinking in a shared world proved to be mostly correct. The importance of these digressions should by no means be underestimated: still, Arendt failed to draw together the threads of the whole intersubjective world of the third *Critique* and that of her political theory. All she did was to decipher the meaning of a digression. With her extreme sensitivity towards the problem of judgement, Arendt must have noticed that in the third *Critique* Kant regarded thinking as a social activity which implicated that it can take place only in a shared world, since a divided world denies humans the possibility of co-thinking. Furthermore, her original insensitivity towards the problem of the beautiful also came into play in her reading of Kant's aesthetics.

#### 4. Kant on International Relations

The idea of the disinterested use of the shared world, especially at supranational level, is present in Kant's essays. Arendt is more indebted to the principal idea behind these writings than she actually acknowledged this fact in her texts. Kant dealt with international relations in Chapter 7 of his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. He held that humans cannot yet see the end of their road through history but he was convinced that progress can be saved by a finely balanced system of self-interests which may prove beneficiary on the long run. [19, p. 50 – 1] In *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Project* he postulated the possessing behaviour as the basic feature of human nature: therefore the states, which are composed of humans, are a hundredfold prone to this faulty conduct. Still, he was convinced that there existed a way out of the actual interstate relation which is fraught with "the malevolence of human nature" [22, p. 326]. Arendt having narrowly escaped the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century held a different opinion. In her view the idea of real progress seemed to be hopelessly mistaken.

The prohibition of the use of other people as a means, this deep insight of the Kantian *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* remains valid not only in his philosophy of history [20, p. 225 – 6] but is analogously expanded in his political philosophy. A state is and should be as autonomous as an individual and, as Kant wrote in his *Toward Perpetual Peace*, "to annex it to another state as a graft is to do away with its existence as a moral person into a thing". [22, p. 318] Kant opposed the possessive relationship at the level of international relations while Arendt similarly disagreed with any satellite-type international alliance with Russia or the USA in its centre. [13] Seeking the principles of "any rightful constitution", Kant considered the individuals, the supranational relations, and the inhabited world, respectively as, the "individuals within a people", the "states in relation to one another", and "citizens of a universal state of mankind". [22, p. 322] Kant's chief argument concerning the free dwelling of humans on the Earth, the right to visit is based on the belief in what Arendt would almost two centuries later call 'the shared world':

“this right, to present oneself for society, belongs to all human beings by virtue of the right of possession in common of the earth’s surface on which, as a sphere, they cannot disperse infinitely but must finally put up with being near one another; but originally no one had more right than another to be on a place on the earth.” [22, p. 329, 23, p. 450]

However, “commercial states” exhibiting inhospitable behaviour adopt a possessive attitude towards foreign peoples which “goes to horrifying lengths”. [22, p. 329] The developing ways of communication caused a new sensation amongst, first of all, the people of Europe: “a violation of right on *one* place of the earth is felt in *all*”. [22, p. 330] Therefore Kant worked towards a practical solution for the problem caused by the increasing injustice and the general consciousness of insecurity. The proposed solution aimed the same target as Arendt’s project: to transform humans “with their self-seeking inclinations” into good citizens without the requirement of moral perfection. [22, p. 335] Although rulers cannot be expected to achieve this goal: “since possession of power unavoidably corrupts the free judgment of reason”. [22, p. 338]

To summarize: both stood on a rather utopian ground. The fields in which Arendt and Kant the philosopher of history worked had corresponding features but Kant’s aims and conclusions were different: he intended to reconcile the malevolent human nature with the overall historical progress of morality on the one hand and with legality in politics on the other. Facing the choice between political prudence and morality, Kant preferred the latter in the hope that it will promote the ultimate goal (that is legal government and perpetual peace). [22, p. 334] Kant held that the moral principles, for “people within a state as well as states in their relations” should prevail, “regardless of what objections empirical politics may bring against them”. [22, p. 346 – 7] That is the reason why he urged federation between states as a guarantee of this construction. In Kant, the foundation of the state (i.e., of politics) is not publicity but legality. This non-appropriative principle by which he meant the prohibition of acquisition, the necessity of federation, and the fair treatment of your neighbour without being biased by self-interest was the basis of his doctrine, while Arendt subsumed these concepts under the all-embracing notion of disinterestedness. This common utopian ground of morality reconcilable with prudence on the one hand and disinterestedness on the other is the link between the two theories.

## 5. Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that Arendt’s reading of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement* was in need of correction and completing: what was the intention of this paper, too. In the period after modernity Hannah Arendt was among the first to turn to Kant’s oeuvre to challenge his views on politics and on human sociability. However, the scope of her interest was in a certain way limited to the political implications of the third *Critique* and to the ever changing character of the notion of sociability. Later this view was broadened by Ronald Beiner who corrected Arendt’s interpretation in fundamental ways. He emphasised the prudential aspect of judging [7, p. 104] as well as the fact that the ‘enlarged mentality’ as the ground of social thinking is the presupposition of any judgement. Ernst Vollrath further complemented this picture remarking that in politics behind the appearance there was no ‘thing in itself’ and that the power of judgement can be substituted for an action in a negative way: humans endowed with power of judgement may hinder the emergence of despotic rule. This means that Arendt never ceased to expect and fear the raise of despotic rule in any part of the world, she cautioned to be continuously vigilant. Possessing a sound judgement seemed to be a good protection against falling for political appearance: “Those who possess taste, who are discriminating in things beautiful and ugly, good and bad, will be less likely to be caught off their guard in times of political crisis”. [7, p. 111]

I highlighted the importance of the experience of totalitarianism in the purpose of a better understanding of Arendt’s relation to Kant’s oeuvre. Arendt considered passivity as sufficient resistance against totalitarian regimes. However, her view exclusively depends on the mature power of judgement on the part of individuals involved in the affair and also mature dictatorship on the

other. Arendt, focusing primarily on the political playground (fit for adults with moral judgement), lost sight of the other side of life and did not take into account the possibility of being born into such a regime therefore having accustomed to it well before the formation of any judgement. Arendt's perspective was overtly predetermined by the experience of her own generation: a young, morally fit generation in its full power of judgement suddenly confronted with dictatorship.

Kant and Arendt were both looking for practical ways of human co-habitation but their starting points were widely different. Kant considered first of all the individual, Arendt the community. Kant described the workable ways of judging, behaving of the ideal individual which led to the system of civil rules of smaller communities. For Arendt, the distinguished place of human interaction and political activity is the polity which excluding the blood ties is open for adults for discussion and decision. The political for Kant is the consequence of human interaction while for Arendt it is the primary condition of it. But Arendt's views met radical challenge presented by dehumanizing totalitarian systems and a new breed of humans: mass men. Despite all this she never gave up the idea of the polity where humans can find dignity and communication.

In spite of the enormous difference in their personal experiences and starting points, their views concerning the level of international relations are strikingly similar. Both advocate that it should involve independent and free states (similarly to independent individuals) and that these relations should be grounded upon sound judgement, reason, and legality. Kant argued for a federation of states ruled by law, while Arendt warned against the dominance of superpowers.

The deepest similarity between them consists in their view of a shared world. It is this feature and not their common view on politics that rendered possible Arendt's reading. They share a similar vision of the historical road of humanity between progress and decline [12, p. 91] and it remains in the background of their picture of the *homo politicus*. The main difference between them consists in the fact that for Arendt this vision is complemented by a theory of public sphere. This public sphere exists at two levels: as the open sphere of the political community formed by individuals, on the one hand, and as a supranational sphere formed by political communities, on the other. In Kant, in harmony with his moral philosophy, it is the doctrine of the *Rechtsstaat* which emerges from this vision. The Arendtian and the Rawlsian theory of the political are equally rooted in Kant's political philosophy, but Arendt's theory springs from the random conditions, historical or anthropological, while Rawls's derives from the latent or not fully developed implications of the critical project. Arendt the storyteller [16, p. 287ff] can be compared with Kant the storyteller who in his essays on the philosophy of history presented the world history as a story. Humans have to use their power of judgement despite their obvious involvement in the actual happenings of history which hinders them to take a point of observation outside the process of history in time.

The connection Kant established between history and human beings judging history proved inspiring for Arendt. She developed forth the Kantian model by completing the story with the political chapter. According to her theory, any given constellation of a public space can be understood only with its precedents in time and the politician, like Kant's historian with philosophical insight, cannot occupy a point of view neglecting the burden of historical experience: their judgement should be characterized simultaneously by the consciousness of this experience and by the reflective attitude towards this experience. Kant did not link politics to historicity: according to him, political communities are based, within a social contract theory, on the autonomy (freedom) of individuals as an a priori principle.<sup>3</sup>

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## Notes

1. As she wrote in her 1968 essay 'Collective Responsibility', "Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal. It refers to an act, not to intentions or potentialities" (Arendt 2003b: 147).
1. Arendt: 'Understanding and Politics', quoted in Passerin D'Entrèves 1994: 106.
2. I wrote this paper as a Simon Visiting Research Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh in 2010.



## Saving Morality: A Case against Moral Neutralism

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### *Abstract:*

The purpose of this paper is to defend a position in metaethics, saving morality from certain reductionist attempts, and arguing that a moral point of view denotes a distinct attitude toward the world with a set of relatively stable conditions. I discuss the problem of demarcation between the moral and the non-moral domains, and contrast the two basic approaches – moral neutralism and moral descriptivism. Moral neutralism is defined as a view which builds no content requirements into the definition of moral rules, whereas moral descriptivism or essentialism places identifiable constraints on the content of an action-guiding principle if such a principle is to count as a moral, as opposed to a non-moral, rule. I show that adopting neutralism is tantamount to giving up ethical theory as a scholarly activity with a distinct subject matter altogether. It is further argued that W. Frankena's essentialist definition of morality, as well as a more recent view of Catherine Wilson, share a similar weakness and fall short from neutralizing neutralism. Finally, I propose a modification to the essentialist account of morality, which would significantly increase the resilience of such an account to attempts of reducing moral prescriptions to any action-guiding policy whatsoever, as long as such policy is sincerely adhered to and followed consistently. The proposed modification is described as a *Realism constraint*, and it refers to the connection between one's expectations of the outcome of observing a prohibition or following a certain rule and the actual consequences of following a given policy.

### **1. The Problem of Demarcation: Neutralism vs. Descriptivism**

Drawing a line between the moral and non-moral normative systems is a less familiar procedure than drawing a line between moral and immoral actions. Perhaps, for this reason, it is often assumed that the former distinction is self-evident. Yet, imagining oneself in a position of an anthropologist who discovers a previously unknown exotic culture with a complex system of social relations and a well-developed, albeit a very unusual, code of the socially acceptable behavior patterns, we can readily appreciate the difficulty of sorting out the many rules that the members of that society actually observe or the ones they claim to be important into the moral and non-moral categories. What should we take as the criterion of a *moral* rule? We may call it the *problem of demarcation*<sup>1</sup> between the moral and non-moral spheres.<sup>2</sup> 'The aberration of closeness' generally hides this difficulty when we consider the more familiar social arrangements such as our own society, but the problem is immediately felt as soon as we attempt to give a precise formulation of the distinctive features of the moral rules for conduct as opposed to the non-moral ones.<sup>3</sup>

On the most general level, one may arrive at two different kinds of *substantive* theories of what constitutes the moral point of view proper. To begin with, one may emphasize the close connection between the normative rules that prompt or prohibit certain types of behavior and the actions of agents who claim to accept those rules. On this view, the problem of specifying the *moral* rules (as opposed to the various non-moral guides) is a matter of observing which ones the members of a given society *actually* take as overriding, i.e., as taking unquestionable precedence in cases of conflict with other (non-moral) requirements. Morality, then, becomes coextensive with any action-



guiding code of conduct adopted by an individual or a group of people. And the problem of recognition of moral principles in a society is thus reduced to the problem of identifying those rules, whatever the content, that are actually observed and honored by the majority of members.

I will follow Kai Nielsen in referring to the position just introduced by the name of *neutralism*.<sup>[16]</sup> Neutralism in its pure form does not build any intrinsic constraints on the form or content of the moral principles, i.e., it remains neutral with respect to what those principles can be about or how they should be formulated.<sup>4</sup> It is rather primarily concerned with the functional, action-guiding character of those rules, and makes the fact of actual observance of the rules by the agents into the *constitutive* part of morality.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Bennett seems to advocate this position when he writes the following:

There could be dispute as to whether the springs of someone's actions constitute *morality*. I think, though, that we must admit that someone who acts in ways which conflict grossly with our morality may nevertheless have a morality of his own – *a set of principles of action which he sincerely assents to*,<sup>6</sup> so that for him the problem of acting well or rightly or in obedience to conscience is the problem of conforming to *those* principles. [2, p. 125]

We can further illustrate neutralism as a philosophical position by reference to a relatively recent and influential tradition. J. P. Sartre in his earlier existentialist writings advocates an ethical theory that ties the moral status of an action to a free, unimpeded choice by an individual.<sup>[17]</sup> There is no natural or supernatural fact, according to Sartre, that should constraint the use of the concept 'moral goodness'. It would be acting in 'bad faith' to justify one's decision, say, to go to war, by reference to some special feature of an action, its foreseeable consequences, an abstract moral principle or concrete advise by another. An action, whatever it is, becomes morally right (and morally relevant) precisely because it is freely chosen and performed by the agent in the absence of any constraints of that kind. Whatever external features of an act are there, it is our free *endorsement* of these features that explains the action, rather than the features themselves. On this view, however, morality ceases to have any definite content, and there can be no meaningful distinction between correct and mistaken use of moral predicates, as long as they are sincerely used. Any type of action or a state of affairs with any set of objective features can become morally relevant through the performative process of endorsement.

One of the consequences of adopting neutralism as a kind of substantive theory of the moral point of view is that we can now legitimately speak of the 'Nazi morality', 'Slave-owner's morality', the 'Ik tribe morality' and the 'Dobu morality'<sup>7</sup> (among others), without being accused of committing a category mistake. However perverse or unjustified were some of the racist principles practiced, for instance, by the Nazis, they were still the kind of principles that the Nazis took seriously and were implementing consistently in their conduct – i.e., the kind of principles that they, using Bennett's phrase, "sincerely assented to." As such, the set of *those* principles would constitute a peculiar *morality* of the Nazis, even if an extremely *bad* morality from our own perspective.<sup>8</sup>

Another implication of neutralism is that certain important categories are eliminated from the ethical discourse. For instance, neutralism, if accepted, would make the notion of *amoralism* all but empty. Indeed, it would deny the possibility of amoralism. An aggressive psychopath whose anti-social behavior can perhaps be subsumed under the principle "Always follow your immediate impulse" or the like, would not be devoid of morality altogether, according to neutralism, but would rather have an unusual moral code of his own. As Richard Garner remarks in criticizing a similar view,

Someone might say that the mere fact that we choose one course of action over another shows that we have moral principles. When "amoralists" behave as if they subscribe to moral principles, we can conclude that they

do subscribe to moral principles, perhaps without realizing it. [4, p. 283]

The actual behavior of amoralists can always be described as being in accordance with the rules and principles that they take as overriding. The principle of ethical egoism or any other principle that arbitrarily selects the group of people whose welfare is to count for more than the welfare of the outsiders is the kind of principle that can be held “sincerely” and manifested in one’s everyday conduct. Those accepting these principles would satisfy the behavioral and dispositional requirements set by neutralism, and can in fact be considered *moralists* (as long as they do not deviate from the kind of behavior sanctioned by the adopted principles) by the people of similar moral convictions.

It is now clear that neutralism in metaethics undermines the foundations of moral philosophy as a distinct discipline. The designation of something as a “moral rule” becomes an honorific rather than a descriptive designation (meaning: “a very important rule”), and the study of moral rules and their influence on human behavior can be safely relegated to behavioral sciences. If *any* rule or *any* natural feature can become a moral rule or a morally relevant feature as long as they function in a certain way, there is clearly no need for a special discipline that would study morality. In this sense, neutralism can be seen as a reductionist theory.<sup>9</sup>

Besides an understandable concern for the future employment of moral philosophers should neutralism succeed, my opposition to the view is driven by a strong intuition shared by many people that, in R. Joyce’s words, “a system of values in which there was no place for condemning Nazi actions simply would not count as a *moral* system.” [10, p. 43.] The initial plausibility of neutralism depends to a large extent on the plausibility of the assumption that all alternative attempts at specification of the moral point of view that take into account the form and the content of moral principles, and that seek to establish a core set of non-relative moral requirements and objective moral values, fail. If no substantive account of morality can be justified, neutralism appears to be the only option left. Yet, there are reasons to believe that a defensible account of the moral point of view can be given which would encompass the constraints on both the form and the content of the rules of morality.

A *descriptivist* or *essentialist* account of morality implies that certain attitudes, normative judgments, principles, action-guiding systems or particular actions can be *excluded* from the moral realm using the definite criteria set up by the account. Descriptivism may assume many forms, but overall it seeks to restrict the domain of the morally relevant features of the empirical world so that to exclude certain normative systems from the list of *rival* moralities. This account can be characterized as a kind of *moral naturalism*, since it holds that certain factual considerations necessarily count for or against the ascription of moral terms. It further implies that simply using the language of morality and employing moral concepts and predicates in description of one’s behavior is not sufficient for taking a moral point of view. Rather, certain objective descriptive criteria<sup>10</sup> need to be satisfied for legitimizing the moral discourse.

In what follows I will look at the two versions of a descriptivist theory, each trying to specify the features necessary for demarcating certain rules or judgments from their non-moral counterparts. One such account was defended by William Frankena, and the other one was recently proposed by Catherine Wilson.<sup>11</sup> Despite their obvious differences, we will observe that both accounts share a similar weakness.

## 2. The Descriptivist Project

Much has been said and written in defense of the thesis that morality as we know it can be explained by or derived from self-interested considerations of rational agents. Hobbes’ classic model suggests a picture of humans, tired of life of unending confrontation, agreeing on certain behavioral constraints in order to improve the chances of their own survival, peaceful existence, personal security and prosperity.<sup>12</sup> This story with changing details was repeated many times by a

number of later philosophers and social scientists. John Stuart Mill, for instance, ultimately argues for the special place of justice in the system of moral values by telling an essentially Hobbesian story in the last chapter of “Utilitarianism”. According to Mill, the sentiment of justice derives its intensity from its link to the animalistic need for retaliation. But its moral force comes from the “impressive” kind of utility that is involved in rights violations - namely the interest of security. Justice has value only in so far, and as long as, it contributes to the overall increase of happiness. Furthermore, one can be motivated to promote justice and act morally if it is pointed out that, being the creatures that we are, we shall find the greatest happiness in living lives in accordance with utilitarianism. Mill argues, in other words, that one needs not fear that commitments to impartial requirements of utilitarian morality may incur heavy tolls on one’s own well-being. Quite the opposite – as people are educated to become more and more *impartial*, they will see – paradoxically – that their lives are getting better and better *for them*. [14, Ch.3.]

There is an equally authoritative tradition which argues that a self-interested consideration is the paradigm example of non-moral motive, and nothing properly moral can ever appear from such an ignoble source. Kantian ethics is certainly the most well-known representative of this line of thought. On Kant’s view, showing that an action was ultimately based on a selfish maxim is sufficient for disqualifying that action from the moral domain, no matter what the consequences for others. Indeed, no action or evaluative judgment can be genuinely moral for Kant unless it is performed on the basis of the maxim which is abstract enough to remain oblivious to the peculiar circumstances of the agent, i.e., his natural inclinations and private interests.<sup>13</sup>

A more recent exposition of the essentially the same intuition is defended by Catherine Wilson in her book “Moral Animals” (2004). Wilson suggests defining morality as *a system of advantage-reducing imperatives*, i.e., as a system of rules and prohibitions which compensate for natural inequalities within a society. She calls it a *semi-essentialist* definition because it points to the proper function of moral rules in addition to the content and form of those rules (e.g., the anonymity requirement). Attempts to provide a functional definition of morality are certainly well-known in the history of ethics. The distinctive function of moral rules and moral virtues was variously seen as contributing to (or being constitutive of) individual happiness, whether here on earth or in the life to come, or pleasing some supernatural being, or else, more influentially, as aiming at creating a possibility for peaceful coexistence of many people with different interests and various capacities within one society. A further development of that latter minimalist description of the purpose of morality may plausibly include its role in increasing the happiness of the greatest number of people, and in minimizing the amount of pain and suffering.

Wilson’s own conception of morality is worked out within the context of that classic tradition which sees the essential role of moral restraints in peacefully regulating the relations between several individuals or groups of people. There are, however, important new developments in Wilson’s account. Unlike Hobbes, who starts with the premise of universal *equality* of all humans – a condition that he sees as being primarily responsible for the constant war of all against all, and which eventually creates a need for agreeing on general rules regulating behavior, Wilson starts with the assumption of fundamental *inequality* of the members of a social group. It is because people are unequal in several important respects (e.g., physical strength, financial and intellectual power) that we need moral regulation to begin with. More specifically, Wilson sees the primary function of morality in that it controls and inhibits the spontaneous aggressive impulses which otherwise give advantage to the naturally stronger or smarter members of the social group. The goal here is to counterbalance natural inequalities in such a way as to increase the range of possibilities for the weaker members. Hence a paradigm form of a moral rule would be a categorical prohibition on a certain type of behavior, e.g., “Thou shall not do X!” Without this internalized prohibition a stronger individual might see no reason for not taking the property or even life of a weaker member of the group, which in turn would greatly reduce the chances for procreation and survival of the weaker party. The moral prohibitions, according to Wilson, seek first of all to offset the advantage of the naturally favored subjects (i.e., the one who could otherwise do X with impunity), and create a more favorable surroundings for the naturally or contextually disadvantaged ones:

*Moral rules are restrictive and prohibitory rules whose social function is to counteract the short or long term advantage possessed by a naturally or situationally favoured subject. A morality, in short, is a system of compensatory or advantage reducing imperatives that correspond to moral judgments.*[20, p. 9]

Wilson's view on the nature of morality creates an interesting contrast with Thrasymachus from Plato's "Republic", who saw justice as a normative system that serves the interests of the stronger. On the contrary, Wilson argues that morality, including that part of it concerned with justice, is primarily in the interest of the weaker party. In this she follows in Nietzsche's steps, although without his scornful feelings about the whole moral project.

By emphasizing the preventive, restraining role of moral rules, Wilson captures much of our intuitive thinking about the aim of morality and the content of moral values. We are outraged when we hear that a person was hired or promoted when we also know of his or her close relationships with the boss. The existence of such a relationship, we tend to think, creates an unfair advantage, which excludes the equally qualified candidates from consideration from the start. The morally right thing to do in the present context, we might agree, is to create a more equal opportunities for all parties and to exclude favoritism.

Still, Wilson's characterization of morality seems to be both too broad and too narrow, as she herself recognizes. She considers the following objection: "Many moral rules are not compensatory or advantage-reducing, and many advantage-reducing or compensatory rules are not moral." [20, p. 13] The first category would include some highly esteemed prescriptions (e.g., a commandment to rest at a certain day of the week) which are hard to interpret as being in the interest of a disadvantaged party. The second category might include ordinary rules of prudence, certain game rules, as well as, say, laws that exempt poor families from paying taxes. All this amounts to saying that Wilson's biggest challenge comes from the side of those theorists who deny that there can be any "cross-culturally valid characterization of a moral rule" and who argue that "to designate a rule as moral is [merely] to single it out as an especially important personal conduct rule," [20, p. 14] i.e., from a position that we have earlier identified as neutralism.

Wilson attempts to meet the neutralist's challenge by offering two responses. First of all, a semi-essentialist, when faced with the *prima facie* non-compensatory rules which are nonetheless singled out by a culture or a group of people as especially important rules of personal conduct (e.g., rules prescribing a certain dress code) may simply insist that those who assert these kind of rules "are speaking or writing in an unusual dialect. [These rules] do not constitute moral rules; they are assignable to the neighboring category of restraining usage taboos applying to objects belonging to a sovereign entity, oneself or perhaps God." [20, p. 15] This initial response, however, amounts to a mere denial of the objector's view on the nature of morality, without yet giving an independent argument showing what is wrong with the neutralist's position.

But such an argument is clearly needed. Wilson's historical reference to the moral codes of antiquity can be seen as an attempt at providing an independent support for the general idea behind her interpretation of the moral rules. She cites historical evidence showing that much of what passed for morality in Ancient Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.E. had to do with the rules prohibiting taking advantage of the weaker subjects, such as orphans, widows, poor strangers, etc. It is not clear, however, how much does this single reference to Ancient Egypt help to substantiate the case. One may argue that historical evidence can support a certain view on the constitutive features of morality only if it is representative of all or most known cultures. In this case, however, one feels that the example of funerary inscription from the Egyptian Old Kingdom was tendentiously chosen, and that equally ancient moral norms (e.g., from the Old Testament) were unfairly ignored. But the latter contains many prohibitions which appear to have moral authority, and yet can hardly be interpreted as serving to offset the advantage of the stronger. By analogy, one would rightly feel suspicious about an argument for the truth of the Divine Command Theory which is supported by reference to the moral justificatory practices of the Old Testament.

Wilson's other response to the neutralist's challenge is somewhat more evasive. The strategy here is to concede that many of the presented action-guiding rules that, on the first glance, do not seem to function as advantage-reducing strategies (e.g., duties to self, rules prohibiting cloning or recreational drug-taking) have yet "the proposed moral marker to some degree" [20, p. 15] on the deeper analysis. A policy that, for example, prohibits the vending of surgically extracted organs may ultimately reflect worries about the "temptation to victimize helpless or needy persons that the profitable vending of organs would awaken;" and the prohibition on recreational drugs may be seen as a moral issue only if "such persons are conceived as escaping ordinary demands and responsibilities and as letting others down." [20, p. 16] Wilson admits further that these 'worries' and 'conceptions' "may be foolish worries or not," [20, p. 16] i.e., a certain rule may acquire the moral marker and thus become a moral rule in so far as the background justificatory story refers to its alleged advantage-reducing effect, but it need not be *true* that the rule in question in fact has that effect. Hence, Wilson concludes: "The semi-essentialist need have no objection to including rules mandating, say, women's hair covering, as moral rules, provided they are not taken without further explanation to be examples of central or focal moral rules and provided their advantage-reducing feature can be made apparent." [20, p. 16]

Wilson's hypothesis enters dangerous grounds when she concedes to the critic that a rule can become a moral rule depending on the background justification. The one and the same rule, e.g., 'Share your candy with your friends' "may function as a moral injunction not to tolerate the relative deprivation of others, or to be a prudential recommendation for achieving popularity." [20, p. 14] The claim that a social rule can have dual significance, as both moral and non-moral prescription, would not be accepted by some moral theorists (e.g., utilitarians), but is a familiar point in other moral traditions (e.g., Kantianism). There is, however, one important question that the defenders of the 'dual significance' theory must address. It is the question of the criterion that one should use in deciding whether a rule in question is moral or not. Wilson cannot mean that the problem of demarcation can be settled by looking whether the behavior sanctioned by the rule would indeed have a compensatory effect, since it is the *same* rule (and thus the same behavior with the same consequences that is sanctioned by the rule) that can be both moral and non-moral. So the demarcation must depend on some subjective features of the agent (e.g., his background beliefs or intentions) who adopts or prescribes the rule in question. But then, one might argue, Wilson's (semi)essentialist account of morality collapses into neutralism, since now practically any rule formulated in a certain way (so as to respect, for instance, the anonymity requirement) can be taken as a moral rule given the right background beliefs of the agent. "Everyone must sacrifice their firstborns to the god of the great river" may well be interpreted as a moral rule when combined with a sincere belief of a local shaman that otherwise the angry god will destroy the crops of poor villagers. I take this consideration as being quite crucial for the survival of moral essentialism.

We can somewhat clarify the objection just mentioned by considering another attempt to escape the claws of neutralism. In an account that has approached a classical status by now, William Frankena offers a plausible characterization of morality and it will be helpful to quote his description of the moral point of view at some length here:

My own position, then, is that one is taking the moral point of view if and only if (a) one is making normative judgments about actions, desires, dispositions, intentions, motives, persons, or traits of character; (b) one is willing to universalize one's judgments; (c) one reasons for one's judgments consists of facts about what the things judged do to the lives of sentient beings in terms of promoting or distributing non-moral good and evil; and (d) when the judgment is about oneself or one's own actions, one's reasons include such facts about what one's own actions and dispositions do to the lives of other sentient beings as such, if others are affected. One has a morality or moral action-guide only if and insofar as one makes normative judgments from this point of view and is guided by them. [3, pp. 113-14.]

Frankena lists here four distinct characteristics of the moral domain. The very last sentence in the quote above suggests that he takes each of these four features to be necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for taking the moral point of view.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, accepting such a precise specification of the moral domain will not yet commit one to any particular theory in normative ethics. It is likely that a number of different and, perhaps, conflicting ethical theories would satisfy the four requirements. This fact will be relevant in the sense that it will tend to confirm that we are dealing here with the theories of *morality*, but it will yield no additional support for any of the specific accounts of the nature of moral obligation and moral rightness.

The initial feature deals with the possible objects of evaluative judgments. Frankena lists actions, desires, dispositions, intentions, motives, persons, or traits of character as the only acceptable objects of a *moral* normative pronouncement. First, the most basic constraint here is the constraint on the domain of the possible moral subjects. On one natural reading of Frankena's position, it is only *human* actions, desires and traits of character that can be evaluated from the moral point of view. Secondly, Frankena argues that we can morally evaluate one's actions, desires and dispositions, but we are not making a *moral* judgment when we, for instance, are making normative comments about one's looks, ethnic origin or one's linguistic accent. There are intuitively plausible constraints on what can be taken as a morally relevant feature of agents. Not every aspect of a person can be the proper object of moral assessment. Frankena's extended list of the morally relevant features can perhaps be reduced to *intentional actions* as the primary bearers of moral value.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, one's intentions, desires, motives and character can be taken as morally relevant in a *derivative* sense only – their moral relevance is parasitic on the fact that they tend to affect and produce certain types of actions.<sup>16</sup> In a possible world where there is no connection between one's 'inner' state and one's outward behavior, the moral evaluation of one's intentions and desires would be quite out of place.

If actions are the primary bearers of moral value,<sup>17</sup> then one is taking a moral point of view if (minimally) one makes a normative judgment about one's actions or any other feature of the inner state or character that may affect or lead to actions. At the same time, a refusal to make such a judgment in relevant circumstances may (occasionally) indicate a non-moral stance assumed by an observer. But clearly not every instance of a judgment about human behavior warrants the name of a moral judgment. I may strongly disapprove of one's conduct without yet expressing a moral disapproval, as when I disapprove of the handling of the puck by a hockey player on the ice. In addition, Frankena argues, one must be willing to universalize one's judgment and be able to justify it in the right way.

The requirement of universalizability is a formal requirement on a moral judgment or principle, a constraint that deals both with the way it is (ideally) formulated and its intended scope. It is a requirement that excludes from the moral realm all evaluative formulations whose validity is essentially tied to the specifics of the place, time and circumstances in which a judgment is made. If one judges a certain action to be morally right or wrong, one is committed, given this requirement, to pass the same judgment on all relevantly similar actions as well. At the very least, it rules out mere numeric differences between the two actions or persons as irrelevant. More formally, as Mackie suggests, this implies that "a judgment containing a proper name or indexical term used not as a variable but as a constant will not yet be universalized," [13, p. 84.] and thus anyone making this kind of judgment is not making a moral judgment, but rather a non-moral one. In this sense, the requirement of universalizability amounts to the requirement of being sincerely willing to apply the same prescription or evaluation to oneself as well as to others, as long as there are no relevant qualitative distinctions between the cases.

This last condition is related to Wilson's 'Anonymity requirement' for moral judgments. She places the following formal constraint on the way moral rules are expressed:

Prescriptive proposals, even if they arise from within particular cultural settings and reflect the concerns of creatures known to be partial to themselves, presuppose a detached perspective. There is an anonymity

requirement on moral theorizing. [...] The requirement implies that the endorsement and propagation of norms that differentially serve the interests of the particular reference class that endorses and propagates the norm qualifies as ideology, not moral theory proper. [20, p 23]

Both Wilson and Frankena require that moral rules are formulated and applied without bias, treating all similar cases and all similar subjects of moral evaluation in a similar way. The point is quite familiar, and it brings to mind the venerable image of a blind-folded justice, impartially weighting the evidence. Admittedly, there remains much vagueness as to what counts as relevant or irrelevant difference between cases or people, but, for our purposes, it is primarily important to notice what kinds of normative systems this requirement *excludes* from the set of rival moralities, relegating them to the class of personal policies, political or religious ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

The third condition from Frankena's account deals with the kind of *justification* that a proponent can provide for his normative judgment, granted that the judgment is about human actions and the proponent is willing to universalize it in the relevant sense. The justification condition is the central issue here. The first two requirements are still not restrictive enough to eliminate a number of *prima facie* non-moral rules and non-moral evaluative judgments, such as "it is despicable that Glenn does not cross his hands twice when entering a house." The judgment is about Glenn's actions, and the proper name used in this context is a variable that one might be willing to substitute with a universal quantifier. But, on this view, it is not a moral judgment unless one makes it for the right kind of *reasons*:

It seems to me that what makes some normative judgments moral, some aesthetic, and some prudential is the fact that different points of view are taken in the three cases, and that the point of view taken is indicated by the kinds of reasons that are given. [3, p. 110.]

The right kinds of reasons, according to Frankena, are "facts about what the things judged do to the lives of sentient beings in terms of promoting or distributing non-moral good and evil." [3, p. 114] The non-moral good and evil can be variously specified, but it is traditionally explained in terms of pleasure and pain. The less tendentious formulation will employ the notions of well-being and ill-being, since the descriptive element contained in these two terms is marginal (as compared with 'pain' and 'pleasure' or even 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'), which in turn allows for greater flexibility in formulating a *substantive* theory in normative ethics.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Frankena specifies the possible recipient of the non-moral good as a 'sentient being', a category that encompasses humans, animals and (potentially) any other creatures capable of experiencing pain and pleasure.

There is, however, an important ambiguity in Frankena's characterization of the third condition, which will refer back to a similar ambiguity in Wilson's account as well. This ambiguity can be illustrated by the following two examples. In the first case, a witch-doctor makes an evaluative judgment "It is always wrong to spit in the direction of the Great Forest", and, when prompted, explains it by reference to the bad-tempered Evil Spirit, who lives in the forest, and who tends to get offended by these kind of actions. As a result, the Evil Spirit might destroy the crops by causing the drought, which will hurt the community. In the second case, a scientist claims that it is wrong to divert the river from its current course, and justifies his judgment by arguing that the lack of water will cause a drought, which will hurt the crops, and, ultimately, hurt the community. The relevant difference between the two examples is that, in the first case, the witch-doctor is clearly mistaken in his factual beliefs about the damaging effects of spitting, whereas in the second case, the scientist is probably correct about his predictions. Does the witch-doctor then make a genuine *moral* judgment?

More generally, we can ask whether the justification story for one's evaluative judgment in terms of welfare changes has to be also *accurate*, in addition to it simply containing references to

(sincere) *beliefs* about the alleged consequences of actions, in order for that judgment to qualify as a moral one.<sup>20</sup> The emphasis on the objective accuracy of the justificatory story would exclude from the set of all moral judgments those prescriptions and value judgments which are based on clearly mistaken factual premises; whereas the more liberal interpretation would recognize the prescriptive claims of the above-mentioned witch-doctor as moral pronouncements despite the falsity of the justification story. Before settling the issue, we should look at both alternatives more closely.

Ronald Milo, among others, embraces the latter, liberal interpretation of the third condition when he writes:

If one holds that it is wrong to step on the lines of a pavement and if one's reason for thinking this is that this will cause great harm by bringing on a plague, then one may be said to accept this principle as a moral one. [15, p. 197.]

On Milo's view the thing that matters in deciding whether a person assumes a moral point of view or some other non-moral normative perspective is the subjective state of the person who makes a value judgment of some kind. In so far as he or she (sincerely) *believes* that stepping on the lines of the pavement will bring great harm, his proscription to do so assumes a moral status, and no further connection of those beliefs with reality is necessary.

This interpretation, however, cannot be accepted for the following reason. As we noticed earlier, the emphasis on the subjective side of justification of one's normative judgments threatens the descriptivist or essentialist account of morality to collapse back into neutralism. If one's beliefs about the facts how "the things judged" (e.g., actions) affect the welfare of sentient beings do not have to be true or even probable, but only, perhaps, sincere at most, then any normative judgment can be turned into a moral one by acquiring a necessary set of (false) beliefs about the consequences. It is conceivable that the normative claim "All members of the ethnic group X are evil, and thus should be exterminated" can be universalized in the required sense (even including the willingness to apply this prescription to the one who utters the claim if he turns out to be the member of this group), and justified by references to the alleged immense harm that the members of this group produce for the rest of the world. As long as the factual story is sincerely believed, on Milo's interpretation, it will be a peculiar *moral* judgment endorsing a genocidal policy. Yet, part of the motivation for embracing the descriptivist account of the nature of morality in the first place was precisely the promise that an account alternative to neutralism would exclude from the moral domain any system of action-guiding rules which incorporates this or similar prescriptions (e.g., 'Nazi morality'), and would further specify objective criteria for such exclusion. As the two recent authors keenly observe: "If you are able to honestly examine the moral arguments in favor of slavery and genocide, then you are likely to be either a psychopath or a philosopher." [5, p. 196] But, surely, they have meant a philosopher who adopted neutralism.

### 3. The Realism Constraint

If a descriptivist account is indeed to be a genuine alternative to moral neutralism, a more restrictive interpretation of the justification condition needs to be adopted. It should be formulated in a way that would exclude cases where the justification story behind a normative claim, which makes references to the alleged changes in welfare or an advantage-reducing effect of a certain prohibition, has no connection with reality. The modified interpretation, in other words, should respect the *Realism constraint*.<sup>21</sup> The Realism constraint, in the present context, brings a healthy dose of 'objectivity' into the otherwise purely subjective account of justification, which would refer only to one's beliefs, hopes and expectations about the outcome of observing a prohibition or following a certain rule.

I suggest, though, that it is neither necessary nor practical to demand that the justification of one's normative judgment in terms of (future) changes in the welfare of sentient beings as a result



of intentional actions must actually be true on *all* occasions when a judgment is made. Even if the above-mentioned scientist is accidentally mistaken in that particular case in his estimation of the adverse effect of the diversion of the course of the river, he is still making a genuine moral judgment, since it is presumably more likely than not that the substantial harm to the village will ensue as the result of these rash manipulations with nature. It seems sufficient to accept a probabilistic account of changes in welfare (or minimizing the disadvantages of the weaker subjects), using general experience and available scientific information as our primary guides in a specific situation. To be sure, all initial references to probability are inherently vague so that a number of borderline cases will always remain (e.g., *how* probable the alleged future harm needs to be in order for a prescription to qualify as a moral judgment, etc.). But adopting this interpretation will set certain objective constraints, and will at least allow us to say this much: Milo's example of "it is wrong to step on the lines of a pavement" will be a non-moral judgment in most contexts, whereas "it is wrong to let children play on thin ice" will be a *prima facie* moral claim, since, as long as we are talking about the actual world, the harm ensuing from playing on thin ice is much more likely to follow than the alleged plague that is believed to occur as a result of stepping on the lines of a pavement.

The proposed Realism constraint is meant to save a descriptivist account of morality of the type proposed by Wilson and Frankena from the collapse into moral neutralism. Admittedly, these are not the only ways of describing what a moral point of view amounts to, although they appear to be the most plausible ones. But it seems clear that any account of morality which harbors essentialist or semi-essentialist ambitions must built a similar constraint into its definition of morality.

A required bond between justification for a proposed normative rule or prohibition and the real world might be differently specified, with various degrees of strictness. On the one extreme, as we have seen, one might demand a perfect coincidence between the predicted effects of the rule-following (or rule-breaking) in a given case and the real set of consequences of one's actions. Yet, most would agree that this interpretation is too demanding, as it will exclude from the set of morally relevant rules or judgments the ones which warn of serious risks which (luckily) remain unfulfilled. "It is wrong to drive while under influence of alcohol" is a genuine moral evaluation for obvious reasons, even if on an occasion a drunk driver makes it home safely. Similarly, using Wilson's criterion, a proposed advantage-reducing imperative (e.g., a certain affirmative action policy) need not benefit the disadvantaged in all cases in order to count as a moral imperative. After all, a rule prohibiting using one's sexual charm while applying for a job may well leave an otherwise incompetent and, thus, a disadvantaged candidate, without the last hope of securing the employment.

Interpreting the Realism constraint in a too liberal way, on the other hand, would risk blurring the line between the moral and non-moral judgments, rules and prohibitions. If a judgment qualifies as a moral judgment as long as the justificatory story behind it is *sometimes* accurate, we open the door wide to a slippery slope regress, and, ultimately, to a reduction of normative sphere of morality to a purely descriptive discipline. Sure enough, it might well happen that someone, somewhere and for some reason could have gotten hurt when he saw a person stepping on the lines of a pavement, which would effectively bring Milo's rule into the moral domain.

We may also observe that the problem of application of the Realism constraint becomes less troubling as we move higher on the scale of generality of rules. "One should not exploit children's ignorance for personal gain or comfort" is a much more probable candidate for the moral domain than "One should not dismiss questions about sex when asked by one's children." The latter rule might well be a sound (or unsound) educational advice with no obvious moral implications, even though it can be plausibly derived from the former, more general prohibition.

What I hope to have done in this article is to have brought out certain deficiencies of the descriptivist accounts of morality and sketched one plausible way of overcoming them. The two versions considered are representative of the mainstream metaethical discussions in this area, and there good reasons to suppose that any alternative account of the moral point of view which as

much as recognizes that the effect of the rule-following on other sentient beings constitutes at least a relevant feature in determining its status as a moral rule, will face similar difficulties in spelling out the connection between the intended and actual consequences of a normative policy. The proposed Realism constraint is by no means a magic stick which would easily solve these problems – we have seen some inherent ambiguities in the constraint itself – but it is something that must be addressed by the philosophers who try to formulate the substantive theory of the nature of morality.

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## Notes

1. The phrase ‘demarcation problem’ used in the present context first appears in Catherine Wilson’s “Moral Animals” (2004), Chapter 1. But there is a well-known analogous problem of demarcating between science and pseudo-science (as opposed to making a distinction between good and bad science).
2. This problem of demarcation equally applies to moral *rules* and moral *issues* as well as to moral evaluative *judgments*. We may ask what makes the evaluative statement “This is a bad weapon” an instance of a *non-moral* judgment, as opposed to “He is a bad person”, which is a *prima facie* moral judgment. We will still need to have some criterion to be able to make these distinctions. For brevity sake, I shall talk mostly about moral rules and principles but much of the same reasoning will apply to judgments as well.
3. We can mention the rules of prudence (e.g., “Always stay away from stray dogs”), the rules of etiquette (e.g., “Always hold your fork with the left hand”) and the game rules (e.g., “Move your pawn in such and such a way”) as examples of the *prima facie* non-moral rules.
4. Ethical Relativism, as a theory in normative ethics, presupposes the truth of moral neutralism, but is not identical with it.
5. It is possible to give both the *objective* and *subjective* formulations of neutralism. In the former case, it would be defined (as I did) in terms of empirically observed behavior of the agents, while in the latter case, the emphasis is given to the inner attitude of approval or disapproval that an agent acquires when presented with a principle of conduct or an occasion for a certain type of behavior (e.g., ‘X is wrong’ is defined as ‘X rouses indignation in me’). As long as there are no references to content, form, goals or grounds of these attitudes, and ‘whatever principle is (strongly) approved’ is used as the criterion by which we distinguish between the moral and the non-moral, we still have a version of neutralism. Since it is natural to expect that the attitudes of approval or disapproval will be (generally) manifested in one’s behavior, I shall mainly refer to conduct here.
6. My emphasis.
7. The anti-social and uncooperative patterns of behavior of the Ik culture in Uganda are documented by Colin M. Turnbull in “The Mountain People” (1987). The peculiar behavioral code of the Dobu culture of New Guinea was described by Ruth Benedict in her “Patterns of Culture” (1936/1989).
8. A short excerpt from Himmler’s speech given in 1943 in front of SS audience may illustrate this: “We had the moral right vis-à-vis our people to annihilate this people which wanted to annihilate us. But we had no right to take a single fur, a single watch, a single mark, a single cigarette, or anything whatsoever...” (quoted in Vetlesen, 1994, p. 110). What is peculiar about this SS Weltanschauung is that the theft of a cigarette is morally wrong, but the collective annihilation of millions is part of one’s moral duty.
9. For more detailed criticisms of neutralism see Milo, 1984, Chapters 6 & 7.
10. That is, criteria that are relatively stable and do not shift from individual to individual.
11. For reasons that will hopefully become clear, I violate the chronology and discuss Wilson’s account before Frankena’s.
12. Hobbes version of the origin of morality in the “Leviathan” (1651/1984) is probably the most widely known. But he is by no means the first philosopher to propose a similar account. Hobbes’ main ideas can be traced back at least to the writings of Lucretius in the first century B.C.E. (“On the Nature of Things”).
13. Admittedly, there are alternative interpretations of Kant’s position, which tend to mitigate this requirement, especially with respect to imperfect duties (e.g., Barbara Herman, 1996). But nothing in the argument to follow depends on a particular interpretation of Kantian ethics.
14. The last, fourth, requirement, of course, is only conditionally necessary – it applies only to cases when the self-referential evaluative judgments are made.
15. The question what precisely makes *some* actions morally relevant events cannot be fully discussed here. I suggest that there are two interrelated features. First, an action is morally relevant if it is intentional, i.e., *free* in some acceptable sense of this word. Secondly, it is morally relevant if it is a type of event that may affect the wellbeing of others.
16. Kant famously argues for what appears to be the opposite view. For Kant, it is the will (which includes intention) that is good or bad in the primary sense, and actions have positive moral value only derivatively, in so far as they are the products of the good will. (Kant, I. 2001, p. 1) But Kant still recognizes the connection between good will and moral actions when he argues that the moral status of an action might be questionable *because* it might be the result of, say, selfish motives. His further claim that a good will would still “shine like a jewel” even if no actions were to follow seems counterintuitive.
17. We do sometimes apply moral predicates to states of affairs, e.g., “this system is unfair.”, but these statements can in principle be analyzed as referring to the actions of particular persons or groups of people.
18. This does not imply that any rule with the *less-than-universal* scope of application is a non-moral rule. Morality is essentially scalar, and certain rules may be ‘more moral’ than others. For an argument to this effect see Zavaliy, A., 2010. But it seems clear that the overly restrictive policies, such as personal ethical egoism, would not pass this test. As Kai Nielsen observes: “Personal ethical egoism isn’t a malign, satanic or cynical morality because it isn’t a morality at all. [P]ersonal egoism is a mere contempt for moral considerations

- altogether and this is not a moral code at all. It is not even something that could be intelligibly and coherently proclaimed as a morality” (1989, pp. 158-9).
19. Hare objects that “to put this restriction upon the use of the term ‘moral’ is to write some kind of utilitarianism into its definition.” (1963, p. 163). This seems to be an overstatement, since all that such content-based definition of morality implies is that the fact about human welfare must constitute at least a *relevant* reason for making a moral judgment. There is nothing in this definition of morality that specifies the weight one should assign to these reasons, or the extent of impartiality with which one should consider these facts. Both Kantian ethics and Utilitarianism are compatible with Frankena’s understanding of morality defended here.
  20. This question is not identical to the more familiar question of what should determine the *moral worth* of an action, its actual consequences or the intention of the agent.
  21. Wilson does introduce a ‘reality constraint’ in Chapter 2 of “Moral Animals” (p. 49), but not as an element of the demarcation problem between moral and non-moral domains. The constraint helps Wilson to introduce the notion of a ‘moral para-world’ in order distinguish good or acceptable moral rules from poor or unacceptable rules (which still remain *moral* rules in the wider sense).

## Enoch Powell, Immigration and English Nationalism

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*Abstract:*

Focusing on the nature of the intra-national relations among ‘indigenous’ British peoples and their attitudes towards the ‘alien’ population that had started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s, I propose that Enoch Powell’s 1968 speeches reflected a ‘traditional’ stance towards the colonial ‘other’ as well as a concern about the demographic changes taking place in parts of Britain, especially in England, in the late 1960s. I then approach the British political elite’s treatment of Powell in the context of the prevailing institutionalised dislike for so-called populist politicians and populist politics in Britain, arguing that this was a ‘timely’ intervention to curb the rise of ‘ethnic’ English nationalism when Britain was moving from an Empire to a nation-state. The essay concludes with an assessment of the impact of Powell’s outright castigation by the officialdom on British politics and the immigration debate in Britain.

### 1. The British Empire and multiculturalism

Referring to the 1858-1914 period, the heyday of colonialism, Stephen Neill notes:

The foolish and unnecessary Crimean war had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion; the Indian Mutiny had been suppressed, with terrible deeds on both sides. Peace reigned almost unbroken for more than half a century. The whole world was open to Western commerce and exploitation, and at a point after point Western man had demonstrated his military superiority to any enemy that had entered the field against him. The day of Europe had come.<sup>1</sup> [16, p. 273]

The period in question was especially favourable to the British Empire. Imperial Britain had learnt a valuable lesson from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 regarding its future treatment of the subjugated peoples. The end of the mutiny brought to an end the rule of the East India Company. From 1858, the British Crown took direct control of India. Throughout their presence in India since the start of the seventeenth century, unlike other European colonisers of this huge country, the British had tried not to interfere too much with the Indians’ religions, cultures, costumes and traditions. As long as the Indians paid their taxes regularly, the British were happy to maintain their detached attitude.

Britain’s colonial policy in South Asia, unlike that of Portugal and Spain, on the whole was never inspired by or presented as a religious mission. In spite of some efforts by the Church of England and other British Protestant sects to convert to Christianity as many Indians as possible, the British did not go to India to claim it in the name of Christ but for its wealth. India was immensely important to Britain especially by the time the British lost their first empire in North America and tried to build their second empire in Asia and later on in Africa.

This typically British ‘non-interference’ policy in India was often unwittingly compromised by the officials of the East India Company, especially in the 1840s and 1850s. The greed for profit had made some British officials increasingly cruel and insensitive to the Indians’ various traditions, cultures and religions. Indian farmers, *sepoys* (native Indian soldiers enlisted in the East India Company’s army), and aristocrats were becoming increasingly annoyed by heavy taxation, land appropriation, racist attitudes and annexation of several Indian kingdoms.

To address the deteriorating situation, the British Crown hastened to convince the Indians, especially the Indian elite classes, that Britain was committed to respect their ancient, rich and varied religious and cultural heritage. This new official policy was expressed very clearly in Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858:

*Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects. We declare it to be Our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law... And it is Our further will that, so far as may be, Our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in Our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity, duly to discharge.*<sup>2</sup> [16, p. 274]

As it is obvious from the royal proclamation, the British masters were eager to assure their Indian subjects, and for that matter all the colonised peoples, that institutionalised discrimination on any grounds – religious, ethnic, racial, cultural – would no longer be tolerated across the breadth of the vast and ever expanding British Empire.

Victoria’s claim, of course, was both incongruous and paradoxical at an age when, like any colonial European power in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, imperial Britain was implementing the tenets of the racial superiority doctrine and preaching the unfitness of the colonised Asian and African countries for self-government. On the other hand, Victoria’s 1858 message was a timely and well thought-out public relations gesture that was meant to appease the angry Indians in the wake of the defeat of their mutiny and at the same time to signal a new stage in their relationship with their British rulers. The royal document is also significant because it heralds, at least in theory, the dawn of a new legal era in India as well as in other British controlled territories. The Queen’s message was intended to make millions of imperial subjects worldwide believe that, be they Indians, African, Jamaicans, St Lucians, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, or Sikhs, from now on they were all equal in the face of British law.

The cleverly composed proclamation is important also because it is perhaps the earliest official articulation and endorsement of what a century later would be known as ‘multiculturalism’. The royal statement itself did not necessarily bring about ‘multiculturalism’, as this concept is understood in early twenty-first century Britain. On the other hand, one could trace in the proclamation elements of the multiculturalist discourse employed in Britain as early as the 1950s and more clearly since the 1980s.

## **1. Between myth and reality**

Queen Victoria’s ‘equal-opportunities-for-all’ proclamation of 1858 was important in sowing the seeds of the myth about Britain as a fair ‘mother country’ that was committed to treat all its overseas subjects equally, irrespective of their colour, ethnicity, creed and culture. Britain would benefit enormously from this carefully crafted public image especially when the British Empire needed its overseas ‘equal’ subjects’ commitment and sacrifices for the ‘common good’. Hundreds and thousands of colonial soldiers would enlist in the British army during the Great War and especially throughout World War II. Numerous soldiers of various nationalities and creeds made

enormous sacrifices in the name of ‘their’ Empire and the imagined ‘mother country’ they had heard so much about but had never visited.

The first opportunity for many such devoted colonial soldiers to get to know their ‘mother country’ came by the end of the Second World War. Throughout the war a large number of foreign subjects enlisted in the British army were stationed in Britain. After the war many of them wanted to stay in Britain. As many as fifty per cent of the West Indian servicemen, for instance, expressed the wish to settle in the ‘mother country’.<sup>3</sup> Much to their surprise and disappointment, however, their requests were turned down.

To get back on its feet after the war Britain needed especially manpower. The British political elite knew that the required workforce could be secured from the colonies but they were apprehensive of the move to bring immigrant workers from overseas, especially in large numbers. The late 1940s marked the beginning of the immigration debate in Britain, a debate which at first was conducted prior to the arrival of the ‘alien’ workforce. At this stage the debate involved only members of the British establishment, who did not always agree with each other on many immigration issues. Many of the participants of this ‘closed-door’ debate were against bringing any foreign workers from overseas. In the end the more practical-minded had it their way and the first immigrant workers started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

An important moment in the history of post-war immigration in Britain is the docking of the freighter *Empire Windrush* in England with 492 Jamaicans on 22 June 1948. For this contingent as well as for the 125,000 West Indians immigrating to Britain throughout the 1950s, arriving in the ‘mother country’ did not turn out to be the home-coming they had expected. No matter how much the immigrants were needed in Britain, the ‘mother country’ was apparently neither prepared nor willing to treat the new comers equally not only in employment but also in housing and education. The first generation of immigrant hopefuls ‘came of age’ very soon. They were left in no doubt that in spite of their significant contribution to Britain’s economy, they were essentially considered as an imposition which the British could well do without.

It would be wrong to see the unfair treatment the West Indian immigrants and later on the South Asians received in Britain as something that had to do only with their physical appearance, although this certainly played an important part. Behind the officially endorsed welcoming rhetoric about the hospitality of the British nation towards foreigners who come to settle in Britain and, what Tony Blair calls, the British people’s ‘innate sense of fair play’ [3, p. 105], there is a less savoury reality. Enoch Powell’s claim in his Birmingham speech on 20 April 1968 that ‘[t]he Commonwealth immigrant came to Britain as a full citizen, to a country which knew no discrimination between one citizen and another’ [19, p. 39.] could hardly be further from the truth. As Bill Smithies and Peter Fiddick put it in their 1969 book *Enoch Powell on Immigration*, far from being the epitome of fairness, ‘Britain has an impeccable pedigree of racial and cultural intolerance of any new – and therefore fearsome – element in the population dating back in to the nineteenth century’.<sup>4</sup> [26, p. 55] In 1902, for instance, Major William Evans Gordon, Tory MP for Stepney, urged the House of Commons to put immigration urgently under control because his countrymen ‘were ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders’.[26, pp. 55-6.] In this case the ‘invaders’ were Italians, Romanians, Russians and Poles. To Gordon, the invasion was so serious, that ‘[i]t is only a matter of time before the population becomes entirely foreign’. The immigrants had allegedly turned everything upside down: rents were raised fifty to 100 per cent, schools were overcrowded with ‘thousands of children of foreign parents’, and more importantly, the country was on the verge of moral collapse. Gordon warned his peers that a considerable proportion of the thousands of immigrants were of ‘bad characters’. Britain was obviously swamped by alien criminals, gamblers, bandits, and prostitutes. Gordon foresaw that a storm was brewing, which ‘if it be allowed to burst will have deplorable results’. [26, p. 56.]

The hostile tone about immigration would continue in parts of Britain after World War II. This hostility was felt also in the Midlands. In some areas with clusters of immigrants the public discussion was hardly diplomatic or polite when it came to the ‘alien’ people who were seen as a ‘threat’ to the local white population. Some Midlands newspapers such as the *Birmingham Post*,

*Evening Mail* and *Sunday Mercury* would often publish ‘politically incorrect’ outbursts of local people and civic leaders well before Powell made his inflammatory speeches in 1968. On 25 September 1959, for instance, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* published Councillor Collett’s following outburst against:

the coloured immigrant who comes in peace and humility and ends by being the arrogant boss. For proof speak to or visit the white people living under a coloured landlord. On Monday a T.V. programme showed how a coloured man suffered when he came to live amongst us. He was expected to do the menial jobs and why shouldn’t he? Few if any are capable of doing a skilled job and they could, of course, return home. But do they? Not on your life! Whether they be intellectual or not, they stay on, hoping to wear us down with the old theme ‘love thy neighbour’. Only good coloured immigrants should be allowed to come here, good in morals and health, and they should be licensed so that their good behaviour and limitation is guaranteed.

Collett’s hostility towards ‘coloured’ immigrants is reminiscent of Gordon’s tirade against ‘white’ foreigners mentioned earlier. The apocalyptic tone, pathos and diction apparent in Gordon’s speech and Collett’s outburst make for uncanny precursors of Powell’s equally doomsday – like future allegedly awaiting Britain almost seven decades later. So much so that it seems that Powell had blatantly plagiarised the speeches of these two public figures.

## **2. British Media and the inferior ‘other’**

There are several reasons why some people in Britain and British politicians used to and still have a low opinion of as well as strong phobias towards foreigners. In this essay I will concentrate primarily on the high level of self-esteem the British used to have throughout the empire period as a ‘nation’ with, to borrow a phrase from Max Weber, “a providential ‘mission’ “, [23, pp. 171-9.] and especially on the negative role of the British print media in making the ‘indigenous’ British population believe in the ‘supremacy’ of the British ‘race’.

In its modern sense, the notion of Britain as a political and national entity had its genesis in the early seventeenth century. In spite of their many and at times irreconcilable differences, the peoples living in the British Isles were well on the way of forging a new collective identity from 1603 when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England and was proclaimed ‘King of Great Britain’. The British identity became even more of a common denominator for the nations of the British Isles especially after the 1707 Act of Union when the United Kingdom was born from the union of England and Scotland and the establishment of one common parliament. The passing of the 1800 Act of Union by the British and Irish parliaments resulted in the merger of the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that was created on 1 January 1801 adopted the Union Flag/Jack as a national symbol. Having secured and endorsed the political loyalties at home, the British felt ever more confident of their destiny as an aggregate nation. ‘Rule, Britannia!’, which was composed by Thomas Augustine Arne in 1740 and was first heard in London in 1745, acquired a new meaning and significance at the turn of the nineteenth century, by which time Britannia apparently arose again ‘at Heaven’s command’.

The print media would play a significant role in inventing, promoting and consolidating the imperial British identity. Newspapers in Britain were instrumental in starting and maintaining what Ernest Renan referred to in his Sorbonne lecture ‘*Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*’ as ‘an everyday plebiscite’. [22, pp. 26-9] The British press was also crucial in forging Britishness as, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase, an ‘imagined political community’. [1]

The ‘cohesion’ and ‘superiority’ of the British nation were constructed at the expense of the ‘fragmented nature’ and ‘inferiority’ of the subjugated nations and to some extent of any foreign country, power and culture. The degradation of the ‘other’, the ‘alien’, the ‘stranger’, the ‘exotic’ that does not conform to the British ‘norm’, which is still strong in contemporary British media,<sup>5</sup>



had its genesis in the early eighteenth century, if not earlier. The British press, which was keen to bring the four nations constituting the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland together, had a detrimental impact on the 'home' readership when it came to the representation of foreigners.

Concentrating on magazines such as the *Gem* and *Magnet*, in his essay 'Boys' Weeklies', George Orwell draws attention to media stereotyping and ridiculing of foreigners in the British press in the first half of the twentieth century. Orwell observes that the two outlets' basic assumptions are that 'nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny'. [18, p. 178.] So for instance, in the *Gem* of 1939, Frenchmen are Froggies, Italians are Dagoes, Indians are comic babus of the Punch tradition, the Americans are the old-style stage Yankees dating from a period of Anglo-American jealousy, and the Chinese are the nineteenth-century pantomime Chinamen, with saucer-shaped hat, pigtail and pidgin-English. 'The assumption all along is not only that foreigners are comics who are put there for us to laugh at, but that they can be classified in much the same way as insects'. [18] Orwell notes that in papers of this kind it occasionally happens that when the setting of a story is in a foreign country some attempt is made to describe the natives as individual human beings. When it comes to national identities, however, they are very much presented as stereotypes that never change. In Orwell's words:

as a rule it is assumed that foreigners of any race are all alike and will conform more or less exactly to the following patterns:

FRENCHMAN: Excitable. Wears beard, gesticulates wildly.

SPANIARD, MEXICAN etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

ARAB, AFGHAN etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

CHINESE: Sinister, treacherous. Wears pigtail.

ITALIAN: Excitable. Grinds barrel-organ or carries stiletto.

SWEDEN, DANES etc.: Kind-hearted, stupid.

NEGRO: Comic, very faithful. [18, pp. 178-9]

*Gem*, *Magnet* and other boys' weeklies were intended for people between the ages of twelve and eighteen. As Orwell rightly observes, the majority of such readers were unlikely to read anything else except newspapers, which depicted foreigners much in the same light. This means that, traditionally, British papers have hardly helped young readers to have a realistic view of or sympathetic attitude towards the 'other'. This was especially the case throughout the first half of the twentieth century when editors would constantly feed readers, especially the vulnerable young ones, on a constant diet of 'snobbishness and gutter patriotism' [18, p. 181] while failing all the time to inform them of the peoples and cultures making up the British Empire. As far as editors and their brainwashed readers were concerned, 'they do not feel what happens in foreign countries is any of their business'. [18, p. 180] What mattered was that their own country was 'always in the right' and 'always wins', [18] 'that foreigners are unimportant comics and that the British Empire is a sort of charity concern which will last forever'. [18, p. 183]

### **3. Immigrants? What immigrants?!**

In view of the kind of press the British were exposed to from the start of the British Empire and especially throughout the first half of the twentieth century when the empire covered one-fourth of the world, it is no surprise that the people living in the British Isles would hardly welcome immigrant workers that started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The British, who had conquered and ruled the world for so long, would soon discover how little they actually knew of their rapidly shrinking vast empire when their fellow empire subjects started

arriving on their doorsteps. By the time the British people and the first immigrants came face to face in Britain in the mid-twentieth century they did not know much about each other and whatever they knew was hardly accurate.

Another feature of immigration in post war Britain is that foreign workers settled in a limited number of areas. The British government did not have any clear policy not only in terms of how many immigrant workers would be allowed to enter the country but also regarding their dispersal around Britain. As a result, while some areas witnessed a large influx of immigrants, others received a few or none. While some parts of Britain would witness an unexpected clustering of the immigrant population, most of the country did not know much about the 'strangers within'. Up until the late 1960s, immigration remained largely a local issue which neither the government nor most British people seemed to be properly informed of or care about. This explains why when some local councillors and Members of Parliament raised the issue of immigration publicly throughout the 1950s and in the early 1960s there was no national audience that was capable of understanding what they were on about. As far as the majority of Britons were concerned, immigration was hardly an issue. The authenticity of Enoch Powell's stories about the 'plight' of some of his constituents suffering as a result of the so-called 'peaceful invasion' was and remains very much a contested issue, but he was convinced that the lives of his constituents (white as well as non-white) were affected as a result of the large number of immigrants settling in their neighbourhoods and that the overwhelming majority of his parliamentary colleagues were hardly aware of the situation. This is one of the main leitmotifs of his 1968 speeches on immigration, a point he is keen to stress from the start of his address to the Walsall South Conservative Association on 9 February 1968:

There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness which comes over persons who are trapped or imprisoned, when all their efforts to attract attention and assistance bring no response. This is the kind of feeling which you in Walsall and we in Wolverhampton are experiencing in the face of the continued flow of immigration in our towns. We are of course in a minority – make no mistake about that. Out of 600 Parliamentary constituencies perhaps less than 60 are affected in any way like ourselves. The rest know little or nothing and, we might sometimes be tempted to feel, care little or nothing... So far as most people in the British Isles are concerned, you and I might as well be living in Central Africa for all they know about our circumstances. [21, p. 19]

By the late 1950s and early 1960s immigration was a more important issue in Britain than it had been at the beginning of the twentieth century. All the same, like other local councillors and MPs, whose constituencies had been affected by immigration, Powell felt more had to be done to turn into a 'national' concern what had been perceived for so long as a 'local' issue. Powell saw himself as a politician with a mission and the media as an indispensable tool to realise it.

#### **4. Powell, the Media and party politics**

Powell was a media conscious politician. He understood very well its role and power as an effective propaganda tool. This explains why he distributed copies of his Birmingham speech before he actually delivered it on 20 April 1968, and why he used uncorroborated examples about immigrants allegedly mistreating white people. Shortly after the Birmingham speech, far from apologising for the unethical way he used his 'case studies', Powell told the *Daily Mail* that 'the best way of getting listened to is to humanise your theme by talking about an individual'. [26, p. 14]

The unprecedented attention the local and national media paid to Powell's 'blockbuster', as the editor of the *News of the World* called the Birmingham speech, meant that Powell finally

succeeded in making immigration a national issue. On the other hand, the publicity hardly brought about the results Powell had expected. His inflamed rhetoric backfired on him and he failed to secure the support of his party or of the Labour government. As far as he was concerned, Britain's parliamentarians had failed to grasp how significant an issue immigration was.

Several explanations have been given about Powell's failure to secure the sympathy and backing of the leadership of his party as well as the support of the government and other political parties regarding immigration. In his 1979 study *Enoch Powell: Principle in Politics*, for instance, Roy Lewis argues that Powell was a victim of an ongoing power struggle in the Conservative Party. In Lewis's words:

[i]t was known, or at least said, in party circles that [Edward] Heath was hoping for an excuse to get rid of Powell, and that in this feeling he had most of the Shadow Cabinet with him. They had found his dissection of party policy proposals uncomfortable; and he was finding that Heath ignored his views or prevented him increasingly from putting them forward. [15, p. 107.]

Heath apparently saw Powell as a contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party. By that time Powell was already a scholar as well as a soldier, a philosopher as well as an arch-rebel. More importantly, the maverick Powell was a statesman with valuable experience in government and in opposition. If Heath indeed wanted to rid himself of Powell, he was aware that he would need quite a strong reason to justify sacking him.

With his widely mediatised Birmingham speech Powell could not have offered Heath a better reason to dismiss him from the Shadow Cabinet. Heath wasted no time in condemning Powell's ranting against immigrants as being 'racialist in tone, and liable to exacerbate racial tensions', a verdict which even the unrepentant Powell could hardly disagree with.

Heath was also obviously annoyed because Powell failed to consult him or any other senior colleague in the party about the Birmingham speech. As far as Heath was concerned, Powell had been 'calculatedly disloyal', [15, p. 106] a charge which Powell strongly denied. As far as Powell was concerned, '[i]t was to the 'tone' of my speech that objection was taken'. [15, p. 107]

Powell's outspokenness as well as the support he received from working class people and some sections of the media obviously made Heath, his Shadow Cabinet and the Labour government feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Whether on purpose or unwittingly, Powell's 'prophetic' tone had obviously incurred the wrath and the jealousy of the establishment. As Simon Heffer puts it in his 1998 biography *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*, Powell's detractors assailed him, among other things, 'for his temerity in thinking that, at times, he knew better than the Conservative party, and had a right to condemn its moral and intellectual failings'. [12, p. 960] This point was articulated very clearly by the BBC's David Frost, who interviewed Powell on 3 January 1969. Having referred to Powell's Birmingham speech and his views on immigration as 'dynamite' several times, [8, pp. 98, 100, 102.] in a moment of frustration Frost interrupts the interviewee saying:

DF: You *underestimate* us. I feel a great sympathy for the people you talk about, make no mistake about that, but – and the people who've got a real problem now, but you – what you do is you *underestimate* us all so much. (emphasis added) [8, p. 113.]

Frost would accuse Powell of 'underestimating us'[8, p. 114] once more shortly afterwards. Obviously, Powell had 'outsmarted' many politicians and media people who were far from happy to be seen as being complete *ignoramus*es regarding the emergency and importance of the immigration issue and out of touch with what people apparently thought about it.

## 5. Populist politicians and politics

Powell's falling-out with Heath as well as the criticism and condemnation he received from political allies and opponents as well as media circles alike can be better understood if also seen in the context of the British political elite's traditional 'contempt' for so-called 'populist politicians' and 'populist politics' as well as in the light of claims made by Raymond Williams, [24] Stuart Hall, [11] Jürgen Habermas [10] and James Curran [6] on the power of the media to 'manage' rather than 'express' the 'public will'.

Britain is hardly the only West European country where populism in politics is frowned upon. Although Western Europe is the cradle of modern democracy, its democratically elected parliamentarians have not always been seen by the 'demos' as listening to and addressing their concerns. European political and intellectual elites have a long tradition of disregard and dislike for democracy [14] and the masses, something which became even more apparent when the industrial and graphic revolutions of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries turned what was known as 'rabble', 'multitude', 'mob' and 'a Dark Continent beyond the understanding of the civilized elite' [9] into 'mass'.

Mass media and especially newspapers have been traditionally seen by European politicians and intellectuals as the means through which, populist leaders air the views of those 'dirty people of no name', as the historian Claredon referred to the masses. [5, p. 50.] Referring to the British political elite's apparently perennial disconnection 'from the public to understand what makes people tick', Frank Furedi holds that, as a rule:

the British political class assumes that the public suffers from irrational prejudice and is easily misled by xenophobic demagogues. This suspicion towards what may lurk beneath the soul of everyday society is deeply ingrained in the more leftist and liberal sections of the elite. It is paradoxical that this group, which continually denounces racism, does not recognize its own brand of contempt for those it deems morally inferior. It is worth recalling that the racial thinking first emerged in Europe among the elite that regarded the lower orders as both biologically and morally inferior to itself. [9]

Like Furedi, several other intellectuals in Britain see the British political elite as ignoring or condemning any politician who raises controversial issues deemed suitable to be addressed only by the self-proclaimed moral guardians of the society. As Brendan O'Neill observes in an article about Robert Kilroy-Silk, another outspoken and controversial former politician and television presenter addressing the issue of immigration hardly with more sensitivity than Powell, now as well as in the past, one can detect 'a barely concealed contempt for the voting masses':

The word that pops up most often in critiques of Kilroy-Silk is 'populist' – he's a 'media populist', accuses Nick Cohen; he has an 'abrasive populist manner' says one commentator; he's a 'dangerous populist' says another. What they're really saying is that Kilroy-Silk is trying to appeal to the masses and, dumbasses that the masses are, they might just fall for it and give in to his 'populist patter'. As one contributor to a web discussion board wrote: 'There is a disenfranchised proletariat rump whose opinions are informed by this sort of xenophobic, populist crap'. [17]

An impartial examination of Powell's 1968 speeches reveals that while he was indeed playing the part of the 'populist' politician he was also keen to present himself as a 'principled' parliamentarian who apparently believed that speaking out for the people who had elected him to the House of Commons was what any politician should do. Powell saw himself as *the* spokesperson of ordinary constituents who, in his view, had been ignored by the establishment. He aimed to achieve maximum publicity by using in his speeches the inflammatory diction of anonymous individuals.

Powell employed several linguistic and stylistic devices to fully identify himself with this 'ignored' and 'enraged' mass. The most effective one perhaps is the use of the first personal pronoun 'we' which makes his identification with the 'alienated' and 'forgotten' 'volks' complete. Central to his Eastbourne speech on 16 November 1968 is that 'the people of Britain are faced with a *fait accompli*, that all sorts of excuses are invented and *we* are told in terms of arrogant moral superiority that *we* have got a 'multi-racial society' and had better like it'. [20, p. 69.] (emphasis added)

Powell's multitudinous 'we' apparently makes complete his identification not only with his constituents but also with a much wider audience. In Powell's case the 'we' has no royal connotation and yet it elevates his standing and appeal. Powell the MP for Wolverhampton South West becomes the spokesperson of the whole country. He is no longer a local politician but a national figure with an important message for all white British people. He models himself as the only 'prophet' of his generation; only he apparently could see what no other politician in the 1960s could or dared to admit. Only Powell and his anonymous supporters knew the truth. The ignored mass, or the 'white ghetto'<sup>6</sup>, to use the phrase coined by North Carolina journalist Peter B. Young, had apparently found in Powell the leader that had been eluding them for almost two decades.

## 6. Powell, England and the United Kingdom

Powell would often refer in his speeches to Britain and the British. On the whole, however, he often sounded like and was an English nationalist. Although of Welsh ancestry, by the time he was born in 1912, Powell's family had lived in England for four generations.

Unless Powell's personality and work are seen primarily in the context of his attachment to England and the English, we would be unable to understand in the first place what made this educated politician employ both a 'racialist' and 'racist' discourse about non-white British subjects.

Powell's attachment to England was fostered in his early years but his devotion to the English nation resulted from the huge influence that German culture had on him in his youth, an influence that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Powell was opposed to Nazism and was eager to enlist in the British army 'from the first day that Britain goes to war'. [12, p. 22] In spite of the threat Germany posed to Britain, Powell 'remained addicted to German culture'. [12] As Powell put it in 1966, the happiest and most glorious hours of his life with books 'have been with German books'. [12]

In spite of his aversion for Hitler, the German leader's propaganda about the superiority of the Aryan race must have made a lasting impact on the young Powell. For anyone who does not know much about German history, the fact that Powell gave his Birmingham speech on 20 January would hardly mean anything. For a highly educated politician like Powell who was so immersed in German culture, however, giving the most important speech of his life on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday was either a stupid memory lapse or a sinister choice.

England's pivotal role in Great Britain does not lessen the role and importance of the other three nations included in the union. In spite of their differences from the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, the English have always been aware that the values and aspirations they share with the other three 'ethnicities' were far more important than their differences. Hence the forging of the British identity and Britishness as a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining the British Empire.

The common 'imperial' identity of the peoples living in the British Isles throughout the imperial era was not seen as a threat to the more immediate national/ethnic identity. Members of the English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh ethnicities would not pay much attention to Britishness for as long as they lived and worked in the United Kingdom. Their Britishness became more of a signifier, an indicator of who they collectively were, when they went overseas.

The collective British nation identity had a strong appeal in the past, especially among the middle classes and the aristocracy, because, to quote Neil Davenport, 'it was based on material interest. No doubt some identified with a mythical and backward-looking idea of 'Britishness', but

essentially the British nation state was seen as the best guarantor of maintaining living standards'. [7]

During the empire, as a result of the lack of Welsh institutions, different from the Scots, and the Irish, the Welsh would usually identify Britain with England, and see the English as epitomising the 'British'. There were cases when even the Scots would equate Britain with England and the British with the English. This is particularly the case in the work of two well-known nineteenth century Scottish authors, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and Samuel Smiles (1812-1904). Their seminal, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* [4] and *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, [25] respectively, for instance, abound in numerous references to England, the English and the Englishman's character.

Different from the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, when Britain was a global empire, the English would normally presume that, in their case, Britishness meant Englishness, something which was reflected constantly in the English newspapers and the political discourse. When the Tory MP for Stanley demanded that the government should no longer allow European immigrants enter the country, what he was concerned about was not the detrimental effect immigration was allegedly having on Britain but on England. The victims he identifies are not British but 'English families'. He is concerned that as a result of the foreigners 'an English working man' and not a British subject is apparently unable to enjoy his day or rest.

The flagging up of Englishness by the English was always resented by the three other nations constituting imperial Britain. As long as the empire kept going, however, economic interests often took precedence over the local national pride. The British Empire was a joint enterprise of the English as much as of the other three 'lesser' British nations, especially of the Scots, who were always aware of their contribution to the imperial project.

The gradual loss of overseas influence and territories from the end of the World War I and more rapidly in the wake of the Second World War meant that Britain was well on the way of changing from an imperial power to a nation-state. The inevitable end of the empire was bound to bring to the surface and with an increased animosity and urgency the issue of the relationship of the four nations comprising Great Britain and, more importantly, the question of England's position and role in this uneasy union. The British Monarchy and the British political elite were obviously interested to keep the *status quo* at home, which in the post war years meant that Britain should outlive its rapidly eroding empire.

The arrival of immigrants in Britain from the late 1940s made the already uneasy intra-national relationship and debate even more imperative. What seemed to have exacerbated the issue further was the concentration of immigrants mainly in England, a point which Enoch Powell makes clear in his Birmingham speech. In his view, some areas in Great Britain 'are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history'. [19, p. 36] He mentioned the same point in Eastbourne later on in the year putting it plainly that 'it is virtually only England which is affected' [20, p. 69] by immigration.

Powell was criticized by his political opponents and sections of the media, especially by David Frost during the 1969 televised interview, [8, pp. 106-9] for painting an unrealistic picture of the effect the immigration would have in England. He was especially opposed for his 'unrealistic' predictions that by the year 2000 the immigration population in Britain 'must be in the region of 5-7 million, approximately one-tenth of the whole population', [19, p. 36] a figure which he later put at one-eighth, [8, p. 107] and that '[w]hole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by different sections of the immigrant or immigrant-descended population'. [19, p. 36]

According to the 2001 Census, the ethnic minority population in the UK was 4.6 million (i.e. 7.9% of the country's total population). In England, immigrant or immigrant-descended population made up 9% of the total population whereas in Scotland and Wales only 2% and in Northern Ireland less than 1%. Today there are areas, towns and parts of towns across England whose population is predominantly non-English.

## 7. The inevitable trend

It has been suggested that Powell's controversial speeches on immigration in 1968 were not in keeping with his interest on this issue but a publicity stunt which he apparently hoped would further his chances of securing the leadership of the Conservative Party. Powell was an ambitious politician and if indeed he chose to use the immigration card to further his political career, he was neither the first nor would he be the last British politician to do so. I propose that Powell's ranting against immigrants should also be seen in the context of other controversial speeches he made before and after 1968 on issues other than immigration.

Powell took pride in the British Empire. He regretted the demise of the Empire and was adamant that the USA was one of its greatest enemies. This is one of the reasons why he was always critical of the USA, a stance which he started to articulate more clearly in the early 1940s arguing that America was using World War II to put an end to the British Empire. [20, p. 75]

Powell was first and foremost a nationalist and a staunch believer in the United Kingdom, and he would raise his voice any time he believed the Union was in any danger. This is one of the reasons why he was totally opposed to the idea of Britain joining the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1969 Powell expressed clearly his opposition to Britain joining the EEC. Edward Heath took the country into the EEC in 1973; a year later Powell resigned from the Conservative Party in protest, believing that the European Community would undermine the United Kingdom and the sovereignty of the British Parliament.

According to Simon Heffer, Powell's 'main, unresolved conflict with his opponents was the question of whether the British people wished to remain a nation'. [12, p. 959] In spite of his attachment to England, Powell was essentially a Unionist and he saw the preservation of the Union as vital to the survival of the British nation. This explains, to some extent, why he was in favour of the complete integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Powell apparently saw the arrival of a large number of immigrants into the UK in the 1960s as a 'threat' to the 'cohesion' of the British nation. He obviously failed to see that in the wake of the World War II, immigration was an almost unstoppable phenomenon. The end of the British Empire, the need for immigration work force and the trend of globalisation which was in its inception in the 1950s made demographic changes in the United Kingdom and other former colonial powers in Western Europe almost inevitable. Britain and other European countries were heading towards a multiculturalist future. The issue was how Britain and other former colonial powers would handle multiculturalism.

Powell's 1968 speeches, especially the Birmingham speech, could well be seen as an attempt on the part of a romantic English/British patriot who put his country before everything else not so much to make history rather than to preserve history. Powell's nationalism is partly motivated by what Heffer calls, the British people's clinging to the idea of a nation 'as a safeguard of democratic freedoms', and 'therefore must order their politics accordingly'. [12, p. 958]

Powell obviously believed that the only way for the British nation to survive was to follow the German model. As Walker Connor notes, prior to the break of the World War II Germany was among the handful of states that clearly qualified as a nation-state, which means that the 'state' and the 'nation' were indistinguishably linked in the popular perception. To the Germans, 'Germany was something far more personal and profound than a territorial-political structure termed a state; it was an embodiment of the nation-idea and therefore an extension of self'. [13, p. 42]

In the case of Britain, the embodiment of the nation-idea and its self extension should be seen in the context of the close ties between the English and their next-door although weaker neighbours: the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish. While English identity was and remains unique, part of its uniqueness comes from the direct positive impact these three nations have historically had on its culture, politics and wealth. In this context, Heath's decision to condemn Powell's Birmingham speech immediately after it was made (as well as after Powell's death) and the fact that the English elite did not rally behind Powell is a reflection of the silent acknowledgment on the part of the English of the benefits of having a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society much earlier than the

heated immigration debate began. The decision of the British political elite to distance themselves from and condemn Powell's ethnic/nationalist rhetoric at a time when the debate in Scotland shifted from being an ethnic nation to a civic nation was probably one of the wisest decisions taken by the British establishment after the Second World War, a decision which with hindsight was perhaps paramount for the survival of the United Kingdom as a state.

## 8. Powell and the multiculturalist debate

The British political establishment's attitude towards Powell immediately after his 1968 speeches would have a lasting, and on the whole negative, impact on the 'official' discourse on multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. The condemnation of Powell did not initiate political correctness in British politics and media. One can find the genesis of political correctness British-style in Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 mentioned at the start of this article.

Enoch Powell was not right. Some of his views, especially his comments of non-white people, were and remain deeply offensive and repulsive. Powell's views on immigration, however, should be seen in the context of the time when he expressed them. To study a controversial figure like Powell does not mean to endorse his views. Rather than seen as taboos which are best ignored, his speeches should be read, critiqued and criticised.

In a parliamentary democracy, the public should be treated as an adult who is capable to distinguish what is right and wrong. Powell has been for almost four decades the bogeyman of British politics. He continues to be used and abused by whoever has an interest in resurrecting temporarily his ghost only to dump it again. Among politicians, one has to have the untouchable status of Margaret Thatcher to dare to mention and even make a positive remark on Powell. Several minor political figure that have referred to him, some rather childishly and out of context, have been forced by their political leaders to resign.

Powell is mentioned often in the work of British social scientists, especially if they come from ethnic communities. In almost all cases, however, Powell's name crops up only to be condemned but never critiqued. A Powell-like politician would make any foreigner, myself included, seriously consider if Britain is the right country to live in. On the other hand, British citizens like myself should use our 'foreignness' as an advantage to try to understand where Powell came from.

In the modern world almost any society and country is multicultural, multiethnic, multilinguistic and multireligious. In this multilayered world, it is important that citizens keep their identities and respect the identities of others as well as try to find out what, in spite of their differences, they share. Without this sharing, multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity *per se* do not result in a cohesive society. At times and in certain places, British multiculturalism has the signs of a self-imposed and officially endorsed apartheid.

In a considerable number of studies carried out by social scientists of various ethnic origins, the dominant theme is that the British society should be more tolerant and welcoming towards foreigners. These studies have played a major positive role in highlighting important social problems, difficulties and injustices faced by ethnic communities, especially the new ones. On the other hand, British-foreign social scientists like myself should conduct more research amongst members of our own ethnic communities to see the extent to which our fellow ethnic people are working to integrate with and respect the culture of the 'indigenous' population in Wales, England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This would hopefully make us increasingly aware of what we share and forge a spirit of togetherness.

This togetherness is possible if we do not see our original/native cultures as set in stone and incapable of dialogue and fusion. Powell did not even consider that such togetherness could be possible. All indications are that this togetherness, although 'dismantled', [2, p. 119] is already here, and social scientists should make more efforts to detect and promote it.



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## Notes

1. The Crimean War lasted from 1854 until 1856, and the Indian Mutiny from 1857 to 1858.
2. According to Stephen Neill, the words in italics were added by Queen Victoria herself to the original draft of the proclamation.
3. For more information on the West Indian servicemen's wish to remain in Britain at the end of World War II and the British government's plans to ship them home, see E. Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1990.
4. For more information on racial and cultural intolerance in Britain since the nineteenth century, see P. Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, London: Penguin, 1965, pp. 80-102.
5. The author has addressed the tendency of the contemporary British press to denigrate foreigners in his article 'Western media and the European 'other' – images of Albania in the British press', included in his book *Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa*, New Brunswick, USA & London: Transaction Publishers, 2011, pp. 117-51.
6. As a consultant to the US President's Commission on Violence in 1968-1969, Peter B. Young 'reported (as if from another planet) the existence of a large underclass of deeply troubled Whites in North Carolina and elsewhere. I described this phenomenon as a 'White ghetto', with social pathology remarkably similar to that which is so well known in the Black ghetto: ignorance, unemployment, poor health, a drenching saturation of racism and random Saturday night violence'. P. B Young, 'Greensboro Deaths Were Foretold', *Southern Changes*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 1980, p. 12.



## **Gender Relations in Daily Newspaper Headlines: the Representation of Gender Inequality with Respect to the Media Representation of Women(Critical Discourse Analysis)**

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### *Abstract:*

This paper investigates gender related discourse in headlines of some famous daily newspapers in the USA. *Discourse* in this case refers to the entire set of social gender relations seen through the media. Based on an interdisciplinary approach to the problem, which includes both cultural and critical studies, the purpose of this research is to offer a critical review of the basic media strategies used in discursive representation of gender relations within the society. Through the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the data collected from the Internet, the author is to describe the discursive reproduction of social power reflected in the newspaper headlines.

### **1. Introduction**

As defined, a headline is the title or caption of a newspaper article, usually set in large type, which contains important or sensational piece of news. [27] In most cases, the headlines provide the essential information about the story that follows, which means that they function as summaries.

All headlines serve to attract people's attention and make them buy the newspapers. They must function as eye-catchers with the readers of different profiles because their main task is to transfer the ideology and system of beliefs of the dominant social structures. [20, p.1]

Mind control is the fundamental task of the elite mass media in contemporary democracies because they serve only to the interests of powerful individuals. The media, as the main means of indoctrination, have the crucial role in this organized system of control and management, ruled by megacorporations and private business.

#### *1.1 Statement of the problem and purpose of the research*

Despite the progress of democratization, the struggle against stereotypes and strengthening of the civil society, media discourse still belongs to the male domain. [1, p. 47; 25] Dominant gender stereotypes, such as those that men are born to hold leadership positions, are presented in the media on a daily basis. Also, gender-stereotyped content presenting women is dominant in the media being a prolonged arm of the male power in the society.

This research aims at offering a critical review of the basic media strategies used in discursive representation of gender relations in the modern society and answering the following questions:

- a) What is the role of media in representing and even reinforcing gender inequality?
- b) What discursive strategies do journalists of daily newspapers use in order to represent women in all positions?

## 2. Review of Literature

Bearing in mind the fact that this study aims to present the main discursive strategies used in newspaper headlines to reflect gender relations within the society, it seemed reasonable to analyze the headlines on *intertextual level*.

Considering the notion of *intertextuality*, Fairclough differs two types of *intertextuality*: “*manifest intertextuality*” and “*constitutive intertextuality*” [6, p. 85] According to him, the former means that “specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text.” The presence of those other texts is usually marked by the quotation marks. On the other hand, “*constitutive intertextuality*” considers the “heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of convention) of orders of discourse (interdiscursivity).” [6, p.104]

Considering the connection between the linguistic and intertextual features of texts, Fairclough says: “Linguistic features of texts provide evidence which can be used in intertextual analysis, and intertextual analysis is a particular sort of interpretation of that evidence...” [5, p. 61] This definition, in fact, emphasizes the descriptive function of the linguistic analysis as opposed to the interpretative function of the intertextual analysis.

### 2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used here in analyzing the data based on Van Dijk's definition of CDA as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality”. [15, 22] According to Van Dijk, “Critical research on discourse needs to satisfy a number of requirements in order to effectively realize its aims:

1. As is often the case for more marginal research traditions, CDA research has to be ‘better’ than other research in order to be accepted.
2. It focuses primarily on *social problems* and political issues, rather than on current paradigms and fashions.
3. Empirically adequate critical analysis of social problems is usually *multidisciplinary*.
4. Rather than merely *describe* discourse structures, it tries to *explain* them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure.
5. More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society.” [15, p. 2; 2]

Fairclough and Wodak state the principles of CDA in the following way:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action. [4, p. 258-284. acc. to 15, p.2]

The term “critical” is used in specific sense by the authors mentioned because it implies “a different mode or perspective of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout the whole field.”[13] The word “discourse” in this study refers to the discourse controlled by the mass media, especially in relation to gender inequality in newspaper headlines.

### 2.2. Gender inequality and gendered media

“*Gender inequality* refers to the obvious or hidden disparity between individuals due to gender. Gender is constructed both socially through social interactions as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences.” [16, p. 1]

“*Media* helps create and reinforce a gender duality based on traditional views of men and women. Often, females and males are portrayed differently in television and film according to stereotypes. Boys and/or men are often portrayed as active, aggressive and sexually aggressive persons while women are portrayed as quaint, passive, pretty and incompetent beings.” [18, 21]

### 2.3. Previous Studies

This study is not the first one dealing with the presentation of gender relations in the media.

The researcher took some similar studies as inspiration for conducting the investigation on gender relationships in the print media, especially considering the representation of women.

One of them is the study called “Critical discourse analysis and the semiotic construction of gender identities” [11, 26], done by *Izabel Magalhães* from the University of Brasilia, in which she discusses textual and semiotic aspects of adverts according to critical discourse analysis. Her analysis was based on the texts taken from the adverts found in a few famous Brazilian magazines, which were analyzed according to *semiotic aspects* and the notions of vocabulary, modality, cohesion and intertextuality.

Under the semiotic aspects Magalhães implies “the ways in which photos represent women and men, their styles of dressing and issues related to their bodies, as well as the particular place of photos in adverts.”

In the vocabulary analysis, she deals with lexical choice in the texts, “what kinds of wording are favoured, and whether or not words are attributed new meanings in rewordings and in new lexicalisations.”

Considering cohesion in the texts analysed, she says: “In adverts, clauses and periods are connected so as to produce a particular rhetorical mode, one which will arouse in the readers the desire to purchase the product being advertised in the text. Such cohesive markers as reference, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical items will be of interest here.”

According to her, “the feminine is represented as a commodified body; it is also frail and pathological. The masculine is linked with power, but with fashion too. Adverts position readers ideologically, so that they can define their gender identities as consumers.” [11, 26]

The next study dealing with this topic is the one called: “Women and the Media / Study on the Marginalization of Female Discourse Power” conducted by the two Chinese scholars, LI Xiaohui and LEI Min. [19, p. 47-55, 28]

They gave a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis on the marginalization of female discourse power and study the potential sexual discrimination of this phenomenon, regarding females as the subjects and the objects of the mass media. They actually aim at the “awakening the masses to establish the correct sexual ideology in harmony and pursuing the equality of discourse power between females and males.”

They point out that there are two reasons for using these discriminating practices in the mass media, the first being the *feudal tradition*, which presents the males as the masters of the outdoor life and the females as the masters of the indoor life, and the second being the *women's unresponsiveness* to the challenges of pursuing equality in discourse power.

The famous linguist and professor of linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, Robin Lakoff, introduced many ideas about women's language and gender inequality in her most famous work *Language and Woman's Place*. [10, p. 45-80, 24] According to her, “women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language treats them.” Both of them actually serve “to relegate women to certain subservient functions: that of sex-object, of a servant; and that therefore certain lexical items mean one thing applied to men and another applied to women.”

### 3. Methodology

The research methodology covers research design and instruments, data collection and data analysis.

#### 3.1. *Research Design and Instruments*

This research was conducted by using the descriptive qualitative research method. It is used because the data analyzed were collected in form of words and not numbers. Discourse Analysis as a scientific approach does not offer the answers to a particular problem, but helps us to understand the circumstances behind a particular “problem”. It focuses on linguistic devices or speech acts and how they serve powerful social groups to fulfill their interests.

#### 3.2. *Data Collection*

The data were collected from the Internet as one of the most powerful contemporary mass medium containing a pile of information, including the web-pages of the greatest world newspapers. The newspaper headlines reflecting gender relations were taken from the web pages of the two prominent daily newspapers: *The LA Times* and *The New York Post*.

#### 3.3. *Data analysis*

According to Van Dijk [14, p. 95-120], there are a few levels and dimensions of CDA:

- 1) *Topics*: semantic macrostructures, which “represent what a discourse is about globally speaking, embody most important information on a discourse, and explain overall coherence of text and talk.”
- 2) *Local meanings* as meaning of words and relationships between propositions which directly influences mental images, and consequently the opinions and attitudes of the recipients.
- 3) Subtle *formal structures* that are much less controlled by the speaker such as intonation, rhetoric figures, syntactic and propositional structures and so on.
- 4) *Context models* present discourse structures as related to local and global context.
- 5) *Event models* imply that “language users not only form mental models of the situation they interact in, but also of the events or situations they speak or write about.”
- 6) *Social cognition* stands for the notions of power, dominance and social inequality as well as the focus of CDA on social groups, organizations and institutions.
- 7) *The relation between discourse and society* implies the analysis on the two levels: the first one being the level of interaction and situations and the second one the level of groups, social organizations and institutions.

This model will serve as a guidance in the following data analysis because it represents the essence of CDA as an approach that is specifically interested in the discursive dimensions of power and dominance abuse or detailed descriptions of discursive violations of human rights by the powerful social groups. The analysis will be conducted through the comparison of 2 headlines found in the newspapers and considering the role of women in society.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

Susan Fiske, a famous professor of Psychology at Princeton University and researcher of stereotyping and discrimination, explains: “stereotyping exerts control or power over people, pressuring them to conform; therefore, stereotyping maintains the status quo.” [18, p. 621-628; 30]

However, stereotypes, especially those about women, are created and reinforced by the media. Female stereotypes that may be found in the print media strong influence the overall image

of women in the society because they tend to underestimate women and present them as sexual objects and inferior human beings.

The examples below will serve as an effective background for a critical discourse analysis of gender stereotyping and objectifying of women in the print media. They have been taken from the two famous US daily newspapers: *L.A. Times* and *The New York Post*.

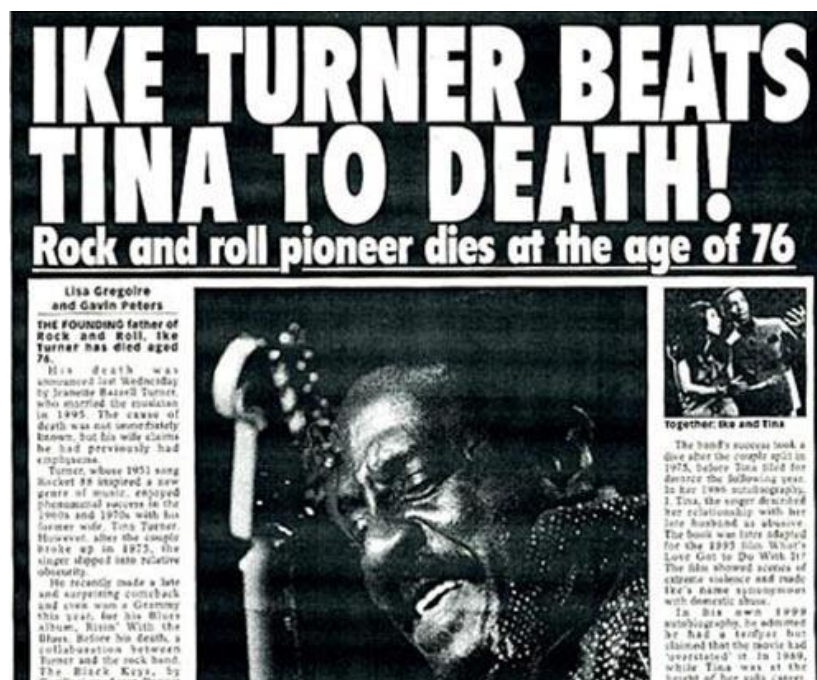
### EXAMPLE 1: Representation of a woman as a „chick“

“Chick” is a derogatory term used for a girl or young woman in order to refer to her sexuality, attractiveness or, rarely, her intellect. The headline: *CHICK ACCUSES SOME OF HER MALE COLLEAGUES OF SEXISM* describes an affair of the lady whose actual surname is Chick, but the journalist's intention was to make it catchy.



Picture 1 (Taken from: [http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-24/news/mn-23690\\_1\\_gender-sensitivity](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-24/news/mn-23690_1_gender-sensitivity); the article published by The L.A. Times on June 24, 1995)

**EXAMPLE 2: Representation of women as physically and mentally inferior to men/depiction of masculinity**



Picture 2 (Taken from: <http://www.cartridgesave.co.uk/news/the-10-most-infamous-music-headlines-ever-printed/>, the article was published by The New York Post on 13 December 2007)

This example is even more astonishing than the previous one considering the fact that one of the two authors is a woman. Huge bold letters announcing a terrible news about a famous musician beating his wife, also a famous singer, have served as a perfect eye-catcher and a guarantee for top-selling of the newspaper.

*Semantic Macrostructures*

The first to be analyzed in both of the examples above are the headlines as the semantic macrostructures which embody the most important information of the discourse. These headlines contain all the linguistic components needed to intrigue the reader: they are catchy, coherent and deal with a pretty delicate topic. Having all those characteristic, they provide the reader with a great deal of informativity.

Considering the main idea behind the texts, there is a difference between the first and the second of the events analyzed.

Namely, the Chick in the first example has really accused her colleagues of sexual harassment, while Ike Turner didn't really beat Tina to death. The journalists used the trick about him beating his wife to death only to attract the readers to buy the newspaper and find out that Ike Turner, who used to beat his wife while being married, died at the age of 76.

I must admit this was an interesting wordplay, but it was totally inappropriate and provided the authors of the article with mockery and critique of their colleagues and the public.

The mockery eventually went too far, so The New York Post removed the article from their web-page.

In addition, we must pay attention to the font of the headlines mentioned. They have been written in large, bold letters and the writers were very careful about the capitalization rules, which do not only imply grammaticality of the text but also the authors' emphasis.

These ere exactly the most important features considering the semantic components of the headlines because they announce the authors' intention to influence the reader's mental space, or, in other words, make the reader to create a mental representation about the discourse in progress.

This is totally obvious in the second example, in which the information about beating the wife has been written in huge letters only to serve as an eye-catcher, while the real news about a



famous person's death has somehow been hidden or made inferior by being written in smaller letters.

#### *Local Meanings*

Another important aspect of this analysis is certainly the concept of local meanings contained in the texts. According to Van Dijk, local meanings are the result of the selection made by speakers or writers in their mental models of events or their more general, socially shared beliefs. At the same time, they are the kind of information that (under the overall control of global topics) most directly influences the mental models, and hence the opinions and attitudes of recipients. [14, p.95-120]

At this level of local meanings, we will surely notice the word "chick" in the first headline which implies the ideological perspective of the journalist as a "he-man". This word depicts this particular woman as "one of the chicks" who provoked and eventually deserved to be harassed by "her male colleagues." At the same time, here we may recognize the positive self-presentation considering the mental image of a "male colleague", which implies an image of a fine gentleman, as opposed to that of a "chick", representing the woman as an inferior, less intellectual creature and degrading her to the level of promiscuity.

Furthermore, we cannot leave the word "sexism" out of this scheme because it functions as a perfect term with ideological implications and, in most cases, deals with masculine attitudes towards the objectification of women.

*Sexism* is defined as "the belief or attitude that one sex is inherently superior to, more competent than, or more valuable than the other. It can also include this type of discrimination in regards to gender. Sexism primarily involves hatred of, or prejudice towards, either sex as a whole, or the application of stereotypes of masculinity in relation to men, or of femininity in relation to women." [2, p. 236, 31]

The second headline looks even more shocking in this context. It completely conveys the *application of stereotypes of masculinity in relation to men, or of femininity in relation to women.*

The discourse used in this headline is the core of media discourse. Why? Firstly, the authors put a famous rock-star and recorded abuser into the first plan, calling him by the full name, while his beaten wife was simply called Tina.

Secondly, *beating a woman to death* is one of the most bestial things a man could do, but *beating a woman to death* in a newspaper headline means selling the newspaper and make a profit out of it.

Thirdly, Ike is represented as a *macho-man*, and not as an abuser, which actually deprives the reader of the empathy for Tina's situation.

Finally, *practice makes perfect*, and sensation makes money. This is the only relevant law in the world of mass media and their discourses are only practical aspects of the law.

#### *Formal structures*

Considering the formal discourse structures, Van Dijk distinguishes between "global" and "local" discourse forms or formats. "Global forms" consist of "typical genre categories, as is the case for arguments, stories or news articles", while the "local forms" imply "formal relations between clauses and sentences in sequences."

Both of the titles ("Chick Accuses Some of Her Male Colleagues of Sexism" and "Ike Turner Beats Tina to Death") have been written in the active form of the Simple Present Tense, which means that the authors wanted to send a clear and direct message to the readers.

"*Chick Accuses...*" are the key words in the first article because they actually present the agent of the action in a negative way.

The use of the slang term "chick" also implies the intentional non-formality of the title used by the author in order to approach to the readers.

The situation in the second example is totally different. The agent of the action is not represented in a completely negative sense due to the fact that beating of the wife has served as the eye-catching information. Unfortunately, Ike Turner in this context depicts masculinity. He almost

appears to be a hero, while his beaten wife has been represented as a poor, unimportant and unsightly woman.

#### *Context*

CDA studies the discourse strategies and structures within the framework of a certain context, which is divided by Van Dijk into the “local” and “global” context.

“Local” context includes “properties of the immediate, interactional situation in which a communicative event takes place.” These properties are: the “overall domain of the situation, an overall action, participants in various communicative and social roles, as well as their intentions, goals, knowledge, norms and other beliefs.” This means that “what we say and how we say it depends on who is speaking to whom, when and where, and with what purposes.”

“Global” contexts might be understood through the prism of social, political, cultural and historical structures in which a communicative event occurs.

Van Dijk joins these notions under the common term – *context models*, which are the actual “mental representations that control many of the properties of discourse production and understanding, such as genre, topic choice, local meanings and coherence as well as speech acts, speech style and rhetoric.”

Thus, the overall domain of the situation in the example above is that of journalism or the media space, and the overall action- that of accusing several men of sexism. The local setting of the first communicative event is one of the pages of the *LA Times* published on June 26, 1995, while the local setting of the second communicative event is a page of the *New York Post* published on December 13, 2007.

The communicative role includes the author and the readers, while the interactional roles include the “chick” and “her colleagues” in the first example and Ike and Tina Turner in the second example.

Another notion to be mentioned is that of the current communicative actions, which are presented in publishing the articles in the particular newspapers. These actions are being performed by the author’s direct addressing to the readers in order to inform them about the particular case.

The cognitive dimension of the context is presented through the complex mental structures including the ideologies, attitudes and opinions discussed in the previous sections.

Finally, we could say that mental models actually present discourses as a sum of personal and social properties, which means that each discourse is different in the same social situation. Van Dijk says that CDA focuses on these complex series of links. According to him, “there is no direct link between discourse and society.

#### *Social Condition*

The notion of social condition implies “social representations” of power, domination and social inequality among groups, organizations and institutions. As Van Dijk defined, “this means that CDA also needs to account for the various forms of social cognition that are shared by these social collectivities: knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values.” These representations control the production of discourse, i.e. text and talk, and they may be expressed directly and indirectly. [14, p. 95-120]

All of the representations mentioned above will be discussed within the notions of knowledge, attitudes and ideologies exhibited through the discourse.

Knowledge may be personal, which means that it is represented through the personal mental representations or images of certain social situations. These are personal interpretations of social events.

On the other hand, group knowledge presents a system of beliefs of certain social groups, including the ways in which they are represented through the properties of discourse like metaphors, topics, coherence, intertextuality and similar.

Finally, we should define ideologies “as the basic social representations of social groups.” [17, p.9]

Thus, ideology might be considered as a study of ideas. It tends to refer to the people's general opinion about the world and their *ideal* concept of living. We could even say that

ideologies are clusters of knowledge, attitudes, norms and values shared by certain social groups and exhibited through discourse.

Van Dijk explains the connection between ideology and discourse in a very simple way: “Much of our discourse, especially when we speak as members of groups, expresses ideologically based opinions. We learn most of our ideological ideas by reading and listening to other group members, beginning with our parents and peers. Later, we 'learn' ideologies by watching television, reading books at school, advertising, the newspaper, novels or participating in everyday conversations with friends and colleagues, among a multitude of other forms of talk and text.” [17, p.9]

The sample texts above indicate some social peculiarities considering the relationships between men and women:

#### THE FIRST EXAMPLE

- a) the word *chick* is used not only to underestimate the particular woman but also women in general
- b) men are referred to as *male colleagues*, which means they are treated with respect
- c) the headline implies that an accusation made by a simple “*Chick*” is not very relevant.

#### THE SECOND EXAMPLE

- a) Ike Turner is presented with his full name, while Tina Turner is only “Tina”.
- b) A tragic event of beating a woman by a violent, drug-addicted musician should not serve as a means of selling the tabloids whose journalists (ab)use the English language only to get attention.

In addition, sexism is explicitly mentioned in the first text, but the other, and even worse, ideology hiding behind this headline is the masculine chauvinism of the worst kind, wrapped into an everyday men- talk phrase like *Chick accuses*.

The second headline is also full of hidden masculine chauvinism and is totally tasteless and disrespectful towards women.

Ideologies in general present sets of principles and instructions which guide and control the attitudes, beliefs, norms and values of the members of certain social groups. Thus, sexism and masculine chauvinism may affect masculine attitudes about women’s mental abilities, body images and women’s place in society leading to discriminative practices like underestimating women in business and education, giving them less respect and making them underpaid in relation to men.

#### *The Relationship between Discourse and Society*

This relationship will be analyzed according to Van Dijk’s notion of 4 categories connecting discourse and society: social situations, actions, actors and societal structures.

In our examples the communicative situations are similar. Both of the articles were found in the Internet and both of them were published by famous daily newspaper in the USA. Both of them are directed to the readers that read these newspapers in order to change their image of the world around them.

Considering the category of action, there is an evident difference between the two articles. The first is about a chick accusing her male colleagues of sexism and the other one is about the death of a violent rock-star who used to beat his wife, also a famous rock-star.

However, ideologies hidden behind these articles are the same: sexism and masculine chauvinism and the authors tend to persuade their readers about men –power and the simplicity of women in every sense.

The actors of the first article are a Los Angeles Councilwoman Laura Chick and her colleagues and the actors in the second one are Ike Turner and Tina Turner. But, they are not the only actors of these communicative events. They also include the authors of these articles as the “main” communicators in the discourse, who transfer the information or the message, and the readers as recipients or the addressees influenced by the things they read in the newspapers.

Societal structures refer to the structure and functions of the discourses presented in the articles above. CDA analyzes these discursive aspects in terms of social power and dominance. We have seen through the previous analysis how the ideologies of sexism and chauvinism are implemented in social relationships between men and women affecting their mental representations of the world in which men are empowered and women are inferior.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

According to Global Media Monitoring Project research in 108 countries coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), women are still significantly underrepresented and misrepresented in news media coverage. Thus, “76% of the people heard or read about in the world’s news are male. This figure transcends geography and culture.” [9]

CDA is a discourse analysis in terms of social relationships, especially considering the notions of power and dominance in society and their implementation within discursive strategies in general.

This particular research referred to abuse of social power and dominance via the print media and the peculiarities of the discourse used by the media in order to shock the readers or make a sensation in order to sell the newspapers.

This research implies that the print media are still in male’s domain, even in great democracies like the USA.

The image of women in society has certainly undergone many changes during the past fifty years in the sense of emancipation and raising their spirits but they are still far away from being equally treated in relation to men.

This is evident when reading the headlines that we have chosen to analyze in this work.

Unfortunately, women still tend to be represented as weak, inferior and “chicks”, seen primarily through body images and sexual connotations produced by the mass media ruled mostly by men.

The New York Post's headline about Ike and Tina Turner was culmination of humiliating women in the men world . It was a rather unprofessional and crude way of reporting the death of Ike Turner via a cocaine overdose which deserved every public condemnation and raised a lot of questions on representation of women in society. The aim of this research is to contribute to the efforts of changing and improving images of women in the media, which underrepresent them “as victims or in outdated, stereotypical roles.” [9]

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## One Day Post-Soviet Countries Will Rise Up?



*Andrew Wilson* is a Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Previously he was a Reader in Ukrainian Studies at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), University College London. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He has published widely on the politics and culture of the European neighbourhood, particularly on Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and on the comparative politics of democratisation in the post-Soviet states, especially its corruption by so-called ‘political technology’.

*Andrew Schumann:* What is the role of the European Council on Foreign Relations? How does this institution cause decision-making in European foreign policy? Maybe some examples.

*Andrew Wilson:* The ECFR is a think-tank. It’s not a state body, or part of the EU. The web address is [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu) because it is pan-European, with offices in seven major European capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, Rome, Madrid and Sofia. Its *raison d’être* is to influence foreign policy thinking in the EU by lobbying the main Member States. We do not have an office in Brussels, so as not to be seen as a creature of the EU bureaucracy, but obviously we lobby it too. I think we have influenced the climate of opinion on key issues, such as shaping and reshaping the Eastern Partnership. Media work, op-eds in key papers, etc. all have an effect, but an inside track matters too. The EU works by consensus – the key is to offer policy ideas to the key decision-making points in the policy process. We are very happy for other top take on, even claim ownership of our ideas. We have built up relations with key decision-makers.

*Andrew Schumann:* For a long time, you have investigated political systems of Eastern European countries. Why can we affirm that Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia are not democratic countries still? Which sophisticated techniques of the “virtual” political system used to legitimize post-Soviet regimes can you describe now? Don’t we have the similar techniques in other post-Socialist republics? We face problems with vertical social mobility in different countries.

*Andrew Wilson:* I tried to address these questions in several recent pieces for *Open Democracy*. The first is summer 2011 was *Political Technology: Why is it Alive and Flourishing in the USSR?*<sup>1</sup> Which asked two distinct sets of questions. One was why Russia still needed to fix elections, when the system seemed omnipotent. Ironically, the next election cycle in 2011/12 then showed the dangers of hubris – it was precisely because the Kremlin saw no need to steamroller to victory with a hyped dramaturgia that a space opened up for real opposition politics. I discussed these dilemmas in a second piece written this spring, *Putin Returns: But will Russia Revert to Virtual Democracy?*<sup>2</sup> The answer is that the ‘Putin majority’ has decayed, but a ‘Putin plurality’ remains, stitched together by the same old tired tricks. Putin has lost control of the narrative, the national public conversation. He is experimenting with repression at the moment, but the system was more stable in the 2000s, when the Kremlin controlled the narrative as well.

Belarus is a different type of state. Lukashenka has no regime party, there are no fake parties (though these played a role in the past, like the Liberal-Democrats of Belarus). Lukashenka’s favorite method of controlling opposition parties is agents, infiltration, divide-and-rule. The stability

of the state depends on other things, namely the flow of rent to pay for the social contract and keep the elite happy.

Virtual politics depends on information control. It is harder to practice in other post-Socialist states; though Slovakia under Meciar came close, as did Romania in the early 1990s. Latvia has oligarchic parties, although these have been on the retreat in recent years.

*Andrew Schumann:* Probably, Ukraine is the most democratized country in comparison with the other post-Soviet (non-Baltic) countries. What problems does Ukrainian democracy face? Is there a chance that this country will be included into the European Union in the future?

*Andrew Wilson:* The other set of questions were about Ukraine. First, why was so much political technology able to survive in the years after the Orange Revolution? And second, why has it made such a comeback under Yanukovich?<sup>3</sup>

*Re-control of the mass media has been key. Ukraine now has a clone opposition (Forward Ukraine) and a scarecrow opposition (the Freedom Party). The authorities will win the October 2012 elections, whatever happens. Political technology has even extended its reach: divide-and-rule tactics have been applied to the Crimean Tatars, Ukraine invests heavily in PR abroad, fake demonstrations are not only the norm, but have become business.*

But Ukraine is still not Russia. The opposition is harder to destroy with political technology, which is why 'legal technology' has been used so harshly as well. And this is what has sunk relations with the EU, who wouldn't notice the more subtle stuff.

*Andrew Schumann:* In your book *Belarus: the Last European Dictatorship* you state that in the Belarusian history there were a series of false starts in the medieval and pre-modern periods and now there are the many rival versions of Belarusian identity. Were all these circumstances the true reasons of that the last dictatorship appeared in this country?

*Andrew Wilson:* In part, yes. Belarusian politics isn't really about identity politics in the same way as other, more 'nationalising' post Soviet states. This gives Lukashenka more freedom of maneuver. But it is also true that Lukashenka does play a type of identity politics that suits the average Belarusian more than the Nasha Niva project ever did: creolic, Russian-speaking or trasianka-speaking, in a special but still exploitative relationship with Russia.

*Andrew Schumann:* Recently Belarus is isolated from Europe. Whether it is possible to push forward democratization in Belarus by means of its isolation? For example, communications with official Minsk are extremely weakened at all levels, not only at the political one. Nevertheless, liberal forces in the country are supported, e.g. there is an essential financial support. In the context of weak communications at the official level, it attracts the number of problems. I am describing some. The liberal communities in Minsk have opportunity to master money of sponsors, reporting only to sponsors. It means, for example, that Belarusian NGO, supported by the West, implement principles which are not peculiar for NGO at all: closeness, secrecy, decision opaqueness, non-responsibility for society. In such conditions the realization of many projects can be fictitious. It causes corruption in liberal Belarusian communities. For example, for the reception of financial support the kickback may be up to 60% of the sum or even higher as some participants tell privately. For the liberal circles in Belarus it is a norm now. Money is in suitcases, etc. Another problem is that for Belarusians the participation in the European programs directed on democratization in the country becomes a wide door for the fast career. Very often at home these people possess a weak social capital, sometimes even they are unemployed, but thanks to personal contacts to some euroofficials start to act in a role of experts, heads of serious programs, although these people have no expert knowledge, no influence in the Belarusian society (e.g. oppositionists have no popularity in Belarus at all). Whether experts of the European Council on Foreign Relations



know about all these problems? Could you offer what ways of democratization of Belarus are possible still? It is obvious that all European recent strategies have appeared failed.

*Andrew Wilson:* Yes, indeed. Regime and opposition mirror one another. Lukashenka is dependent on Russian rents, the opposition on Western funding. One other consequence of this is there is no real interaction between the two. There is no political middle ground. The West should support the NGO sector more rather than opposition parties; funding should be linked to outreach performance, rather than report filing. There should be more technical contacts with the middle ranks of the bureaucracy.

**Notes:**

1. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrew-wilson/political-technology-why-is-it-alive-and-flourishing-in-former-ussr>
2. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrew-wilson/putin-returns-but-will-russia-revert-to-%E2%80%98virtual-democracy%E2%80%99>
3. [http://www.phil.uni-greifswald.de/fileadmin/mediapool/slawistik/Projekte/Ukraine\\_under\\_Yanukovych.\\_The\\_wrong\\_man\\_at\\_the\\_wrong\\_time.Andrew\\_Wilson\\_.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-greifswald.de/fileadmin/mediapool/slawistik/Projekte/Ukraine_under_Yanukovych._The_wrong_man_at_the_wrong_time.Andrew_Wilson_.pdf)



## Can an IT-Company like Apple Be Established in Belarus?



*Dr. Valery Tsepkalo* is the Director of Hi-Tech Park Administration, Minsk, Belarus (since 2005). From 1994 to 1997 the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus (Minsk). From 1997 to 2002 the Ambassador of Belarus in the USA and in Mexico (Washington). From 2002 to 2005 the Assistant of the President of Belarus (Minsk).

*Andrew Schumann:* The school of Soviet mathematics gave a huge number of important theorems proved in different areas including as well branches connected to IT-theory such as theory of recursion functions, theory of automata, non-classical logics, group theory, graph theory, etc. This school was very strong, maybe one of the strongest all over the world in theory of IT, but not in praxis of IT. How can you estimate abilities of recent Belarusian mathematicians working in the IT sphere? Can Belarus become sometime a leader in IT and appear more effective than for example even India? Can Belarus produce own IT?

*Valery Tsepkalo:* In order to develop information technologies and implement them we should have something else, not only talented mathematicians and engineers. I agree with estimations belonging to Walter Isaacson who named Steve Jobs and Bill Gates supernovae, superstars. They appeared, lighted up, because all – space, time, person – should have converged in one point so that the creative idea would be fruitful. And for them all converged indeed. When someone tells me, let us make so that in the Hi-Tech Park of Belarus Apple will appear, I emphasize: let us start with small project – let us create, for example, the company like Boeing in Belarus which will supply all merchant fleet all over the world and which will produce lunar rockets, etc. And so now Boeing is only 1/12 of company like Apple. Why do we want to start up with something large? Let be with something small so that to fly to Mars and to Moon. The problem is that the appearance of the largest IT-companies was a phenomenon which could not be predicted. Similar phenomena arise suddenly and not clearly how. Therefore any expecting that a theoretical product can lead to similar results, I would not accept.

Let us reflect, why all largest brands in IT sphere are located in the USA. The EU is large enough, about 500 million persons. Nevertheless it is possible to name only SAP as a well-known brand. India has more than billion population, but also there is difficult to name their own brand. In China the same is observed. In Japan we can find good brands in microelectronics such as Sony, although the given company suffers now heavy losses and every year a situation for them only worsens. Samsung for a long time has already bypassed all Japanese companies.

The matter is that for establishing big IT companies an appropriate environment which takes place in the USA is necessary. Belarusians are creative as well as Americans, Germans or Japanese. The main task of our Park has been in creation of the environment which presumes something valuable to be born. For us, first of all, there should be a critical mass of engineers. In the Silicon Valley the following significant factors have converged: talented open-minded engineers and creative thinkers like Steve Jobs (who even did not finish his education in a humanitarian speciality). But also in his brilliant case the business started with an engineer. If there was not Stephen Gary Wozniak and there would be no possibility to enlarge staff of engineers in the company, Jobs could not have been

successful as the organizer of the biggest IT-company. Developing creative ideas without a staff of engineers is not productive at all. Traditional mathematical education is quite good, as it gives a wide world-outlook that can be applied in IT, but it is not enough for success.

For the Western experts the outlook is a little narrowed, they are ground at once on narrow tasks: encoders and other. Though in the field of custom programming there are outstanding experts in the West. The first thing that we should do in the Park consists in a transfer of high technologies from the USA to Belarus. This transfer should make the Belarusian IT-creativity successful and effective. What is creativity in general? It should be obviously in the common trend. For example, one outstanding Belarusian scientist about 8 years ago invented a unique method of magnetic tape data storage. Thanks to this method the information can be stored longer and more. Tape chemical properties are in that it can be stored in less whimsical conditions. But the problem is that on magnetic tape nobody stores information now. It is a deadlock branch. This scientist fulfilled a serious study but when you are out of understanding, what now is in mainstream, your opening will not become IT-project.

*Andrew Schumann:* At the beginning the IT development in the West and in the USSR was independently and in absolutely parallel ways. The USSR practically did not have a time lag (maximum from 1 to 2 years). For instance, the first own computer with a safe program, MESM (in Russian *МЭСМ*, Small Electronically Computing Machine), created under the supervision of Academician Sergey Lebedev (1902–1974), was put into operation in 1951. The IBM mass-produced the first industrial computer IBM 701 in 1952. Since then the IT development in the West has been much quicker. One of the explanations is that the management and decision-making in the USSR was less effective (or ineffective at all). For example, Arcady Zakrevsky, the great Belarusian computer scientist, participated in the creation of first computers in the USSR and became the developer of the first Soviet programming language for logical tasks LYaPAS (in Russian *ЛЯПАС*), told me in the interview that in the 1970s the country leaders made a decision to stop all original developments in the field of computer technics. The decision was to follow copying IBM's samples, though sometimes in technical implementation it appeared more challenge, than a creation of own samples. Since then developers of Soviet computers have called their "child" Stolenscope (in Russian *Дралоскоп*) for fun. After the USSR had quitted race for creation of more and more perfect computers, IBM became the world leader in this sphere. In Belarus there is an authoritative political regime that is based quite often on Soviet ways of management and decision-making that are not effective as we have just said. Could you please describe how decisions are made in the IT policy in Belarus now and who are main actors in decision-making? What is effective and what isn't in comparison with the Soviet Union?

*Valery Tsepkalo:* The main problem of the Soviet Union consisted in that the state was a unique customer of any innovations. At the same time, the work cost in the USSR was the lowest. As a result, developing high technologies economically was not favourable. If we consider the situation in the Western countries, thanks to high salaries they have been forced to implement high technologies in production for possibility to reduce expensive work places. On the other hand, the Western workers had a lot of money on hands and they had opportunities to purchase expensive computers. So, the first computers which were done by Jobs 25 – 30 years ago cost from 2 to 2.5 thousands USA dollars. Now this sum is equivalent to about 5 thousands USA dollars. Who in the USSR could have bought such computers? In the Union there was no economic basis to accumulate the IT-companies at all. The low payment in the USSR has prevented economic development.

The same case has been observed in Belarus now, there is a weak capitalisation in society, low salaries. We are the export-oriented country. Customers of residents of the Park are located in the USA, the West Europe, some countries of Asia. Among all our orders Belarus has only 10%. Why? A bright example. Yesterday I parked my auto. I should pay for parking about 25 USA cents to the young, healthy worker who I guess receives a very little salary. For economic reasons using this man is more favourable and effective, than to deliver any system with the difficult software, to have

possibility to pay, say, by a mobile phone. Accordingly, there are no instruments, requirements and stimulus to install system of meters or electronic parking. If you were forced to pay for his job \$1,300, in this case it would be more favourable to deliver e-meters.

I think that the main obstacle of IT-developing the Soviet Union was not that samples were copied. After all at first Taiwanese, Koreans have successfully copied. Recently China has copied. After all when you copy, the own staff of engineers which know already all recent trends and last specifications is being organized for you. In this critical mass the own products start to implement. So in this way ADC in Korea developed. So in this way there appeared Japanese brands in mechanical engineering – first they started with copying the American developments. I have no anything against copying as a form of the transfer of high technologies. But there should be an appropriate market environment. Without it all is useless. In the Soviet Union the problem was not that they copied, but that there was no market environment. Say, a computer was made and then there was a real problem to put it into operation. The ministry should have required pointers about implementations from the works manager. The director had other estimations of his success. He was evaluated by the number of work places and if he implemented computers this number of places should have been reduced. At the level of Soviet chiefs there was a tearing away of new technologies. For the development of high technologies in the USSR there was no appropriate economic and social environment, there were no requirements for a real sector of economic activity. This was a principal cause of backlog of the USSR.

*Andrew Schumann:* In Belarus there are many examples of implementing IT into the everyday life. How and why is it possible to develop e-government and other IT implementations under conditions of the Belarusian authoritarianism? How far can e-government and e-democracy develop in Belarus recently? What may be expected in the future?

*Valery Tsepka:* On the one hand, in Belarus something is done already in the field of e-government. On the other hand, as a whole we essentially lag behind. It is not the problem of us as developers of IT-products. We did a similar production for many countries: the USA, the Great Britain, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. For example, we did it for urban authorities of Los-Vegas. Implementing e-government for us faces the same negative economic and social reasons which were in the Soviet Union, too. The problem is that the government in itself should be electronically-oriented. After all, the implementation of electronic government changes all administrative procedures. It should involve modifying the structure of management by ministries, changing mechanisms of interaction between ministries. As a result, it is necessary to rewrite all regulations. Thus, e-government more is a management reform in the country, than simply a certain implementation of electronic units. For us as for developers of IT-product in Belarus it would be easy to realise this task within the context of quite good past developments which we did for other countries. But here the government should understand that we should pass through a serious management reform, e.g. to force chiefs of the first level to manage by means of computers. The task of e-democracy is to solve the question to make decision-making and actions of authorities transparent as much as possible. Especially, in the economic sphere the power should be as much as possible understandable and open, e.g. delivering plot allocations through open auctions. The greatest problem for democracy is in corruption. For this purpose there should be a complete transparency of mechanisms of decision-making. In Singapore the Prime Minister is the most highly paid employee. He earns about \$2 million a year. In the USA the President receives about \$350,000 a year. Once the Prime Minister of Singapore told to a journalist that Ferdinand Marcos in Philippines receives, say, \$9 a year, but his personal accounts in the Swiss banks content about \$9 billion and what is better, the high salary of employee or corruption. It is obvious that first of all there should be transparent decision-making in economy. Although it should be everywhere, e.g. in recruiting on a state position, on an academic position etc. For denying corruption it is necessary to beat out the economic chair.

*Andrew Schumann:* The Hi-Tech Park in Belarus is a good sample of the Belarusian innovation policy. The Park has been quickly developed. What are its main goals? What are the most interesting and promising projects in the Park recently?

*Valery Tsepikalo:* The Park really became the successful project. For six years thanks to creating the Hi-Tech Park the export of Belarusian computer programs has grown more than 2000%. The Park fulfils also an important role of integrating Belarus into the world trends. In my article *The Remaking of Eurasia*<sup>1</sup>, published in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, I considered a geopolitical situation of integration on the post-Soviet territory under the conditions of the Russian crisis connected with disintegration processes on Caucasus, low costs of barrel of petroleum etc. At that time I worked as the Ambassador of Belarus in the USA and in talks to Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russian, working in the Silicon Valley, never at all it was supposed that Belarus can sometime export IT-products. Then it seemed that Belarus can do only manual labour. After the disorder of the Soviet Union there was a big problem of employment and nobody thought of quality of employment. There was no system of retraining of personnel. And I was convinced as well that we cannot work in the sphere of IT. We could make the Buran spacecraft, but it is not an innovation at all, it is not a kind of high technologies. From my point of view any innovation assumes at once commercialisation. You can make up any project, let be the greatest invention, but nobody will give you money, if this project does not assume a commercial result. In this meaning it is a bit strange that the Soviet Buran spacecraft is not an innovation, but iPhone is an innovation. In the latter case the market as an ultimate goal of project was ever visible. We could have done difficult things in the Soviet Union, but their majority was not entered in modern economy.

For this year we have made thousand projects for Belarusians and foreign customers. Our partners now are Google, Reuters, Dun & Bradstreet, and so on. For Belarus we do only 10% from all our projects, thereby for the last year we have realised for Belarus about 8,500 projects. I am pleased that many interesting projects start gradually to be implemented in our country too – in the field of management and so on. Recently, there was published an article in *BusinessWeek*<sup>2</sup> and it was devoted to the project Viber that was realised in Brest (Belarus). Another our well-known project is the World of Tanks<sup>3</sup>.

*Andrew Schumann:* Which global trends in IT can be emphasized? Might Belarus be in trends? Which ones?

*Valery Tsepikalo:* In 2002 I asked the Minister of Finance of the USA, Paul Henry O'Neill what is the next big thing. Always in the American economy something was a main drive at this or that stage: mechanical engineering, atomic engineering, aircraft construction, biotechnologies, information technologies. But there were also periods of crisis. Here it is possible to remember the crisis of dot-coms in 2000. The Minister told me that if he knew the right answer, he would not be the Minister of Finance of the USA, and would be a very rich person. The matter is that to predict the development of new trends is a too difficult task. When iPhone and iPad have appeared, first there were many critical recalls in top journals such as *BusinessWeek*. But these projects all have shot.

At my modest sight, most likely, IT-directions linked to mobile-phone applications will become priority. There will be a further integration of phone and computer. Programming for mobile phones, for mobile terminals will develop. Many our residents actively attend to this trend now. We open laboratories at the Belarusian universities where all these programming languages are studied. For at least 5 years it will determine a fashion, trend. Also, all programs linked to cloudy computation which allows us to develop customisation and personalisation will develop rapidly.

**Notes:**

1. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/53811/valery-v-tsepalo/the-remaking-of-eurasia>
2. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-08-23/the-skype-killers-of-belarus>
3. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-04-19/is-world-of-tanks-the-belarusian-farmville>



## Libertarians in Russia: Moscow Never Sleeps?



*Anatoly Levenchuk* is President of TechInvestLab.ru, since 1994 coordinator of the ‘Moscow Libertarian’, one of the oldest political and economical web resources in Russian, blogger (<http://ailev.ru>). His interests span from ontology and systems engineering to praxeology and organizational design. As an expert and industry representative, took part in several legislative initiatives.



*Victor Agroskin* is Vice-president of TechInvestLab, has an experience in strategy, IT and management consulting. Participated in investment and consulting projects in various industries for private and government clients, including e-government projects, financial market infrastructure, exchange trading, network capacity distribution.

*Andrew Schumann:* The libertarians in any country represent a minority; nevertheless very often this minority is an influential expert group whose opinion is considered as meaningful. What spheres are where the Moscow libertarians have influential expert estimations?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* In Russia there are several libertarian intellectual groups and one formal (yet unregistered) libertarian party. One of the oldest groups is closely tied to Austrian school of economic thought and is interested in the development of praxeological thinking. Austrian school has a rich and long history, but is rather forgotten now by a leftist mainstream economy, although its existence always surfaces at the time of economic turmoil.

*Victor Agroskin:* In Russia Austrian economic school is probable known better and wider than in other countries – because of the activities of the said group and first of all because of the publishing house “Sotsium” and its founder Alexander Kouriaev. Here every economist knows (and some are afraid) of its influence on the intellectual life. Nevertheless it should be noted that adherence to or knowledge of Austrian school of economics does not automatically mean adherence to libertarian political philosophy.

*Andrew Schumann:* Who or what has suggested a number of Muscovites to accept libertarian worldviews? What background is for libertarianism in Moscow? What projects have been implemented by the Moscow libertarians recently?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* As I’ve mentioned, one group of Moscow libertarians was involved in translation and publishing activity since early 90-s. For many years works of Mises, Hayek, Rothbard, etc. were translated and published in paper and on-line. People with different backgrounds (soviet-style economists, mathematicians, programmers, engineers) started to share common views on economy and politics, and became involved in various public projects, such as reforms in privatization, energy and transport sector restructuring, financial markets and banking.

Annually “Lebedev readings” are held in memory of Gennady Lebedev, once an important member and one of informal leaders of the said group. It is a scientific conference where with each year we have more and more original works – ones that don’t just offer reinterpretation of classic thinkers but propose something new and original.

*Victor Agroskin:* Another group of younger people is trying to win the place in reborn Russian public politics now, coming to streets with libertarian banners and fighting for the registration of Libertarian political party under Russian law. This group is publishing “Atlant” newspaper and organizing Adam Smith readings as a public forum on freedom in economy and politics.

There are several professors of economics in Russian universities (Moscow, St.Petersburg) who are teaching Austrian school of economics to their students. Sometimes they are doing this with support of their universities, but some of them are really defending their right to teach about economic freedom and real market economy.

*Andrew Schumann:* What features of Gennady Lebedev’s libertarian point of view can you note? Usually supporters of von Mises’ economic views are skeptical about mathematical methods in economics. Lebedev was not so obviously skeptic and suggested to use logical methods in economics. Is it a promising approach today?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* There are different kinds of mathematic models: a numerical models, used in statistics, and a discrete models, used in logic. Austrian economists do not recommend use of statistics for peoples’ behavior. If you kick a stone you can predict its behavior with precise numerical model, if you pressurize a gas – you can use a statistical one. But if you kick or press one sentient individual or even a country of sentient individuals, reaction cannot be predictable. But Austrian economists have no objections to the use of mathematic language for precise logical reasoning about core economic concepts.

Years ago we’ve discussed with Gennady Lebedev that “Human Action” treatise is very rich in ideas for persuasion but isn’t especially good in providing a formal ontology for reasoning about economics. It should be remodeled with the use of contemporary instruments of philosophical logic: counterfactual reasoning, possible worlds, modal logic, etc. Then we’ll get a tool for successful distribution of freedom ideas in broader circles, which are now under the influence of mainstream mathematized pseudo-science.

*Andrew Schumann:* Is it possible to state that your interest in ontology is connected to attempts of synthesis of the Austrian ideas and logic? What achievements have you in ontology sphere?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* It is not specifically about economic ideas, it is about praxeology (theory of action) ideas, which also comprise the foundations of Austrian economic. I want to see human action ontology (although I don’t believe in an existence of one-fits-all ontology) that I can use to reason about possible human activities. I am interested in studies at a borderline between planned and non-planned activities. E.g. you definitely can plan work of 5 employees in a small engineering boutique, but you rather can’t plan activities of a whole construction industry even in a small town. How can we describe and attempt to optimize activities of a federation of dozens enterprises (extended enterprise) in a big infrastructure project with their own supply chain management, CAD/PLM systems? I need a compact language to reason about such projects – greater than a single firm but smaller than a whole market.

We are participating in the development of industrial standard ISO 15926 – life cycle data integration ontology. It is rather unique for its ontological foundations in 4D extensionalism and possible world approach. We’ve developed .15926 (pronounced “dot15926”) software framework to work with data structured with the help of this ontology. There is a small (about 80 people)



Russian-speaking community interested in such applications of ontology to human activities in engineering.

*Victor Agroskin:* ISO 15926 so far is not used for ontology modeling with formal semantics, and there are no software tools with logical provers or reasoners under the hood. It works more like a common dictionary now but this is sufficient for our purposes of activity description mappings.

We are testing ontology-based mapping of enterprise and extended enterprise activity descriptions – project management, process management, case management, supply chain logistics, factory floor logistics, etc. These descriptions are distributed across different project management tools, issue trackers and process engines in CAD/PLM, ERP, EAM and other kinds of engineering, production, maintenance and financial enterprise information systems.

Some day we hope to use .15926 software for conceptual modeling of a general praxeology framework to obtain a model good for theoretical studies and for education. But currently we have no resources for such an endeavor.

*Andrew Schumann:* What is your interest in systems engineering and engineering management connected to? What appreciable results you have in this area?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* Engineering is a good starting point for the study of complex human systems. And it is possibly the only area where definitive scientific results are within our reach, compared to social and government domains.

Engineering activity consists of substance and information transformations to fulfill product requirements. Systems engineering is an interdisciplinary activity to build system as a whole and view the whole system's life cycle while dealing with it. Specialty engineering (mechanical, electrical, software, etc.) is only concerned with a part of a whole system. Therefore systems engineers need a good systems-centered ontology to describe a system and its life cycle. It is very challenging task – to build an oil refinery or an aircraft and eliminate all collision imminent to collaborative efforts. Systems engineering tell us how to do it.

Engineering management (or operation management) deals with flows through multiple workstations in a single enterprise or in multiple enterprises' supply chain. These are flows of materials and parts, of work tasks, of information, or money. This is about planning enterprise resources, scheduling and executing project, managing, queues, buffers, etc. Engineering management also deals with configuration management – defining objects of various flows and managing changes to these objects.

But all these disciplines are just different views on a human activity. We have developed PraxOS (Praxeologic Organisational System) framework that is in essence a library of systems engineering and engineering management method components. We use PraxOS in our consulting work with industry holdings. Also we are introducing students from a couple of Moscow universities to PraxOS concepts.

*Victor Agroskin:* And also we pay special attention to the problem of social engineering. Specifically we always teach people that systems engineering or engineering management recipes are not good when you are working with public systems and systems of state rule. These methods are developed for private entrepreneurial domain and for artificial systems, and should remain where they belong.

Humans are not a substance for engineering and their wishes and preferences are not the same as engineering requirements.

*Andrew Schumann:* When can we expect the high-grade electronic government which will completely replace the real governments? Will the era of libertarian communism appear then?

*Anatoly Levenchuk:* A decade ago we've participated in e-government projects in Russia. We've worked from a presumption that electronic government is not more than computers in aid to real government and real people. You can rename computers in your home (including chips in telephones and cars) as an "e-home" but this will not mean that real sweet home suddenly disappears and you enter a virtual reality. The same is true for e-government.

We believe that e-government should not be used to empower bureaucrats to the same extent e-enterprise is empowering workers. Absolute power corrupt absolutely. The government was not delegated the right to use computers for better control of the citizens.

Libertarian communism is oxymoron. I understand your sarcasm. Be careful with "progress" when you deal with governments and powers.



## **Can Politics Be Beautiful?**

*Review of the book*

The Art of Power: Machiavelli, Nietzsche and the Making of Aesthetic Political Theory by Diego von Vacano, Lexington Books, 2007

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All wars, even those conducted justly (*jus in bello*), involve harsh scenes. But since the invention of the camera, in the mid-nineteenth century, these scenes are documented. And ever since the invention of television and the Internet, in the 20th century, these scenes are brought ever closer to us. Each of us, as Susan Sontag argues in her classic book *On Photography*, has watched more suffering than any other person who lived before the age of photography. Visual images, violent and non-violent, increasingly dominate the way we perceive and judge the events that they document. But even if the visual images do not determine how people judged the war, they certainly do determine the starting point of the debate about the war. Such images, everyone agreed, call for either severe condemnation or for convincing justification.

We live in a visual culture. People read and write less, and view and photograph more. Information streaming in to us by means of the various media – mainly television and the Internet – includes fewer and fewer words and abstract arguments yet increasingly more visual images aimed at our sensory and aesthetic cognition. Therefore, any attempt to comprehend the conduct of contemporary politics must deal with its aesthetic aspect, and more general with the old and complicated relationship between politics and aesthetics.

The oscillatory nature of the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the West's intellectual history, begins with Plato. In his *Republic*, Plato banishes the poets from the polis that he sets up in Logos. Thus, Plato seeks to prevent the citizens' exposure to aesthetics' seductive powers, which by means of manipulating the senses presents the unreal as real. According to Plato, aesthetics range in the area of sensuality, whereas politics should be conducted solely within the bounds of reason. Therefore one should keep as far away as possible from aesthetics. Yet the power of the aesthetic medium is so dominant that even Plato who warns of it in such a clear voice, cannot resist it. Time after time, in the *Republic*, Plato uses myths – laden with visual images and other aesthetic means – not just as "noble lies" by means of which he seeks to maneuver the masses into rational-like behavior, but also, possibly mainly, in order to express the truth that can not be expressed by the logos.

Nevertheless, at least formally, Plato takes care to maintain a set hierarchy that positions politics above aesthetics. Aesthetics, he asserts, is merely a tool, and as such has no intrinsic value.

In *The Art of Power* Vacano presents two philosophers who at different times and in different contexts criticized this position of Plato's, and offered a substitute: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). In a rebellious act, they both transgress the limited traditional identification of the aesthetic with the beautiful – which Plato identifies also with the Good and with Truth – and adopt instead a more broader and modern definition of aesthetics that relates to anything perceived by the senses. This definition enables them to assert that man is

not a rational or political creature by nature, but specifically an aesthetic creature. For its senses, rather than its rationality or its social skills, are the means by which it interacts with its environment and leaves its mark on it. Politics, according to their view, is not a product of reason or morals but rather an aesthetic project, in which man leaves his personal and unique mark – not a general and eternal mark – in the raw material of humanity. Therefore, the political theories that they offer hark back to the original sense of Greek *theoria*, that denotes the act of physically *looking, observing*, which belongs in the realm of the senses. And as such, their political theories are characterized by the transferring of concepts from the aesthetic realm to the political. So, for example, the concept of perspective – as denoting a private point of view of the general reality, which man, as a finite being, in principle cannot transcend – becomes one of the main concepts in Nietzsche's political theory, a concept he inherits from Machiavelli, whom he holds in rare appreciation (95). The far-reaching implication of transferring the principle of perspective from the aesthetic realm to the political realm means separating the political realm from morality. For if all political actions are always and necessarily a matter of personal and subjective perspective, it is not possible to subject them to moral judgment that is universal and objective.

The assertion that the basis of Machiavelli's conception of man and politics is aesthetic, enables Vacano to shed new light on this philosopher who is usually perceived as a cold, ruthless, self-serving cynic. To support his assertion, Vacano turns to a close reading of the literary part of Machiavelli's oeuvre – especially of poetry and of letters that have not yet received the attention they deserve – before he begins to analyze Machiavelli's more famous works, chief among them, *The Prince*. Adjoining the aesthetic part to the political part of the Florentine philosopher's oeuvre leads Vacano to the conclusion that Machiavelli's main argument is a double one: only by means of the aesthetic medium can the political man's existential burden be properly exposed and understood; and only by means of perceiving politics as an aesthetic project, can the political man extricate himself from this tragic burden.

Machiavelli foreshadows Existentialism in his use of the aesthetic medium for the purpose of inquiring into the tragic state of man whom he perceives as wretched and lonely in a hostile and fickle world. Man in general, and political man in particular, Machiavelli asserts, is necessarily doomed to fail. For ultimately an unforeseen and uncontrollable change of his circumstances for the worse may completely ruin not only the various enterprises into which he pours his most valuable time and skills, but may even ruin his own self. Neither religion, nor morality, nor science – nor even the political science of Machiavelli himself, which is dedicated to the cultivation of the prince's virtue – can completely fortify the city walls against the fickleness of fate and its purposeless destructiveness. Moreover, neither religion, science, nor morality have the means to essentially describe the heavy burden mortal beings carry, and the deep tragedy in which they are immersed. Only by aesthetic means – such as poetry and rich metaphoric writing – can the basic state of human existence be accounted for. For that reason, Machiavelli not only combines aesthetic motifs in his political essays – such as personification of the unpredictable and uncontrollable element of existence in the form of Fortuna – but he also writes poetry that seeks to inquire into the burden and tragedy of human existence. So, for example, in his poem "The Golden Ass" he captivantly speaks at length of political man from the point of view of a wretched and ungrateful ass. In the same context, he concludes another of his poems, "Ingratitude" with the following assertion:

“Let everyone abhor both court and state:  
For there's no shorter way to make man hate  
The things he wanted most, once he has had them.”

But aesthetics, for Machiavelli, not only allows the identification of the human existential burden, but also the release from it. Observation of the beautiful and becoming one with it, is described by Machiavelli in "The Golden Ass" almost in terms of redemption. In place of the wretchedness of the political world, the aesthetic world holds promise of sensual delight. However, the ambition of a political man like Machiavelli did not allow him to abandon the political world to

become engrossed in the aesthetic. Instead, Machiavelli seeks to combine the two worlds, turning the Prince's political engagement into an aesthetic one. Not only in the sense that in political action the prince disguises reality behind a screen of aesthetic images meant to maneuver at once both his enemies on the one hand, and his citizens on the other; but also, and mainly, in the sense that like the artist, the prince in his political action, seeks to impose order, meaning, and stable form on the chaotic world that is in constant flux.

New creation obliges the prince, as it does the artist, to transcend all moral bounds and social mores. Therefore, Machiavelli's virtue, as Vacano asserts, is fundamentally, "the ability to foresee opportunities presented by fortune and to adapt accordingly to circumstances in order to establish something great and of duration. And this sort of virtù is aesthetic, for it requires imagination, creativity, flexibility, and plasticity. It is neither driven by moral rectitude nor by political ideals, but simply by the desire to create order out of either nothing or something intractable. This challenge requires artistic creativity." (115)

The perception of the political project of the prince as an aesthetic project is strengthened when taking into account that as opposed to our modern concept of state, for Machiavelli the state (*stato*) is not impersonal but "of the ruler". It is the medium through which the ruler casts himself upon others, just as the artist casts himself on the material at hand.

Vacano is absolutely right in asserting that as for Machiavelli, so for Nietzsche, the political project is essentially an aesthetic project. But his claim that for Nietzsche, as for Machiavelli, the ultimate test of this project is in its ability to ensure the political establishment with order and stability for as long as possible (87), seems to me less grounded. On the contrary, as I shall attempt to show, Nietzsche maintained that from the total criticism principle, it follows that a successful political project comes to an unavoidable end precisely in the deliberate and absolute destruction by its very own ruler.

The total criticism principle, which is the organizing principle in Nietzsche's philosophy, asserts that the Overman (*Übermensch*) must not accept anything as a given; he must completely doubt every scientific theory, moral value or metaphysical assertion. According to Nietzsche, only he who adopts the total criticism principle, is living on his own terms – both in that he is sufficient to himself (autarkic) and in that he makes his own laws (autonomous). Contrary to Kant, the laws that the Overman makes are not general laws but private laws that express the Overman's ability to detach from any common value and to form his own world by his own effort.

The Overman's creation is aesthetic in the sense that it carries its own significance within itself. Every law that the Overman makes gains its significance from the particular context within which it is made. Just as every motif in a musical work gains its significance from the entirety of its relations with other motifs in the work. Nietzsche did think that the only possible justification of a work is aesthetic – "the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon" he asserts in *The Birth of Tragedy* – but he was against minimizing the critical creativity solely to the aesthetic medium, and calls for applying it to life in general. This is the unavoidable political context in which Nietzsche believes in conducting "grand politics" beyond good and evil, whose sole purpose is to express the Will to Power of "the man of grand style", the Overman.

However, and crucially, he who is ruler of himself must not depend upon anything, not even on his own ruling and creation. Therefore, just as the great style obligates the Overman to create his own political world, it also obligates him to destroy his creation by his own hands. Only by means of creating and destroying political beings one after another, Nietzsche asserts, is the Overman likely to prove to himself that he is as powerful as reality itself, that creates and destroys an infinite number of individuals in an infinite number of ways.

The application of the cycle of creation and destruction not only to plastic and musical beings but also to political beings is intolerable from a moral point of view. So that even if Machiavelli's and Nietzsche's attempts to restore the city's poets, whom Plato banished, is appealing and seductive, still the moral price of the union that they endorse between politics and aesthetics raises heavy doubts as to its advisability. To such a marriage between politics and aesthetics, one

can, at least, apply the famous Jewish folk-saying, “Marriage resembles a city under siege – those on the outside wish to enter, and those on the inside wish to escape”.