MARTIN JAY: AN INTELLECTUAL PICTURE

MARTIN JAY: UN RETRATO INTELECTUAL

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Abstract: The following interview took place on June 6, 2018 as part of the interview series "The Intellectual and his/her Memory" of the School of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Granada. During the interview, Jay reflected upon his intellectual career, the current state of critical theory and dialectical categories, the status of truth in our time, postsecularism and identity politics.

Keywords: Martin Jat, Critical Theory, Visual Studies, Negativity, Parrhesia, Postsecularism.

Abstract: La siguiente entrevista se realizó el 6 de junio de 2018 en el marco del ciclo de entrevistas "El intelectual y su memoria" de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Granada. A lo largo de la entrevista, Jay reflexionó acerca de su carrera intelectual, el estado actual de la teoría crítica y de las categorías dialécticas, el estatus de la verdad hoy en día, el postsecularismo y las políticas identitarias.

Palabras clave: Martin Jay, Teoría crítica, Estudios visuales, Negatividad, Parresía, Postsecularismo.

Martin Jay is Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor of History Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. Martin Jay started his career around the pivotal year of 1968, at a time when the last fundamental books of the Frankfurt School (*Negative* Dialectics and *Aesthetic Theory*) were published and the main works of the soon-to be vanguard of contemporary French Thought (Guilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault) were being written. In those years, Martin Jay interviewed and studied the first generation of the Frankfurt School, which resulted in the publication of his PhD thesis under the title of *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973). Subsequently, Jay published a monograph on Theodor W. Adorno (1984), a study on the category of totality in Western Marxism (1984) and a seminal study on the critique of vision in French Thought, *Downcast Eyes* (1993). In addition to a newly-developed interest in American thought, especially pragmatism, Jay's two main areas of expertise, critical theory and post-structuralism, continued to inspire his later works: *Songs of Experience* (2004), *The Virtues of Mendacity* (2010) and *Reason after its Eclipse* (2016). Martin Jay has also published an enormous number of articles in scholarly journals, and has been a regular collaborator in *Salmagundi* since 1987.

Q – Your work, following your own convictions in relation to intellectual history, has developed in tension with the social, political and historical realities of the past fifty years. Your interviews with T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer took place precisely at a time when both philosophers were under attack by the leaders of the 1968 revolts. You became involved in the study of the French critics of vision in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the time of 9/11, you were immersed in the analysis of the concept of experience. Your study of lying in politics was marked by the 2008 financial crisis. Your own intellectual history can therefore be understood against the backdrop of a complex historical context. Why did you decide to study the history of the Frankfurt School fifty years ago and how did your interests expand, following *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (1984), into post-structuralism and the critique of visuality? To what extent political and historical changes have marked your own intellectual development?

A – The question of how I first became interested in critical theory is often asked and the answer that I normally give is two-part. First, in the 1960s' America I was part of a generation that was in a sense both part of the New Left and part of the counter culture. In the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse was a figure of great importance but also of great mystery. We had no real sense of where he came from. Books like *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) had an impact allowing us to think of ourselves as perhaps as oppressed as the working class had been in an earlier Marxist version of social conflict or as minorities, especially African-Americans, were in the United States. H. Marcuse allowed

us to think, as allegedly privileged mainstream white male Americans, that we too were somehow oppressed by capitalism, that we too were victims of one-dimensionality, that we too were victims of the culture industry. In a way, that gave us permission to be radical. H. Marcuse's theories could be used as a self-justification for the radicalism of the New Left, and although I cannot pretend to have been a full-fledged member of any militant New Left position, I nonetheless was a sympathizer. H. Marcuse gave us that kind of permission but we had no idea where he came from. There was no real sense of even Hegelian Marxism, let alone something called the Frankfurt School. There was that mystery to be solved and I was fascinated by trying to figure out H.Marcuse's own background. During that period a book called *The Unknown Dimension* (1972) was published and I had a piece in it, ultimately out of my dissertation. It was edited by Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare and it dealt not only with the Frankfurt School but with other schools of thought that came to be called "Western Marxism". Figures like Karl Korsch and George Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Louis Althusser and others were included in this book, and as the title suggested, in the 1960s and early 1970s all this was unknown. We were discovering as it were a new continent of thought, usually through translations, since our command of languages was rather weak. I was part of this very exciting moment of discovery, the discovery of a Western Marxist tradition which I later tried to understand in its complexity in *Marxism and Totality* moving beyond the Frankfurt School.

The second source of my interest was a growing sense that the so-called "intellectual migration", people who had come from Germany in the 1930s-1940s and after the Holocaust, this generation which had so enriched American intellectual life, was now passing from the scene. Some had died, many were retired, they were at the point of their careers where they were interested in telling their stories. My dissertation director at Harvard was a man named Henry Stuart Hughes who had worked with a number of these people in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services). He knew H. Marcuse, he knew Franz Neumann, he had been part of the American war effort and he was very interested in the migration himself. In fact he was to write a book about the intellectual migration a few years later (*The Sea Change*, 1975) in the trilogy that began with *Consciousness and Society* (1958). I was fascinated by that group of people, many of whom were living, and I wrote later about a number of the others: Hannah Arendt, Henry Pachter, and Siegfried Kracauer, who had already died. It was in that larger context of the migration of these figures that I began to be interested in the Frankfurt School.

But there was a third reason and I would have to admit that it is very personal: My background is basically assimilated Jewish, non-observant religiously but identifying very clearly with that tradition. And many of the people from the migration and most of the

members of the Frankfurt school also came from Jewish backgrounds more or less lacking a strong religious dimension. It was a certain identification with these people, and it was an identification which involved a kind of "upward cultural mobility". As an American there was something about European high culture, European *Bildung*, as the Germans call it, which was extraordinarily attractive. It was a kind of ideal version of the way in which a truly cultured figure might be and I think a lot of Americans felt in a way that they aspire to achieve that. So to take the intellectual migration seriously, to take the Frankfurt school seriously meant in a way identifying with that level of high European culture. But and this is the fascinating thing about the Frankfurt School in particular instead of seeing it as elitist, as discriminatory, as conservative, as somehow bound to the status quo, they had turned it in a critical and even subversive direction. They had been interested in high art, yes, but also in the avant-garde. They had been interested in reading German idealism but reading it against the grain. They were interested in figures like Friedrich Nietzsche I wrote my undergraduate senior thesis on F. Nietzsche who were also transgressive figures. It allowed you and this is a kind of confessional moment to identify with high culture, to aspire to be a to be a *gebildeter Mensch*, to be somehow part of that great tradition of European high culture and yet also be critical, subversive, to understand the political implications of all this, to read it against the grain and develop a kind of appreciation of the dialectical if we could use that term ways in which the high and the low of the seemingly elite and the democratic could be intertwined. In a way, the intellectual history tradition that I assumed as a student was a tradition which gave us access to ideas which had that subversive potential but were not necessarily part of the cutting-edge of fields in the present. For example, psychoanalysts. Most members of the Frankfurt School were very interested in Sigmund Freud, and many of the migrants were practicing psychoanalysts, but in psychology departments psychoanalysis was dead. Psychoanalysis was surpassed and other types of behavioral psychology or a variety of different kinds of analysis—therapeutic or otherwise—dominated. To be interested in a figure like S. Freud was to be interested in someone who had the potential to be interesting at a time when he was no longer taken very seriously. And the same of course happens with Marx, who for a long time was marginalized and even a condemned figure. It was possible to act as an intellectual storehouse, as a kind of placeholder or repository for ideas which were once important but were no longer important and might one day be important again. Intellectual history was looking towards the past but also looking towards the future.

I could go on and go through each work and see it as related to specific larger trends in American and world history, but I am not sure I could tie them quite as easily. *Marxism and Totality* was begun when Western Marxism was still riding high, but by the time it was

published in 1984 that wave had crested. The book ends with a very brief discussion of something new on the horizon which was, broadly speaking, French post-structuralism, which had a great impact in American academia. I took very seriously figures like M. Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Deleuze and others who were emerging as alternatives to German thought. What made them particularly exciting for me was the idea that they were not simply the opponents of these German traditions that I had understood, but they could be better used as a kind of enrichment of them: It was possible to ask difficult questions that they illuminated for the first time. For example, T. W. Adorno's various notions of non-identity and negative dialectics could in complicated ways be compared with J. Derrida. Their understanding of psychoanalysis could be compared with J. Lacan's reading of psychoanalysis. M. Foucault and Jürgen Habermas had a kind of complicated relationship in the question of power and knowledge, and not always one that was fully compatible. There was a healthy, but not completely successful, exchange between the German tradition and French post-structuralism.

The Virtues of Mendacity had been stimulated not by George W. Bush, who had been accused often of having lied about the weapons of mass destruction that supposedly were in Iraq, but rather by a book about Bill Clinton's presidency by Christopher Hitchens called *No One Left To Lie To* (1999), which attacked Clinton for being mendacious. What this showed me was that Clinton, Bush, and other figures of political importance were all on some level open to the accusation that they were hypocritical or outright liars. This suggested that there was an affinity or at least a complicated relationship between political discourse, political action, leadership in politics and a certain bending of the truth or creating a kind of smokescreen in which the truth was not fully told. In the age of Trump we have now achieved a kind of hyperlevel of this, and my book, which in a somewhat perverse way defended a level of lying in politics—I could go into the reasons why I made that defense , now seems like a bad omen of what was to come. The way I now conceptualize the link between the two moments—when Clinton or Bush or other figures in politics were in some ways using a kind of hypocrisy politically and what we now see with Trump , is the idea of the *pharmakon*, an old Greek idea which was revived by Derrida. The *pharmakon* has to do with the dosage: A small dose of a medicine may cure you, but a large dose may be a poison. In the case of lying in politics, I would argue that a lot of little lies or little spins creating a rhetorical smokescreen that obscures the absolute truth can have a healthy effect, but if the dose is too large and this is what we are now being subjected to with the current American administration the effects are indeed poisonous.

Q – In 1996, you wrote a foreword to a new edition of *The Dialectical Imagination* which still is one of the main sources on the history of the Frankfurt School today. In this foreword, you argued that the relevance of the Frankfurt School after 1973 could be explained by a certain tendency to neglect economical criticism and a growing interest in aesthetic and cultural questions. Is this same diagnosis valid after the financial crisis of 2008 or maybe economic questions are now more important than ever, as the renewed interest in the criticism of political economy and Marxism suggest? In other words, are the ideas of T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer or J. Habermas and Axel Honneth still useful today or have they now been surpassed?

A – Broadly speaking, the history of Marxism has been a series of shifts of emphasis of terrain. The first period, at least the one that occurs after the failures of the 1848 Revolution, is a period that emphasizes the economy and the crisis which, according to Marx, flow from capitalism's inability to solve economically-derived problems. This led in the Second International to a kind of waiting for capitalism to collapse of its own weight, which of course did not happen. The second period begins, we might say, in 1917 and we might call that the "period of political emphasis" ("political" in a Leninist sense or at least in a more activist sense one could think of Antonio Gramsci's notion of Marxism as a "philosophy of praxis"). This was a period in which it seemed that one had to organize politically, one had to be somehow involved in overthrowing political systems and then economic change would follow. This period more or less ends with the success of fascism and the failure of the world revolution to follow from the Russian example. This introduces a period of what J. Habermas called a "strategy of hibernation" (142) in which the belief that the economy would produce a terminal crisis was no longer possible because capitalism had stabilized. The belief that politics could produce a revolution also stalled after the failure of the attempt to stop fascism, and instead the terrain shifted from economics to politics, to culture, to art, to the everyday life, that under capitalism was still problematic, still oppressive in fact, but which might produce a different consciousness if a certain kind of critique could be absorbed by its victims. The Frankfurt School appeared in this third period, but behind this there was still the capitalist economy, the commodity fetishes of the exchange principle and the potential for crisis, the potential for the system not to work. There are examples 2008 is the most recent in which there is a hint that maybe capitalism is not so stable after all, maybe there is a way in which it has its own internal, self-destructive impulses. We know from Thomas Piketty and his work on the stubborn persistence of inequality that the world system as a whole has a terrible potential to increase class distinctions and to give more power to the wealthy and less to those who lack economic resources. The crisis of 2008 was however solved or at least

postponed, and once again capitalism found a way to restabilize. The state had to help it in certain respects, but we came very close to the precipice. One might argue that the so-called economic deficit of critical theory, which means that it needs to come up with a more explicit theory of modern twenty-first-century capitalism, is still an important imperative. We need to include the economy but I would say it is wrong to think that the cultural analysis, the analyses of psychology and mass culture (or rather the culture industry) are now simply swept aside and that we can go back to something like that first period in which the economy was really determinant. We have a period of what J. Habermas calls a "new unsurveyability", a "neue Unübersichtlichkeit" in which you cannot really survey the whole. Global capitalism exists, yes, but so do issues like multiculturalism, the anti-migrant prejudice and all those things which are not simply reducible to the issues of capitalist crises. I think that rather than saying that J. Habermas or even T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer have been surpassed one should think of the ways to supplement their work by once again thinking about politics and once again thinking about the economy and its difficulties, but not arguing that one must replace the other. The larger task of critical theory is to figure out how they are related. I am an historian and I could use that as an excuse to say that I don't have the answer to how they are related, and I would not pretend to have a serious critique of contemporary capitalism. I am also not clear, politically, about what is to be done, in a literal sense, but I think it is necessary to still draw on and build on the legacy of the critique of culture that the Frankfurt School itself fell back on when both economics and politics no longer seemed the center of gravity of the critique of contemporary society.

Q – Following on from the previous question, I would also like to ask about the possibility of recovering dialectical categories such as negativity or immanent criticism in our socio-political context. In an interview in 2016 with Jamie Keesling and Spencer A. Leonard entitled "Critical Theory, Marxism, Social Evolution", you warned of the dangers of a conceptualization of negativity "without rational critique, without plausible goals and laudable values". Certainly, the complexity of the current political moment is undeniable. What diagnosis are you able to offer in the face of the increase of reactionary forces at a global level which seem to be preparing a pretty obvious "moment of danger" in the sense in which Benjamin used the expression? How can this moment be approached theoretically with the intention of transforming society? Is the programme of a negative dialectics still viable for you now that the worst omens of the Frankfurt School about the absolute absence of negative forces seem to be more fulfilled than ever? If, as you put it, the critique of ideology can exist only "when yearnings [for something better] are still accounted better", are we living in an age where those aspirations remain?

A – One of H. Marcuse's most powerful slogans in *One-Dimensional Man* was "the great refusal", the idea and this goes back to my description of a privileged mainstream, often male Americans who discovered that they were somehow oppressed that we should learn not to be complicitous with the system, not to accept its pseudo-rewards, not to be bought off by consumer happiness, but rather to leave the system behind, refuse it at the deepest level, refuse to be involved with electoral politics, even refuse to accept gradualism, become as radically opposed as you possibly could to the one-dimensionality of the world. This was the "great refusal" which allowed you to be unpolluted or uncorrupted by the temptations of accommodation. I must admit I always found this histrionic and unpersuasive. There was too much that I felt was worth preserving in liberal democratic traditions, the welfare state and other traditions which were not simply ideological covers for the power relations that kept capitalism and oppression in existence. There was also a defensive quality rather than one that involved refusal, and the necessity also to have a positive series of attainable goals. H. Marcuse's ultimate goal was explicitly utopian. The "great refusal" went along with an intransigence about the possibility of a completely other society, a completely utopian society, which he described to some extent in sexual and hedonistic terms in works like *Eros and Civilization.* Here too I must admit that I was always a bit skeptical. The absolute utopia always seemed to me a recipe for either something that was even worse than the status quo or simply a disappointment: One cannot really achieve that level of perfection without either violence or coercion. Negativity needs to be mixed with a certain practical effort to defend what is worth defending and improving a society which will never be absolutely perfect. In the present world, broadly speaking, it seems to me that there is in fact lots of negativity, but it is not necessarily emancipatory or enlightenment-oriented negativity. It is negativity about many of those things that need to be defended, such as liberal democratic traditions. When in Hungary Viktor Orbán talks about "illiberal democracy", it seems to me he is being very negative about traditions of human rights or the rule of law which I hold still very dear. I am not in favor of a kind of diffuse, abstract negativity without substance, without positive content, and it seems to me that it is therefore necessary to know what needs to be defended, to be critical or negative in a traditional sense when you are opposing something which is oppressive, but not to turn negativity into an absolute principle which should be followed under all circumstances. It is very important, especially as the world now seems to be heading in directions that are frightening in many respects, not to believe that we are faced with an apocalypse, and that the only way to move beyond it is to go through the apocalypse, through a kind of cleansing violence which will allow something better to emerge. This seems to be extremely hazardous and has never really worked in the past. There are too many victims in the present to allow us to have that kind of apocalyptic

mentality, so I think one needs to use negativity as a weapon not only to prevent a simple, one-dimensional acceptance of the status quo, but also to identify what traditions need to be defended as well as those that need to be rejected.

Q - I would like to ask you about post-truth, a subject on which you have written at length in *The Virtues of Mendacity*, but I would prefer to adopt a visual perspective. In "Visual Parrhesia? Foucault and the Truth of the Gaze" (2008), do you criticise the impossibility of finding continuity between the risk of "truth-telling" (fearless speech) and its relation with modern visuality? If we transpose the traits of the gaze as a way of "revealing all" and *parrhesia* as the verbal technique of "telling all", both would share the attempt to see what, being in the same present, has not been seen. What could the Foucauldian concept of *parrhesia* contribute to this issue? I understand Foucauldian *parrhesia* as the heir of certain traits of a gaze that, beyond the visual regime, allows us to address "the opening to the unintended", which in *Downcast Eyes* you called "an art of trying to see what is unthought in our seeing, and to open as yet unseen ways of seeing" (414).

A - This is an enormously complicated question. Maybe there are three different ways to look at it. First is the issue of the relation between truth and truthfulness: Truth is and this of course is very hard to pin down a description of what is the case: Truth as somehow external to the observer, as something that can be found by various methods that can be agreed upon by various kinds of differential reasoning and persuasiveness, truth as something which involves the world. Truthfulness is a virtue of the individual, of the subject. I am truthful when I say something rather than a lie. I am sincere but this points to my own intentions. The two may be related, but they are not the same. So if for example in the tenth century someone were to ask a citizen of Granada whether or not the Sun went around the Earth, the citizen of Granada, not having had the opportunity to hear what Galileo or Copernicus were to tell the world many years later, would have said truthfully that the Sun went around the Earth, but this was not the truth. One can separate the two. It seems to me that the *parrhesia* argument of M. Foucault has to do with the subjective truth-teller. It is an issue of character, it is an ethical issue. To tell the truth rather than to lie is basically something that we owe other people. Now, the difficult question of course is "do we always owe them the truth?" In *The Virtues of Mendacity* I argue not always. For example, in the movie *Inglorious Basterds*, when the Nazi Jew hunter comes to the village where a peasant is hiding Jews during the Second World War, initially the peasant lies and says "no one's here". Threatened by the Jew hunter, he finally tells the truth, which then leads to the murder of all the people under his floorboards. So sometimes one has to lie to power, one has to be menda-

cious: Truth-telling is not under all circumstances a virtue. Truth and truthfulness are related but not the same. There is a quite wonderful book by the late Bernard Williams, my former colleague at Berkeley, *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), that deals with this in very complicated ways.

A second dimension of the issue is the relationship between truth-telling and truth-showing. To tell (verbal action) involves an intentionality and then a verbal utterance: I know something and I either tell you what I know to be the truth or I tell a lie. There is a kind of active internal knowledge and external speech act which has an intended consequence. Showing can be very different in the sense that when I take a photograph, the photograph simply is, it does not have a kind of intentionality in it. The photographer may in fact try to manipulate and alter the fact, he may doctor the photograph but the object itself is mute. It does not really quite have the capacity to lie. I did a piece recently ("Can Photographs Lie? Reflections on a Perennial Anxiety", 2016) where I argued that photographs, ultimately because they are intertwined with speech and writing, may have a kind of potential to lie, but by and large the image is mute.

A more interesting question has to do with what we might call the ambivalence of full transparency, full disclosure, full enlightenment. Those of us who accept a certain notion of a transparent political realm and also transparent personal relations, where we have relations with people and we try to be as honest as possible, have a kind of bias towards the virtue of transparency, the virtue of illumination, the virtue of somehow not hiding and not being secretive, not being hypocritical and so forth. This is one of those things that at a social level gives us a belief that democracy is inherently transparent, accountable, and that it gives people the capacity of knowing what their government is doing, etc. There is however also a danger in what might be called "excessive transparency", as pointed out by a recent book by the American scholar Stefanos Geroulanos on the critique of transparency as a value in French thought (*Transparency in Postwar France. A Critical History of the Present*, 2017), which overlaps in many ways with my book *Downcast Eyes.* Why is transparency a problem and why can secrecy or opacity under certain circumstances be a virtue? Well, take for instance the secret ballot, which emerged in the nineteenth century in Australia and some states in the United States, and then becomes pretty much the norm around the world. When I go into vote I do it in a closed environment, no one knows who I vote for, when I come out I do not have to tell you who I vote for, I have privacy. I have the right of privacy, the right of not being transparent, the right that the government does not know everything about me (in a totalitarian system it tries to but in a democratic system it does not know everything about me). We are now of course facing with the Internet and the ways in which it is able to track all of our preferences for commercial and political pur-

poses. There has to be a certain balance between transparency when it is warranted and opacity, secrecy, the right to privacy when it is not. This occurs in visual terms as well as in terms that we might call "discursive". So do I have a right always to take a picture of you or can you say no I do not want to have my picture taken? We can see this with pictures that are obviously private, for example in sexting, of sex pictures of people not wearing clothes. Should these be available for everybody to see? There are lots of other examples of the way in which we need to keep up a certain façade, our houses are not places that can be invaded by the state without a warrant, without a reason. The eye that pierces, the eye that intrudes, the eye that sees all like George Orwell's Big Brother, is also a very dangerous eye. The question once again is to whom is the truth owed, to whom is visual transparency owed. It is not owed to everybody, it is not owed necessarily to the state, it is not owed to commercial interests, and therefore there is a very delicate balance or dialectic between the pressure to have full disclosure the idea that sunlight is the best disinfectant on the one hand and the idea that I have the right not to be visible, that I have the right not to be exposed, not to be surveilled or seen by the state on the other hand. To complicate matters even further, I would like to add the following footnote. The computer engineer Steven Mann came up with the term "sousveillance" as opposed to surveillance. Surveillance means being looked at from above, whereas "sousveillance" means being looked at from below. We have many examples of the latter in the United States and elsewhere: Video allowing people who are brutalized by the police to show that brutalization, to show that the police may in fact lie when they tell us why they beat up somebody or even kill somebody. It is possible to use transparency in this sense in a liberating way to expose the abuse of power on the part of authority which otherwise would go unnoticed. What I want to leave you with here is not a simple answer but a sense of the contextual need to understand truth-telling under certain circumstances, truth-showing under certain circumstances but also its limits for political and other reasons.

Q – I would like to have a closer look at the postsecular approaches that, from Taylor onwards, have come to revise what our supposedly secular society has ultimately never achieved. Recently, we had an example of this in Spain, when the newly-elected Prime Minister dispensed with the tradition of taking the oath of office on a Bible and a Crucifix for the first time. It appears that the return of religions even posits the prerequisite of understanding Western religious traditions in order to understand other religious traditions such as Islam as well as all kinds of fundamentalisms. It seems to me that your magnificent *Songs of Experience*, published in 2004, tries to answer the question of how to understand religious experience in a context that is nevertheless secular. Thus, your definition of

experience deals with a crucible of complex subjects. For instance, you explore the issue of intersubjective subjectivity when you define experience as the tension between a collective linguistic concept and a private subjectivity as a signifier that unifies a type of heterogeneous signifiers located in a diacritical force field, reminding us that such concepts elude homogenizing control. First, how do you understand the term "postsecular"? Do you find a possible effect of it in your work? And, second, do you think that it is through experience as event of the other that we can respond to the social and political challenges posed by fundamentalisms?

A – This is an immense question. First of all we have to understand that secularism does not mean atheism, and that religion has always survived attempts to eradicate it in the Soviet Union or other contexts in which strong atheism was a state policy. Religion always survives. It fulfills so many different functions and means so much to different people that it is clear it is doing something that surely a rational or scientific approach to the world does not do. So what does secularization really mean? It does not mean atheism, but rather a relative diminution of the power of religion to permeate all aspects of our lives. As far as I would suggest a shorthand definition of it, postsecularism means a willingness to accept pluralism, religious pluralism in a context in which no particular religion has established authority and becomes hegemonic over others. It realizes that in the modern world there is a willingness to tolerate or even to celebrate religious diversity as well as non-religious existence, so that one can be non-observant or even an atheist and not pay a penalty. There has of course always been a pressure against this, a pressure to say that a certain religion is dominant. Whether it be Catholicism or Protestantism, Islam, Judaism or Hinduism, there has always been a pressure to say that one of them is the true religion and that the others are false. This is what has now become a greater threat to the secularization of religion understood as a private affair, something that may have been communal but was not coercive. What we have seen in the past decades is the reassertion on the part of some believers we can call them fundamentalist although they would not accept that term to claim that their position is the only true position. Just to use the American example, Evangelical Christians under certain circumstances call for a re-description of the United States as a Christian nation, which means getting rid of other groups or at least marginalizing them, making them somehow understand they are not as welcome. There is in the United States now an enormous outcry against the hypocrisy of these Evangelical groups who are able to support Donald Trump, who after all is the embodiment of the Antichrist in virtually every aspect of his existence. So one wonders whether or not it becomes a kind of cover not for real religious belief but for other more political positions on such issues as abortion and so forth. The issue of hypocrisy comes to the fore here.

My own feeling is that religious practices are one way of meeting deep anthropological cultural needs for meaning, for some sort of order, for ritual, for community, which can be satisfied in other ways but which sometimes are successfully satisfied by religious adherence. So, that is not a question of one being true and the other false, one being early the other late, one being superseded, but rather a question of a wide variety of different practices which give human beings some orientation in a world which is by and large a world of danger and of chaos and here I follow Hans Blumenberg, who claims that basically we live in a precarious situation in which we do not have an inherent understanding of either why we are here, why we are mortal, why human violence exists, why all the dangers of the world threaten us and we come up with a variety of different short-term explanations which give us some reassurance. They exist for a while and they fail because they are not fully satisfactory and others come to replace them. For a significant period of human history, ever since maybe the Axial Age, the period when the great religions emerged, religion played that role. Now, after broadly speaking modernization, the Enlightenment, secularization, or whatever you might want to call it, religions lost a bit of their capacity to do that for many people, and they still of course do not do it for many, but they were never completely obliterated and they have come back. I think we are not living in an age that is postsecular, because we were never fully secular in the first place.

I think it is necessary to be understanding of people's religion. There is nothing worse than assuming that somehow the anti-religious position has some sort of absolute truth and we could simply sweep away religion as superstition. It is it seems to me absolutely crucial to restore respect for religious difference and plurality: Any society that tries to institutionalize any one religion is one that is headed for disaster. The United States is alas, at least in some respects, moving in that direction, especially because of its panic about Islam, new forms of anti-Semitism and a variety of other kinds of religious intolerance which have emerged in recent years. Against the philosopher Charles Taylor I would say that a restoration of religion in this sense is deeply problematic and that we should hold on to some of the lessons that we learned during the secular age: Lessons of toleration, lessons of the private-sphere religion as opposed to a state-oriented or public-sphere religion which tends to be biased against other religions and sometimes even leads to violence against them.

This is an enormously complicated question and I would have to spend a great deal of time trying to sort it all out, but I would like to add one little footnote. The Frankfurt School always took seriously the emancipatory potential in religion. T. W. Adorno, at the end of *Minima Moralia* (1951) says that the world has to be looked at from "the standpoint of redemption" (cliii). M. Horkheimer, in the preface he did to my first book said that we have to hold on to the goal of "ein ganz Anderes" (xxvi), "the entirely other", the completely different,

maybe utopian alternative to the current fallen world ("Das ganz Andere" was a term that had been coined by Rudolf Otto, a German theologian in the early twentieth century). There is always been what I would call a theological or even religious underpinning to their theory. That is one of the ways in which the utopian impulse has been expressed.

Q – You concluded *Songs of Experience* with a reflection on identity politics in which you suggested that there had been a certain neglect of the fact that experience is an encounter with otherness. And yet, today we seem to be witnessing a process whereby some groups within minorities and oppressed groups have done precisely the opposite. In their rejection of what is conceptualized as privilege these groups are usually identifying themselves with a kind of essential otherness which produces a different kind of the "fortress of sameness" on which you wrote in the same book, maybe as a defensive move against the growth of reactionary forces we just talked about. It seems that some groups are starting to forget that the theses on strategic essentialism advocated by Gayatri Spivak were primarily strategic and not primarily essentialist. In this respect, I am particularly concerned about the effective boycott of dialogue and the reproduction of a depoliticizing identity atomization. What is your opinion on this issue, and how is this problem experienced in the United States?

A – This is one of the most controversial and vexed issues in American culture and politics today. I think one has to give a concrete answer depending on which groups create a strong sense of a fortress identity and which groups are more fluid, open and in some ways less possessive. It takes a certain amount of security and privilege to feel unthreatened by the erosion of your communal identity. I mentioned earlier that I was fascinated by European thought and was interested in German Jewish refugees. I saw this interest as a way to achieve a certain idealization through identification with they work, and I think this was possible because I did not feel anxious about my own initial communal identity. I did not feel threatened, I did not feel as if I would lose something by expanding myself and I have been really lucky in my life to have experiences with many different cultures. I spent a summer living and teaching in a black community in South Carolina in 1967. I have spent time with Mexican theater people going to various cities in Mexico. I have spent time living in a house with Indian friends in New Delhi. These have always been enormously enriching and exciting openings to otherness without the anxiety that I was somehow losing my own identity.

There are however groups that have been subjected to a kind of forced assimilation in which their identity has been devalued, in which they are seen basically as on some cultural or even racial level inferior. In the United States today, certain groups and I think here of African Americans, sometimes Hispanic Americans are anxious about the appropriation of their culture, anxious about losing their identity. We had a case recently where a white woman

claimed that she was black and the black community was very hostile to this woman for having somehow appropriated their identity. The idea of cultural appropriation, for instance, where whites take black music and make rock and roll, is also seen as aggressive. From the perspective of openness and encounter with otherness one could say that this is petty and perhaps something that needs to be condemned, but one can understand it from the perspective of the group whose identity had been so long demeaned. The pride and a sense of trying to be recognized in a way that creates solidarity can be understandable. Interestingly, the same thing has occurred with the gay community in the United States. Michael Warner, one of the most important queer theorists in the United States, became a controversial figure as one of the main critics of same-sex marriage from a gay perspective. His logic was that same-sex marriage is a process of assimilation which creates, through a heteronormative notion of marriage, an erosion of what made gay culture unique, what made a kind of outlaw gay culture somehow different from mainstream culture. He wanted to protect that difference, to protect the identity which for a long time had been as I said in the case of African Americans a demeaned identity, an identity that was stigmatized. He wanted to keep it but turn it around and make it itself more attractive while avoiding full assimilation. One can see a certain kind of logic in that. Another example has to do with the disabled. In the United States there is a great deal of interest now in considering people who are often seen as inferior because they cannot hear as well or cannot walk as well or whatever disability they might have as equal, not inferior to people who have normal abilities. There are institutions, like Gallaudet University for example, which want to make deaf signing a language of its own and not try to allow deaf people to be given medical treatment to be able to hear, but instead keep the solidarity and autonomy of people who are deaf. Disability studies is a way to say "well, alright, I seem to be less of a human being than you, but in fact I am just differently abled. Maybe I am blind, but I could do other things better than you, such as hearing". Even blindness has a certain potential virtue. A colleague of mine, Georgina Kleege, has written very movingly about this topic.

I would say the issue of identity and experience, the issue of fortress identity, the issue of deciding that you are somehow going to hold on and keep the other at bay is a contextual, situational and relational issue depending on which group at which time we are talking about. I do not want to give a kind of blanket condemnation of identity politics or say that identity politics is always in and of itself valuable. In the United States now we are seeing a movement which could be called "white identity politics", in which people who were in some ways privileged in many respects now feel threatened and say "well, wait a minute, there is black studies, why isn't there white studies? Well, if there is affirmative action for blacks, why is not there affirmative action for, say, poor and disadvantaged whites?" There

is now a kind of adoption of the same rhetoric that minority groups used for beleaguered whites, and much of the support for nativist populism that we see in the base of Donald Trump comes from the sense of grievance and resentment on the part of whites who claim that their culture has been attacked and undermined. One has to be very careful about assuming all identity politics is inherently valuable or necessarily problematic.

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