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The Politics of Virtue

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The Politics of Virtue

Post-Liberalism and the Human Future

John Milbank and Adrian Pabst

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‘Two men went up to pray; and one gave thanks,
Not with himself—aloud,
With proclamation, calling on the ranks
Of an attentive crowd

Thank God, I clap not my own humble breast,
But other ruffians’ backs,
Imputing crime—such is my tolerant haste—
To any man that lacks

For I am tolerant, generous, keep no rules,
And the age honours me.
Thank God, I am not as these rigid fools,
Even as this Pharisee’

Alice Meynell, ‘The Newer Vainglory’

‘A gross error it is to think that regal power ought to serve for the good of the body and not of the soul, for men’s temporal peace and not their eternal safety; as if God had ordained *Kings* for no other purpose than to fat up men’s souls like hogs and to see that they have their mash?’

Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

‘I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised, unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat’.

John Milton, *Areopagitica*

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John Milbank and Adrian Pabst
Southwell and Muswell Hill, 19 July 2016

Introduction

From the Ethics to the Politics of Virtue

THE ARGUMENT

At the end of the twentieth century, the triumph of capitalism and democracy seemed so complete that it raised once more Hegel's spectre of the 'end of history' – the convergence towards a final form of human government that embodies the supposed universality of liberalism. But then the twenty-first century quickly revealed a recommencement of history that called into question both the complacency and the character of the West. First came the extra-civilisational challenge of Islamism after 2001, and then came intra-civilisational financial and civil breakdown after 2008. Both challenges exposed the limitations of the two liberalisms that have dominated Western politics for the last half-century: the social-cultural liberalism of the left since the 1960s and the economic-political liberalism of the right since the 1980s. These liberalisms have provided greater personal freedoms and individual opportunities for some, but can now also be seen as atomising and authoritarian. For together they have served the purposes of the central state and the globalised market, which have collusively brought about an unprecedented augmentation of power and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.¹ In consequence, a new, rootless oligarchy now practises a manipulative populism while holding in contempt the genuine priorities of most people.²

The two liberalisms were always in tacit, secret alliance. They have now more explicitly fused to proffer a creed shared by the left that has embraced economic liberalism together with an impersonal statism, and by the right that has openly espoused cultural liberalism in scorn of its own natural constituency. This book will suggest that, instead, politics now needs a novel and paradoxical blend of two older and nobler traditions: a combination of honourable, virtuous elites with greater popular participation; a greater

sense of cultural duty and hierarchy of value and honour, alongside much more real equality and genuine creative freedom in the economic and political realms. This would be enabled by a newly mutualist approach to both domestic and foreign affairs that substitutes for the dominance of market, state and technocracy the primacy of society, culture and interpersonal relationships.

To understand more deeply what this new approach involves, it is necessary to attend closely to the intended sense of the notion ‘post-liberalism’. ‘Post-’ is different from ‘pre-’ and implies not that liberalism is all bad, but that it has inherent problems and deficiencies. Long centuries and recent decades of liberalisation have afforded some protection against the worst transgressions upon the liberty of some by the liberty of others. But evermore individual rights and untrammelled economic contract alone cannot provide security, prosperity and human flourishing for the many. Appeals to emancipation and social justice ignore the relationships that can provide substance to such abstract norms. That is why there is a need to invent or discover new, more participatory modes of self-restraint and responsibility, of economic justice and shared well-being.

The Metacrisis of Liberalism

It is not merely the twin liberal revolution that is now in question. Instead, the whole liberal tradition faces a new kind of crisis because liberalism as a philosophy and an ideology turns out to be contradictory, self-defeating and parasitic on the legacy of Greco-Roman civilisation and the Judeo-Christian tradition, which it distorts and hollows out. The triumph of liberalism today more and more brings about the ‘war of all against all’ (Hobbes) and the idea of man as self-owning animal (Locke) that were its presuppositions. But this does not thereby prove those presuppositions, because it is only liberalism that has produced in practice the circumstances that it originally assumed in theory.³ In this manner, liberalism marks the unnecessary victory of vice over virtue – of selfishness, greed, suspicion and coercion over common benefit, generosity, a measure of trust and persuasive power. Just as liberal thought has redefined human nature as fundamentally individual existence abstracted from social embeddedness, so too liberal practice has replaced the quest for reciprocal recognition and mutual flourishing with the pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure – leading to economic instability, social disorder and ecological devastation.

The alternative to this anthropology is, first, the antique notion of humanity as ‘a political animal’, expanded by Thomas Aquinas to ‘social animal’. This means that, paradoxically, by *nature* we are also the artificial shapers

of a polity, and live our specifically human animal lives only through the contrivance of social and legal convention based on the artifices of tool and sign.⁴ Second, it is the specifically Christian idea of the uniqueness and universal value of the person (not an individual, atomic example of a general norm) inherently realised through constitutive relations to other persons and to things through a dynamic, essence-exceeding participation in an infinite, ordered and transcendent *Logos*.⁵

So in theory and practice, liberalism goes against the grain of humanity and the universe we inhabit, as captured by such older traditions. Therefore, the current crisis is neither merely a temporary or cyclical nor necessarily a final crisis, but rather a ‘metacrisis’, since now, at last, this perversion is starting to be revealed in its full nihilistic scope. The metacrisis of liberalism consists more specifically in its evermore exposed tendency at once to abstract from reality and yet to reduce everything to its bare materiality. This twin tendency leaves an irreducible *aporia* between human will and artifice on the one hand, and imagined laws of nature and history on the other – the violent ‘state of nature’ (as for Hobbes) or conflict-ridden human association (as for Rousseau) that requires the remedies of coercive state control and market competition. In this way, liberal ideas and institutions rest on a violent ontology and a pessimistic anthropology that incentivise and reward bad behaviour. Eventually, as we see today, the fantasised state of nature returns, but now in reality to expose the limits of the solutions of social contract or impersonal, supposedly automatic coordination, and to give the lie to their purported capacity as artificial devices to naturally restrain nature in its fantasised human raw. In such a fashion, liberalism not only undermines its claim to offer the salve to the reality of human vice. It also undoes itself and erodes the polity it claims to save from rival ideologies.

The only genuine alternative is a post-liberal politics of virtue that seeks to fuse greater economic justice with social reciprocity. It rejects the double liberal impersonalism of commercial contract between strangers and individual entitlement in relation to the bureaucratic machine. Instead of the mixture of contract without gift, plus the unilateral and poisoned gift from nowhere that is state provision at its worst, it proposes gift-exchange or social reciprocity as the ultimate principle to govern *both* the economic and the political realms.

So faced with the double failure of the post-war ‘embedded liberal’ model that nationalised the economy and the neo-liberal model that privatised the state, we argue for a new settlement that is centred on association and mutualisation. We propose a reciprocalist model of sharing risk, responsibilities and resources wherein reward is reconnected to personal requirements both for varied self-fulfilment and for rendering a social contribution.

Defining Virtue Ethics

In our usage, 'virtue' is not an empty, moralistic word. Instead, it indicates an ethical and political approach that calls into question basic liberal and secular habits of mind that have become so ingrained that we scarcely notice them.⁶ These habits assume, above all, that most of reality has nothing to do with either good or evil, that it is just 'there' in its underived givenness. This applies first and foremost to the surrounding physical environment in which we are located and included. But in the second place, this inclusion is taken to mean that most of human reality also – our consumption, production, exchange and linguistic expression – shares in the same natural neutrality. In consequence, all normal human activity and political or socio-economic processes are regarded as being, at best, amoral, if not often also inevitably flouting of any perceived moral imperatives. The ethical is not seen, as it was for previous Western traditions, as self-grounded in the reality of the good, regarded as the real factual *and* valuative object of human pursuit.

Entirely otherwise, virtue ethics runs with our spontaneous inclination to see goodness in nature, in the mode of the flourishing of all things insofar as they fulfil their given character and realise their innate ends to circulate, grow and propagate. It follows that for this alternative and traditional outlook, the primary dimension of the ethical is *continuous*. A moral stance does not ask, first of all, what I should do faced with such and such a predicament, but rather what I should consistently be doing *at all*. What sort of shape might my entire life appropriately take? What sort of character do I want to be and how should I order this desire in an acceptable way to my relationships to others? And those questions, even though they are unavoidable, especially at the key transition points of life, can only be answered if we also ask what sort of society all of us want. What aims should it pursue and then what individual tasks might be set by this society? How can individual aspiration fall together with a collectively shared one? For naturally no one ever really projects for herself a role *ex nihilo* – we all of us pursue, in however rebellious a form, initial social promptings.

From this point we can realise, against any form of ethical 'situation-ism',⁷ that relatively abiding virtuous character is just as much assumed and acquired from the social exterior as is any momentary response to contingent circumstance.⁸ It is untrue that consistent virtue is an illusion, which some form of behaviourism exposes, because *both* publically prescribed roles *and* the inward life of the person exhibit patterns of consistency that are always linked, the one with the other. Without this there could be no possibility of lived or described *narrative* – neither as history, nor as autobiography, the two being always complexly entangled and reciprocally presupposing. Certainly historical situations and events can shock us with a life-changing

trauma, or bend our existing habits in new directions. But events themselves always exemplify non-identically the repetitions of habit, in however novel a form, as much as they jolt them into new deviation. Thus a pure ‘situationism’ is merely in league with the doomed but dangerous attempt of contemporary liberalism to render us all spiritless and passive subjects of spectacular shock and accumulators of transient sensation. The attempt to do so is a crucial aspect of liberal metacrisis – its *reductio ad absurdum*, which calls the very coherence of its principles into question.

It will then be apparent that virtue ethics is less moralistic than either liberal consequentialism (the imperative of happiness) or liberal deontology (the imperative of duty to preserve freedom). For it assumes that the ethical is a normal and essential ingredient of human action. Most good human actions are performed unconsciously and with nothing like a ‘saintly’ attitude, if to be saintly means to be exceptional. The most fundamental human goodness is an everyday matter of performing your job well, being a good lover, spouse, parent, friend, colleague and citizen, or even enjoying a game or a trip. For if goodness is *given* in nature and not something we contrive with difficulty from time to time, then simple gratitude is a crucial aspect of virtue.

Defining a Politics of Virtue

This alternative but more traditional approach to ethics is also less moralistic insofar as it is immediately and even primarily *political*. Inverting the import of the genitive, the politics of *virtue* is also the *politics* of virtue. This equally intended inversion indicates that by a ‘politics of virtue’ we do *not* mean a pious new demand for more morality in public life, as if the ethical were something alien to the political in the first place, and in tension with its more pragmatic and realistic exigencies. Instead, the point crucial to virtue ethics is that there can *be* no human practice, which is always collective, unless we are aiming for the good in some sense, and have some idea how to recognise and successfully pursue it. Thus for virtue ethics, morality is not a kind of optional extra for either the historical or the political process. History cannot be cynically related as a story of mere necessities and expediencies without a measure of inaccuracy. For it is also and inevitably – on account of the very nature of the specifically human, historical event as such – a story of human courage, imagination and creative effort to achieve honourable ends. Were it not so, then it could not also be the tale of both intermittent and continuous catastrophe – of lamentable failure to project sufficiently good aims, failure to achieve them and a tendency also to distort them for lazy, greedy or sadistic purposes.

One might negatively ask here whether this is not a kind of seemingly Victorian outlook that has rightly not survived the horrors of the preceding

century, and the continuing horrors of the present one. However, the counter-question to that now typical stance would be this: supposing the horrors are in some measure a self-fulfilling prophecy, supposing the gradual Western slide into theoretical nihilism and cultural despair were in part responsible for a political disintegration of goodness in practice?

However that may be, if all human historical action is ethical just *because* it is human action, then the immoral is also a failure of action as such, a failure of the practical really to be so. Therefore immoral action is of its very nature unrealistic, because the immoral by definition means a mistaking of true fulfilment and a deficient or incompatible way of pursuing it. To put it in the simplest possible way: to do something wrong is also to do something badly, to botch things up in a way that is bound sooner or later (even if decades or centuries later) to fail, because vices are hard to sustain and ultimately self-defeating. Lies get found out, lack of trust leaves people alone, poor workmanship damages even our material well-being, and unreliable products tend eventually not to sell well or do not sell at all – even though this usual circumstance is today massively distorted by the blandishments of brands. But even there, the unhealthy or ugly can be but artificially kept alive and may always suddenly fail, like the crudest forms of fast-food or post-war architecture.

So part of the claim of this book, which we hope to make good in detail, is that contemporary politics is failing because it mistakes the very nature of the realistic – this being finally coincident with the ethical. According to the eighteenth-century Neapolitan ‘civil economist’ Antonio Genovesi, ‘Virtue is not ‘an invention of philosophers ... [but instead] a consequence of the nature of the world’.⁹ By contrast, ever since the dawn of early modernity, liberalism has privileged vice by pursuing a kind of simulacrum of real association, which consists in the ‘automatic’ balancing of fear with fear, egoism with egoism and selfishness with selfishness. This, indeed, seems to work, yet it also engenders an ever-faster spiralling social and ecological crisis.

An ethics of virtue therefore counter-diagnoses *merely* cynical verdicts as themselves always insufficiently realist. It is certainly true that in history virtuous endeavours habitually fail – from the decline of craft skills to the corruption of ruling echelons. Yet this does not alter the fact that they are the only possible endeavours, and that the challenge is *not* to balance ethical considerations with pragmatic ones, but to try to act more humanly. This means with more skill, more art, more tact, more forceful subtlety – and with more vision, given that an unrealistic vision is not a vision at all, but an illusion.

And if we act in this way, then we also act with more receptive gratitude, more communicated generosity, and in such a way that in turn opens up the possibility of trust and further self-giving on the part of others. For virtue and gift are inseparable: virtue, as we have seen, begins in grateful wonder and is sustained only through an honourable ‘seeming to be virtuous’ as well as

having the inwardly right intention. Deeds must be publicly enacted and so *offered*, and the highest outcome of virtuous practice is the reciprocal giving that is friendship, upon which – as for the older Western tradition, but not for liberalism – the human city is founded. In this way inner virtue is inseparable from external, manifest honour. Like justice, it must be seen to be performed if it is really to abide.

Therefore to act with honourable generosity is not at all to qualify politics adjectivally as ‘virtuous’. Our title is really an unavoidable misnomer. It is, instead, to act *in more political terms* as such. It is to resume politics as a necessary and properly shared teleological purposiveness, and as an attempted architectonic justice – or a distribution of roles and resources according to capacity and calling. Thus politics is a shared demand for a manifest mutual recognition and regard, since justice and friendship are co-original and inseparable.

Virtue so construed also breaks with the usual contrasts of people *versus* elite. For in the first place, virtue is democratic because its practice is open to all, especially the supreme virtues of love, trust, hope, mercy, kindness, forgiveness and reconciliation, which we have all in the West, whether avowedly Christians or not, inherited from the teachings of the Bible. But second, it is also benignly non-democratic because the practice of virtue requires guidance through time by the already virtuous, skilled, generous and wise at every level of society from the plumber to the wing-commander. Faced with largely self-serving elites that are corrupt and nihilistic, society today desperately needs honourable and much more widely distributed leaders who can lead by example in all walks of life. For without good examples, there can be no guidance as to initiation into good practice.

Beyond Communitarianism

A post-liberal politics of virtue is not simply a rehash of communitarian thinking. We do build on the communitarian critique of liberalism, but our account accentuates the role of free and newly shaped associations beyond merely ‘given’ ethical and cultural solidarities. We also seek to link the admittedly ‘ineffable’ and indefinable nature of given community in place and time with a more purposive and culturally pluralist shaping of association around shared aspiration and ideal purpose, which seeks to integrate different human roles and traditions.¹⁰

Moreover, we try to develop a post-liberal ‘civil economy’ where communitarian thinking is either silent on matters of economic organisation or else views the market as more or less inevitably devoid of virtue and thus appeals almost exclusively to the state in order to limit the damages of commercial exchange.¹¹ The reason for this is that it wrongly sees community as either an undisturbed preceding ground for embedding the market, or else

as a compensatory tempering of its ravages.¹² This flies in the face of all the evidence of the power of hyper-capitalism both to disembed the economy from society and to invade the familial, social and cultural sphere, as Karl Polanyi argued. Hence, unless one can achieve a genuine 'social market', society itself will be ever-further eroded. Communitarian thinking does not take seriously enough the possibility that market activity can have a proper *telos* and that virtuous behaviour is compatible with both just returns to the individual and with social benefit.¹³

Equally, communitarianism tends to lack a real political dimension, confining itself to a nostalgic one-sided appeal to group rights, autonomy and plurality, however important this emphasis must be. Our book tempers this approach, which can expand into nationalism and atavistic ethnocentrism. It also qualifies the usual demand by the mainstream left and right for simply more freedom, equality and democratic choice, which history has shown often to produce evermore terrible and arbitrary tyrannies. That is why we match our programme for a civil economy with a political one that renews a Classical and Christian centrality of the mixed constitution, the priority of education as *paideia* for domestic affairs, and the primacy of cultural association and shared sovereignties for external ones.

Structure of the Book

The book applies this conception of a politics of virtue to the economy, politics, culture and international relations. Throughout it involves a blend of political and social theory with consideration of our current human predicament. Each of the five parts combines a critique of liberalism with post-liberal alternatives. The first part provides a novel account of the limits of liberal political thought and the shape of post-liberalism, while the second part turns to the metacrisis of capitalism and the civil economy alternative. In the third part, the shortcomings of liberal democracy are detailed and the mixed constitution alternative is proffered. The fourth part focuses on the metacrisis of liberal culture and ways in which we can renew a true culture of formation. In the final part, we analyse the unravelling of the liberal international order and set out a post-liberal vision of international relations with a specific emphasis on culture, covenant and commonwealth.

Our entire argument will suggest that in the long run, nobility is more realistic than mere realism. That is because nobility is about the sustaining of a high quality of action and an honourable social ethos that generously recognises and advances every essay of the good, however fragile. Without these characteristics, no specific mark of our humanity can remain. For this reason the return to the common good is the least implausible of all the admittedly implausible positive alternatives to the contemporary metacrisis of liberalism.

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Part I
POLITICS

Chapter 1

The Metacrisis of Liberalism

1. THE RISE AND CRISIS OF ULTRA-LIBERALISM

The last century in Western politics can be read in terms of the ever-increasing triumph of liberalism. After the First World War, the 1920s inaugurated the elite influence of an avant-garde that for both good and ill eventually spread its libertarian revolt to mass culture, thereby often debasing its bohemian critical edge during the 1950s to 1960s. Amid economic stagnation and a post-colonial hangover, the ‘embedded liberalism’ of the post-war *trentes glorieuses* gave way to the ultra-liberalism of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan that has defined politics and the economy since the 1980s. Over the last fifty years, the left has advanced a social-cultural liberalism that promotes individual rights and equality of opportunity for self-expression, while the right has advocated an economic-political liberalism that champions the free market liberated from the constricting shackles of the bureaucratic state. For some time now, we have had a ‘liberal right’ celebrating economic and political negative liberty, and a ‘liberal left’ celebrating cultural and sexual negative liberty.

In reality, of course, the two liberalisms have triumphed both at once and in secretly collusive harmony, despite their twin and symmetrical residues of shame about a consistent espousal of either full economic or full personal ruthlessness. And starting with Bill Clinton’s politics of the ‘new center’, both liberalisms shamelessly converged – and with them the mainstream left and right. The result was a new, scarcely questionable consensus masquerading as a pragmatic centrism that concealed its ideological commitment to limitless liberalisation and mindless modernisation. The notion of emancipation has thereby become debased to mean liberation not simply from the prejudiced social exclusion of certain groups and from arbitrary inequalities,

but also from almost all and every restriction on individual choice. As the unleashing of choice always involves new restrictions of the choices of some by the choices of others, it quickly and contradictorily leads to new and draconian restrictions on citizens' freedoms. Since rival rights and freedoms collide, power decides, such that ultra-liberalism results in a hysterical oscillation between release and control. For merely negative liberty lacks positive criteria for discriminating between what should be allowed and encouraged and what should not.

Both the liberal right and the liberal left have also privileged blind progress (understood as growth in technology, wealth and private autonomy) over tradition and a sense of mutual obligation. The twin triumph of the two liberalisms has thereby reinforced the continual convergence of the strong state and the free market. By celebrating individual choice and dismissing reciprocal responsibility, the liberal 'market-state' disembods the economy from society and at the same time re-embeds social relations in a transactional, economic and utilitarian culture that only state-power can coordinate.¹ From this perspective, the post-war and the 1980s settlements represent two sides of the same coin. Each has favoured processes of uniform, legally guaranteed transaction over interpersonal relationship. By venerating an increasingly positivistic, amoral and supposedly neutral law, liberalism has reduced politics to little more than managerial and technocratic bureaucracy – a neo-liberal variant of the Communist nightmare that sought to replace 'the government of people' with 'the administration of things'.

Both settlements have, accordingly, combined to fuse the visible hand of the state with the invisible hand of the market at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation. To this end, liberalism has undermined the civic bonds upon which a vibrant democracy and a productive market economy depend. It has further fragmented mutual organisation and undermined the pursuit of reciprocal benefit based on contribution and appropriate reward.

But the joint failure of the post-war and 1980s settlements is now becoming evermore apparent: neither remote bureaucratic control nor commercial competition has worked for the mutual benefit of all, while when conjoined they have led to a new oligarchy. Nor is there any pragmatic justification for this. On the contrary, it has presided in many countries over economic breakdown that was later thinly disguised by a financial surge, which has often blinded elites to the need to regenerate a beneficial agriculture, manufacturing and industry, and to better deploy human inventiveness.

Before returning to the crisis of liberalism, we will first of all, in the following sections, (a) further define liberalism as individualism, negative liberty, pessimism and apparent optimism; (b) deal with objections to this characterisation; (c) discuss objections to our thesis that liberalism is *the*

ideology of modern times; and (d) review the objection that our tracing of 'liberalism' to early modernity is anachronistic. Then we will show (e) how pessimistic political liberalism is also, and ineluctably, capitalism; and (f) how apparently optimistic liberalism automatically involves state technocratic control. In conclusion we will explain how all these features finally engender a metacrisis.

2. THE TYRANNY OF NEGATIVE LIBERTY

Historically, each face of liberalism seems to be the opposite of the other: the liberal left appeals to the state to protect the people from the forces of market fundamentalism that the liberal right champions, while the liberal right defends conservative values of family and the nation against the multiculturalism and emancipation that the liberal left celebrates. But far from representing genuine alternatives to one another, the two liberalisms are mutually reinforcing in the way we have just described. Thus we have entered a new era in which the seamless fusion of both reveals liberalism's hidden nature: the primacy of politics and the economy over society, which brings about a centralisation of power, a concentration of wealth and a commodification of life.

Nor is this fusion limited to party politics. In business and the 'culture industry', figures like Richard Branson, Bono, Bob Geldof or Bill Gates, who simultaneously pose as free-market champions and liberal humanitarians, embody a post-hippy, beach-combing 'capitalist philanthropy'. The merging of social with economic liberalisation has produced a new form of liberal imperialism that extends state and market power to conflict-zones by commodifying access to suffering populations – a multi-billion business that benefits not just predatory belligerents and for-profit military/security companies, but also donor countries that pursue their geo-political self-interest and NGOs that promote their liberal ideology.²

In broader conceptual terms, the two liberal revolutions are one because both champion 'negative liberty', that is to say, unfettered personal choice and freedom from constraint except the law and private conscience.³ This is to be contrasted with the promotion of 'positive liberty', or the self-release of people from debilitating passions and degrading choices, in favour of the more strenuous pursuit of human flourishing. To believe in the primacy of positive liberty is to take the view natural to every parent that what is most freely chosen is genuinely attractive in its own right and most satisfying and releasing of creative individuality in the long run. By comparison, the apparently free choice of false goods always involves a succumbing to false blandishments that conceal a hidden and, thereby, all the more insidious coercion.

Just as children deserve nurture and so our protection from disguised violence and subtle domination, so also all citizens have the genuine right to expect that their leaders will encourage their true creative development and (often surprising) fulfilment, rather than their covert frustration.

And here it should be noted that, to the instance of the thwarting of people's nobler natures and aspirations, can be added a much more recognised and conscious frustration at the inevitable inability of liberal society to offer anything like the same degree of the release of negative liberty for all. Liberalism legitimates the limitless expansion of the power of the more skilled, opportunistic and ruthless, so long as this proceeds in accordance with contractual agreement and the supposedly neutral expansion of one's 'own' domain. And yet the expansion of private resources of all kinds in reality affects through influence of usage the environment and scope for free action of others.

In this way, the produced inequity of liberalism gives rise to endless discontents, which today, once more, are spilling over into atavistic assertions of absolute identities – of race, nation, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. Such identities are often in hybrid association with liberal goals of egotistic increase, which are, after all, but half-spurned.⁴ In direct contrast, an initial admission of the inequality, though equal importance of the many different and necessary social roles – which form an organic unity and which all bear different inherent inflections of the goals of positive freedom – is far more likely to engender relative social contentment. This is particularly true if people are encouraged to seek fulfilment more through excellence in their specific vocations rather than in unending material competition. And where liberalism yields ever-greater actual inequality in the name of formal equality, a politics of virtue can exhibit just the reverse tendency. Respect for the necessity of every role, however humble, is more likely to encourage a relative parity of material rewards, where the 'professional' architectonic functions are pursued more for their own sake and accorded a high degree of social honouring.

Beyond the vocational dimension of our lives, the pursuit of positive liberty also encourages the living of rounded lives with time and space for the leisure pursuit of other creative talents and of religious or cosmic contemplation tending to genuine (as the reverse of complacent) tranquillity and contentment. At this most crucial level of all, the politics of virtue pursues a more substantive equality. It follows that the espousal of egalitarianism and democracy by liberalism is a deception. By contrast, the support of these things by a politics of virtue is more modest and cautious, since it will not surrender the priority of excellence to a formalist obliteration of real differences in capacity. Yet, just on account of this more balanced and realist axiology, it has a greater tendency to foment greater equity and inclusion in practice.

For this reason, politics should revert to its ancient character as a 'politics of the soul', concerned above all to nurture virtuous citizens, just as parents are concerned above all with the character of their children, precisely because they are also primarily concerned with their happiness.

Of course, the liberal riposte to this deliberate and unavoidable post-liberal provocation is that it is wholly unacceptable to treat citizens as children and for government to assume any kind of parental cast. Yet this trite liberal truism about government for and by autonomous adults is also the ultimate liberal delusion, and on two counts. First, liberal government is inevitably involved in just the most patronising mode of parenting, since the alternative to treating citizens as souls is to treat them as mere bodies to be endlessly and externally managed and manipulated. This is done through the bypassing of all dialectical, Socratic persuasion and with a requirement from their minds only of assent to prevailing mass opinion, propaganda and fashion. For that is all that the shadow of the publicly psychic can consist in, if it is thought that there are no souls and no objective truths to be discerned by them.⁵

Secondly, and most crucially, adulthood is never achieved all at once, is never fully achieved at all and yet is already partially entered into in the course of childhood itself. Over the span of 'adult' life, it is forever being further entered into, including by leaders and educators of all kinds themselves – the very precondition for whose leadership should be their (always relative) maturity. Where this reality is half-suppressed, as by liberalism, and it is officially supposed that adulthood is a matter of absolute metaphysical status and not of degree, then, ironically, all citizens are trapped within the worst sort of perpetual, self-congratulatory infancy. They live in denial of their need to grow in their most essential humanity, which is not already given as a matter of both inalienable fact and right. No doubt this is why, today, a vast number of adults seem to spend much of their time off work out shopping in children's shorts, trainers and slogan-covered t-shirts, the speaking garments of the inarticulate. Only the multiple tattoos, in mockery of 'barbarian' symbolic dignity, proclaim that they have undergone an initiation to distinguish them, by a skin-stamped particular expressive variant of universal fashion, from their equally half-clad offspring.⁶

Where all free choices are validated in the name of negative liberty, then infantile options go unrebuked, just to the degree that these adults are in reality the victims of coercive and abusive economic and political processes. These processes subvert their humanity by appealing to their lower and distorted instincts, including, now, a blatant advertisement of contempt for aesthetic standards in the name of comfort and grotesque singularity. Bound by concealed chains, such citizens become less and less capable of creative autonomy and active participation, though they may *in extremis* fall prey to nihilistic and atavistic cults of *ressentiment*.

In this way, the characteristic liberal ignoring of the primacy of time, tradition, habit and formation, together with the gradualness and unfinished character of human growth, ensures that its formal claim to treat all equally as autonomous adults, bearers of natural rights, reverts inevitably to a real infantilisation of most. Increasingly, we are subjected to a rationalising, utilitarian calculus, which barely conceals the usage of people for mass ends as a substitute for a care and cure of their souls. By contrast, the apparently unacceptable ‘parentalism’ of the politics of virtue in reality nurtures both freedom and independence, since it is only the truth that can possibly set us free. If there is no truth, then the realm of the spirit must also be an illusion, a mere phantom of material processes to which governments should more honestly attend. And if no spirit, then no freedom, only the unblocking of the path of atoms for a more coordinated articulation (after Hobbes) and the smoother securing of social permissions via better educative manipulation (after Locke).

All this is not to say that a priority of positive freedom leaves no place for negative liberty whatsoever. On the contrary, to begin with, in the history of modern times, the release of individual negative freedom removed many forms of oppression and allowed for new manifestations of political liberty and creative talent. But in the long run, by virtue of that excess which attends any partial good, it too much stifles the exercise of trust that is crucial to all human association. It also erodes the belief in the objective values that liberty and creativity might seek ceaselessly to discern and instantiate. A lack of trust and belief in objective truth and goodness (however hard to fully disclose – it is the work of centuries) then favours the growth of high-level criminality. For a legality founded in egotism is scarcely morally distinguishable for the individual from evasion of the law when she can get away with it. This but reinforces inequality and fear-driven rivalry.

Such an atmosphere actually starts to inhibit people’s inventiveness and, therefore, their capacity for freedom – even for freedom of choice.⁷ The liberal defence of exclusively negative liberty therefore ends up undermining all modes of freedom, because it produces the very effects that liberalism wrongly associates with positive liberty – ideological supremacy, the closing down of debate about substantive ends and the hollowing out of plurality. Thus liberal politics brings about exactly the kind of intolerant illiberalism that it ascribes to all non-liberal positions.

Liberalism’s conception of negative liberty rests on two pillars: a procedural, formalistic conception of justice and an instrumental notion of reason. The former articulates in practice the classical liberal argument that any notion of substantive, objective truth engenders a ‘tyranny of the Good’ and that justice is best seen as a form of procedural fairness (on a Rawlsian model). The latter – instrumental reason – reflects the liberal tendency

to replace social solidarity that seeks mutual benefit with a calculative rationality that maximises enlightened self-interest (on a Weberian model). In this manner, individuals are proclaimed 'autonomous' when all the while they are subjected to the instrumental logic of bureaucratic control and commercial exchange. The more they are deemed negatively 'free', the more their freedom can only be cashed out in a public, measurable currency of degrees of force and lack of self-constraint. Thus the scale of self-worth that the individual is encouraged to adopt is the very same scale by which she is subjected to mass manipulation. Furthermore, it is only this manipulation – through the continuous removal of traditional barriers and the proffering of opportunities for endless consumer and investment growth – that offers the individual the possibility of liberal 'autonomy' at all. Such a logic locks human beings into a vicious circle of ever-greater voluntary servitude and obsequiousness.

Taken together, procedural justice and instrumental reason can only entertain freedom as negative refusal, arbitrary spontaneity or affirmation of its own emptiness. Positive freedom is, by contrast, the liberty to search for objective truth and the substantive good, which offer themselves without constraint or coercion to our wills just because they attract only through their own inherent rightness. They draw our desire but do not force it. In this manner, they can sustain a more generous tolerance of individual and group practices that are similarly aimed at truth or goodness than can a formalism of reason. For such formalism must ceaselessly and even terroristically seek to banish any hint of persuasion to the substantive and extra-rational ('rational' in the narrow sense of logically watertight and fully demonstrable). Of course, persuasion will always, in time, tend to be commingled with subtle ideological coercion that must, indeed, be endlessly sifted out. But by bracketing truth and goodness out of the picture, liberalism does not so much liberate society from the 'tyranny of the Good' as impose a new tyranny of freedom from any sense of mutual obligation, which paradoxically enslaves the supposedly emancipated subject.

For it soon turns out, as already intimated, that most exercises of negative freedom interfere with the liberties of others through the arbitrary use of economic power. Also the imperative to continuously expand the sphere of 'emancipated' negative liberty collides with the equal exigency to call it in check through new legislation and evermore intensive policing and surveillance, as the last thirty years have so dramatically witnessed. Here we face a double paradox at the heart of liberalism: the relentless privatisation of the public sphere and yet the ever-greater invasion of the private sphere, coupled with an oppressive moralism masquerading as liberal impartiality and procedural fairness. As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, the liberal obsession with negative liberty has led to

an explosion of legal and moral rules, an endless process of legalization and moralization, presented as ‘the fight against all forms of discrimination’. If there are no shared mores in place to influence the law, just the bare fact of subjects ‘harassing’ other subjects, then who – in the absence of such mores – will decide what counts as ‘harassment’?⁸

He cites a number of revealing examples, such as associations of obese people demanding an end to all public campaigns against obesity and for healthy food because they violate the sense of self-worth of obese people. Other examples include ‘those fighting for the right to incest-marriage, consensual murder, cannibalism, and so on’.⁹

Thus keeping exact pace with the extension of formal rules, we have an equal extension of practices based upon the mutual consent of autonomous adults to anything and everything, regardless of a consequent debasement of character that cannot be without a contaminatory social effect. For we increasingly do not know what should be allowed and what should not, and inevitably permissions given to some will be experienced as peremptory barriers by others. This liberal logic of exponentially expanding legalism and moralism is not limited to minority rights claims, but extends to majorities and the whole governance of the common public realm that is drained of any shared ethical moorings. Like most other Western societies, Britain makes entirely arbitrary decisions about what is permitted and what is banned. Most, but not all, soft drugs are prohibited. Smoking is now outlawed in cars, but not in closed rooms at home.

Beyond this arbitrariness, liberalism has a clear tendency to impose at once a libertarian ethic and an oppressive moralism often linked to a fetishisation of perfect health (ironically alongside a total neglect of real preventive medicine and regulation of the food supply). Soon we will suppose that right and wrong can be precisely defined and that all that is wrong must be legally outlawed, while all that is not outlawed must be not only permissible but also objectively desirable. Soon after that we will imagine that we should only be allowed to do that for which we have a legal licence and that allowance implies imperative encouragement.

A society devoid of any shared moral horizon would, as Jean-Claude Michéa writes, ‘by this token be condemned to see crimes everywhere’.¹⁰ These drifts can be readily seen to be at work in the recent debates over same-sex adoption (closing down the Catholic agencies that asked to be exempt in the name of freedom of conscience) and same-sex marriage (threatening to take to courts those institutions that refuse to comply with the assumed implications of the new law) and also in those over surveillance, whistle-blowing and the indictment of military decisions before courts of human rights. All of this witnesses to the bankruptcy of the liberal rights perspective and the lack of attention to non-formalisable, non-legal judgement.

In short, we have today a sterile oscillation between a ruling liberal ruthlessness on the one hand, and an impotent and unrealistic liberal moralism on the other. The ruthlessness is the result of the ever-greater submission of more and more spheres of human life to the instrumentalist logic of capitalism, which is increasingly driven by a revived social Darwinism. In the face of this ruthlessness, moral reserve retreats into the private domain and takes the form of a stuttering series of complaints that all too often are merely about the supposed restriction of certain individuals and groups from full participation in the mass instrumentalising process.

3. LIBERALISM AS PESSIMISM

Despite the failures of contemporary liberalism, ‘liberal’ may, nonetheless, suggest to many an easy-going and optimistic outlook that celebrates universal freedom, equality and happiness. Liberalism is also synonymous with the inalienable rights of the individual and the fundamental liberties supposedly upheld by a state whose sovereignty derives from the people and whose powers are split between the three branches of government. Yet, to the contrary, at the core of a searching critique of liberalism lies the argument that it is a far too gloomy political philosophy. For liberalism assumes that we are basically self-interested, fearful, greedy and egotistic creatures, unable to see beyond our own selfish needs and, therefore, prone to violent conflict.

Virtue Dismissed

This assumption ultimately arose from a tension within late medieval and early modern Christianity between virtue as human achievement and virtue as divine grace.¹¹ Traditionally, grace had been thought synergically to ‘deify’ and complete human life and action, and such an outlook was subtly reworked by the Jesuit theologians and playwrights in terms of a human theatrical ‘putting on’ of virtue, such that cultural artifice here provides the mediating link between one’s given nature and a new infused gift from above.¹² But now, in both Protestant and some Catholic thought, a cruder metaphysics often placed divine and human activity in false competition, and as a result any human contribution to merit was regarded with increasing suspicion, while the only true merit was thought of as arriving from a divine exterior. This shift had a double consequence: *either*, theologically, the human self-management of the exclusively human realm was thought of in purely amoral terms. *Or*, in total or partial rejection of Christianity, the pagan virtues independent of grace – Augustine’s ‘glittering vices’ – were revived, though often in a manner newly ignoring any divinity whatsoever.¹³ The first option can be described as ‘modern pessimism’, the second as ‘modern apparent optimism’. The

first gloomily assumes that we are naturally selfish and violent. The second tends to celebrate pride and self-assertion, yet in a manner that often *equally* assumes the agonistic as ontologically fundamental – the difference being that *agon* is here celebrated in a post-Christian and quasi-Homeric fashion.

Perhaps surprisingly, the main founding assumption of the individualistic liberal creed as to virtue is not the second, secular, humanist and apparently optimistic one. Rather, it is the first, debasedly theological and pessimistic one, whereby human virtue is not redefined, but rather dismissed. It is just this view, in its Protestant recension, that ultimately informs the three primary founding fathers of liberalism in the seventeenth century: Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.¹⁴ Instead of inherent virtue, one has here the notion of originally ‘self-possessed’ individuals mutually contracting to ward off the threat of the other and thereby to conserve and even promote by artificial means their supposedly natural self-possession.

Robert Brenner has linked the growth of this ideology to agrarian surplus extraction arising uniquely in England from the abolition of the peasantry in favour of rural wage labour, and the pursuit of initially piratical forms of overseas trade by a newly mercantile gentry.¹⁵ The exponential growth in surplus caused a switch from the primacy of subsistence production and localised exchange towards a generalised and eventually international agricultural commerce. It was later supported by the creation of the Bank of England, whose unique functions simultaneously permitted the growth of the national debt, upon which landowners, in turn, speculated.

Such speculation was able, also for the first time in history, to fund a government run by professional politicians, ruling through patronage and influence and the manipulation of a parliament whose genuine power was highly constrained. In this way the aristocracy and gentry became characterised, in practice, less by their local political and juridical functions and more by their purely commercial ones. The entirely contingent and by no means fated growth of capitalism was in this way linked to and predicated upon an undoing of ancient corporate order, or the separation of the political from the economic role. ‘Liberalism’ as a theory and as a political practice based upon the primacy of the individual cannot be separated in its origins from the whig settlement combining the alienation of agricultural labour, an economic primacy of financial speculation, the commercialisation of landed power and the professionalisation of politics.¹⁶

This outlook sounds, as it effectively and eventually became, secular and materialistic and was from the outset enthusiastically embraced by many libertine spirits whose religious beliefs had thinned to deism or become almost non-existent. And, indeed, one cannot divorce the dominant whig ideology from its modification of the sacral basis of the early modern English state, and its concomitant dislike of corporatist order, which was inseparable from

the sense of the Kingdom as a sacral body, incorporating a 'community of communities'.¹⁷ To deny the primacy of kingship as the source of constitutional privileges (the older tory view) in favour of their theorised contractual origin was also to deny the personal and in a sense private character of supreme power. Traditionally, it had been limited (and remained so limited, even in the case of French 'absolutism')¹⁸ by this privacy, which demanded that it be exercised in confederal association with other lesser 'private' individuals and bodies, whose very 'personality' was, nonetheless, linked to the expected virtuous performance of public duties. By contrast, an altogether de-privatised central sovereignty, however far that might seem to us now desirable, proved in effect much more absolute and imparticipable, becoming eventually the authority of a 'state' whose scope was unbounded just by virtue of its abstraction.

To abandon corporate aristocratic and gentry participation in the royal power, whose divine right was now qualified by original contract, was also to secularise the noble and gentlemanly role. One effect of this was to restrict it to the regular observance of economic contract and to a 'mannerly', polite conduct regarded as a style of behaviour that 'interestedly' modified one's passions in the face of the desires of others. The now discarded alternative was to 'honourably' assert one's virtue in a way that expected public recognition on account of substantively shared, positive standards.¹⁹

However, the rise of agricultural capitalism, the commercialisation of the upper classes and the new speculative basis of political power cannot after all be regarded as simply secular manifestations, attributable to ahistorically constant secular causes. They are, rather, themselves manifestations of the construction of the secular, attributable to a modification of religious legitimations of political and social authority, which *theologically* displaced the primacy of virtue and honour in favour of the normativity of more impersonal and ultimately utilitarian procedures.

Calvinism and Jansenism

Such modification, which is historically a crucial part of the makeup of liberalism, derives especially from Calvinist and Jansenist theologies. The latter rejected all taint of Jesuit 'theatrical' mediation of human nature with the sacred (rendering Racine's 'Augustinian' anti-baroque dreams also a kind of 'anti-theatre')²⁰, just as the former came to oppose the theatre in England.²¹ For these theological outlooks, original sin was envisaged as so extreme that human beings must be considered to be 'totally depraved' or (for Jansenism) almost so, and incapable by nature of acting out of generous instincts to produce any 'exemplary drama' of economic, social or political order. Instead, in a kind of proxy operation, divine providence, on a stage deprived of all

actors save a *deus ex machina*, must manipulate our egotistic wills and even our vices behind our backs. This occurs in such a way as to make will balance will and vice balance vice in order to produce a simulation of economic and political harmony – as in the exiled Huguenot Bernard Mandeville’s dictum ‘private vice, public benefits’.²² Here lies the ideological root of Adam Smith’s ‘hidden hand’.

Historians have now shown that this ultimately descends from the French Jansenism of Pierre Nicole and, later, Pierre le Pesant de Boisguilbert.²³ Here one must note a seemingly complicating factor in the genesis of liberalism. The main traditions of political economy specifically refused, in an apparently more humanist manner, the Hobbes-Locke fantasy of originally isolated human beings entering into mutually limiting contracts for self-interested reasons. Instead, they envisaged a more plausible, historical and continuous process whereby selfish passion was constantly negotiated by a micro-calculation of interest ensuring an economic machine that converts sinful chaos into order, itself embedded in a wider context of social ‘sympathy’ – whether conceived as a projected egotism, or a spontaneous animal instinct.²⁴ However, Nicole, nevertheless, drew on Hobbes in support of his economic vision of the interested qualification of passion by passion and it was this vision that tended to prevail in the specifically *economic* aspects of the later social thinking of Hume and Smith.²⁵ This serves to indicate how the more tacit contract conceived by political economy is by no means the substantive, shared traditional horizon later envisaged by Burke. Rather, it is a slower, more incremental, dispersed and diversified version of the conveniently coinciding egoisms of the social contract model. Thus Hume and Smith do not allow sympathetic concerns as drivers of specifically market processes as opposed to wider civil concerns.²⁶

Therefore, the pessimism of Hobbes was not abandoned, but, rather, differently inflected by the Jansenists and, later, the political economists. Moreover, it did not apply only in the economic, but also in the cultural sphere. Nicole treats interpersonal relations in exactly the same, theologically depressed idiom. Just as the market produces a simulacrum of reciprocal charity, so also does our *amour propre* in all human interactions. Since the realisation of self-interest depends greatly upon success and the opinion of others, we naturally tend to placate them, flatter them or please them positively in pursuit of our own covert ends.²⁷

The Market in Manners

In describing what he calls the first rise of ‘liberalism’, Jean Rohou has related how, in the course of the seventeenth century, an inherited ethic of honour and generosity was, in accord with this model, displaced by a half-cynical, or

even avowedly Machiavellian, code of *politesse*, *courtoisie* and *coqueterie*.²⁸ Traditionally, noble behaviour at every social level was perceived as pursuing not self-interest, but, rather, social recognition for the manifestation of a given or achieved social status with its concomitant duties. But now there was a shift in the aristocratic redefining of its prestige away from the honour of the *noblesse d'épée* towards the performance of the administrative functions of the *noblesse de robe*. Besides commercial success and successful speculation (also present in France, though far more dominant in England),²⁹ this led to a situation where all social 'position' itself began to become more speculatively insecure. That was especially the case because (contrary to the Marxist narrative of a primary 'class struggle')³⁰ the big change in early modernity was the pacification, juridification and commercialisation of the upper classes and not the 'rise of the gentry' or of the 'middle classes'. Nevertheless, it had also perforce to involve the enhancement of the role of lesser middlemen and to create a greater fluidity between aristocracy and owners of 'real' landed property on the one hand and the speculative traders and owners of 'mobile' property on the other.³¹ In consequence of this 'debasement of office', every social interaction started to become one of a dynamic negotiation of separate advantages, rather than one of reciprocal and honourable meeting and melding of priorly understood responsibilities.

Thereby, from the outset a 'free' economic market was matched by a more fluid cultural market, just as the 'release' of individual autonomy in every sense could not be separated from the capitalist project. Not just since yesterday have economic and cultural liberalism been inseparably linked, even though it is but recently that a far more hegemonic and unchallenged liberalism has been unleashed within both spheres.

Given Rohou's genealogy, we can see how liberalism has been doubly promoted from the outset by both secularising hedonists and Christian puritans – both those unashamed of egoism as the basis of economic order and those who think the latter is a providential diversion and tempering of our shameful nature. Today Britain's Conservative Party, which has long since abandoned toryism for liberalism, remains something of an uneasy alliance between these two different character traits, even if the puritans are fast losing ground.

This is a very significant development if, as just suggested, the thesis of a normative materialist selfishness first of all achieved legitimacy in the seventeenth century only because it was underwritten by perverse and distorted developments of the Christian Augustinian legacy. For it then becomes hard to envisage the precise eventual consequences of the final abandonment of this carapace, which remained paramount, for example, in the case of Margaret Thatcher. But one must assume that, without the lingering belief in the providential purpose of obeying the rules, even if for selfish reasons, it will become evermore likely that both elites and many others will calculate

that they should exacerbate their vices for the sake of their own short-term gain. They will do so in the belief that they may be able to get away with viciousness and even illegality for a sufficiently long term to satisfy themselves, and with indifference to a widening gap between their own short-term success and any possible Mandevillian long-term public benefit.

4. LIBERALISM AS APPARENT OPTIMISM

However, neither the hedonist nor the puritan label would seem to apply to the *Guardian/New York Times*-reading, granola-eating left liberal, whom we more usually take today to define liberalism as such. Why does the fit appear so poor? The answer is that there is another, ‘romantic’ variant of liberalism that was invented in the late eighteenth century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and which resumed, in a new guise, the humanist and apparently optimistic secular response to the decadently Christian suspicion of all natural virtue.

Rousseau inverted Hobbes by arguing that the isolated, natural individual is ‘good’, lost in contemplative delight at the world around him, satisfied with simple pleasures and provisions. He is not yet egotistic, because that vice arises from rivalry and comparison. However, Rousseau took the latter to be endemic once the individual is placed in a social context. Accordingly, his optimism about innocent isolation is trumped by a pessimism about human association. This encouraged scepticism about the role of corporate bodies beneath the level of the state: for it is only the state that can lead us to sacrifice all our petty rivalries for the sake of the ‘general will’ – each and every negative freedom and all negative freedoms compounded in their degree of shared compatibility – which will return to us, at a higher level, our natural isolated innocence.³²

The problem with this vision is that the state will not really stand above the interests of faction and sectional intrigue. And meanwhile the concentration of all power in the centre will just as effectively undermine the immediate bonds of trust between people as does the operation of impersonal market forces. Recent Western governments have apparently exulted in this erosion of trust because it tends to increase their power to control individuals both directly and *en masse*. Accordingly, they have decreased the power of local government and voluntary associations, and permitted immigration without integration in such a way that tends to make the inhabitants of countries more and more strangers to each other.

The invocation of Rousseau allows us more easily to locate the left liberal. While the ‘right-wing’ *FT/Wall Street Journal* liberal takes a basically gloomy view of the individual, the *Guardian/New York Times* reader takes a basically gloomy view of society. This verdict, nonetheless, seems to have

things back to front. Is not the political right suspicious of anything public and the political left unwilling to trust individual liberty very far? But at the deepest level, the contrast is the other way round: right-wing liberalism is so cynical about individual motivation that it entrusts social order to the public mechanism of legally enforceable contract and to an inflexible protection of absolute and invariable property rights by the state. This occurs in the Nicole-like belief that the market will deliver a providential or natural simulacrum of the effect of real interpersonal charity and real distributive justice, in defiance of all the evidence that the simulation eventually delivers a degenerative distancing from ethical goals. The liberal left, on the other hand, so distrusts shared tradition and consensus that it endlessly seeks to release, by the agency of state power, chaotically various individual desires from any sort of generally shared requirements, which it always tends to view as arbitrary. Hence the convergence of the two liberalisms is reflected in the more apparent than real oscillation between the liberal right as the party of greed and the liberal left as the party of lust.

This is most of all shown by the ‘New Left’, which ever since the 1960s has rarely pursued a politics of solidarity but, rather, predominantly one of ‘emancipation’. As Marx pointed out, that means always at base the freeing of the economic from political control and responsibility, and therefore a new mode of enslavement of people by economic avarice, however culturally disguised.³³ Such a politics endlessly seeks to show that an overlooked ‘exception’ – of gender, sexuality, race, disability, religion or culture or inclination – does not and cannot conform to a shared norm or pre-given social role. Therefore, the specificity of exceptions must be released into Nicole’s cultural market of more or less politely mediated self-assertions, even though each such specificity is regarded at once, incoherently and undecidably, as arising from both given nature and pure elective preference.

Equally, this politics misreads the necessity of hierarchically organised care that is intrinsic to our need for education through time, and variability of talent and formation, as unacceptable patriarchal domination.³⁴ But by doing so it cannot promote an extreme libertarianism (crossed with and confused by multiculturalism) without at the same time reinforcing and assisting the cause of right-wing liberalism, which it claims to oppose, since the anarchy of legitimation by choice alone can only be mediated by market forces.

The most defining product of the New Left was the student revolution of the 1960s. It represented the ultimate Rousseauian gesture that rejected even the necessity of a temporal hierarchy of education between teacher and pupil – a hierarchy that is, of course, likely to be reversed in time, as the initially ignorant themselves gradually become the wise. Since this inequity of relative maturity and learning is unavoidable, all that its impossible refusal has led to in the long run is students being treated as consumers. Their exaggerated

rights to elect, assess and complain conceals from them the reduction of their education to a standardised and quantifiable process, which supposedly guarantees their fitness to enter the labour market.³⁵

In this instance, as in many others, all that survives of a left libertarian legacy accrues mostly to the advantage of the liberal right. For the new left, what is basically celebrated is random individual desire. By implication, human association or relationship is distrusted, since it is held that it is bound to be perversely motivated in terms of a will to power over others. The political right – symbolised by a generation of drug-using financial speculators – has now fully appropriated both this emancipatory goal and mistrust of trust itself. It holds that the remedy for inevitably warped interpersonal relationships is the ‘hidden hand’ of the marketplace. In riposte, Clintonite Democrats in the United States and New Labour in the United Kingdom insisted that part of the remedy remained the manifest hand of the state, now less in the economic than in the cultural and social spheres where it enthusiastically renewed the task of social engineering.

This settlement represents a new and insidious form of corporate control working in the interests of an unprecedentedly unleashed and unrestricted new elite of ‘ultra-whigs’, augmenting beyond precedent ‘old corruption’, who trade in power and cash for purely personal advancement.

5. WHAT LIBERALISM? WHOSE LIBERALITY?

At this point in the chapter, however, we must pause. So far we have tried to claim, with both philosophical and historical support, that liberalism is the prime ideology of modern times and that, despite tensions, its economic, political and cultural manifestations are in ontological terms seamlessly one. This unity, we have implied, is given by an assumption of the primacy, both real and axiological, of the isolated individual and his untrammelled will. However, many will object that ‘liberalism’ denotes no such unified creed and that it cannot be taken as the sole dominant bearer of modernity.

In this section we will deal with the first objection. The sheer diversity of liberal thought and thinkers appears to support the claim that there is neither a single history of liberalism nor a unitary core of liberal theory. Accordingly, the liberal tradition has been distinguished in binary terms: either ‘classical’ *vs.* ‘new’ liberalism, contrasting a serious concern for the nobility of freedom with the triviality of a celebration of consumer choice;³⁶ or the English penchant for atomistic empiricism and utilitarianism *vs.* French egalitarian social philosophy;³⁷ or else again in terms of relative universalism *vs.* relative pluralism.³⁸ Based on the latter characterisation, John Gray argues that liberalism has two ‘faces’ and is caught between two incompatible

philosophies: either a universal regime that provides the maximum possible progress for each and every one by enabling the pursuit of a single good life, which is best for all humankind based on a rational consensus that must inevitably be defined in utilitarian terms. Or else a plural *modus vivendi* that promotes peaceful coexistence between incommensurable substantial values and ways of life – founded upon the recognition that pluralism and the diversity of difference are both metaphysically and culturally true.³⁹ For Gray, only the latter can secure liberalism's claim to the universal authority of liberal values such as toleration and the advancement afforded by (an updated account of) universal human rights.

Given these claimed contrasts, there has been a recent tendency to eschew the language of 'essence' or 'core' in favour of Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances'. Gray mentions liberal universalism, individualism, egalitarianism and meliorism, while in a recent book, Edmund Fawcett sees liberal thinkers as coalescing around four closely connected ideas: inescapable conflict of interests and beliefs; resistance to implacable human power; the promise of progress; and equal respect for all.⁴⁰

But what is immediately striking here is that, with the exception of the primacy of the supposedly 'natural' individual (not even listed by Fawcett), none of these values would appear to be unique to liberalism, even if liberalism inflects them in certain decisive ways. For example, many creeds would espouse an equality of persons, but only liberalism accords people equal 'natural rights' in formal terms that prescind from any given social arrangement, while at the same time withdrawing a natural law endorsement of any normative set of culturally specific rights or distribution of roles. Accordingly, this dubious latitude of definition beyond individualism tends falsely to insinuate that we owe certain inherited Western values to liberalism alone. But in reality, liberals cannot pretend to have invented values such as freedom, equality, toleration (well known to the late antique period, for example), individual rights, constitutionalism, mixed and balanced government, the rule of law, limits on both state and market power or even the principles of generous and, so, justly cautious justice: fair detention, fair trial, right to defence, *habeas corpus*, good treatment of the convicted, trial by peers, need (in some mode) of proof for guilt and requirements of restitution, reparation and rehabilitation of offenders.

Liberality before Liberalism

All such values, however greatly they have mutated with time, have been handed down from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – notably from Greco-Roman philosophy and law as well as their fusion with both Germanic law and Christian notions of charity informing Church canonical

formulation and practice.⁴¹ In certain dimensions, the latter demanded a generous giving of the benefit of the doubt, as well as succour, even to the accused, and was thereby the eventual source of the assumption of innocence in modern times. By contrast, in all earlier ages, the actionable was thought of more in terms of interpersonal civil disturbance than of criminality, and credence was readily given to communal suspicion of a seemingly disruptive individual. A presumption of guilt was much more the norm within all historic legal codes. So in the case of the presumption of innocence, we have a case where liberalism has validly extended the protection of the individual and yet has surely not invented the sense of the absolute worth and non-dispensability of each and every person. Nor has it invented the sense of absolute (originally divine) justice as transcending even the most valid community concern, which ultimately undergirds this principle.

Thus legal historians have recognised that the first universal polity knowing no bounds and truly based upon the rule of law (thereby combining both universality and right in the sense of objective *ius*) was none other than the Latin Catholic Church. After the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century, the *ecclesia* was reconceived in terms of the sway of Canon law, rooted in the charitable precepts of the gospel and the theology of the creeds and Church Fathers.⁴²

A politics of virtue as necessarily a politics of the soul tends to be assured by the existence within a polity of such a ‘transpolitical’ community orientated beyond time to eternity and devoted to more rigorous ideals than the community at large, which nevertheless serves to guide it.⁴³ In antique times, even though the most crucial religion was strictly civil, this function was supplied by communities of mystical initiates and philosophers, whose desiredly pivotal role is theorised in Plato’s *Republic*. Certain parallels exist in ancient China, and the elevation of the *guru* beyond kingship in India, but still more with the Buddhist *Sangha*. In the case of Christianity and Islam, the ‘inner and higher’ community is democratised and made coextensive with the political community itself (as *Ecclesia* and *Ummah*), while being somewhat distinguished from it – in the case of Christianity, far more acutely so. The political community is regarded as finally answerable to the spiritual, whose higher standard is much reinforced by the presence of spiritual *virtuosi* and ascetic sub-corporations. In this way the universal ideal is rendered concrete and not merely abstract through exemplification, while – beyond pagan norms – this concretion is seen as transcending the state and, in the case of Christianity, the secular legal domain.

Without this inner polity, it is arguable that liberalism represents not so much a ‘progressive’ advance as a lapse towards paganism and a mythical civic politics – an *aperçu* that looks especially plausible in a world religious context in which other religions and other Christian formations have not so

clearly been overtaken by the Enlightenment: for how can liberalism refer beyond the realms of prevailing power towards the transcendent norms, which it still claims to instil? Arguably, its post-ecclesial conceptual space faces an *aporia*: *either* universal law floats free of any concrete communal instantiation and so tends to be without effect, such as claims to human rights against regimes that, by their own definition, will never enforce them, *or else* it claims to coincide with the rule of a political 'state', thereby running the risk that rights are subordinate to the interests of the state and may always be suspended in its every emergency.

The first instance is true, by and large, of modern, post-Catholic Anglo-Saxon law, which celebrates the 'rule of law' that is, in principle, like Roman and Canon law, not state-bound. In consequence, this legacy eventually bifurcated between two strands: first, the English insistence on an absolute sovereignty resultant upon an Erastian interpretation of Church establishment (whereby the King and parliament are absolute because the state is now the church); second, an American primacy for natural law, interpreted increasingly as absolute formal rights – potentially applying across national boundaries, but in practice still requiring state enforcement. The latter is mainly true of continental and French revolutionary *Staatsrecht*, for which the liberty of each as the liberty of all cannot be divorced from the Republican liberty and monopolised legitimacy of the state itself. In this way, liberalism, as in origin primarily a refusal of ecclesial power (see further below), is aporetically caught between absolute exaltation of the individual and absolute exaltation of the state, even though in the end one tends to imply the other. Neither individual presumption nor state overweening can now be so effectively chastened as by the constraining and normative presence of an inner psychic community.

It is for this reason that liberalism does not necessarily entail an accompanying democracy. Its very protection of individual liberty and social equality can readily morph into their subordination to collective power and commercial exchange, since these, in lieu of the role of a guiding psychic community and the carapace it offers to smaller intermediate corporate bodies, are now the very conditions for the possibility of such protection. Government will then tend to become entirely a policing and military function, as we begin to see in contemporary China, most of all, but also elsewhere. For the decay of all tacit constraints embedded in family, locality and mediating institutions has illiberal consequences in every sense, as Tocqueville warned. Even though liberalism promotes the idea that a family, a region, a craft tradition, etc. are crucial elements within a polity, it undermines the role of an overarching psychic community that sustains their transcending of the political, leaving the isolated individual at the behest of an anonymous collectivity. Increasingly, the operation of economic and civil rules, which no individual

has any longer any intrinsic interest as an isolated ego in enforcing, will be extrinsically and evermore exhaustively imposed by a state become totalitarian in a new mode.

The French Liberal Difference?

To mention Tocqueville is to allow that some liberals have recognised that check. liberalism itself can threaten freedom and have therefore realised the need for lower corporate bodies to act as a check on state power. As Larry Siedentop has stressed, nineteenth-century French liberalism, in particular, tended to qualify the atomism and exclusively formal representation promoted by English liberal philosophy, on account of its empiricist and utilitarian assumptions.⁴⁴ By contrast with Locke and J.S. Mill, French liberal thinkers accentuated the social nature of man, the centrality of civil society and the role of political participation in fostering human fulfilment through the practice of civic duty.

Crucially, for Siedentop, French liberalism maintains a clear distinction between mores and laws (*les mœurs et les lois*), and it links individual intentions and motives to social action beyond self-interest. In turn, this somewhat shifts the emphasis away from the dialectical relationship between subjective rights and collective power towards notions of free *mœurs* – the habit of self-government and voluntary association that defines intermediate institutions as opposed to the central administrative state and the free market. Dislodging individuals from the fixed social positions of the *ancien régime* provided greater individual freedom and opportunity, but growing equality also entailed atomisation that paved the way for the centralisation of power and wealth, with a resulting diminution of the scope for the common exercise of genuine liberty. In the face of this, the French liberals argued that diverse participation was necessary even for the realisation of negative freedom. Following Benjamin Constant, they, indeed, upheld ‘the liberty of the moderns’, which is negative, against the ‘liberty of the ancients’, which was a positive liberty of the soul and of the shared pursuit of commonly accepted goals. Yet, by way of modification of this preference, they emphasised the crucial role of variegated social rules in the realm of *mœurs*. Politics is now viewed as providing guarantees for rights that imply accompanying obligations, which operate to uphold the negative liberty of the other and which may take varying substantive forms in different historical and cultural circumstances.

However, Siedentop’s defence of French liberal thinking against the empiricist and utilitarian tradition of English liberalism fails to question two fundamental premises: first, in accordance with ‘modern’ liberty, rights still ground obligations, rather than duties begetting rights; second, the individual is more primary than human association, even if the practice of the latter at

every level is crucial to defend individual freedom. Both presuppositions have their ultimate roots in late medieval univocity (the denial of inherently different qualitative degrees within being), nominalism (the denial of the reality of universal modes of existence) and voluntarism (the insistence that divine and then created will is the primary determinant of reality), which shape much of modern political thought all the way to Rawls.⁴⁵

The Unity of Liberalism, After All

Thus Siedentop's typology of two distinctly different traditions underplays the unity of liberal thinking. This unity pivots about the primacy of the individual. Always allied to this primacy is the replacing of notions of substantive goodness or truth with the ultimacy of subjective rights, subjectively and voluntaristically grounded; the substitution of formal social contract for prescribed, substantial unity and the privileging of progress (towards negative liberty) and 'laws of history' (entailing the necessary 'rationality' and, therefore, logical necessity of this progress) over tradition and contingency.

It is because of the collusion in liberalism between the subjective and the objective that Gray's dual categorisation also collapses. For the *more* that pluralism involves the coexistence of incommensurable values, then the *more also* a purely rational and utilitarian process must govern the unavoidable public coordination of an otherwise anarchic diversity. The application of formal rules cannot achieve this, since the avoidance of overlap between incommensurable principles and attitudes in the sphere of their various operations is clearly an illusion.

Liberalism is, therefore, *incorrigibly* atomistic and oscillates between the isolated subjective individual and collective unity either objectively compounded or artificially supposed – 'Leviathan' was both. Otherwise, it fails any definition or consistency as a recognisable modern and secular phenomenon. Liberal recognition of association and group identity must, in consequence, always logically give way before the recognition of individual rights that are ultimately upheld by the state.⁴⁶ So in terms of a genuinely liberal logic, democratic, corporatist or republican qualifications of this tension can never be stable, and are always threatened with corrosion in the name of a further unleashing of individual potency. Though one may, indeed, try to argue that the substantive scope of freedom is diminishing and becoming trivialised into consumerism, such protests are in vain, though admirable, unless one questions liberal first premises. For these, by virtue of their agnosticism concerning substantive ends and the means to achieve true freedom (by disciplining of psychic passions towards the true and the good), are committed at base to a formal and not substantive definition of freedom. The understanding of modern, negative liberty as the removal of barriers, legally guaranteed, means

that wherever these formal conditions prevail, there genuine freedom must be presumed to be present. Thus a more chastened liberalism is impotent in the face of Hobbesian arguments to the effect that the formal liberty of the individual is better guaranteed by an absolutely unvarying and uniform system of market and state regularity. For it no longer places any democratic barriers on mass will or corporate barriers of special group privilege between the person and her self-chosen destiny. The will merely to will naturally evolves into the will merely to shop.

Those nineteenth-century liberals in France (Constant, Tocqueville, Guizot) and in Britain (W.H. Gladstone, T.H. Green and L.T. Hobhouse) who tried bravely to channel liberalism in a more organicist direction, were, therefore, either proffering incoherence, or else producing a hybrid theory, which was no longer exclusively or even predominantly liberal, since they sought in effect to blend formal with substantive freedom. Even if the latter be conceived as negative exercise of autonomy, it is impossible for a theory grounded on a formal definition to defend any exception to the formal extension of liberty, or any special pleading on behalf of customary mores as opposed to the indifferent operation of law. For this can always be deplored by the consistent liberal as improper delimitation of choice, contract and commercial flow. Thus liberalism, as with J.S. Mill, is ineluctably drawn towards positivism.⁴⁷

In retrospect, the problem with all this qualified liberalism was that it tried to make arbitrary 'tradition' do the work of a previous, traditionally mediated metaphysic. The latter was always in some way religious and involved an appeal to ancient, positive liberty.⁴⁸ By forgetting, or vainly seeking to secularise, its religious roots, liberalism cuts itself off from the tradition of Western theology and legality, which had first proffered a thicker and more coherent version of those values – liberty, equality, constitutional representation, etc. – that liberalism still tries to sustain. For freedom rests on the belief in the existence of a genuinely free will under rational guidance of a psychic essence, and equality is linked to the idea of a personal Creator God in whose image and likeness all men and women are made. They are considered equal in terms of their unique spiritual personhoods, which are believed to have impermeable value only because of their participatory reflection of an eternal personal principle, which is therefore the ultimate truth. St Paul's teaching on the equality of souls in the eyes of God accordingly laid the foundations for a universal order beyond particular legal or cultural normativity.⁴⁹ It was the Christian fusion of ancient with biblical virtues and of the principle of free association in Germanic law with the Latin sense of equity and participation in the shared *civitas* that created the conditions for an ethics and politics of the common good.

Equally, Christological and sacramental notions of ‘representation’ of a whole by a part, sign or person first encouraged – through canonical, monastic and mendicant influence – the growth of constitutional government in the West, initially within the Church and later within the secular order.⁵⁰ But this older and initial sense of representation was not seen as a mere mirroring of, or alternatively substitution for, a group will, in the absence of a given, shared horizon of agreement.⁵¹ Rather, within a substantive horizon of shared *mœurs* and attitudes, the representative could authentically, yet freely, interpret the will of those whom he represented. His role is at once to listen and to follow, and yet, also to lead educatively, and, in either case, both for clarification and for guidance. The role of the representative is indispensable and required for the democratic aspect of any polity (which the Middle Ages usually affirmed and practised).⁵²

Without such a horizon, it is unclear for liberalism as to whether constitutional representation is required at all, and if it is seen as requisite, its role becomes aporetically indeterminable. Thus, for the Hobbesian approach of what one might term ‘undemocratic authoritarian anarchism’, there is no representation, but only an assumption that the state as a whole constitutes a fictional, artificial body, which is ‘Leviathan’. It is quite deliberately conceived by Hobbes as a kind of blasphemous substitution for the community as the body of Christ – a body requiring a representative head and, in turn, many plural representatives and mediations of this headship. The fiction is necessarily of an absolute sovereign totality, if it is to be able to secure and guarantee the irrefrangibility of all individual negative freedoms and privately agreed contracts.

Equally, though with a different twist, for Rousseau the general will of the state is the unalienated, and so, unrepresented unity of the entire people, in a fashion that can come to support a more statist and bureaucratic (rather than market-mediated) mode of tyrannical power. On the other hand, if representation is embraced, as for more constitutional liberals like Locke or modern republicans (like James Harrington), then a debate must ensue as to whether the representative is simply a mandated delegate or else is permitted to exercise her free judgement. This tends to bring an assessment of her character back into the equation in a way that is problematic for a purely liberal outlook. In strict liberal terms, where this permission is granted, the representative must tend to become a substitute – substituting her lone will for a coagulated will of the people – in a manner that tends to the oligarchic.

Representation accordingly lapses, or else is deconstructible, into either mandation or substitution, once uprooted from its earlier, Christian metaphysical background. As Burke realised, in order to operate at all it requires an unwritten, unformalised sense of customary ‘prejudice’ and acceptance of the

traditionally ‘prescribed’ (as mediating in culturally specific ways the natural law) to be tacitly shared between the represented and the representing.⁵³

6. LIBERALISM, REPUBLICANISM AND MODERNITY

A second objection to our treatment of liberalism might be that liberalism is not, after all, the only, or even the central, ideology of modernity. This is a particularly important issue, because the key counter-claim here would be that there is a distinctly modern and secular mode of the ‘politics of virtue’ that has been promoted by the tradition of civic republicanism since Machiavelli. We will now show just how this counter-claim is open to question.

Liberty in Machiavelli and Harrington

Amongst the advocates and historians of republicanism itself, there has been much recent debate as to whether it is allied to positive or to negative liberty.⁵⁴ This is crucial, because in the first case, it would proffer a genuine politics of the soul and of virtue, whereas in the second, it could be regarded as a variant of liberalism. Specifically, this would be a variant that insists, contrary to Hobbes, that the protection of individual freedom requires a participatory and democratic theory of government to the extent that (as for the French revolutionary ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man’)⁵⁵ the natural rights to life and property must be supplemented by a natural right of specific formal assent to sovereign rule. Otherwise, it is contended, one has the right to freely dispose of one’s own life and property only at the discretion of another person or power. This is seen as a condition of slavery and not citizenship – in advertence to the basic classical typology of human actors. The status of citizenship also requires as a primary, not secondary, aspect of individual liberty the collective participation of free individuals in the business of what is ultimately self-government.

For modern republicans, the landed class of gentlemen proprietors constituted the prime band of such political actors, who aimed to keep taxes low, and sustained a potentially fighting militia. Thereby, they espoused a ‘country’ ideology that contrasted with the ‘court’ promotion of a professional political class together with a standing professional army, both sustained by relatively high taxation and a national debt on which a more commercially conceived landed class constantly speculated. The court ideology aligned more naturally with theories of original political contract and natural rights, though it was primarily linked with the continuous economic contracts of political economy, and sometimes included a republican account of the division of powers at the centre, derived from James Harrington.

In general, the second view, which regards modern republicanism as a variant of liberalism, turns out to be correct – although the issues and examples are highly complex, largely owing to the often hybrid and scarcely consistent character of modern republican thinkers.

For J.G.A Pocock, the Renaissance republican tradition, which he situates in a largely Machiavellian trajectory, upholds positive liberty and active virtue. That is because it insists, after a Roman model,⁵⁶ that to be free is to participate, on the basis of secure property ownership and a degree of military independence, in the running of a polity, which is itself freely bounded against all external imperial control.⁵⁷ However, Pocock defines republican virtue as essentially the sustaining of a prideful ‘self-government’, in a way that would not qualify as full positive freedom in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense of ‘self-realisation’. The latter is the attaining of a true *telos* of self or civic rule in terms of the securing of distributive justice, true friendship sustained by a shared and interactive love of the truth and the encouragement of a contemplation of the cosmos or of the divine.⁵⁸ And Machiavelli does not advert to the governance of the soul. His *virtù* is the military and political excellence required to sustain collective independence, and can notably be fostered by a certain controlled sustaining of factional struggle within the city, which serves as a training ground for the combative spirit.

Thus Machiavelli shares with Hobbes the ‘liberal’ assumption of a given, ontological *agon*, which is to be manipulated but not potentially overcome in the name of a more primary and peaceful ontological harmony (as for Augustine and Aquinas still more than for Aristotle or Plato).⁵⁹ This *agon* is seemingly given a little more instrumental play by the Florentine than by the sage of Malmesbury. But just this dimension is an aspect of the later much-debated ‘politically economic’ question of the relation between military virtue on the one hand, and more muted commercial rivalry on the other. It follows that the price of the modern secularisation of virtue in Machiavelli is also its re-primitivisation and re-paganisation, which returns virtue understood as *virtù* to its etymological root of male aggressive prowess. This renders modern virtue actually proximate to liberal norms, whose formal negativity is predicated on the latent violence of an assumed initial lack of consensus. Such a view brackets out of political relevance the cultural ‘prejudgements’ later seen as essential by Burke.

English and Scottish Republicanism

When one turns from Machiavelli to the post-restoration English and later Scottish republican theorists, one is faced with a tangle of complexities. Harrington does, indeed, refer to the soul and he, Shaftesbury and Algernon Sidney tend to blend elements of Machiavellian *virtù* with notions of Platonic,

Aristotelian and Biblical virtue.⁶⁰ To the extent that they do so, they advert more to a transcendent horizon and obeisance to divine government, however deistically construed. And other Renaissance traditions of civic republicanism, especially the Venetian, remained much more Catholic in character, as with the approach of the ecumenically humanist Gasparo Contarini, by whom these British thinkers were also influenced.⁶¹

At the same time, and somewhat confusingly, the purity of even a Machiavellian understanding of *virtù* and freedom is qualified in the case of these thinkers, in ways that show, after all, some proximity to and influence of ‘liberal’ natural rights thinkers, like Hobbes and Locke.⁶² Indeed, their very insistence against Hobbes on the need for constitutional guarantees of representation and mixed government in order to sustain negative liberty, nevertheless, exhibits a certain parallel shift from the primacy of individual ‘character’ as ensuring freedom to the primacy of structural arrangements.

One can try to grasp the nub of this confusion at the point where James Harrington defends against Hobbes’s ‘the rule of law’ as opposed to ‘the rule of men’.⁶³ In one sense, this is indeed an appeal to ancient virtue, to Aristotle (who is cited here) and to Plato. Therefore, in contrast to anything in Machiavelli, Harrington elsewhere endorses Plato’s rational rule of legal patterns reflecting the eternal forms, as opposed to a mere sophistic economy of the passions.⁶⁴ Yet in another sense he is saying that Hobbes offers only an economy of power – the rule of a fictional, compounded atom, really embodied in the force of a single monarch and her counsel. By contrast, the rule of law does not rely, for the securing of freedom, on the ingenious self-limiting by contract and monopolised violence of the powers and passions of men. Rather, it entrusts this to more impersonal and inherently rational patterns and structures.

For Harrington, the primacy of even Machiavellian *virtù* is ultimately subordinate to the best securing of negative individual liberty of choice and security of possession. Thus he argues that *even if* Hobbes is right and we are generally ruled by our passions and selfish interests, then the ‘republican’ balancing of forces will still serve infallibly to secure a free people in a free state. This balancing is itself conceived according to a scenario that is but a variant on the notion of an original contract, involving the famous example of the two girls sharing a cake. Where Hobbes and Locke would require that they need to draw up an agreed contract to be enforced by their parent, Harrington suggests, instead, that one girl will divide the cake, but the other will get to have first choice of which piece to take, with the implication that the foreknowledge of the first girl will constrain her to a just slicing.⁶⁵ In political terms, this becomes the crucial division between the judicial, senatorial function of one chamber (advising on how the cake is to be cut) and the sovereign decisions of the more popular chamber (authorising which pieces are to be taken and

by whom). The executive carrying out of this advice and these legal decisions is somewhat dispersed (in great contrast to Hobbes) amongst the justices of the peace and the like. In this way, the primacy of political virtue is severely undermined by Harrington, in favour of the primacy of political structures guaranteeing a balance of forces – even if there remains, ambivalently, some suggestion that these structural arrangements will encourage a more substantive cultivation of virtue and of positive freedom.

In the wake of Harrington, and his successors Algernon Sidney and Henry Neville,⁶⁶ historians no longer think that there was in eighteenth-century England a clearly distinct ‘commonwealth’ or ‘republican’ faction.⁶⁷ Instead, many thinkers (beginning with Sidney himself) blended natural rights ideas with an insistence upon the importance of the direct ‘virtuous’ political participation of landed proprietors. The latter requirement did, indeed, clash with the oligarchy of the ‘new’ or ‘court’ whigs, who had, as we have already mentioned, professionalised the political together with the military function and concomitantly commercialised the role of landed proprietors, through the mechanism of the national debt. All these things were often denounced both by ‘old’ whigs and by some (but by no means all) Tories.

However, the unease about the substitution of commerce for agriculture and warfare, and the consequent effect on virile *mores*, was registered by almost everyone in various degrees. For example, David Hume, while broadly accepting commercialisation, also worried about the loss of the personal representative role and the implications of an ever-mounting debt.⁶⁸ Equally, almost everyone was influenced by a specifically modern substitution, since Montaigne and others, of the ‘gentle’ virtues of pity and sympathy for the harsh and ascetic virtues both of the antique hero and of the Christian ascetic or saint.⁶⁹

What is more, insofar as commerce is seen as an acceptable substitute for warfare and the accompanying ‘manners’ as a substitute for virtue, there is also a subtle continuity with Machiavelli. That is because the competitive rigours (qualifying the docility) of commerce are regarded as an acceptable substitute for the fearful training ground of the Italian city-state in factional, familial and class rivalry.⁷⁰ And at the defining limit of national pride, freedom and survival, commerce can be once more converted into military currency and the mask of manners slips to reveal the real continued face of passion now, in extreme, threatened circumstances no longer able to be tempered by a measured ‘interest’.

Whigs and Tories

Finally, the crucial lines of political division appear to have run, after all, not between court and country, but between whigs and Tories who were divided

over the questions of the legitimacy of the Hanoverian line and the primacy and independence of the Church in the constitution.⁷¹ Just this latter stress rendered the tory version of ‘commonwealth’ constitutional politics (remarkably instigated in part by none other than Charles I)⁷² more genuinely hospitable towards diverse corporate privileges and to the cultivation of genuinely virtuous roles – architectonically guided by ‘gentlemen’ – within communities of purpose, positively pursuing a collectively shared end of national and human excellence.⁷³ By contrast, the whigs tended to override all inherited rights in the interests of property – demolishing and removing villages, executing youthful deer-stealers and legitimising the ownership even of people.⁷⁴ And far from being necessarily in favour of a republican option, or its commercial simulation, they could at times, as in the case of Josiah Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester, be dismissive of Locke and natural right just *because* it appeared too much to echo the Harringtonian insistence on the primacy of property as allowing a Roman independence and primacy of self-subsistent production.⁷⁵ So here ‘liberalism’ and republicanism are, in effect, equated, and yet Tucker’s own advocacy of what he saw as a natural law primacy for exchange and continuous, always already initiated, rather than original contract, must itself be seen as a variant of the liberal creed.

In the end, those substituting the state and civil religion for the Church (Harrington as much as Hobbes) were at one in promoting a primarily negative liberty, whether as natural right, political economy or the quasi-virtue of the modern Commonwealth. It is for this reason that one must argue against Pocock’s view that both right and left nineteenth-century romantic critics of liberalism in the name of organic virtue had overlooked the modern idiom of republican virtue or commercial quasi-virtue as a feasible synthesis of the modern with the ancient. Quite clearly, it was an unstable, or else false, synthesis, failing essentially to qualify a liberal ideological hegemony. The ‘commonwealth whig’ version of history is simply a mild mutation of the whig version of history after all, as J.C.D. Clark contends.

This is not to say that the tory faction was authentically uncontaminated by modern idioms. To the contrary, at times it might favour the disdain of all custom in favour of absolute, centralised, voluntary control.⁷⁶ And as Clark emphasises, English divine right doctrine (whether in its tory-Stuart or modified whig-Hanoverian version) was not authentically medieval and constitutional. Rather, it followed from the Reformation merging of Church with State and placing of the monarch as the Church’s head. This resulted in an extreme doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of king in parliament that rendered the thought of a federal sharing of sovereignty much more difficult than it was under the norms of Roman law and eventually served to make the problem of the Thirteen Colonies (how can they have self-rule without separation?) wholly intractable.⁷⁷ Equally, the English Reformation tended to

encourage the idea of common law as being (like the literal and sole rule of the Bible) wholly based upon positive precedent. Only under the influence of Richard Hooker amongst others, encouraging a recovery of canon and so Roman law influences, was ‘prescription’ once more fused with interpretative equity – as it later is, supremely, by Burke.⁷⁸

At times, toryism could follow both Reformation bents and regard the power of the king and the force of law in the secular realm as bounded only by will and the positive series of legal judgements, in total disregard of ‘the ancient constitution’. On the other hand, the ‘neo-Harringtonian’ and ‘gothic Whig’ adulation of the latter as an equivalent of ancient republicanism tended to reduce both to a contractual balancing of monarchic and aristocratic forces. Only in the case of the later Burke does one see a certain blending of whig constitutionalism, tory prescription and tory sense of the protective authority of kings in a way that recovers something of a genuinely Catholic Christian approach.⁷⁹ The mixed constitution is seen now as a more organic unity with each governing aspect and equivalent estate paying a vitally necessary, rather than mutually limiting, role to combine unified monarchic governance with the wise advice of the few and the represented or tacit assent of the many. Equally, the realm is once more seen as a community of communities:

With us, the representative [the house of commons] separated from the other parts, can have no action and no existence. The government is the point of reference of the several members and districts of our representation. This is the center of our unity. This government of reference is a trustee for the *whole*, and not for the parts. So is the other branch of our public council, I mean the house of lords. With us the king and lords are several and joint securities for the equality of each district, each province, each city.⁸⁰

These were not reactionary insights on Burke’s part, but, essentially, a belated realisation, in the face of the French Revolution, that liberalism could eventually use the unleashed power of money and the national debt to overturn all sacral authority above the level of the state and all lesser authorities beneath it. This tends to legitimate the terroristic and nationally unbounded activities of any arbitrary group claiming to act ‘representatively’ in the name of the people.⁸¹

US and French Republicanism

In the case of the founding of the United States, a republican element was also much fused with a natural rights theory that had become increasingly detached from common law.⁸² Already, Montesquieu had misread the British constitution in terms that accentuated the Harringtonian emphasis on a

‘balance of powers’, and the American recension further detached this from any real sense of organically cooperating social orders.⁸³ In consequence, the balance at the centre only confirmed the power of the centre at the expense of a federal subsidiarity (as favoured by the more truly republican Jefferson). Yet the failure to envisage a shared, if balanced, sovereignty distributed amongst the three powers ensured and ensures to this day an ironic contestation between them over sovereign government and an ironic accentuation of the English eighteenth-century whig oligarchic rule through patronage and influence, always hovering on corruption. Equally, the liberal republican insistence upon a strict division of powers clashes with the theoretical investment of sovereignty now, no longer in the Crown and its sharing of rule (as for a ‘tory constitutionalism’), but in an abstract ‘people’. In consequence, the United States has been caught from the outset between oligarchic stasis and corruption on the one hand, and the claims of a majoritarian tyranny, manipulable by the propaganda of opinion, on the other.⁸⁴

By contrast, the British constitution would seem to allow at once clean decision making and yet some sort of genuinely independent advisory roles (of the Crown, the Lords, the independent civil service). But, of course, the advantages never lie altogether with one system. Thus many more federal dispersive elements remain in the United States, which has to this degree succeeded in a ‘country’ qualification of absolute common law ‘court’ sovereignty that still eludes the United Kingdom – now to its double dire peril in terms of its relations to both Europe and its own Celtic constituents. Equally, the republican sense that freedom requires an active, educated and even virtuous participation is surely far more alive in the United States. What is more, for all the Unitarian, Masonic and old dissenting character of the founding fathers,⁸⁵ this sense has since then been much buttressed by new dissenting, (Methodist and evangelical) besides Irish and other Catholic, contributions – not neglecting the Anglican ex-loyalist presence in New York State, nor the strong Scottish Jacobite and Irish Catholic presence in the original thirteen colonies from the outset.

In the case of France, we have already reason to suppose that the republicanism of both Montesquieu and Rousseau is at bottom liberal. Indeed, it is gathered round the protection of private person, property, central state power and debt-funded commerce – to which the power, property and charitable endowments of the Church were all sacrificed in the Revolution to provide the stable guarantee for a new flood of paper money. This, of course, formed the centrepiece of Burke’s critique, alongside his new realisation that the avatars of ‘natural rights’ were mainly concerned to abolish all traditional corporate and often socially beneficial privileges that the Church had sheltered.⁸⁶ To begin with, in the Middle Ages, as François Guizot noted, French monarchic power had been weak and English monarchic power strong.⁸⁷ Accordingly,

the English aristocracy in alliance with the commons and under the *aegis* of Canon law, secured constitutional rights against the crown. In France, by contrast, the monarchy started to erect against landed power its own somewhat arbitrary legal and policing structures – as criticised by Sir John Fortescue in the late Middle Ages.⁸⁸

But in the long run, the rival cousins separated by the channel have converged, with the Reformation and its Jansenist and deistic aftermath proving the great solvent. In England, the aristocracy and gentry came, after all, to ally themselves with undiluted central sovereignty (thereby *betraying* the Catholic spirit of Magna Carta, clean contrary to ‘old hat’ Protestant-Whig mythology).⁸⁹ In France, the burghers and functionaries, together with some aristocrats and clergy, usurped and perpetuated the aspirations of the crown.⁹⁰ In so doing, they removed to a large degree the power of the corporations and guilds. It was not the beginning of modernity as such, but, rather, of *that* modernity which is but the final triumph of the *intendants* and the gloomy Jansenists, besides being the final, hypertrophic and unwanted revenge of the Huguenots.

The Liberal Attack on the Ecclesial Polity

In the face of *this*, liberal, modernity, Burke suggested that it was not that commerce gave rise to civilised manners, but, rather, that the tempering spirit of mediaeval chivalry had first permitted sufficient peace for the development of markets and trade.⁹¹ Without the continued work of this spirit, an incremental rights-based anarchy and a terroristic insistence on an ever-further removal of extra-rational barriers to negative liberty was bound to ensue. Religious and gentlemanly virtues were therefore not dispensable for any civilisation, ancient or modern, and cannot be substituted by any *ersatz* mannered ‘civility’ whose mask over a new barbarity will always slip in time. Therefore, Burke reasserted the independence and normative priority of the Church patrimony as the shelter for various corporate liberties and honourable practices.⁹²

In his wake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggested (in a manner partly anticipated by Hume) that the Clergy supplemented by a cultural ‘clerisy’ are required to mediate between the stable landed and the ‘mobile’ commercial interest.⁹³ For the truncated republicanism of the whig outlook, it had proved impossible to resolve an aporetic oscillation between the notion that virtue as autonomy could only be upheld by landed archaism and the acclaimed dynamism of modern, commercial society. But it is precisely Coleridge’s Christian romanticism that is able to overcome this oscillation between a truly reactionary Roman and pagan option on the one hand, and a dangerously anarchic progressivism on the other: for now, once more, virtue is not to be solely dependent

upon property and independent military prowess. Rather, it should depend more primarily upon lands and resources (for example, and partly under an ultimately Coleridgean influence, modern universities, the BBC and the National Trust)⁹⁴ set aside to offer at once a real possibility for, and materially sacramental mediation of, divine contemplation and the priority of charitable practice.

This extended ecclesial space – allowing also for sacramental mediation by nature, by the arts and by learning – is neither exclusively on the side of the rural, bounded and productive, nor on the side of the urban, mercantile and accumulative. Its transcendence can accommodate both and resist equally the older (exaggeratedly Roman) negative liberty of stable possession and the newer negative liberty of increasingly abstract speculation. And its sacramentality requires at once a certain substantive stability and also a certain dynamic, such that the modern progressive factor is paradoxically what guarantees an ancient and spiritual apophatic reserve. In this way, the ‘aristocratic’ element is Platonised and naturalised (as partly anticipated by the *arriviste* Burke) in terms of the crucial guiding role of talent and excellence for any sound polity. At the same time, it serves to shelter non-formalised, unarticulated and ‘obscure’ interests against the notion common to both pure democracy and pure absolute monarchy that representation involves total alienation, giving the dangerous and illusory presumption that ‘the whole will of the body politic is in act at every moment’.⁹⁵ Such a vision is truly once more the republicanism of Plato, Aristotle, the Bible and Cicero, gothicised and Christianised, and by that token also modernised in a more stable fashion. Both in Britain and on the Continent the nineteenth century often bravely sought to realise this through endeavours that persisted in the twentieth century at least up till 1945.⁹⁶

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Moreover, socialism and certain other post-romantic radicalisms are not, after all, the offspring of liberalism and iconoclastic revolution, but, rather, themselves began as a kind of romantic left-Burkean critique of the French revolutionary legacy. Even Thomas Paine criticised the power of paper money and the national debt as the most fundamental driver of capitalism.⁹⁷ Such a left-Burkean perspective by no means (any more than did Burke himself) wished to restore an *ancien régime* or the tory ideology.⁹⁸ Beyond secular republicanism and often with various explicit religious avowals (however heterodox), they revived the ancient and Catholic projects of the pursuit of substantive, shared ends of flourishing through mutual cooperation and reciprocal exchange. In these respects, they often popularised certain older approaches of the Jesuits, the Jacobites, the Pietists and the tories. This can be tracked, especially in the development of Methodism from the High Church tory legacy of John Wesley.

But if, for example, William Cobbett agreed with Edmund Burke that for a republican, non-corrupt involvement in politics, one required a propertied

independence as the foundation for the development of free virtue, then he did not, in the end, see this as a barrier to the extension of the franchise.⁹⁹ Instead, he saw it as an argument for the undoing of the effects of abolishing the peasantry, enclosure and expropriation of rural resources, which was the precondition for the take-off of capitalism as such. A wider distribution of assets and resources in this way adds genuine independence to cooperation as the true basis of political virtue, and thereby should avoid any slippage into the radicalism of mere collectivity whose only justification is likely to be utilitarian.¹⁰⁰

The latter Benthamite option has always been, since the late eighteenth century, the serious alternative to Burke, once the anarchic heart of liberalism had been exposed by the revolutionary turmoil. As we saw in the criticism of John Gray, the limitation of the anarchic discord opened by rights is here filled by the supposedly transparent objectivity of material well-being. The pursuit of such well-being can only add a bodily confirmation to the untrammelled liberal sway of individual will and passion on the one hand, and the necessary subordination of this to central 'scientific' organisation on the other.

7. THE DEFINITION OF LIBERALISM

Liberalism therefore exhibits in all its variants an individualist consistency and is truly defining of the most influential, specifically modern, political outlook. Insofar as this has been constantly qualified, it has not been fundamentally challenged by 'alternative secular modernisms', supremely republicanism, whose unproblematic difference from liberalism tends to evaporate upon inspection. Rather, it has been mainly qualified by religious perpetuations of older outlooks whose creative mutations (as in the case of evangelicalism or Catholic personalism) can be seen to be just as contemporary as the dominant 'modern' norms of liberalism and secularity.

'Liberalism', however, was not used as a term until the early nineteenth century: first, in a political context in Spain to denote the followers of the French revolutionary principles; second, in a theologico-political context in England (as by J.H. Newman) to denote a position (religious or otherwise) that refuses to accept anything not rationally proven or demonstrable and, above all, disallows any public influence for the non-proven – the emotively or faithfully affirmed.¹⁰¹ However, this late specific usage would not seem to disqualify, but, rather, to confirm the usage of 'liberal' as a term of art to capture something that has much earlier and distinct origins. The revolutionary ideology was clearly a development of the post-Hobbesian substitution of subjective individual 'right' for objective, distributive and relational natural

law. Equally, the outlawing of the extra-rational as cognitively or publicly acceptable is rooted in the refusal by Hobbes, Spinoza, Harrington and Locke of any public power to psychic communities or to traditions of interpretation (of scripture and other authoritative, including legal, texts) that cannot be fully rationalised, but must perforce rely on ‘prejudice’ or prejudgement.¹⁰² A reigning individualism is inseparable from this rationalism and from opposition to any Catholic conception of the role of the Church.

Here the advocacy of toleration by Locke and others was in reality an advocacy of civic indifference, and his exclusion of Catholics from toleration was not an ‘exception’ to his theory, but, rather, its whole basis, since for Catholic doctrine, such indifference is unacceptable.¹⁰³ For this reason, the nature of eventual Catholic emancipation is a highly debatable event and the debate is clearly not yet over. Arguably, it was understood by some, in an English romantic tradition (after Burke, Coleridge and Carlyle), as an *admission* that the notion of a collective neutrality as to some sort of fundamental existential choice is as much a myth as it would be in the case of an individual. For in either case, not to choose is, after all, to choose only arbitrary choosing, supplemented by a qualifying, yet confirming, utilitarian notion of the objective and effective as the only thing that can ever be chosen in all its modes. Thus the effectiveness of choosing and operating becomes the only shared public measure and value.

The actuality of liberalism therefore preceded its verbal identification and always involved a tight combination of individualism, latitude as to substantive opinion and advocacy of a strong state to support and yet protect from anarchy both these aspects – the one political and the other cultural. But, in addition, the mediation of sovereign strength and cultural latitude was provided by the theory of government as stronger when apparently lighter and less overbearing, as we shall now see.

8. LIBERAL PESSIMISM AS CAPITALISM

The unity and modern primacy of liberalism also allows us to see the integral link between liberalism and capitalism. Not only must the latter be regarded as a liberal upshot (as will be argued in this section), but one must also counter arguments to the effect that there can be non-capitalist liberalisms, or liberal regimes severely qualifying of capitalist hegemony (see the following section).

We have already seen how liberalism involves a combination of the centralised ‘absolute’ state with the dispersed ‘free’ market. In fact, liberalism comes more fully into being in the eighteenth century when, to the existing seventeenth-century theory of the primacy of the individual, was added the idea of deceptively ‘minimal’ but strong government.

This was linked to the science of political economy, which proposed the novel idea that governments can rule more by ruling less.¹⁰⁴ Instead of trying to ‘police’ every aspect of their subjects’ lives, they can leave much to the operation of the market whose workings are seen as ‘naturally’ mediating between originally isolated choices, sympathies and predilections. In this way, through the supposedly mechanical balancing of supply and demand, wealth and population are more increased, while peace and order are spontaneously maintained. The state’s interest is in a controlled and strong population, energetically ready to fight wars, yet pacifically compliant in the everyday, prepared to renounce traditional prerogatives of honour and eccentric local privilege. It is for this reason that Michel Foucault argued that we must understand liberalism to involve the ‘bio-political’. This heuristic concept allows us to see how a claim to rule less over the subject *qua* subject and *qua* possessor of an immortal soul is in reality an unprecedented claim to extend sovereign lordship over human, nature as such, besides man as *homo politicus*.

Apparently, and by its own lights, the state now releases the economic and social spheres to be pre-politically themselves as natural, meaning true to human biological needs and inclinations. In truth, however, it politically produces this sphere of man as most basically pursuant *of amour propre* and ‘trucking’ advantage, and tries through the educative and cultural processes of ‘civil society’ (in a new and specific sense) to create subjects who are negatively choosing and self-governing, relatively disembedded from family, locality, tradition and artisanal formation (and so from civil society as we would now more widely understand it, in an older, more generic sense).

In reality, such subjects could well be seen as *less* ‘natural’, but this is disguised from view by Adam Smith’s redefinition of humanity as *homo economicus*, characterised by ‘the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’.¹⁰⁵ As Polanyi argued, when the economic sphere is sequestered by this naturalising sleight of hand, it is bound to become fundamental, because it concerns our most vital human needs and functions. Just because these material needs are basic does *not*, however, mean that they are determinative in the last instance, in either a Marxist or a Hobbesian liberal sense. To the contrary, specifically human existence is perhaps definable by an ‘original detour’, which determines even animal functions through cultural ones, and even the *utile* through the gratuitous.¹⁰⁶ However, once the managing of our material needs for production and exchange is sequestered from other aspects of social life – the symbolic, the ritual, the ethical and the political – then the unavoidability of material needs, including our mutual material reliance, tends to ensure that what is naturally basic now, indeed, becomes culturally fundamental. Yet only by cultural illusion do we imagine that this primacy of the spuriously ‘natural’ belongs naturally to, specifically, human nature.

Only modern economics treats the biological as foundational for human cultural existence. And this was greatly accentuated in the nineteenth century through the Malthusian view that one requires the threat of poverty and the spur of hunger in order to force people to work in a world of lazy sinfulness and constitutive material scarcity. Yet, in point of fact, just as the idea of the supposedly ‘free market’ is politically produced, so, also scarcity is nearly always something artificially engineered by monopolisation or global trade in order to increase returns on capital. Nature is naturally abundant and inexhaustible, if treated with ecological care. But ecological abuse is not merely an accidental spin-off from supposedly ‘rationalised’ economic practice. It is actually constitutive of that practice insofar as both a social reality and psychological fantasy of ‘scarcity’ must be instilled by capitalism if competition is to be seen as a basic necessity, rather than being rightly regarded, in more tempered fashion, as often a stimulus to greater excellence, with ensuing social benefit. In this way, the destruction of a natural, if measured, superfluity is driven not only by greed but, ironically, also by a fantasised fear of an ultimate natural paucity.

The psychological fantasy of scarcity (as with marginalism in the later nineteenth century) supposes a sheerly natural contagion of mimetic desiring, in denial of any hierarchy of values or any sense that the most valuable things – such as sunshine and friendship – are not in short supply.¹⁰⁷ The produced social reality of scarcity in the Malthusian tradition requires an artificial blocking of nature’s plenitude by monopoly control and short-term exploitation of given resources, in self-fulfilment of the otherwise erroneous prophecy of endless diminishment of a supposedly finite supply. Through the false supposition of a given scarcity that, in fact, we alone create, liberalism here again promotes its own projection as something ‘natural’. The narcissistic greed of the lone trucking animal is now compounded by a fantasised fate of a given constraint to struggle with its fellow creatures over limited means and ends. Added to ontological violence and natural egoism, this thesis of unavoidable scarcity engenders a triple anthropological pessimism at the heart of the liberal tradition that renders it, in Michéa’s phrase, the realm of lesser evil – the best of all possible realities in a world of necessary perversion.

9. APPARENT LIBERAL OPTIMISM AS TECHNOCRATIC CONTROL

Many on the contemporary left will claim that if liberal rights began as the defence of property and the self-possessed individual, they were later reinterpreted, around the French Revolution, as emancipatory rights of liberation

from all oppressive personal and property-based constraints. Yet the revolutionary account of rights, whether after the 1790s or the 1970s, is not a simple subversion of the property-based account of right.¹⁰⁸ Rather, it is the case that property and revolution are twins. Just because the new prime duty of the state is to protect life and property, Hobbes (never mind Locke) claimed that the legitimacy of government lapses if it fails to do so.¹⁰⁹ This implies a new individual or mass right to rebellion that is quite different from traditional medieval 'rights to resist' that empowered lesser constitutional bodies to overturn higher ones if they had grossly lapsed in their exercise of responsibility. Indeed, many still interpreted the legitimacy of the rebel causes in both the English civil war and the Glorious Revolution in these 'ancient' terms.¹¹⁰

What one can anachronistically but validly describe as the 'liberalism' of Hobbes and Locke was concerned primarily with the freedom of inequitable property ownership as secured by the state with a monopoly on violence. Thus political liberalism initially had a bent to the authoritarian and not the democratic. But once such a state has started to remove the various particular liberties and customary privileges that had existed at a lower level, then inevitably 'counter-rights' start to be asserted against the original rights – rights to extend the franchise in order that the state be not merely on the side of big property, rights to equality of entry into social and economic competition.

In consequence, the revolutionary traditions have continued to be fixated on ownership, while demanding a more egalitarian access to it. Although the non-statist traditions of socialism refused the language of rights in the name of distributive justice and social reciprocity,¹¹¹ welfarist social democracy has been largely concerned with rights as entitlements. Even Marxism remains focused on the rights–property–revolution triangle insofar as it thinks of a general will as controlling collective property and suggests that equity means the 'right' of the individual to receive all she needs. This is matched with the equal collective right of the general will to demand from each such individual the full measure of her means.

Marx recognised the liberal revolutionary suppression of the social, and realised that social contract implies a channelling through state power, and not complete suppression, of an originally supposed anarchic, natural violence, precisely in order to tame it. Thus the state's claim to act as guardian of absolute rights also depends, with the same paradox, upon a continuous infringement of this absoluteness. This occurs in terms of its constant decisions as to what are effectively 'exceptions' to the regular but impossible equal exercise of contractual balance between isolated absolute wills, in which its establishment of its own sovereignty must always finally consist: 'The limits within which each individual can move *without* harming others are determined by law, just as the boundary between two fields is determined by a stake'. Arbitrariness alone can mediate between freedoms by arbitrarily

limiting them because '[t]he liberty we are dealing with here is that of man as an isolated monad who is withdrawn into himself',¹¹² and who therefore must 'see in others not the *realisation* but the *limitation* of his own freedom'.¹¹³

However, Marx finally reduced the social to an 'immediate' Leibnizian coincidence of the individual with the species, downplaying the primacy of reciprocal bonds of agreement as to social value.¹¹⁴ For him, the *content* of rights must be technologically determined according to supposedly objective criteria, and the operator of an ensuing social machine must initially be an evermore bureaucratic government. Thus, if the nineteenth century in its liberal aspect came to exacerbate, as with Malthus and Ricardo, the supposedly 'natural' character of the *economy*, it also exacerbated the supposedly 'artificial' and 'scientific' character of the *political*.¹¹⁵ The 'police' aspect of the pre-politico-economic mercantilist state, which still sought to increase national wealth in a more 'direct' fashion, did not, after all, go away, even if it was now exercised with more subtlety. From the Scots philosopher Adam Ferguson onwards, liberal political economy concluded that the state must continue to create an environment within which the market can flourish by attention to education, the arts, sanitation, crime, poverty and demography.¹¹⁶ If the market was concerned with a supposed release of free choice (undergirded by individual property rights), then the political aspect of civil society had to do with material interests at the point where this is also an inescapable aspect of the economic sphere.

In this way, from early on, the rise of the 'free market' and of 'polite society' and an accompanying political 'indirection', which regarded the market and cultural spheres as freely non-political, nonetheless involved also an unprecedented growth in the power of the central sovereign state.¹¹⁷ The economy and the political order were radically sundered, just because they were secretly so united. The liberal minimalism of government conceals from view a new maximisation of the same that is more sinister than the old architectonic role of the state, being less mediated by decentred *foci* of sovereign power and more amorally self-directed. On the one hand, this maximisation is exercised indirectly, as we have seen, through persuading people into a fantasy of nature whereby they can now only receive social recognition and quasi-honour through adopting the new role of sheerly 'economic' and 'civil' individual actors. On the other hand, the new political-economic state intervenes directly with a more technocratic (rather than architectonic) artifice. It does so not to shape people's ethical habits educationally, but, rather, to determine their material conditions, strength and contentment in a scarcely disguised contempt for higher human possibilities that is at once Protestant, Jansenist and utilitarian. The implicit contract here involves a trade-off between the security of the individual, as increasingly guaranteed by the state, and his political indifference and lassitude – together with the compounded

military and economic strength of a nation-state made up of increasingly healthy, happy and passive human persons.¹¹⁸

Thus this 'direct' power concerns an increase in political artifice as outright amoral *techne*, in contrast to the supposedly 'natural' operation of self-interest in the economic and of 'sympathy' in the social sphere. But in reality, such a novel governmental art operates, as Foucault argued, to control and manipulate human 'animal' life as the context within which economic processes can nestle¹¹⁹ – hence an entirely new and mostly unprecedented governmental attention to health, demography, sanitation, technical education and public entertainment. Previously, medicine, education and artistic-craft activity had been more diffused through 'social' management, predominantly by the Church, city-state or borough, and these activities participated in political rule to the degree that they shared in the governmental aim to promote human flourishing and virtue.¹²⁰ Now a more centralised politics intervenes more immediately in people's lives, but less holistically, since it is only to the degree that these are *mere* lives – examples of a proper human *bios* that can be subjected to outright political manipulation in order to produce a new sort of human–animal hybrid. This is quite other to the integrally rational, social, cultural and religious animal envisaged by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas.

For the new human construct is by contrast schizophrenic – a hybrid of the *purely* animal and the *purely* and arbitrarily artificial, as if reason, sociality, creativity and the political architectonic of virtue were in no way our *natural* destiny. But this model does not work, as we now know, even for beavers.¹²¹ We see only the germ of this bio-political combination of 'natural' market and 'artificial' sovereign state in the later eighteenth century. In the course of the next two centuries and beyond, its scope has been vastly intensified and extended, so rapidly that today even the pre-1970s politico-social landscape looks somewhat 'Aristotelian' compared with what we now experience.

If, on the politically economic model, the state political aspect is relatively artificial but in reality works upon the infrastructure of economic and civil nature, then we can see the same liberal inversion at work in the case of the individual. Like the collective state actor, she is deemed to be at base amorally free, not naturally constrained to any ethical goal. This means that many of her economic and social choices are regarded as trivial: a matter of lifestyle or preference in a sphere that must be indulged for the sake of contentment. Likewise, state technical artifice must be matched by state sponsorship of the arts, now regarded as a libidinally free realm of leisure-time indulgence or else as a quasi-religious refuge from the objective realm for the isolated subject.

However, her objectively crucial choices concern those to which she is formally bound by contract. Economic choices are of this kind, and they are

artificial both to the degree that they reflect personal whim and insofar as they are yet secured as permanent through the shackles of a legal fiction that is ‘binding’. Nonetheless, it is assumed that people enter into the pretence of this bond in order to secure their very real material interests or welfare, besides their ultimately corporeal desires. The freedom of the ‘politically economic’ and ‘civilly polite’ subject is, indeed, a freedom rooted in rights, which presuppose a ‘spiritual’ notion of free will. But this is paradigmatically linked to the self-government of mere animal nature, which takes into account only utility and an animal or egoistic sympathy for the material needs of others. When the French revolutionaries spoke of social hierarchy as only justified in the interests of ‘public utility’, they by no means had a reduced Benthamite notion of the useful in mind. Yet the voluntarist emptiness of the notion of foundational rights that they espoused invites this investment in a measurable, merely hedonistic utility – in parallel to the way ultra-capitalist abstraction must ultimately be coordinated with starkly reduced material need.

Hence, as Foucault puts it, material ‘interest’ in the liberal model always overflows rights.¹²² Accordingly, the notion of the cultivation of civility degenerated (most of all in Britain, yet also elsewhere) into a government-sponsored but socially diffuse promotion of the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest numbers’ (Bentham) by educative and disciplinary programmes more designed to induce a regularity of behaviour than to induce any discernment of personal talents or vocation.¹²³ So where it might appear that liberalism is primarily about personal freedom, on account of its biopolitical character it turns out in the long run that it is more fundamentally to do with material interest or with (individual and collective) ‘welfare’.

Statism Trumps Individualism

Here one can go further. The duality between the political and the biological means that, in the end, it is the freedom of the state and not the freedom of the individual that is primary for liberalism, once it has been deconstructed: for the liberty of the subject is only in historical reality allowed as an indirect device of ‘governmentality’ in order to increase the power of governance. And in this sense, the mercantilist model was never really abandoned, only surreptitiously refined. The market promotes, first of all, the welfare of the individual, but the state promotes the market, providing a legal contractual framework as its condition of possibility. Its aim in doing so is mainly to promote the welfare of the entire political body, wherein the formal interests of each and every one are taken, ever since Hobbes, to coincide, but are inevitably also over-determined, and perhaps primarily determined, by the interests of a governing class.

This can be evidenced by the way in which modern state tax-and-spend does not so much serve the purpose of rooting out poverty or inequality as seizing control of civil society and ensuring that it operates in the Fergusonian sense of support for a strong economy, state security and military power. Indeed, compared with the impact of the exigencies of mass warfare, such measures alone have done very little to diminish inequality, even though they have improved base levels of health and security, if not of literacy and numeracy. Thus the welfare states variously in place since 1945 have ultimately proved unable to prevent the rise in power once more of inherited and earned wealth.¹²⁴

Meanwhile, apparent direct attacks by governments on capital accumulation have fared no better. For example, the legal abolition of primogeniture and entail under the Napoleonic code did not prevent the return of economic disparities to levels as high or higher in France than in the United Kingdom by the end of the nineteenth century. As in the case of later social expenditure, these measures may have weakened the socio-political role of patrimonial power, but not the economic power of patrimony, which is now rendered all the more irresponsibly private, and yet more recruitable to the service of a centralised political oligarchy linked to a supposed 'order of merit'. One can suspect that this effect was the prime objective intention of such measures all along: for, as Burke noted, the French Revolution attacked absolutely everything *except* the national debt, which had to a large degree occasioned it, but which it proceeded to deploy as an excuse speculatively to plunder existing ecclesial and social patrimonies.¹²⁵

The executive usurpation of the common sovereign will by the governing class becomes almost inevitable under liberal assumptions, where no tacit bond of a mutually acknowledged common good any longer places rulers and ruled within a shared horizon. But in the case of either the presumptively shared or covertly ruling interests of a new utilitarian elite, an increase in supposedly natural power or collective material strength will be the first prerogative. And so it is logical that later, with the advent of the economic doctrine of marginalism, the always latent assumption of political economy that the economic operator is a *utilitarian calculator* is explicitly recognised, beyond even Bentham's perception. Later still, with the neo-classical ideas of Kenneth Arrow and then the Chicago school in the twentieth century, this calculation is extended to the working of bureaucracies and finally even to things such as education, sex and procreation – thereby economising the entire social field.¹²⁶

At this point, the overturning of all inherited human wisdom is complete. No longer is the economy embedded in society regarded as reciprocal exchange. Instead, all of human life is supposedly economic and so capable of being 'naturalised', if one strips away the many veneers of custom in

the name of liberal reform. In consequence, the artificial directness of state bureaucracy and re-crafting of civil society starts increasingly to merge with the 'naturalising' indirectness of rule through the marketplace.

So, for example, today in the United Kingdom, central government intervention by regulation and diktat in the operation of the non-monetary public professions of education, medicine, law, policing and emergency aid has reached unprecedented heights. But the aim of this intervention is often newly to enforce an internal market that displaces self-control through adherence to standards of professional honour, with an internal market that negatively motivates by pitting individuals in accentuated competition with their peers and is happy, for example, to put public policing and prison management out to tender to private security forces. Here indirection comes entirely to coincide with direction, the invisible with the visible hand: for a supposedly natural competitiveness can only be released through the all too artificial imposition of targets, checks, quantification of achievement and accountability (that shiftily liberal word).

But the economic, as we have seen, like the liberal sovereign state, finally concerns entirely material interest or 'welfare'. It is this primacy of welfare that allows us better to understand and deconstruct the duality of state and market. In a first historical phase (approximately from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century), a still mercantilist concern with the welfare of the entire body of the nation-state caused the deliberate construction through primary accumulation – via enclosures, abolition of guilds and privileged corporations at home, and colonisation abroad – of the sphere of the 'natural' market governed only by the price mechanism in the balance of supply and demand.¹²⁷

Then after the interval of classical political economy in the eighteenth century (which ostensibly stressed freedom, but, in fact, inserted a more subtle rule of indirection), during a third historical phase in the nineteenth century, the still-lurking shadow of human psychic and spiritual freedom gives way more and more to the socio-Darwinian fantasy of a sheerly animal humanity, which a better evolutionary science by no means requires.¹²⁸ So it is 'economism' itself (the doctrine of material accumulation as the fundamental socio-political reality, rather than the seeking of social recognition) that returns us *full-circle* to the primacy of welfare and so to the primacy of the state as the authoriser of a predominantly capitalist market in the first place. Crucially, this includes the dependence of the emergence of a professional political class upon the creation of a national debt.

Moreover, if market choice is gradually acknowledged to be a mode of indirect and dispersed public utilitarian calculation in the disguise of apparently foundational respect for individual rights, it remains the case that the market cannot fulfil the whole of utility or of welfare even from

a dogmatically liberal point of view. As Polanyi noted, the arrival of an unlimited market in labour, land and money in Britain in the 1830s coincided with an unprecedented extension of state power in terms of the collecting of statistics, of policing and of promotion of scientific education, civic sanitation and national transportation. So from its inception, the free market was always linked to the authoritarian state – a model that Mrs Thatcher would later revive and extend.¹²⁹

And as Polanyi also pointed out, the subsequent emergence of state welfare structures in the second half of the nineteenth century was not primarily a reaction against *laissez-faire*, but, rather, a problematic extension of its tendential logic.

We have seen how the liberal invention of capitalism rests on the fusion of the free market with the centralised state in the following terms: first, the biopolitical assumption of human division between a nature without value or meaning and an artifice that is either objectively technological or else culturally arbitrary; second, a legal framework for the undermining of older corporate and guild privilege, together with the institution of untrammelled formal contract that in general absolves impersonal transaction from personal involvement and commitment; third, insurances against the capitalist deficit in terms of both oligarchic corporatism and welfare provision that more fundamentally allow the ‘free market’ economy to evade for a further time its own shortcomings.

10. LIBERALISM SWALLOWS ITSELF

Why should liberalism produce this illiberal upshot? And has it really done so? Is our diagnosis correct and is liberalism itself to blame for the manifest triple erosion of democracy, liberty and economic justice? For surely the liberal legacy has further released individual freedom and our respect for the individual human being? Surely it has increased true community in the form of a spirit of diversity, whereby we are less likely to confuse our own particular preferences with universal norms?

Because post-liberalism is not simply anti-liberalism, it candidly agrees that those things have proved true up to a point. At first, as we have already noted, the exaltation of negative freedom of choice swept away many rigid restrictions and autocracies that have eventually seemed without justification even for their (often religious) instigators. However, *in the long run*, liberalism seems to undo itself and to reveal that, as a mode of sophistry, it erodes the very political field that it claims to save. This self-undoing turns out to mean that eventually liberalism is exposed as a tautology and as only applying to abstract individuals and the monolithic collectivity, thereby revealing

nothing of the deeper truths about human association. Going backwards from post-modern liberalism through modernist liberalism to original, early modern liberalism, we will briefly highlight in three ‘snap-shots’ ways in which the working through of the logic of liberal thought ends up by drastically mutating or threatening to abolish liberalism itself.

The Scepticism of Post-Modern Liberals

Post-modern liberalism advocated deconstruction, whereby one reveals the arbitrariness of any construct and the way that ‘higher’ values are only revealed by their complicity with contrasting ‘lower’ ones. This very simple exercise, of course, proved for a time eminently marketable and made many an academic career. However, its validity depends wholly on the assumption that every artificial construct is *merely* arbitrary and that the co-dependence of higher and lower somehow disproves the inherently hierarchical nature of their relation.

But, of course, only liberalism itself makes this assumption about human constructs: they are seen as the result of naked force or else as covert imposition disguised as contractual agreement, since there can be no valid consensus about objective values for either the community or the individual. Claims to valuation are assumed to be rival and even incommensurable, as already for late modern liberal thinkers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition like Isaiah Berlin and Joseph Raz, who contrast the liberal value-pluralism they defend with the authoritarian universalism of other liberals and conservatives or Marxists.

Thus liberalism imagines it can deconstruct the non-liberal – the traditional, the deferential, the customary, the religious – but, in reality, all that liberalism can deconstruct are the works of liberalism itself. For example, the atomising effect of both social and economic liberalism undermines the very social contract that liberalism promoted. And this tends to deconstruct liberalism *tout court* as being always the operator of the deconstructible. Of course, the post-modernists knew this – but even when exposing the inconsistencies of liberalism, they could not exit from the liberal logic upon which even that exercise of scepticism depended.

The Diminishing Returns of Neo-Classical Liberalism

The second older and modernist self-abolition of liberalism concerns the law of diminishing returns on marginal utilities as expounded by neo-classical economics from the late nineteenth century onwards. The problem is that, as with deconstruction, this law only applies tautologically to the products of

liberal choice. Trivial material goods or things that are *merely* the election of my passing fancy (which is all that liberalism and neo-classical economics can recognise in terms of valid desire) are subject to the reverse lure of boredom and lose their significance and so economic value over time. But that is not true of *symbolically* valuable objects, like your grandmother's ring, or of *relational goods* whether enjoyed along with other people or other natural realities. I can constantly find more and more to treasure in a person or a beloved landscape. And a non-liberal economy could realistically express, even through the various modes of exchange, our often *mutual* appreciation of such things, since human disagreement about the common good or individual goods is simply not as absolute as metropolitan liberals like to fantasize.

However, if liberalism encourages an economy based on our boredom with shallow things, inciting us always to want *more*, as our passions are beguiled through their subtle persuasions, then liberalism *itself* is of diminishing utility. At first it unleashed a thousand blossoms of creativity, but in the long term, it undermines creative impulses to produce the genuinely valuable and it equally undermines the *confidence* upon which all economic interventions and exchanges ultimately depend.

Primordial Violence in Early Modern Liberalism

In the third place, reaching still further back in time, liberalism has now abolished, precisely by trying radically to renew, its own early modern origins.¹³⁰ The abandoning of the politics of the soul had begun well back into the Middle Ages but was certainly consummated in the seventeenth century, as we have already suggested. It arose to a large degree because agreement concerning the transcendent good started to be associated with conflict and warfare. Yet, in the face of an increasing exigency for peace at any price, Hobbes and others oddly assumed a hyperbolic violence, a war of all against all as the natural human condition.

But this exposes to view a remarkable *chiasmus*. While both the Greco-Roman philosophy of Plato, Aristotle or Cicero and Christian thought believed that reality was originally and at heart peaceful, and only violent because of the irruption of fate or sin, but in practice such thought had sometimes encouraged warfare in the name of this original harmony, liberalism exactly reverses this. In the name of reducing conflict, it, nonetheless, thought that reality was inherently agonistic and humans naturally egotistic and indelibly prone to the sway of *eros*.¹³¹ In the long run, just and limited warfare, as espoused by the older outlook in the name of original and eschatological peace partially advanced towards its terrestrial echo. By contrast, in the long

run, a liberal quasi-peace – designed to restrain a ‘gnostically’ perverse reality – has served only to increasingly engender it in finite time, through the unleashing in practice and prospect of evermore unlimited and total war.

11. LIBERALISM IN METACRISIS

In this way, as already contended, liberalism more and more produces the war of all against all that was its own mistaken presupposition. This developed illusory proof in the shape of practical violence of its negative assumptions also undermines its claims to offer the salve to this reality. Thereby, its self-swallowing is no partial crisis, susceptible to a new adjustment, but is rather a metacrisis, which cannot be transcended, whether for good or ill, in a purely liberal way.

This holds true despite the many historical wars over truth as to claims to territory or creed: for were they not more noble than liberal wars over money, and less terrible than the wars that have been instigated by nihilists who have taken the liberal logic to its limits? At least, the past wars over jurisdiction and belief assumed a reachable horizon of consensus in eternally guaranteed moral reality: the *pax romana* or the *pax christiana*. But it is this horizon that liberalism no longer envisages. Initially it wagers that a more modest, horizonless cynicism will produce a more stable *political* pacification. But in the long run, this very cynicism has proved to be naive delusion: a horizon, after all, of assumed ontological violence that eventually proves a terrible prophecy of the nihilist consequences of such an assumption, without by one jot confirming it.

At the heart of liberal self-undoing lies the primacy of the economic and the political over the social and thus the subordination of both social bonds and civic ties to the abstract standards of law and contract. So under the aegis of liberalism, the realm of society is corroded from two opposite directions. On the one hand, everything human is declared only natural – we are a bunch of greedy apes with bigger brains. On the other hand, everything human is declared entirely artificial, just stuff that we have made up such as the social contract, which reflects nothing other than the arbitrary whims of human volition and can be simply undone by other acts of will. In this way, liberalism tends to make the human vanish in two directions: first, archaically in the face of the tide of pre-human nature by appealing to the lowest instincts such as greed, fearfulness and enmity; second, futuristically, in favour of a ‘post-human’ project that can hopefully subordinate human egotism and the unpredictabilities of desire to a cybernetic future that will augment the liberal ‘peace of a sort’ into an absolute bio-politics. In this way, the consummation of liberalism’s inevitable utilitarian inversion ushers in a phase of history that is both post-democratic and post-humanist.¹³²

AQ: ‘bio-politics’ is made consistent. Please check if this is okay.

NOTES

1. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]).
2. Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Business* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).
3. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–72.
4. Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013).
5. This primacy of opinion in a de-ethicised world was already contended for by John Locke in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (New York: Hackett, 1996), subsections 62, 76, 148.
6. Is it abusive to tattoo children? Can they choose it? Presumably we should live in expectation of such a banal debate.
7. Raymond Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* (Paris: Hachette, 1988), 211.
8. Slavoj Žižek, 'Liberalism and its Discontents', *ABC Religion & Ethics*, 26 October 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/10/26/3619378.htm>.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Jean-Claude Michéa, *The Realm of Lesser Evil: An Essay on Liberal Civilisation*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 99; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 [1990]), 9–47.
11. John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 19–113.
12. Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: the Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 128–70. The Jesuit achievement inversely tends to show how the truth that human beings are, by nature, paradoxically 'cultural animals' is most readily sustained by invocation of a transcendent link: thus here the 'addition' of grace completes the 'addition' of culture to nature.
13. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, *passim*.
14. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon 1962); Michéa, *The Realm of Lesser Evil*; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9–47, 278–442.
15. Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003).
16. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 2012), 211–317; J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51–71.
17. Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–10, 183–206, 271–80; J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–6, 46–125; *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68–119.
18. Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992), 101–19.

19. Pocock, 'Virtues, Rights and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought' and 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse', in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 37–50, 215–310; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 146–49.

20. Which is still a theatrical gesture and a most acute, if partial, one.

21. Adrian Pabst, 'From Civil to Political Economy: Adam Smith's Theological Debt', in Paul Oslington (ed.), *Adam Smith as Theologian* (London: Routledge, 2011), 106–24.

22. Serge Latouche, *L'Invention de l'économie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005), 154–60; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 26–47.

23. Simone Meysonnier, *La Balance et l'Horloge: La genèse de la pensée libérale en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Montreuil: Éd. de la Passion, 1989), 35–51; John Milbank, 'Oikonomia leaves Home', *Telos* 178 (Spring 2017).

24. John Milbank, *The Future of Love* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 207–13. Most of this liberal discourse fails to realise that, because we are linguistic creatures, sympathy is not a secondary or accompanying reality to primary self-identity. Rather, we 'first' fully see ourselves only as others see us, from a 'second person' perspective, implying the primacy of mutual love (as already realised by Aquinas), just as we require others (in default of mirrors) to tell us how we appear from behind and 'in the round': Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (New York: Transaction, 2007); Andrew Pinent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (London: Routledge, 2012). We are indebted here to discussions with Rowan Williams concerning Edith Stein on this topic.

25. Jean Rohou, *Le XVII^e Siècle: Une révolution de la condition humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 477.

26. In this respect, they can be contrasted both with the 'civil economy' of Antonio Genovesi in Naples (see further in chapter 4) and with other currents of Scottish social thought, exemplified by Dugald Stewart and later Thomas Reid, who far less thought that economic motivations and concerns for 'justice' were based on negative fear and gave much more role to a shared 'common sense' of 'public utility', still underwritten by divine natural law. Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180–81, 248–60.

27. Rohou, *Le XVII^e Siècle*, 477–84.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Wood, *Liberty and Property*, 289–317. Wood emphasises that the French upper and middle classes relied far more upon office-holding, feudal dues and tax-collecting than their English counterparts. However, there was much agricultural commerce in France, as indicated by the Jansenist theorisation of a free market, while inversely personal patronage as to office was a crucial aspect of the English whig system. Wood wishes to associate French statism with a benign 'enlightenment' that was 'bourgeois but not capitalist', citing the anti-imperialism, monopolism, sexism and racism of Condorcet. But this is no proof of his rejection of capitalist appropriation and, in reality, this was endorsed by an 'enlightened' French nobility and bourgeoisie

bent upon destroying all the corporate and guild privileges that remained far more prevalent in France than across the channel.

30. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion*, 24–44.

31. On real and mobile property, see Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 103–123.

32. Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

33. Karl Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’, in *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 232–34. Despite his deconstruction of this entirely liberal concept, Marx finally supports emancipation, but only on account of his delusory view that the freeing of the economic will ultimately, through and beyond capitalism, liberate purely ‘natural’ technological forces in a variant of the Rousseauian model.

34. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx clearly affirmed this necessity against ‘French’ revolutionism. See Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

35. This is a critical commentary upon Nancy Fraser’s article, ‘A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi’, *New Left Review*, 81 (2013): 119–32.

36. Michael Freedman, *The New Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mark Garnett, *The Snake That Swallowed Its Tail: Some Contradictions in Modern Liberalism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004).

37. Larry Siedentop, ‘Two Liberal Traditions’, in Alan Ryan (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 53–74.

38. William Galston, ‘Two Concepts of Liberalism’, *Ethics*, 105 (1995): 516–34.

39. John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

40. Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1–33.

41. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Michel Villey, *Le droit et les droits de l’homme* (Paris: PUF, 1983); *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2006).

42. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 205–26; Alain Supiot, *La Gouvernance par les nombres* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), 67–69.

43. John Milbank, ‘The Politics of the Soul’, *Open Insight*, VI:9 (2015): 91–108; Christopher A. Ferrara, *Liberty, the God That Failed* (Tacoma: Angelico, 2012), 20–22.

44. Siedentop, ‘Two Liberal Traditions’, 15–35. He stresses that this qualification is true of both the more statist liberal strand of Guizot, Royer-Collard and the *Doctrinaires*, and the more individualist and constitutionalist strand of Mme de Staël and Constant.

45. See André de Muralt, *L’unité de la philosophie politique. De Scot, Occam et Suárez au libéralisme contemporain* (Paris: Vrin, 2002); Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 272–303; Janet

Coleman, ‘Ockham’s right reason and the genesis of the political as “absolutist”’, *History of Political Thought*, XX (1999): 35–64.

46. Villey, *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne*; *idem.*, *Le droit et les droits de l’homme*; John Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition’, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 1:1 (2012): 203–34.

47. Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

48. Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Jerrold Seigel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80–113.

49. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

50. Sir Ernest Barker, *The Dominican Order and Convocation: A Study of the Growth of Representation in the Church during the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913).

51. Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 142–52.

52. Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (London: Penguin, 2015), 92: ‘Work on a manor was to a large extent collective and remarkably participatory: the community regulated activity, rights and duties through juries, assemblies, by-laws and customs. Senior villagers held offices such as constable, churchwarden or ale-taster. The Anglo-Saxon tithings, responsible for mutual good behaviour, still existed’.

53. Edmund Burke, ‘An Appeal from the Old to the New Whigs’, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), Vol. IV, 61–215; J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’, in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 202–32.

54. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); C.H. Wirszubki, *Libertas as a Political Idea during the Late Roman Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Politics, Language and Time*, 104–47; ‘Authority and Property: The Question of Liberal Origins’, in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 51–71; David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) – especially the ‘Introduction: The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth to Common Sense’ by David Wootton and the essays by Blair Worden and Paul A. Rahe. Pettit’s claim that Republican liberty falls between the negative and positive would not seem to hold up: for him, the refusal of ‘enslavement’ is also entailed by the primacy of a negatively open individual freedom.

55. For the text of the declaration, see William Doyle, *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12–15.

56. In reality, though the Roman tradition tended in the direction of a more negative understanding of freedom both for the individual and for the Republic/Empire,

it still sustained more substantive notions of liberty. One can notice both things in Cicero. See John Milbank, 'Dignity Rather than Right', *Open Insight*, VI:7 (January 2014): 77–124.

57. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); 'Civic Humanism and its Role in Anglo-American Thought', in *Politics, Language and Time*, 80–103.

58. Pocock, 'Virtues, Rights and Manners' and 'Authority and Property'.

59. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9–25, 382–442.

60. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* and *A System of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), *Oceana*, 8–68; Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1996), esp. 82–87. See also Worden, 'Republicanism and the Restoration, 1660–1683' in *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society*, 139–93. Worden places a rightly corrective, though arguably exaggerated, emphasis on the presence of positive liberty and genuine classical virtue in the English republican thinkers. For an alternative stress, see, in the same volume, Rahe, 'Antiquity Surpassed: The Repudiation of Classical Republicanism', 233–69.

61. Augustine Thompson, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125–1325* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2005); Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society*, 424, n. 23 to Blair Worden, 'Harrington and "The Commonwealth of Oceana"', 1656', 82–110.

62. Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society*, the contributions of Wootton and Rahe and M.M. Goldsmith, 'Liberty, Virtue and the Rule of Law, 1689–1770', 197–232; Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 20–29.

63. Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, 9–23.

64. Harrington, *A System of Politics*, 273–75.

65. Harrington, *Oceana*, 22.

66. Henry Neville, *Plato Redivivus: Or, A Dialogue Concerning Government* [1681] (London: Dodo, 2012). Sidney and Neville have been categorised as 'neo-Harringtonians' because, unlike Harrington, they assimilated 'medieval prudence' to 'ancient prudence' and did not dismiss the 'Gothick' epoch as merely outmoded and enslaving 'feudalism'.

67. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 20–29; *Revolution and Rebellion*, 92–119; *From Restoration to Reform: The British Isles, 1660–1832* (London: Vintage, 2014), 116–292.

68. J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 52–57; Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution: The Dying Thoughts of a North Britain' and 'The Varieties of Whiggism for Exclusion to Reform', in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 125–41, 250–53.

69. Rahe, 'Antiquity Surpassed: The Repudiation of Classical Republicanism', 233–69.

70. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 26–47.

71. Clark, *English Society*, 31–32; *Revolution and Rebellion*, 104–16.

72. King of England, Charles I, *His Majesty's Answer to the XIX Propositions of Both Houses of Parliament (1642)* (London: EEBO, 2014) esp. pp. 9–10. This

document, admittedly issued under pressure (but later espoused by some parliamentarians and viewed askance by many royalists for its clear *refusal* of royal absolutism), envisages an organic balance between three ‘estates’, with the Lords accorded the supreme judicial role, the King the supreme executive and the Commons a checking function upon the executive in terms of a power to levy taxes and impeach crown ministers. But the sovereign power to make laws is regarded as being jointly held by all three powers in a way that does not see judgements, executive decisions and acts of restraint as divided from the activity of law making itself – in distinction from any modern ‘republican’ theory of the more absolute separation of powers and of any whig notion of contractual leasing of executive authority to the king, which implies an ‘absolutist’ parliamentary sovereignty. In rejection of that, the importance here given, by implication, to the organic fusion of powers and the construction of sovereign authority through continuous legal enactment, to precedent or to ‘prescription’, implies both the consistent interpretative unfolding of a legal tradition (in contrast to Sir Edmund Coke’s more absolutely prescriptive myth of an unchanging law and constitution, besides a more absolute conception of monarchy as standing above the three estates of bishops, nobles and commoners) and the participatory involvement in sovereign authority of all lesser common assemblies, judges and executive officers throughout the land. This is relevant to chapter 5 in this volume.

73. Clark, *English Society*, 64–121; Jonathan Clark and Howard Erskine-Hill (eds.), *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012); Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

74. E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); also the poem by the eighteenth-century tory Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (London: Mudhorn, 2015) and his novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), with their decisive notes of social protest on behalf of the weaker and poorer.

75. Josiah Tucker, *A Treatise Concerning Civil Government* [1781] (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967); J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke and Price: A Study in the Variety of Eighteenth-Century Conservatism’ in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 157–91.

76. J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Authority and Property’; ‘The Varieties of Whiggism’.

77. Clark, ‘The Conflict between Laws: Sovereignty and State Formation in the United Kingdom and the United States’, in *The Language of Liberty*, 46–140.

78. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformation on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 373–82.

79. Burke, ‘An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs’; *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1969), *passim*.

80. Burke, *Reflections*, 303.

81. Pocock, ‘The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution’, in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 193–212; Edmund Burke, ‘The First Letter on a Regicide Peace’, in *Revolutionary Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 253–334.

82. Clark, 'The Conflict between Laws, VI', in *The Language of Liberty*, 125–40.
83. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 78.
84. On American Whig oligarchy and *stasis*, see Pocock, '1776: The Revolt against Parliament', in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 87–88; Clark, 'The Conflict between Laws, VI' and 'The Conclusion' in the *Language of Liberty*, 138–40, 385.
85. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 141–391; Ferrara, *Liberty*, 128–69.
86. Burke, *Reflections*, 255–70, Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution'.
87. Siedentop, 'Two Liberal Traditions'.
88. John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* [1471] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
89. Edwin Jones, *The English Nation: The Great Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998).
90. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. S. Gilbert (London: Fontana, 1969).
91. Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution'.
92. Burke, 'Advice from the Old to the New Whigs'; *Reflections*, *passim*.
93. S.T. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State According to the Idea of Each* (New York: Harper, 1854); John Milbank, 'Divine Logos and Human Communication: A Recuperation of Coleridge', in *The Future of Love*, 3–24.
94. Both the BBC and the National Trust can arguably be in part traced back to Coleridgean influence.
95. Coleridge, *On the Constitution*, 96.
96. Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Moyn has uniquely recognised this 'last' strong political and cultural (mainly, but inconsistently, anti-liberal) influence of Christianity upon the West.
97. G.K. Chesterton, *William Cobbett* [1925] (London: Dodo, 2012), 39–50. Paine here seems to have absorbed certain Tory radical and Jacobite themes.
98. For the anti-Jacobin character of French socialism up till 1903, and its sceptical stance towards the legacy of 1789, see Jean-Claude Michéa, *Les Mystères de la Gauche* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).
99. For Cobbett's blending of Burke and Paine, see James Grande, *William Cobbett, the Press and Rural England: Radicalism and the Fourth Estate, 1792–1835* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014).
100. Chesterton and Belloc's 'distributism' is a development in the line of Cobbett. One requires today, for an adequately personalist politics, a blend of distributism and socialism: a sense both of required but participatory ('republican') independence and of an ultimate common sharing that is expressed as explicit common ownership in certain areas and in diverse fashions.
101. J.H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 260–62.
102. Initially this meant, not the ignoring of the Bible, but that it can be rationally interpreted, and that this rational reading shows that the Bible itself requires the supremacy of the state and the civil character of religion. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 18–22.

103. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York: Prometheus, 1990); Ferrara, *Liberty*, 87–99.
104. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
105. Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book 1, chap. 2.
106. David Jones, ‘Art and Sacrament’, in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Readings* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).
107. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Girard describes superbly the pathology of mimetic desiring, but in a newly Rousseauian fashion naturalises this condition without warrant or evidence.
108. Costas Douzimas, ‘Philosophy and the Right to Resistance’, in Costas Douzimas and Conor Gearty (eds.), *The Meaning of Rights: The Philosophy and Social Theory of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 85–105.
109. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 2, chap. 21 [114]; Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*.
110. Ferrara, *Liberty*, 74–79.
111. Michéa, *Les Mystères de la Gauche*.
112. Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’, 229.
113. *Ibid.*, 230 (original italics).
114. *Ibid.*, 229–34.
115. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993). Latour argues that modernity rests on an irresolvable *aporia* between unalterable nature and human artifice, for example the violent ‘state of nature’, which can only be regulated by way of imposing an entirely artificial social contract. In this way, modernity renders everything entirely artificial yet entirely natural at the same time.
116. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
117. Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (London: Penguin, 2003), 213–42; Richard Robison (ed.), *The Neo-liberal Revolution: Forging the Market State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Adrian Pabst, ‘The Crisis of Capitalist Democracy’, *Telos*, 152 (Fall 2010): 44–67.
118. Charles Tilly, ‘Reflections on the History of European State-Making’, in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3–83; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
119. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*.
120. Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
121. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 114–269.

122. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 273.
123. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 68–80.
124. See chapter 3.
125. Burke, *Reflections*, *passim*.
126. Ernesto Screpanti and Stefano Zamagni, *An Outline of the History of Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 380–455.
127. Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
128. Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science: Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).
129. Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).
130. Michéa, *The Realm of Lesser Evil*.
131. In detailing the horrors committed in the name of liberalism – slavery, imperialist exploitation, abuse of workers – Domenico Losurdo (*Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott [London: Verso, 2011]) tries to blame these on the alien influence of a ‘providentialist’ political economy, which saw governmental intervention in the social and economic sphere as impious: both the earlier Burke and Tocqueville at every stage used such arguments. Yet this is not the distortion of liberalism by ancient theology, but, rather, as we have already seen in the main text above, the influence of a new (largely Jansenist) theology that is part of the very original constitutive fabric of liberalism itself.
132. Colin Crouch, *Post-democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Francis Fukuyama, *Our Post-Human Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Picador, 2003).

Chapter 2

The Post-liberal Alternative

1. POST-LIBERALISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

The sway of both social and economic liberalism is today being qualified by the intrusion of political polarities that do not readily fit into a left–right spectrum.¹ These new polarities concern variously the populist *versus* the technocratic, the bio-conservationist *versus* the trans-human, rootedness *versus* mobility, the interpersonal *versus* the anonymous, the virtuous *versus* the amoral, the local *versus* the uniformly global and, above all, the primacy of society *versus* the primacy of the economy and the polity.

The neglect of the social is the neglect of the substantive. People may be free and equal in theory and even before the law, but in practice, the grossest inequities and inhibitions of the freedoms of the many pertain. During the period of neo-liberal hegemony, the gap between the wealth of the super-rich and the often falling incomes (in real terms) of the majority has widened, while rights to free time, work breaks and worker organisation have narrowed. In a more concealed way, the pressures of frenetic work have left most of us too tired to explore real exercises of freedom in creativity and adventure. Yet it is increasingly apparent that liberty and equity cannot be rendered fully substantive by a programme of liberal statist equalisation that has always proved to engender a new tyranny exercised by an elite of state functionaries and party cadres.

Instead, post-liberalism suggests that a more universal flourishing for all can be obtained when we continuously seek to define the goals of human society as a whole and then to discern the variously different and in themselves worthwhile roles that are required for the mutual achievement of these shared aims. The respective freedoms of these roles and their rewards will be variegated: not literally equal in terms of wealth, power or command and yet

equitable and so capable of sincere general acceptability. It can even be the case within such a post-liberal approach to justice that – as Aristotle suggested – rewards of honour and prestige for some may be balanced by unexpectedly high material rewards for relatively humble but crucial contributions.²

Yet contemporary liberalism argues that appeals to goodness ignore the diversity of incompatible and incommensurable values in the complex societies of our late modern age. This means that we can only agree to disagree and put in place some ground rules of fairness, for anything else would violate the sacrosanct principle of negative liberty. But, if anything, the reverse is true. It is precisely negatively open and indeterminate freedom, the ‘general will’ and utility maximisation that are the enemies of pluralism and tolerance, because they impose a single, homogeneous and uniform set of standards on everybody: mutually self-interested contract instead of real mutual agreement; an often assumed collective volition to the detriment of free association and aggregate utility instead of the diverse but coordinated flourishing of both persons and groups.

By contrast, faith in the common good promotes the plural search for shared ends. For the common good is *not* the total mathematically measurable good, an aggregate of privately owned items, but is, rather, concerned with the truest goods that we share together, such as intimacy, trust and beauty, whether momentarily with strangers or continuously with friends.³ But a sense of the common good shared by an entire culture is embedded in practices of honour and reciprocity. Such an ethos can only develop over time, through the habitual formation of tradition, the educative exercise of wise leadership and the prudential adaptation in practice by all of previous example.

Indissolubly linked to the vertical need for virtuous leadership is the other aspect of a general ‘moral economy’ of the entire social order, which is horizontal mutual obligation or the principle of solidarity. European socialism was first grounded in the notion of solidarity among labour and it regarded all human beings as workers in one crucial aspect of their humanity, which is the capacity for artifice and free creativity. As Maurice Glasman has said, in line with Catholic Social Thought, ‘It is with respect to work that we see the *personal* origin of all of human society and culture, the manifestation of individual and unique character.’⁴ Yet work as the free expression of personhood requires learning from the past and induction into inherited lineages of good craft, as well as an initial submitting to guidance if one is eventually to guide in one’s turn (the self-cancelling aspect of verticality). It requires equally patient relating and sympathetic cooperation with fellow workers and clients (along the horizontal plane). A traditionally socialist affirmation of solidarity and mutuality therefore requires a linkage with certain Burkean thematics if it is not simply to fade back into the current hegemony of liberal notions of isolated freedom of choice.

AQ: Please validate the quote marks introduced in the text ‘As Maurice Glasman...’

The same consideration applies to notions of equality. How can we decide to own some things in common and to divide up other goods equitably if we do not know what constitutes a good and what broad ends of flourishing human beings should agree to pursue? Of course, we have no fixed or final knowledge of such things. But it is precisely the inherited wisdom of tradition that gives us some intimation of their nature, something to begin to debate about. And it is education that allows us critically to refine and debate this intimation. Without a concern for formation and virtue, which is not in itself democratic – because the genuine good remains the good even if all voted against it – we lack the precondition of well-informed discussion. Only such a discussion enables a true ‘republican’, participatory democracy, which will not degenerate into mass manipulation through propaganda wielded by the powerful and amoral. The paradox here is that democracy depends vertically and temporally on a hierarchy of virtue. Yet at the same time, virtue is *also* spatially horizontal and of itself democratic in the sense that virtuous practices are open to all, and universal education provides one form of such access.

This is especially the case in the Christian era, which has seen the most crucial virtues stemming from *agape* as exercisable by all – in contrast to the most admired virtues of classical antiquity, which involved a usually male exercise of stored wealth, knowledge and power for the exercise of generosity. Here the crucial vertical dimension of social giving was grasped, but not so completely the horizontal dimension of the reciprocal exchange of gifts of all kinds as the most fundamental basis of social order.⁵ Such mutuality reflects the fact that we are rarely either purely interested or purely disinterested. Society is a spiral paradox of ‘non-compulsory compulsion’, in which the giving of gifts (and every act and speech-act is a gift) half-expects but cannot compel a return gift. This is the very fabric of all human society. It is at once a political and an economic fabric, so that when we try to base our economy on de-sacralisation and individualism, society is gradually abolished and humanity starts to contradict itself.⁶

Post-liberalism, accordingly, concerns the continued link of loving intention to ancient virtue as skill, whose key mark is Aristotelian *phronesis*: a kind of moral art or tact. Without such links, we will remove social judgement from the hands of humans as workers or craftsmen and assume that everything public must be precisely legislated and oligarchically controlled, with love confined to the private sphere. Similarly, this notion of ethical art allows us to steer between the illusion of absolutely inviolable (and so non-relational) human rights on the one hand, and equally absolute rights of the sovereign power to override private freedoms in the name of collective security and strength, on the other. One can illustrate this by saying that governments have no unexceptioned right to know everything, but neither

are rights of privacy unexceptioned in relation to the public good. Therefore (to avert to some contemporary contestations), soldiers who reveal flagrant injustices performed in the course of battle should not be treated as mere breakers of a contract, since they are appealing to a wider, and sometimes implicit, social compact. But neither can army commanders treat protection of their troops' lives as an absolute, given that a soldier, by definition, has signed up to possible sacrificial death, in the face of other considerations, such as not alienating a civilian population.

Having initially defined post-liberalism as the primacy of common good, we must now further spell out the nature of the common good in terms of what we will argue are its crucial general components: (a) a culture of honour, (b) community as the combination of virtue with gift; (c) true socialism; (d) political pluralism; and (e) genuine corporatism.

2. HONOUR AND ETHOS

In a sense, what is most of all opposed by post-liberals is the increased criminalisation of political and economic power, which both lies behind, and is reinforced by, their newly reinforced collaboration. Inner-city riots across the West, from New York to Paris, London and Malmo, can plausibly be seen here as a strangely *political* manifestation of petty criminality. In effect, the rioters indicate their scepticism about the moral superiority of the current legislators and law enforcers.⁷ If they implicitly suppose that there is no moral, as opposed to pragmatic, reason for keeping the law, then this is surely a conclusion that they share with many wealthy financiers, journalists, senior policemen and holders of government office.

Thus the criminalisation of the young rioters ensues necessarily upon the debased materialism of modern liberal assumptions, which demand no exercise of 'honour' from leaders, but only an acting in their own self-interest within legal bounds and a representation of the massed selfishness of others. An understandable cynicism about the exercise of honour in the past causes us to overlook the fact that yet more dire consequences follow when honour is not even paid any normative lip service. For it is no longer so clear that self-interest and legality will sustain each other in a beneficial circle, as the liberal capitalist model requires. According to this outlook, a more measured and pragmatic self-interest will prevent any habitual or contagious breaking of legal bounds. But today, the loosening of regulations on finance and business, together with the legal weakening of trade unions' right to resist, means that the border between the permissible and the impermissible has become fatally blurred. In consequence, the realm of 'what one can get away with' has been greatly extended. And since the requirement for order permits no

real vacuum, the formal bounds of trust in contract – upon which capitalism is supposed to rely – get gradually displaced by mafia-like power structures of interpersonal corporate bullying, blackmail, deceit and protectionist racketeering (of however polite a kind).

The antidote to this cannot only be a restoration of proper regulation of monetary practice. For if the single constraint upon individuals and corporate bodies is fear of reprisal, then such a purely liberal economic order is inherently unstable. That is because the Hobbesian logic of sheer self-interest undergirding contract always ensures that the former will strive to break the bounds of the latter. Thus the inherent dynamic of capitalism threatens its own formal, anarchy-assuming order in the direction of a more substantive and enacted anarchy. So it is not just a matter of ‘the wrong politics’ having allowed moneyed men to more and more evade norms in a manner that is readily reversible, should more popular voices prevail. For it is the inner thrust of capitalism that has recently broken through the forlorn attempts of social democracy to hold back its tide, while not seeking to alter this fundamentally prevailing current. Thus the seawalls of state protection against the worst excesses were eventually and not accidentally breached.

But this breaching by the force of capitalism is also over-reaching, as we have seen. It tends to convert capitalism into a mode of criminal economic oligarchy, often half in league with political oligarchies of the state. By refusing all self-restraint of honour and all direction towards truly substantive goals, market operators are ironically doomed to evolve towards a mafia-like parody of an honour-economy. In such a perverse economy, the neglected interpersonal dimension reasserts its unavoidable human sway in a brutal idiom, however paradoxically enabled by evermore obscurely abstract refinements.

It follows that only a business ethos that eschews financial gain as the sole motivation can possibly ensure a stable economic process that does not degenerate into inequitable practice, malpractice and outright criminality. More substantive teleological regulation based on mutually recognised self-interest and allowance of organised labour’s right to resist are necessary ingredients in such stability. But even they are not sufficient in themselves, because they also will be breached if their tenor is at variance with the groundswell of a continued self-interest alone on the part of entrepreneurs and also of workers themselves.

Therefore, a new internal ethos is required, in order to ensure stability and sustainability in the economic domain. One can never abolish, nor should one seek to abolish, the motivation of proper pride. But this lies deeper in human psychology than our mere pursuit of power, material wealth or a shallow *amour propre*. It is an inherently social motivation because it is linked to recognition by others for honourable performance of a mutually recognised

and beneficial role. And here lies the core of an honour culture. An alternative business ethos, which would be a new version of many economic environments in the past, would seek to instil the pursuit of self-worth as a seeking for collegial and public recognition. In turn, this would encourage the virtuous provision of social benefit, and genuine distributed wealth of all kinds – besides the successful production of worthwhile things and the attainment of reasonable profit enabling a future expansion of objectively desirable as well as successful economic production.

In this way, one can see how a renewed sense of ‘my station and its duties’ (in the Victorian Idealist philosopher F.H. Bradley’s phrase) is the basis for any possibility of equitable sharing. Otherwise, we will have no basis upon which to agree what resources and rewards might properly belong to any given civic role. And in the case of every *metier*, this inevitably includes a legitimate place for hierarchy in terms of educative guidance, gradual initiation and the conveying of tradition and ecological balance (both natural and cultural) into the future. Where this necessity is insincerely denied, there the unavoidable hierarchical function does not just vanish, but, rather, assumes more and more the modes of abstract wealth, empty celebrity and naked force, shorn of the tempering gloss of the honourable. Thus the pursuit of pure equality is a self-defeating myth, whereas, paradoxically, the attempt to realise a valid hierarchy and a true deference is the only possible means to realise a more equal society in practice.

Likewise, honour and good ethos can only be renewed by reconnecting in novel ways both material wealth and political power to symbolic significance. Here the work of Karl Polanyi is decisive. In effect, Polanyi devised a history and typology of the economics of honour, or of the relationship of wealth to power and symbol. He recognised that, in the era of ancient community, the economy was integrated first through the reciprocal exchange of gifts, which was the crucial way of constituting society through ever-renewed mutual dependency and recognition. Later, with the emergence of proto-state formations of one kind or another, it was reintegrated through a more deliberated exchange of economic goods mediated by a sovereign tribal or political centre. Such a centre distributed and redistributed benefits and favours. Of course, this generally involved various forms of oppression and inequality,⁸ despite the common expectation of an honourable magnanimity on the part of rulers, which to a degree was supposed to restrain, and sometimes even did restrain, these endemic excesses. This is witnessed in many ancient Near Eastern texts, including the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament.⁹

In modern times, by contrast, integration has been increasingly achieved (at least in aspiration – in reality, many crucial archaisms oil its wheels) through the unplanned and seemingly accidental coordination of isolated

individual needs and preferences in the increasingly global marketplace. In consequence, all the higher and ideal motivations of human beings in the past, which had been perennially proposed as examples for children to imitate, now start to be read as mere ideological disguises for the self-seeking of the 'few' rather than the 'many'.¹⁰

However, Polanyi did not wallow in mere nostalgia. He recognised perfectly well that the spread of commerce had dislodged unjust hierarchies and impermeable local tyrannies. Yet at the same time, he correctly considered that there was severe loss as well as gain involved here, and that with the passage of time, economic disembedding engenders more terrible and locally impinging tyrannies than any known to the past – the 'satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution, which Danny Boyle's opening ceremony at the 2012 London Olympics captured so well.

Therefore, Polanyi hoped that we might yet achieve a balance between community and contract through a fluid cognition of the importance of reciprocal free association and just political distribution. This could be done in a manner that would respect group feeling and the common good, and yet *also* advance the authentic creative reach of individual liberty – given that it lacks any real scope if pursued in isolation.

The popular search for such a balance is today witnessed in a growing desire on the part of many people to combine the pursuit of material well-being with honourable social service.¹¹ Perhaps this is because, where a certain measure of wealth commonly prevails, one starts to need other markers of prestige. The currency of mere currency must eventually become debased with over-usage, and people begin to search for other and usually more elevated tokens of esteem.¹² For one can wager that the logic of mutual honour is fundamental to the constitution of human culture itself.

Once, through this dialectical return to basics, the exchange of honouring becomes itself a socio-economic currency, more and more consumers may naturally tend to ally themselves through their choices to an honourable style of life. The capitalist mutation of the buying of mere commodities into the buying of lifestyles enables people to feel that they are joining the ruling spectacle of cultural command.¹³ But this can further and benignly shift into a more genuinely participatory involvement in an ethical process. Indeed, such participation tends to prevent the creaming off of both the surplus value of the commodity and the surplus alienated power of the mass cultural spectacle. Examples here include various modes of Fair Trade and fair treatment of workers, which tends to go along with the relative reliability of product and fair treatment of the consumer herself. In this way, a certain significant contagion of good practice is starting to arise: limited and peripheral, yet growing and converging evermore upon the core economy, as we see with the growth of hybrid profit/not-for-profit enterprises.¹⁴

3. VIRTUE, GIFT, COMMUNITY

It is for these reasons to do with honour and good ethos that one should now question our over-devotion to the social democratic politics of supposedly 'given' material interest qualified by governmental tinkering where profits will allow. Instead, political movements need to revisit their legacies of ethical commitment, which was often linked in the past to strong group adherence – whether to religious bodies or to secular equivalents. This also tended to involve a spirit of genuine festivity, rooted in folk culture (that persists, despite everything), as opposed to the craven promotion of mass commercial culture by a left liberal metropolitan middle class.

A post-liberal perspective would thereby combine a working-class search for restored community with the new middle-class search for more holistic fulfilment in work and the search of both classes for the combining of work with the needs of family and community.¹⁵ It would also *not* give priority to goals of social mobility and individual rights – although these aims have a validity and importance within a certain range.¹⁶ Rather, post-liberals seek to broker cooperation where there are conflicts of interest and to bring people together in a nobler and more benign rivalry over honourable achievement and excellent performance.

In this context, they refuse the implicit disdain for those performing necessary mundane jobs implied in the reduction of equality to 'equality of opportunity'. The same attitude rides roughshod over humble circumstances of birth and belonging that are still vital to most individuals' sense of identity and being cherished. 'Rescuing' a talented few from an abject human morass is hardly a radical objective, even if lowly born talent should rightly be recognised and encouraged to succeed. All the evidence suggests that in any case this approach rarely works. Rather, whole families and communities need to be nurtured. It has been demonstrated in practice that only a holistic tackling of every aspect of a deprived local community's life, including the initially gratuitous distribution of owned assets, resources and responsibilities, can make any effective and long-term difference.¹⁷ By the same token, we need a shift in focus away from a reactive approach that mostly deals with the effects of problems (e.g. unemployment and ill-health) and towards a proactive stance that tackles the root causes by adopting a strategy of early intervention.¹⁸ For example, teaching underprivileged parents to read with their children has been shown to be decisive.¹⁹

For fundamental humanist reasons, post-liberals place a securing of the mutual flourishing and vocational development of all above the goal of social mobility. Yet these considerations show that this more associationist and outcome-focused approach is also more likely to assist a wider number and range of individuals. Equally, the ensuring of more contentment and

satisfaction from the bottom up is more likely to instil good working practices that complete and round off more overarching architectonics, besides fertilising a ground soil from which more sturdy and flamboyant shoots may spring.

If it is true that virtuous ends are internal to activities, then it follows that no ethical objective, which is not to some degree intrinsically realisable by some known process of activity, is genuinely 'moral' at all.²⁰ By comparison, the public promotion of utility may appear moral, but at bottom it is only committed to the pursuit of an amoral and sensualistic private 'happiness'. Equally, the public respect for freedom may appear to be moral, but at root it recognises only the infinite vagaries of private desire. For an unadulterated liberal understanding, private desire must reduce to the random promptings of individual bodily motions or the human will. But against the impersonal-ism of liberal institutions and policies, post-liberals shift the emphasis to the 'whole person' – the unity of body, mind and soul, embedded in a social order that is more basic than either state or market and to which these necessary realities must be referred.

The social is more basic than either the political or the economic because human society – beyond the nature–culture divide – binds together material reality with symbolic significance. Indeed, human culture primordially forms around the production and exchange of things that are both goods and symbols. If the inaugurating gifts of goods and symbols are received, then they enter into circulation, and a community is constituted insofar as it understands itself as 'participating' in the 'ideal reality' that significant material goods are taken to represent. This circulation enjoins on the community certain preferred behaviours, as contemporary anthropology has documented.²¹

According to ethnographically aware thinkers in the wake of Marcel Mauss, the linguistic, the social, the political, the economic and the ethical were all originally inseparable. To some degree they remain so, since this is the very logic of the human as such, as an irreducibly social animal.²² We are only 'bound together' through structures of mutual recognition mediated by things at once tangible and meaningful. That implies things imbued with a 'sense' that must be in the last analysis ineffable.²³ Therefore, to remove all 'location' from people is to remove the very soil of their humanity, which alone fundamentally nurtures cultural growth.²⁴

Against this abstract universalism of liberal ideology and its preference for the global and the virtual, post-liberals argue for the honouring of place.²⁵ At the same time, they recognise that communities are never discrete and are even internally constituted by micro-meetings with relative strangers who constantly arrive through time, from other 'tribes', from the other gender and from elsewhere altogether. The ineffable identity of community is the result of a constant binding and re-binding of these micro-disparities. And with the advance of history, diverse communities get evermore entangled with each

AQ: Please check if the sentence that begins with "Yet, this" is OK in meaning.

other.²⁶ Yet this circumstance only augments a need to newly construct a situated if complex and spatially entangled shared identity, which never altogether loses touch with its originally more discrete bases. For example, the inhabitants of Cornwall today are fathomlessly diverse, yet an ancient sense of Cornishness still exerts a deeper sway over most of them.

It follows that the clichéd contrast of a cosy community where all are friends to an alienating city where all are strangers is false. Community is always a 'being with', as etymology would suggest. Therefore it is composed of a long string of entangled relationships. All these encounters are with others who must remain somewhat unknown, however familiar. Indeed, the deeper the encounter with a friend, the more her profound otherness will emerge. It is, rather, every urban stranger who is formally the same and substitutable. And surely it is in negotiating such mutual strangeness that a shared ineffability of local cultural atmosphere arises to engender a shared new strangeness and depth. Because community consists of a series of endless, if characterised, encounters, it is also, as its etymology further indicates (*munus* is one Latin word for gift), a series of exchanged and binding gifts, which originally constitute society prior to any economic or political contract. Herein consists the very 'commerce' of both friendship and common life in a shared polity.²⁷

In this way, the social *already* includes and yet constrains both the economic and the political. As Jacques Godbout puts it, the social as the gift-exchanging relationship is a 'strange loop and a tangled hierarchy'.²⁸ It is the former because it involves an economy of spiralling linkage through time rather than perfect circularity or mutual standoff in space. It is the latter because it involves continued guidance and ordering of some by others, but often in educative oscillation and in such a way that some may lead for certain purposes while others may lead for different ones. From this argument, it can be seen how both the economic and the political spring from the humus of the social. In the course of time, they have obviously attained a certain autonomy that cannot simply be undone. Nonetheless, the post-liberal politics of virtue asks how the economy and the polity could today be more referred back to their always secretly fundamental social basis, embedded in relationships of reciprocal trust and collective endeavour.

4. SOCIALISM AND COMMON DECENCY

As we saw in chapter 1, the supreme irony of liberal theory is that the pessimism and cynicism with regard to human nature, which it falsely assumes in theory, it truly delivers in practice over time. People tend to live up to what is expected of them, and if the prime mode of social recognition is a collective

salute to successfully manifested narcissism, then the dominant idioms of human behaviour will follow suit. Yet the liberal ‘ontology of violence’ or of ‘the primacy of evil’ is not thereby confirmed, only the real effect of perverse liberal assumptions.²⁹

We can contrast this self-fulfilling prophecy of liberal pessimism with George Orwell’s genuinely socialist, but also ‘Tory anarchist’, trust in ‘common decency’.³⁰ People have always lived through practices of reciprocity, through giving, gratitude and giving again in turn. By way of this process, people achieve, in a simple way, mutual recognition and relationality. Most people pursue association and the honour and dignity of being recognised in significant ways (however lowly) as their main goals. They are relatively unconcerned with becoming much richer than their fellows or achieving great power over them. Indeed, most people wisely realise that such things will only increase their anxiety and insecurity. Rather, like hobbits they prefer the less spectacular but steadily satisfying life of the shire.

Nevertheless, this is not Rousseauist liberal optimism. The temptation to pursue the goals of pride at the expense of danger is there in all of us – in some, more than in others, and in some, to an overwhelming degree that can threaten the social fabric. Deep down, people are ‘decent’ and rejoice in relationality, yet in all of us a destructive imp of the perverse always lurks, and it is finally human perversion and passionate submission to their worst instincts, and not merely the unavoidable sway of alien structuring forces, which are responsible for the ravages of liberalism. The bad structures are, in the end, but our bad human habits.

Orwell suggested that a good society is one that erects safeguards against such perversity, and especially against the overweening, reckless individual, and he pointed out that most tribal structures are built on just this ‘warding off of danger’.³¹ Conversely, the positive structures of a social order should seek to build upon our natural and given practices of reciprocity – not destroying, but augmenting, our natural capacity for association. For Orwell this was ‘socialism’, and one could cite here the way in which the UK National Health Service built upon the pre-existing practices of mutual assistance that had begun in the working classes, sometimes with philanthropic help. Of course, this very genealogy demands that we remain vigilant as to whether or not the politicisation and centralisation of an originally social practice is in danger of destroying the local, participative and cooperative dimension.

But liberalism does just the opposite to what Orwell recommends: it tries to remove intermediate social practices of mutual assistance, while augmenting our tendencies to pursue wealth and prestige, instead of human and, ultimately, divine love. It ignores the fact that human life as such depends upon a bedrock of gift-exchange and that it develops in time through the astonishing and gratuitous irruption of new gifts of talent.³² In the nineteenth

century, working people and some intellectuals started to grasp this. They were inspired by a spontaneous sense that something was missing from liberal modernity. What was lacking was relationality, creative fulfilment in work, festivity and joy. They did not, like some conservatives of ‘the right’, wish to return to the bastard feudalism of the *ancien régime*, but they also rejected the individualism of the modern liberal ‘left’.

Now, to pursue relationality above all is to risk being *wounded* by the other: thus the mood is, indeed, often going to be ‘blue’.³³ The market and the state encourage us to think that we can be insulated from such hurt by the impersonality of economic and bureaucratic or legal transactions.³⁴ But without embracing the likelihood of some or even much sorrow, there can be no openness to real joy either. Through a bland buffering, participatory power is removed from ordinary people.

By contrast to such sterile immunity, traditions of courage, commitment, loyalty and leadership shaped the workers’ movement in Britain, France and then elsewhere, in resisting the worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Against the forces of the increasingly free market and the increasingly centralised state, British workers set up burial societies to honour their dead, and created cooperatives and mutuals to honour their communities and the places that they inhabited. They forged ties among Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, other Nonconformists, Evangelicals and Jews that gave rise to an almost unique internationalist movement of patriots who honoured their country, its constitutional legacy, literary culture and singularly long history of political unity and organic development.

This radical traditionalism transcends reactionary nostalgia whose fatalism is just as misguided as the progressive utopianism of both state communism and market capitalism. In keeping with the oldest socialist traditions in Britain and France, and with an echo of Radical Toryism reaching back to Cobbett, Wesley and Dr Johnson, post-liberals reject both these positions in favour of the endless creative reshaping of traditional prescriptions and the reforming of habits, which can seriously and drastically transform, beyond the illusory reach and damaging iconoclasm of revolutions.

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5. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

As we saw in chapter 1, liberalism is *incorrigibly* atomistic. Liberal recognition of group identity is always subordinate to the recognition of individual rights. As we also saw, those nineteenth-century liberals who tried to transform liberalism in a more organicist direction, were, in reality, producing a hybrid theory that was no longer pure liberalism.³⁵ Rather, it drew upon some form of ‘organic pluralism’ on which contemporary post-liberalism builds.

Liberalism so inspired, as with aspects of W.E. Gladstone and the more theologically orthodox drift of mainline Victorian Protestant dissent (as compared with the eighteenth century), denoted not religious or philosophical ‘indifference’, nor the revolutionary ‘rights of man’. Rather, it denoted charitable humanitarianism, constitutionalism, the rule of equitable law, and the deepening and widening of ancient civil liberties (in a manner that could, as with Gladstone, sometimes blend variously whig and tory legacies). *This* liberalism, which is still liberal in the root sense of ‘generous’, post-liberals fully endorse and sustain. That which genuinely challenges liberalism is a truer ‘liberality’, which supposes that societies are more fundamentally bound together by mutual generosity than by contract – this being a thesis anciently investigated by Seneca in his *De Beneficiis*, and in modernity again reinstated by Marcel Mauss.

Organic constitutional pluralism supplements the other nineteenth-century liberalism of ancient liberality or tolerant generosity in a significant way. As already intimated in chapter 1, its defence of the relative independence of social groups is part of a fundamentally different conception of sovereignty. It rejects the liberal idea of isolated, autonomous individuals whose activities can only be coordinated by an absolutely sovereign centre, holding a monopoly of violence, power and ultimate decision making. By contrast, political pluralists would shift the focus away from modern accounts of sovereignty in terms of a single source of absolute sovereign power (monarchic or popular) towards the idea of plural sources and graded degrees of sovereign power. Key to this is the role of constitutionally protected corporate bodies that mediate between the individual and the sovereign centre, for example, associations and intermediary institutions such as manufacturing and trading guilds, cooperatives, ethical and profit-sharing businesses, trade unions, voluntary organisations, universities, village colleges, ecological groups and free cities.³⁶

An ‘organic’ pluralism provides a more logical bulwark against atomistic liberalism than a mere ‘liberal pluralism’ (to which many pluralists have been prone) that sees the state as secondary to the social, because it proffers no postulate of either individuals *or* groups existing ‘before’ the political. Groups no more ‘precede’ the political whole than do Locke’s supposedly isolated individuals engaged in the ‘original’ social contract. That is because both persons and corporate bodies can only fulfil their functions and turn conflict into cooperation within a common polity pursuing shared ends, even if this polity consists in a pre-legal tribal ritual bonding. For the architectonic function of ‘the one’, though it need not be monopolising or monolithic, is, nonetheless, indispensable and co-original with the social, being part of it – as Thomas Aquinas (building on Aristotle and the Greek Christian fathers) taught.

Yet, conversely, pluralism does not posit a political sphere that takes precedence over particular societies and society in general, constituting them with theoretical and historical priority.³⁷ That is because the polity is itself a nested, interlocking union of persons, families and communities who are bound to one another by social ties and civic bonds – the fabric that holds society together. And despite its organicism, which stresses the functional interlocking of diverse groups in achievement of a shared sociality and the common good, the organic constitutional pluralism that we defend does not rule out elements of a more heterogeneous pluralism and the toleration of different groups. For political society as a whole need not entirely agree with the premises of individual groups or corporate bodies to be able, nonetheless, to accept that these groups and bodies are performing certain roles that contribute to the cohesion of the entire polity. Christians do not have to ascribe to exclusively adult baptism to see that Baptist churches rightly value Christian baptism and assist in social cohesion. Likewise, we do not have to be pacifists, teetotallers or execrators of all forms of gambling to see that organisations of pacifists, temperance associations and Methodists usefully remind us through their extreme rejections that war and addiction to potentially dangerous practices are not good things. Therefore at a deeper level, dissenting groups paradoxically reinforce a deeper social consensus.

If this is not the case, then either society is tolerating and often regulating a sin that it rightly does not see as a crime (as for example with some modes of pornography and, in some countries, recreational drugs), yet still marks its disapproval through modes of regulation. Or else society cannot and should not tolerate at all dissenting practices that do not exaggerate shared common principles so much as reject them altogether. For example, it is fine if shari'a law brokers marriages according to Islamic custom, so long as this does not permit polygamy or the coercion of women disallowed by either Roman or Common Law as informed by the Christian Canon law tradition. That would violate the necessarily organic element in post-liberal pluralism, in the name of a diabolical combination of liberal pluralism and barbaric disrespect for the female sex and human dignity.³⁸

Finally, pluralism defends the idea of group personality. That means the paradoxical blending of personhood and association. A notion of group personality requires a teleological ethics: one has to be able to say that a group is aiming for a goal, that its collective character fosters desired social ends. And to reiterate the point just made: even if there are groups with whose ideals you do not fully agree, you can, nevertheless, acknowledge that in one sense they are pursuing social goals that are compatible with, and promote a shared sense of human dignity and respect for life. The hyperbolic respect of animal rights activists for animal life and dignity reminds us of something important,

although if they equalise the worth of animal with human life, they must be strenuously resisted.

Linked to this pluralist organicism is the re-invention of ‘constitutional corporatism’ in a more plural guise against both market individualism and state collectivism, in particular the principle of ‘mixed government’ and the role of corporate bodies in both politics and the economy. Beyond the formalist separation of powers that ends in institutional stalemate or the primacy of executive power, the principle of mixed constitution can help balance the three branches of sovereign, executive and judiciary, while at the same time upholding the autonomy of both individuals and corporate bodies within a free, shared social space. Such balancing blends, power of the ‘one’ (nation, parliament, monarchy or president), the ‘few’ (regions, localities, professions and virtuous elites) and the ‘many’ (the people or the citizenry). This approach can re-balance the growing power of the executive and the judiciary vis-à-vis the legislature at the national level and of a financial oligarchy at that of the global.

6. PERSON, CORPORATION, DISTRIBUTION

In addition to support for the integrity of social groups, post-liberals seek to uphold the inalienable dignity of the person in extra-legalistic ways. Persons, unlike liberal atomic ‘subjects’ who are supposedly primary and yet in both theory and reality interchangeable, are at once ‘more’ and at the same time ‘less’ than the social whole. Less, because persons only exist in relation and only acquire defined personal roles in relation to the totality of these relations, which is the social whole. More, because it is the very position of the person in a relational series that helps to grant her a unique identity of character. Serial positioning is not simply fated, and if personal positions are situated in a chain, the chain is equally constituted entirely by its links. A person freely, interpretatively and creatively absorbs and responds to all the human relations in which she stands and the physical influences to which she is subject. Therefore her character springs as much spontaneously from herself as from her unique and complex relational situation.³⁹ Both factors combine to ensure an irreplaceable ‘personality’ that is ‘more’ than the whole, since the human whole is only composed of the totality of such persons. The Christian West, through the outworking of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine, came to accord a unique value to the person in this sense.⁴⁰ By comparison, the liberal valuing of the individual and her rights is but a pale parody of this complex and more entirely humanist recognition of the basis of all human worth.

But the ‘double excess’ of society over single person and, yet, person over the social whole can only be sustained and mediated by a complex

and overlapping series of partial societies or intermediary associations that compose 'civil society'. We take the latter in a neo-medieval sense that does not divide the political from the social, or vice-versa. Thereby, it exceeds the eighteenth-century dominant usage of this sphere as an instrument of political control by keeping culture within the bounds of *politesse* or 'civility' as such.⁴¹ Such relatively independent associations at once remind the state of the excess of personal freedom over its own totalising thrust, and yet equally temper the personal tendency to autonomy with a liveable concrete reminder of wider society in an amenable microcosmic guise.

In this way then, personalism and authentic corporatism (the role of intermediary formations as qualifying absolute state sovereignty) are inseparable. And since this true corporatism, in refusal of the whig debt-funding of politics as an alien, 'expert' profession, necessarily involves the non-separation of the economic from the political, the contemporary Catholic and European subsidiarist vision entails a distribution of some political responsibilities to economic bodies, in a socially accountable manner that can correct the *de facto* anarchic and criminal distribution of such responsibilities that is now in any case to the fore. So, inversely, in ensuring that economic decisions acknowledge their political and social consequences, it also ensures that personalism must pervade the economic as well as the social and political dimensions. From a post-liberal perspective, the alternative to atomistic liberalism is something at once social and political, which embeds state and market in a social polity ('civil society') more loosely yet more substantively and humanely construed.

Here it is important to note that not just Catholic (beside much Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant) social teaching, but also the non-Fabian currents within the early British Labour Party, as with G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney, tended to uphold something like this mix of personalism and corporatism, combined, as for Catholicism, with notions of subsidiarity and a wider distribution of property and assets, rather than a supposed collective ownership of everything.⁴² So this socialist current in its own way also ascribed to 'double excess'. Each human person is spontaneously unique, as still, for many of the Labour pioneers, seen as created in the image and likeness of God. Yet this precious and irreplaceable 'character' of each and every one is also in part conveyed by nurture, vocation and friendship. For this reason, it is inseparable from its social role. In consequence, one cannot respect a man and at the same time despise him as miner, son, father, cricket player or lover.

It might, nonetheless, still seem to some that stressing the dignity of role would run the danger of subordinating the person to her function for the social organism. This raises the spectre of an ugly corporatism that dominated much of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century – whether in the form of Fascism, National-Socialism or Communism. But a rigid organicism only

follows for a reactionary traditionalism and positivism, not for an Aristotelian and, later, Thomistic view that defines the purpose of the social and political whole as securing reciprocal justice and the always specific virtuous flourishing of each of its members.

Indeed, one can turn the tables on liberalism here: if we mainly respect a man as a man *per se*, then this formalism can readily turn out to be compatible with all and every exploitation of him *qua* miner, son, father, fast bowler, etc. In consequence, these functions do, indeed, get reduced to merely instrumental functions of a machinistic totality. Functions cease to be personally infused if, with false idealism and piety, we try to divorce personhood from 'vocational role'. This false idealism informs every liberal constitutionalism insofar as it only recognises persons as bearers of abstract individual rights, and otherwise regards social and economic life as 'politically indifferent'. However, if, as for Aristotle, the aim of politics is to produce virtuously flourishing citizens, then, since people only develop characters through social and economic relations, the nature of these relations and their aims cannot be so treated. Inversely, the aim of social and economic relating will not be mainly the satisfaction of private predilections, but relationship as such, reciprocal sympathy as such, and the good of the other, besides oneself, in the widest possible range. The widest possible immediate constitutional range is the *polis* seen as the 'biggest legally-governed society', and beyond the bounds of the state the broadest scope of just reciprocity is the culturally united international society of the Philonian *megalopolis*.⁴³

In this sense, *megalopolis* refers to an interlocking, nested union of cities, regions, nations and commonwealths. Such a vision differs sharply from a Stoic-Kantian unity of *cosmopolis* (today championed by left liberals like Jürgen Habermas) in which both individuals and states are absorbed within a global public square that is governed by formalistic, procedural standards that are in danger of endorsing an individualism of the nation.

This national and international rejection of the separation of political from socio-economic powers is a necessary conclusion of any authentically post-liberal political thinking. It is the simple core of non-Statist corporatism, which operates a subsidiarist influence of relatively independent economic bodies upon the political centre, combined with an inverse tempering of economic purpose by political responsibility, rather than a fascistic manipulation of still essentially capitalist business and market to racist and nationalist, and then nihilistic ends (as denounced in the pre-war era by Catholic thinkers such as Jacques Maritain). We have also just seen how such genuine corporatism enables the 'double excess' of personalism. In order to value each and every person, one must accordingly nurture free associations, local government and economic vocations. To widen personal political participation or *democracy*, one must ensure that every individual can exercise political influence through

the workplace and with those with which she shares a common purpose. In this way, the corporatist refusal of any absolute political/economic divide is brought right down to the level of the experience of every individual.

By contrast, merely representative democracy (which, nevertheless, has its place) assumes that there is in any case little impact to be made on most of human life through the political process. This is one reason why today democracy and the exercise of majority will is inevitably withering in the face of sheerly economic choice and judicial determination of private rights. For liberalism *undemocratically* defines legitimate politics as primarily the upholding of contractual rights that do not need voting on because they are supposedly 'natural'. Similarly, liberalism is committed to the securing of social and economic 'fair play' irrespective of any substantive and constantly debatable notions of the common good or the good life. Democratic decision is in consequence reduced to mass adjudication concerning the endless 'hard cases' to be decided within these terms of reference. All merely liberal constitutions (above all that of the United States) are devised to prevent any representation of a collective will that would reject the ground rules of liberalism itself.

Understood in these broad but authentic terms, corporatism may have been more muted in Catholic social thought and practice since the Second World War (in part because of its rejection of corporatist state totalitarianism on both right and left), but the tradition of non-state corporatist ideas and institutions has never gone away. Under the leadership of Luigi Sturzo and Luigi Einaudi, Italy retrieved its more authentic Catholic Christian legacy of corporatism, which Mussolini's neo-paganism had corrupted.⁴⁴ And with British rather than American encouragement, West Germany adopted powerfully corporatist elements, purged of most fascist statism, into its post-war settlement.⁴⁵ These elements included the close alliance of local business and local government, vocational training, vocational associations, high entry qualifications and alliance of traditional craft skills with modern technology. What is more, these elements have proved capable of delivering sustainable economic success as well as greater personal fulfilment compared with typical Anglo-Saxon practice.

Equally, in recent Catholic social teaching, the stress on vocation and virtue and their political relevance has been paramount. Nor is it right to say that Catholic social thought has abandoned its defence of forms of virtuous hierarchy. 'Subsidiarity' is clearly a hierarchical doctrine, since it teaches that political, social and economic functions should be fulfilled at the *most appropriate levels* and preferably at the lowest ones (closest to the person, the family, the community and associative ties). Such a conception assumes that there is a socio-political pyramid with rule at the top only authenticated by its guardianship of the common good with popular assent. The key shift in Catholic teaching came with the reclaiming of this link of height to

responsibility under law, and of rank to achieved virtue. Beginning with Leo XIII's social encyclical, this marked a late nineteenth-century rejection of certain absolutist *ancien régime* notions, *which are essentially modern and voluntarist*, insofar as they reconceived 'feudal' bonds in terms of property ownership instead of personal fealty, and so in a sense were themselves 'liberal'.⁴⁶ It did *not* mark any supposed twentieth-century rejection of organic hierarchy, which remains essential to the notion of subsidiary cooperation.

By the same token, the doctrine of subsidiarity remains corporatist, since it seeks to devolve central sovereign powers to groups that are economically vocational and voluntary, as well as to local political formations. They are all regarded as interlocking in function and as contributive to the flourishing of the political whole, as the work of Paul Hirst on associative democracy illustrates.⁴⁷ Clearly, this mode of more rightly named corporatism has nothing to do with the oligarchic sway over governments of irresponsible corporations in recent times. For such bodies do *not* accept and are not openly granted any political purpose, but, instead, deploy political influence through 'whiggish' lobbying in order to subvert political priorities and subordinate them to the economic, itself falsely understood as the mere accumulation of abstract wealth by whomsoever.

Recognition of group rights and the supplementation of representative democracy by corporatist governance by no means implies any neglect of individual civil rights. But post-liberalism defends individual rights in personalist terms, which regard the individual not in isolation, but as the most basic rung in a subsidiarist vision that is in continuity with older 'distributist' notions. What an individual can do for herself, own for herself, grow for herself, make for herself, she should – this relative independence being a precondition for genuine social and political participation, in a more democratised version of the republican tradition. Inversely, she should be able to appeal against an oppressive group, just as a group has the right to appeal against an oppressive higher body and, ultimately, the state.

But the claim to rights of the individual necessarily closes the circle: she must appeal back to the state or an international jurisdiction, thereby revealing a hidden reciprocal aspect to the hierarchy of a subsidiary settlement. The latter is not a kind of 'group liberalism' that regards the state as a necessary evil. Rather, national or international sovereign bodies themselves should sometimes reach down to protect the individual person against the group, or smaller groups against greater ones, as in the protection of small businesses against greater ones and against monopoly.

This, indeed, was traditionally the populist argument for the need for 'monarchy' as against merely 'aristocratic' power: the One must sometimes defend the Many against the virtuous Few turned corruptly oligarchic. And this is one of the reasons why we argue for a greater equitable role for the

head of state, in a way that is to be distinguished from an executive usurpation of representative authority (see chapters 5 and 6).

In the wake of the manifest failure of the liberal consensus adhered to on all sides, it is clear that we should search for an alternative politics and a different social ethos. This would be not just about linking rights to responsibilities, but also about solidarity and subsidiarity. In these ways, the real alternative to liberalism involves both greater economic egalitarianism and an updated social conservatism, freed of oppressive and unjustifiable prejudices against women and minorities and intolerances of exceptions and complications. At the same time, it rejects the new tyranny of exception posing as obligatory universal and supportive of loyalty and belonging to the family (traditional or otherwise), community and locality.

The theory and implications of post-liberalism will be more extensively elaborated in the remainder of the book.

NOTES

1. The logic of left *versus* right is, after all, little more than the inheritance of the French Revolution and its rationalist, spatialising conception of politics. See Marcel Gauchet, 'The Right and the Left', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 241–99.

2. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, EE VII, xi, 6, VII, x, 10–13; Robert L. Gallagher, 'Incommensurability in Aristotle's Theory of Reciprocal Justice', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20:4 (2012): 667–701.

3. Stefano Zamagni, 'Catholic Social Teaching, Civil Economy, and the Spirit of Capitalism', in Daniel K. Finn (ed.), *The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 63–93.

4. Maurice Glasman, 'Politics, Employment Policies and the Young Generation', in Alberto Quadrio Curzio and Giovanni Marseguerra (eds.), *Rethinking Solidarity for Employment: The Challenges of the Twenty-First Century* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014), 255–70.

5. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

6. Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. D. Winkler (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

7. John Milbank, 'Riot and Response: England's Violent August', *ABC Religion & Ethics*, 15 August, 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/08/15/3293122.htm>, on which this section draws.

8. Luigino Bruni, *The Genesis and Ethos of the Market* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

9. Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 283–323.

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Part II
ECONOMY

Chapter 3

The Metacrisis of Capitalism

1. CAPITALIST CRISIS

Clearly, the global economic crisis since 2008 does not foreshadow the end of capitalism. However, it both reminds us of something well known and reveals something new. It reminds us that capitalism is subject to a peculiar sort of periodic downturn: an alternating deficiency of profit or of demand. Episodic over-accumulation of capital, achieved in part by the depressing of wages, entails lower demand – as Adam Smith recognised long before Karl Marx.¹ Inversely, Keynesian attempts to remedy this crisis by boosting demand can eventually eat into profits and returns on capital.

But the current crisis also reveals that globalisation since the 1970s has so expanded and speeded up the processes of capitalist change as to engender something qualitatively different: not only the need to balance the growth of abstract wealth with demand for concrete commodities, but also a chronic difficulty in sustaining economic growth as such. This was symptomised already in the 1970s by the ‘impossible’ coincidence (in Keynesian terms) of high unemployment and, therefore, depressed demand, with rampant inflation, which should have been an indicator of intensifying economic activity, but clearly was not. Here one had an early sign that the late modern capitalist system so much depends on creating abstract wealth that it is increasingly less able to generate productive capital and genuine goods serving human needs. One indication for this is that global finance uses other people’s money to trade almost exclusively with itself: taking deposits and lending to industry accounts for only 3 per cent of assets on the balance sheets of UK banks, while international foreign exchange trading is nearly 100 times the volume of commerce in goods and services.²

The growing frequency of financial crashes and the recessions they induce suggests that capitalism, taken to its logical extreme, provides only the kind of nominal growth that arises from making money out of money and that is compatible with actual material decline. Thus capitalism simultaneously abstracts from the real economy of productive activities and reduces everything to its bare, abandoned materiality – a double movement that is central to the capitalist metacrisis (not to be confused with a ‘final crisis’), which is the focus of this chapter.³

Meanwhile, globalised movements of international finance now severely curtail government freedom of action in a way that places democracy itself in danger. The manner in which excess capital can be transferred from one part of the world to another and back again in a matter of milliseconds has in large part generated the recent economic destabilisation and also expanded the opportunities for outright criminal behaviour.⁴ In response to the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market and the 2008 global ‘credit crunch’, national states bailed out transnational banks by taking over their debts in a manner that locks politics itself yet more into this financial logic. In consequence, government has less and less regard for the specifically political ends of human well-being and interpersonal relationships, while the long-term needs of the national polity and society are subordinate to the short-term interests of quarterly returns.⁵

This growing global economic turbulence sheds new light on the nature of capitalist crisis as such. The maximisation of profits by defeating workers’ demands in the 1970s and 1980s did not prove effective for very long. Quite quickly, a lot of capital had nowhere to go and there was a need to boost demand again. The increasing speed of capitalist cycles meant that supposedly opposite crises started to coincide, delivering a double deficiency of both return and demand, which manifests as ‘metacrisis’ the linear tendency of capitalism towards simultaneous abstraction and materialisation. This ultimately generates a problem of correlation between money and the material substance of both land and labour-power, as exemplified by the bursting of the sub-prime housing bubble in 2008.

More specifically, such a drastic coincidence has been achieved through financialisation, or the complicity between the speculative loans of the wealthy minority and the debts of the masses. Financialisation seeks first to increase demand through credit, rather than through a more egalitarian increase in wages and distributed ownership. It operates this preference in part for political, class-based reasons and in part because today a productive economy that might supply higher wages and salaries is stagnating. Second, financialisation seeks to exit debilitating cycles once and for all by rendering demand in the mode of credit in a newly positive relationship to profit deriving from speculation. However, it does not thereby resolve the crisis,

but further assists that ‘metacritical’ process whereby seemingly opposite crises of insufficient extraction of surplus value as profit and insufficient purchasing-power of demand now coincide. And yet within this coincidence a certain oscillation remains uncured, after all, as we shall see.

Under financialisation, those in debt are socially disempowered and politically weakened as they find themselves shut out from the formal banking system and driven into the arms of dubious mortgage brokers, payday loan companies or loan sharks. The returns that accrue to payday loan companies from charging usurious interest rates (in the United Kingdom between 100 and 4,000 per cent) further anchor wealthy speculation only in order to allow it to become increasingly unmoored from labour-power, which is left abjectly confined to its own resources. In this manner, the triumph of artifice seems to return the mass of people to that ‘state of pure nature’ which liberalism first fantasised as a false historical origin (as we argued in chapter 1). Liberal capitalism realises an economic version of the reduction by biopolitics of people to ‘bare life’.

Thus we are facing a metacrisis of capitalism whereby the simultaneous process of abstraction and materialisation subjects the real economy of productive activities to combined speculation and exacerbated commodification. In so doing, it further separates symbolic significance, equated with pure exchange value, from material space, which is seen increasingly as just an object for arbitrary division, consumption and destruction. Thereby, it renders social destruction and ecological damage constitutive of our fundamental economic processes. However, financialisation is not ‘the end of history’. Debts cannot be endlessly offloaded onto more and more fictional vehicles, and so the doubled resort to credit by the few in terms of securitisation and hedging, in order to shore up capital returns in the face of too easy loans to the majority, is not indefinitely sustainable. One cannot really do without the final securitisation of the abstract on the concrete, on real profits and real wages derived from real production and consumption of things with use-value, understood in however generous a sense. Hence our current impasse.

These observations suggest that the supposedly pure economic logic, old and new, at work here, is not the logic of a market economy as such. Far from being necessary or inescapable, it is entirely contingent and avoidable – a logic only of capitalism that acts out certain theoretical assumptions, linked to the loss considered in chapter 1 of the psychic as integrating body and mind and the contradictory modern rendering of everything as ‘entirely natural’, yet equally ‘entirely artificial’. These assumptions are as follows:

1. That material reality is securely trumped by abstraction. Yet even the bankers themselves scarcely knew what was going on, because they were speculating in terms of ciphers about ciphers and guesses about other

AQ: Please check if the sentence that starts with “Debts cannot.” reads properly.

- people's guesses concerning the future, while assuming that property prices would go on rising forever.⁶ By these means, they were increasingly entangling us all in the shifting rules of their own game.
2. That the well-being of the corporate firm takes second place to that of the individuals who run it, and the shareholders who benefit from it, as encouraged by a culture of 'meritocratic extremism'.⁷ This is best illustrated by the yawning gulf between executive pay and the salaries of ordinary workers (with top-to-bottom pay ratios of around 300:1 in companies listed on the London stock exchange and over 450:1 in many US corporations) and the perverse 'bonus culture' that excessively rewards risky success, mere chance or even failure.
 3. And, most fundamentally, that resources are naturally scarce, given the supposedly random character of human desire. Thus axiologically neutral markets are the best means to palliate the *agon* resulting from fantasised scarcity.

Interrogating these three assumptions will be the later focus of this chapter. But first we will further explore (a) the specific nature of the capitalist system; (b) its inherent tendency to generate inequality and inertia; (c) its human contingency, as opposed to historical fatedness; and (d) the way in which it is also, and increasingly, itself an intensified liberal politics, besides being an economic process.

2. THE LOGIC OF CAPITALISM

The dominant strands of both liberal and Marxist thought tend to consider the emergence of the capitalist economy as an inevitable occurrence that was necessary for the transition from medieval feudalism to the emancipation of modernity. In each case, the strong sovereign state is seen as indispensable for the dismantling of 'feudal' structures and consolidating the hold of capitalism by boosting merchant trade and driving forward the conquest of colonies. For most liberals and Marxists, capitalism is therefore an economic system of production and commerce that determines a new set of social relations based on private property, capital accumulation and wage labour.

However, Karl Polanyi's economic anthropology showed that it is much more than an economic system. Beyond Smith, he argued that capitalism fuses state with market power and, thereby, disembeds the economy (and, one can add, a newly professionalised politics) from society, while inversely embedding social relations in economic transactions, in a manner that is intrinsically indifferent to personally and socially beneficial outcomes. And beyond Marx, Polanyi showed that commodification, especially of labour and

land, is not just a matter of the reduction of use value to exchange value, but also a loss of the *symbolic* exchange of irreplaceable social realities. Shorn of the symbolic link of thing with value, capitalism exhibits a deeper logic than Marx envisaged: not simply the suppression of real usage, but rather the endless commodifying division of reality between the usable in an instrumental sense, leached of meaning, on the one hand, and symbolic meaning reduced to algebraic abstraction and equivalence on the other.

Thus the capitalist market is a social system governed by a secular logic, as commodification has to do with desacralising nature and life. It means that one buys, sells and trades without reference to tradition, association, duty or end, because things and people now lack intrinsic worth and their true value is their exchange value according to the iron law of supply and demand, or else the concrete but amorphously amassed value of ‘raw materials’. The crucial point is that the capitalist economy rests not *primarily* upon a mode of production and exchange – the extraction of surplus value from labour and surplus desire from consumers – but, rather, upon financial speculation and material aggregation. Its indifference either to meaning or to natural variety, accordingly, renders capitalism first an iconoclastic *system of destruction* before it is a system of production.

This character can also be confirmed insofar as, for modern economic capitalist theorists, the destiny of production itself is always consumption, which means, again, a final destruction.⁸ That destiny is only evaded insofar as one aspect of consumption (as, most obviously, with food) is the enabling of reproduction – but that is just a postponement of aggregate, asymptotic demise. For the denial of the symbolic dimension of consumption or its character as reception of a gift means that one cannot any longer construe consumption as also a reception with meaning, a kind of interpretative absorption that is accumulation in another register. One can think, here, of the consumption of bread and wine in the Christian Eucharist, but every meal received and eaten with gratitude has a dimension of ‘thanksgiving’: a shared meal festively reproduces the social order, not by the conversion of entropic energy into a new physical resource, but directly through the meaningful compounding of eating as a symbolic act. In this way, one could ethnographically generalise Augustine’s view that the bread and blood of the Eucharist do not become us; rather, we become them – the body of Christ, which is both the *corpus mysticum* and the source of the social body.

The capitalist system of primary destruction, as we saw in chapter 1, was actively promoted by the liberal sovereign state since its inception. However, one cannot simply say that the state invented the capitalist market and colonial commerce.⁹ A capitalist economy always hovered in the background as a shadowy possibility and was prophesied by Aristotle, as Polanyi emphasised.¹⁰ Within traditional economies, human beings exchange gifts – even if

this is eventually regularised in terms of money and commodities. With very remote strangers, with whom we share no common language, again the only language that we share in common is that of gift.¹¹ We exchange one strange thing for another: transistor radio for rare coral. But in the middle, with *known strangers across the sea*, as for example in the antique Mediterranean, humans tend to operate more in terms of contracts, loans and mercantile self-seeking. Maritime trade in the 'mid-sea' has always approximated to a kind of piracy. Hence city-states at the margins of nations have tended to 'diagonalise out' of those nations in a free-booting fashion, including cities such as Genoa, Venice and Rotterdam.

Nonetheless, Polanyi also argued that the function of maritime states was strangely to keep separate reciprocal inland trade from reciprocal remote trade, as well as from more zero-sum accumulative overseas trade. For instance, the London East India Company remained pro-monarchic and Cavalier because it engaged in a traditional remote reciprocalist trade. But the unofficial and guild-excluded merchant class were Roundhead parliamentary supporters because they engaged in a more piratical mode of enterprise. Furthermore, they joined this up with the commercial activities of often Calvinist agricultural capitalists who invested the surplus they extracted coercively into the speculative activities of merchant enterprise.¹² Thereby, material landed assets tended to be further subverted in their stability through their connection with a more abstract and (literally, as it were) fluid form of maritime wealth linked to more speculative fortunes. Such nominal profit often ended in debt-fuelled bubbles that burst and destroyed real wealth, of which the Dutch Tulip Mania of 1637 and the English South Sea Bubble of 1720 were early examples.

Thus a more searching genealogy of capitalism reveals that the key transformation away from an earlier mode of market economy towards capitalist exchange is less primarily to do with production and exchange than with simultaneous speculation and material agglomeration. In the first instance, capitalism commodifies money in such a way that it has no longer any connection to real goods, but is now purely nominal and tradeable for a profit – making more money out of money. Speculative profit is itself predicated on the endless turning of the solid and symbolic into the abstract, and yet the ultimate securing of the abstract on the now conglomerated concrete (as, paradigmatically, the conversion of the ecclesial patrimony into the economy of *assignats* by the French revolutionaries). If so, then financial crises are not an accidental phenomenon within capitalist process but a necessary occurrence.

Indeed, financial crises tend to be the culmination of a process whereby irrational expectations lead to investments, funded by excessive credit creation, that result in speculative manias, involving mass herd behaviour

and systemic distortions in the market mechanism¹³ – not least the failure to price-in real risk and externalities. As soon as state action contravenes market expectations (e.g. not bailing out Lehman Brothers or, conversely, taking ‘systemically important’ banks into national ownership, as with Northern Rock), contagion spreads to the core of the financial system, inducing panic and exacerbating the crash. When panic sets in, banks stop lending and call in collateral, while businesses and investors hoard cash and other liquid assets, so that governments and central banks have to inject *ultra-liquid* liquidity to keep the capitalist wheels going round in the fond hope that it will not be hoarded – precisely what happened when the Western financial system teetered on the brink of collapse in October 2008. This downward spiral only stops when the lender of last resort – the central bank in concert with the Treasury – injects yet more liquidity by recapitalising banks and by launching a programme of quantitative easing, creating new money and acquiring financial assets such as government bonds to stimulate private sector spending.

By oscillating between illiquid and liquid security, financial speculation connects two core characteristics of the capitalist system: first, a permanent process of ‘primitive accumulation’, on which capitalism depends for economic expansion and which requires no-cost coagulated material resources that mitigate the consequences of the need for incessant internal growth in the pursuit of increased abstract ‘wealth’.¹⁴ Second, an ever-greater financialisation of the everyday economy through the relentless creation of credit and exponentially growing levels of debt (generally starting with state debt, followed by a transfer of debt and risk to households).¹⁵

To further understand why capitalism is to do with paradoxically conjoined financial abstraction and appropriative materialisation, more primarily than with production and exchange, it is also instructive to see that, as realised by the Marxist theoretical legacy, colonisation and globalisation are later extensions of the capitalist logic: a response to falling rates of profits leading to sagging demand – hence the need for ever-further ‘primitive accumulation’.¹⁶ But Marx saw capitalism as inevitable, and so offered an insufficient explanation as to how primary accumulation permitting the absolute commodification of land, labour and money initially started. Polanyi and Robert Brenner, by contrast, see (from diverse theoretical perspectives) how it has to do with an always-present diabolically ‘middle’ sphere of relatively anarchic international relations escaping the reach of any *ius gentium*. The full incursion of the sea into the land that engendered capitalism only occurred in England because of the unique capitalisation of the land in terms of a free market in property and the establishment of the agricultural labourer as a dispossessed wage labourer – contingencies that both liberal and strictly Marxist accounts of the nature of capitalism neglect.

Capitalism, Credit and Contingency

These things, as we saw in chapter 1, were consequent upon the disappearance of the English peasantry at the end of the Middle Ages and the later dissolution of the monasteries, both of which events vastly increased the amount of land held by the gentry in primarily economic terms, with fewer social or political duties attached. The gravitation of the English gentry towards Calvinism, which sharply separated human contract as regulating fallen, quasi-ethical conduct from the divine gift of now sheerly elective grace, is in this respect unsurprising.¹⁷ Thus the dissolution of the monasteries and the English ‘enclosure movement’ started the process of repeated ‘primitive accumulation’, providing the surplus capital for financial investment in non-reciprocal, piratical trade, as the High Church Anglican socialist historian R.H. Tawney first argued.¹⁸

Another dimension of the emergence of capitalism concerns the break-up of Christendom. Once there exist competing nation-states linked to different religious bodies, then material organisation for war and self-defence becomes a priority. In these contingent circumstances, mercantilism is the inescapable consequence. So the complete invasion of the land by the sea in England produces also for the first time a comprehensive internal market organised upon contractual and competitive rather than reciprocalist lines. This internal *agon* is seen, in line with an economic version of Machiavelli’s martial logic for republics, as increasing internal power through a trial of strength and through a resulting greater size of national wealth.

The end of Christendom also led to greater competition and conflict between rival states, starting with absolutist-tending monarchs who commanded unprecedented fiscal control and military might.¹⁹ Even when absolutism was eventually overthrown, the foundations of the modern state were firmly built on permanent central taxation and standing armies. Thus modernity created the conditions for a fiscal state and a warfare state that have reinforced each other ever since – from the wars of religion via colonial conquests and the two world wars to the Cold War and the global war on terror.²⁰ Connected with the concentration of power in the hands of the sovereign centre was the concentration of wealth also in the hands of the new but variegated ‘capitalist class’ that backs the state’s quest for more resources because it opens up new market outlets. Charles Tilly rightly described this in terms of ‘the two interdependent master processes of the [modern] era: the creation of a system of national states and the formation of a worldwide capitalist system’.²¹

However, the point that both Marxist and liberal theories tend to underplay is the role of credit and debt in the transition from empire to nation-state and from market economy to capitalism. As the modern sovereign state built up

its military and administrative apparatus, neither taxation nor trade provided sufficient resources to sustain state and market expansion. That is why public credit became a central part of the capitalist system, first at the hands of the whigs and later the revolutionaries in France. As the historian J.G.A. Pocock argued, it was

Queen Anne Tories, of the school of Swift and Bolingbroke, [who] had thundered against Whig rule as that of a monied interest, made up of men who owned no property or rather had substituted property of an altogether new kind: the paper tokens of a fluctuating public confidence, in which the determinants of the rate at which money could be had, and the value of all property created, had themselves become a species of commodity.²²

‘Old’, more constitutionally organicist and more republican-leaning whigs, whose perspective Burke finally reverted to and developed, similarly cautioned against the multiplication of national debt, which undermined prosperity and stability. As we saw in chapter 1, the creation of public credit reached a *new* acme with the French Revolution. The revolutionaries brought about, according to Burke, a new settlement whereby

Everything human and divine [is] sacrificed to the idol of public credit, and national bankruptcy the consequence; and to crown all, the paper securities of new, precarious, tottering power, the discredited paper securities of impoverished fraud and beggared rapine, held out as a currency for the support of an empire, in lieu of the two great recognized species that represent the lasting conventional credit of mankind, which disappeared and hid themselves in the earth from whence they came, when the principle of property, whose creatures and representatives they are, was systemically subverted.²³

Burke’s critique anticipated not only political totalitarianism and looming terror, but also the ‘paper-money despotism’ that consists in expanding simultaneously public credit and state debt, which had built up as a result of corruption and expensive wars, by converting the property of Crown and Church into money. In this manner, the power of the state and the monied interest of capitalists converged, with the latter lending to the former and the former turning property into money in order to pay to the latter the interest on the growing stock of debt. This produced an ‘ignoble oligarchy’ composed of state agents and private speculators who colluded against society, as Burke observed.²⁴ *Pace* Marx, capitalism does not primarily substitute one set of property relationships or one dominant class for another, but is driven by speculative capital and a ‘dreadful energy’ of the state (Burke), which is disconnected from any property relationships and ends up dissolving real in nominal value.

Since then, the oligarchic system of state functionaries and capitalist speculators has evolved and expanded, predominantly in the course of colonial conquests and the two world wars, after which the weight of the state in the economy across the West has rarely dipped below 40 per cent of national output (compared with around 10 per cent prior to 1914).

Over time, the edifice of public credit and debt on which the fiscal and the warfare state are built has also been expanded to accommodate the welfare state. For as Polanyi further pointed out, the emergence of state welfare structures in the second half of the nineteenth century was not primarily a reaction against *laissez-faire* capitalism but, rather, an aporetic extension of it. First, just as the capitalist market tended towards monopoly, so too the state concentrated power in its hands at the expense of worker self-organisation and more mutual businesses that foster free and fair competition to the benefit of all stakeholders, not least suppliers and consumers. Second, state bureaucracy balanced anti-strike or industrial relations legislation with compensatory welfare measures intended to resign workers to a proletarian status and to inhibit their mutual organisation, which naturally tended to revert towards the human norm of reciprocal benefit. In this manner, state welfare compensates for market failure, including involuntary joblessness, ill-health or lack of education and skills. In most advanced economies across the West, the 'welfare bill' is now the biggest single item of the annual budget at a time of budget deficits and growing public debt as a proportion of GDP. Insofar as in-work benefits have the effect of subsidising the low wages paid by employers, and thereby keeping workers quiet, the welfare state subserves capitalism while increasing national debt.

In summary, capitalism differs fundamentally from a market economy in that it rests on a permanent process of 'primitive accumulation' and financial speculation that undergirds its appropriative production and exchange. This abstraction leads to the destruction of private and communal property in favour of paper money and ever-greater levels of national debt through public credit creation under the auspices of a new oligarchical collusion between the sovereign state and the monied interests of a growing capitalist, *rentier* and functionary class.

3. CAPITALISM, INEQUALITY AND INERTIA

Within the ranks of this class there are the super-rich and then again the super-super rich.²⁵ As Thomas Piketty has shown, the new tendency to extreme concentration of wealth combines the resurgent importance of inherited wealth in a period of low growth with the newly excessive salaries encouraged by the climate of 'meritocratic extremism'.²⁶ In consequence, we

see, both nationally and internationally, the emergence of a new 'aristocracy without honour'. Its continuity both with the debased aristocracies of the various *ancien régimes* and with the new moguls of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industry reveals just how little, in the long term (bar the effect of mass warfare), either revolution or redistribution or social rights have been able to temper the inegalitarian tendencies of the capitalist market. The reversion to low growth compounds the theoretically ascertainable and historically demonstrable tendency of capital accumulation to outrun profit in all economic circumstances.

Yet there is nothing systemically inevitable about either of these tendencies. As to the augmentation of the percentage of landed assets and money in relation to national revenue, the constraints upon this in terms of legal regulation, income tax, wage policy and trade union power were dismantled in the United Kingdom, as in the United States, after 1970. In considerable part this was because of a misperception that Keynesian social-democratic models were causing the Anglo-Saxon countries to fall behind both Continental Europe and Japan. Curiously, the question rarely seemed to be asked why variants of this model should work well in some parts of the West but not in others. This applies especially to the key characteristics of the German economy such as regional banks lending to SMEs, a national investment bank supporting an industrial and manufacturing policy as well as co-determination and workers' representatives on company boards. In reality, the growth lag of the Anglo-Saxon countries was more truly the catch-up enjoyed by the more war-torn countries during the post-1945 *trentes glorieuses*.

Here ideological parity requires one inversely to confess, as Piketty allows, that this would probably have occurred to a considerable extent in any case, even if more free-market policies had been followed in Japan and on the Continent. His main point is that minor variations in capitalist policy pale into insignificance compared to the disruptions caused by mass mobilised warfare. This includes the massive increase in public wealth and the huge transfer of assets that are necessary to support the generally higher level of health, education and well-being, which such mobilisation requires.²⁷ The further we get from the effect of the two world wars, the more long-term tendencies of capitalism reassert themselves: first, for returns on capital to exceed rates of economic growth; second, for capital to assume a relatively constant ratio to national revenue in terms of the division of savings by rate of growth; third, for inheritable capital holding to increase exponentially in relation to the growth rate, which historically tends to be low, even (and, indeed, especially) under the conditions of capitalism.²⁸

This thesis, as Piketty says, resembles both Ricardo's notion that land, which is in scarce supply, will consume an increasing amount of capital resources and, thereby, undermine production, and Marx's view that

ever-rising profits undermine demand, leading to an over-accumulation of capital, which, thereby, ‘digs its own grave’. Ricardo was wrong insofar as he did not foresee the massive nineteenth-century transfer from static agricultural to dynamic industrial capital. Marx was wrong insofar as he did not foresee the huge technologically powered growth in productivity that somewhat offset the capitalist contradiction by allowing more money to accrue to wages and social infrastructure without seriously damaging the returns on capital.²⁹ However, the unprecedented effects of twentieth-century mass war eventually came to obscure the sense in which these nineteenth-century economic theories remain perennially true. Whether in neo-classical or in Keynesian terms, capitalism was thought to be self-adjusting (automatically or by means of capitalist state regulation) as between capital ownership and overall revenue, which is capital return plus incomes. Yet now that inequalities are returning to the levels of the pre-1914 *belle époque*, we can better see, after all, the renewed relevance of both Ricardo and Marx. For even if industry has now displaced agriculture, in our own day ownership and inheritance of urban and rural land, as well as of financial resources, is once more assuming a disproportionate economic, social and political role – and here we see one aspect of incessant capitalist ‘materialisation’. Equally, despite the way technology boosts growth, and so demand, this does not prevent the continued excess of return on capital over economic growth, which Piketty rightly insists must increase inequality and so threaten the culture of democracy.³⁰

One can agree with Piketty against Marx that capitalism is not bound to collapse, hence providing a negative economic self-solution that obviates the need for the socio-political.³¹ However, it is notable that he himself attributes considerable importance to the decline in demand that ensued after 1970, and recognises that capital owners eventually found this detrimental to their rates of return and so resorted increasingly to financialisation.³² And while Piketty is right to argue that Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism was based in part upon a chauvinistic misperception of the reasons for its growth lag, the eventual spread of the neo-liberal model to some degree *everywhere* was not just a result of a reciprocal, Continental misperception of the reasons for the slowing of their own growth rates after 1970. It also had to do with a general recognition that the Christian-Democrat and Social-Democrat models were, indeed, constraining profits, at least in larger countries, through the ever-increasing need to expand over-stretched government resources.

To what extent should one agree with Piketty overall? One can argue that his analysis is largely accurate (if somewhat historically foreshortened), but that his proposed remedies are woefully inadequate.

As to analysis, the key objection to Piketty is usually that the admitted tendency of capital (meaning abstract profit, not the red herring of ‘human capital’, etc.) to outrun production and engender increased inequality does not

matter, because of a long-term ‘trickle-down effect’ witnessed by the ‘great enrichment’ ever since 1800. This same objection claims that both the outrunning and the inequality were essential to this enrichment. And yet, Deirdre McCloskey, who has articulated this objection most decisively, herself admits that the great enrichment has *not* been due to capitalism: ‘Our riches were not made by piling brick upon brick ... or bank-balance upon bank-balance, but by piling idea upon idea’.³³ To say this is to say that our ‘wealth’ (however understood) has increased because of human ingenuity – though it is not correct to sunder intellectual from material human labour. Wealth has increased because of improvements in technology, medicine, transport and communication, besides the widening operation of commerce. If, indeed, capital has played a role in this, then this is not on account of the primarily speculative role of capital within capitalism, but because of its productive investment within a market system.

What is more, Piketty’s evidence that return on capital far less outran growth during the periods of war-time mass mobilisation, and their aftermaths, suggests that wealth has considerably increased when capital has been state-channelled (in diverse ways) in more productive directions, and relative equality has acted as a greater stimulation to labouring forces. McCloskey also ignores the evidence adduced by Piketty to the effect that the presence or absence of social democracy has made little difference to either inequality or the rate of increase of capital over growth, compared to that of mass warfare. This tends to negate any inflated claims for the crucial role of government non-interference in the market process.

The tragic success of war economies also helps to give the lie to the myth of trickle down. In reality, over the long term, and especially in our own day, this effect tends to slow or even go into reverse. Nor can a large equality gap be regarded with any complacency, because it can depress aspiration and produce increased relative poverty that is very genuine poverty, given a loss of social participation that can quickly result in real material need. Therefore, the slowing in relative peace-time of growth in relation to capital and the accompanying increase in unequal wealth cannot be just ahistorically written off in the name of the supposedly eternal and eventually benign tendencies of the capitalist market when ‘left to itself’. To the contrary, McCloskey is too confined by the liberal (and Marxist) idea that capitalism is primarily a system of production. But, to the contrary, as Burke saw, the more the right to make money by any means is ethically legitimated, the more one is unleashing speculation as a power of material as well as symbolic destruction. The long-term tendency of capitalism may then be towards not just increased inequality, but also economic stultification³⁴ and devastation of both cultural and natural ecological systems of interconnected and reciprocal balance.³⁵ How can McCloskey’s optimistic prognosis make sense in a world where

increasing numbers of migrants are prepared to risk death in order to escape ecological, economic and political horror in parts of the Near East and the Global South?

It is interesting that she claims, falsely, both that capitalism has always existed, and that the great enrichment was not owing to capitalism but to ideas engendered by *liberalism*. Yet we have already seen that, if capitalism was a liberal invention, then it is for this reason subject to the same sort of meta-critical contradiction as liberalism itself. This contradiction has to do with a fundamentally negative assumption of ontological violence and original evil. Given this assumption, liberalism will propose ways in which this negativity may be held at bay. Yet, since Machiavellian or Hobbesian fear- and greed-driven leaders remain in place after the forging of the social compact, all that liberalism can really propose is the monopolisation of fear and greed by an absolute sovereign power whose tendency will then be (as history has proved) to pursue mass warfare.³⁶ A kind of monopolisation, in fact, of the original right to murder in the state of nature, which Hobbes clearly affirms – and in such a way that his remedy for civil war eventually pays too high a price in terms of ever-increasing *international* violence, which ultimately perturbs the civil peace also. But equally, liberalism implicitly proposes an endemic entertaining by many of a ‘criminal’ tendency to escape the law’s monopoly. In this way, the normative liberal actor is a destroyer and is held back, but only for a time, by a concentration of destruction, of which capital monopoly is but one avatar. Therefore, productive ideas were rarely engendered by liberalism – scientific and technological inventiveness ascribes to no ‘liberal’ politics if it ascribes to any at all, while the creative artistic energies of romanticism, symbolism, modernism and the best post-modernism have often been allied to a critique of liberal nihilism.

As to remedies, Piketty suggests that international taxation upon capital could provide real stability between capital and labour in wealth creation, and seriously mitigate the structural tendency of capitalism towards inequality.³⁷ The simplicity of this solution involves too Ricardian a view of capitalist wealth as a kind of innocent mathematical sum, and ignores the contention of Marx and Polanyi that it always passes through the sieve of commodification before it can be ‘counted’ as wealth in capitalist terms at all. Capitalist wealth is never in material gross, but must always be priced as abstractly equivalent to other wealth, and so as exchangeable. For this reason, an anticipation of demand must enter into its very pricing. Yet, in order to increase, capitalist wealth must restrict labour costs, and therefore must saw away at the branch of demand, in terms of either reduced sales or lowered consumer prices, thereby diminishing the security of the very perch upon which its profits ultimately hang. Inversely, salary and wage earners cannot ultimately be indifferent to the profits of their employers, however far they are tempted

to eat into them. That is because they do not generally receive as payment a direct 'stake' in the capital and profits of the business they work for. Rather, as Marx argued, they receive a residue of the value of their labour, which is itself commodified as 'stock' in terms of the exchangeable wealth that average labour time can be calculated to generate.

AQ: Please check if the sentence that starts with "The exceeding..." reads correctly.

So by virtue of commodification, it is not only the case, as Piketty after Ricardo and Marx argues, that return on capital tends to overtake growth and, therefore, labour in the long term. It is also true, as Marx saw, that it can only do so aoretically. The exceeding by fixed and inheritable amounts of capital over the flux of growth that is produced by labour (including the increase allowed by the stored human work of technological innovation and improvement of land and property) is only possible in relation to active humans – workers of any kind, inhabitants of property or consumers of goods. For the gradual appropriation, storing and passing on of greater and greater fixed sums has to be at the expense of general income and consumption. Yet it cannot under any circumstances be completely indifferent to the ever-renewed dynamic realisation of these sums in the market. Hence Piketty's tendency of return on capital to increase over economic growth never transcends the cycles of contradiction and crisis, even if it does not inevitably succumb to them.

In consequence, excessive inequality and tax evasion by the rich threatens not just, as he says, eventual political rebellion, but also militant economic protest and pressure on corporations by governments to respond to this circumstance (as the revelations in the 'Panama Papers' demonstrate). In pursuit of his thesis that only war seriously tempers the long-term tendencies of capitalism, he somewhat glosses over the fact that trade union pressure and new welfare measures were already well in evidence in Germany, France and Britain before the First World War, even if the latter increased their instance exponentially.³⁸ Indeed, following Ernst Jünger one can suggest that worker organisation linked to state control and modern warfare are two manifestations of a single 'mass mobilisation', which, as Marx already realised, industrial capitalism itself encourages.³⁹ Thus, significantly, the German war effort sought at once to constrain and to co-opt already politically dominant socialist forces, and in this conjunction lay one crucial seed of 'national socialism'.

This observation can therefore correct a tendency in Piketty to regard twentieth-century mass wars as an accidental intrusion upon the perennial plot of capitalism that he wants to narrate. In reality, one can see that they were fought on both sides in extension of capitalist-statist aims and, yet, on the German side also in a state nationalist and collectivist reaction against those aims in their individualising and globalising tendencies: a reaction that the more democratic nations had rightly to resist, twice over. Such an analysis should today warn us against a renewed, semi-fascistic possibility

of a 'mass mobilising', atavistic counter to late capitalism – albeit one more based on a 'citizen' rather than 'worker solidarity' in an era of disorganised, post-industrial capitalism. This new mobilisation, as evidenced in the rapid resurgence of semi-fascist parties across Europe, could once more lead eventually to various modes of conflict, themselves of an unpredictable, post-industrial kind.

4. CAPITALISM'S SUPPRESSION OF THE MARKET

Piketty's strong emphasis on historical contingencies as impacting on economic growth needs to be yet further augmented in the face of his even stronger and countervailing stress on constant capitalist laws and tendencies. For his contingencies tend to be extra-economic: war, culture, political fashion. All this is to be admitted, yet one also needs to acknowledge a greater measure of intra-economic contingency. Here Piketty appears never to distinguish capitalism from the economic as such and different modes of market economy, a lack much encouraged by his flattening, Cartesian approach. This reduces class to incremental centimes for the sake of measurement, thereby ignoring the economic impacts of a culturally and consciously constituted group, capable of acting collectively and, thereby, making a real difference.⁴⁰ Equally, this approach sees a constancy of the proportion of 'capital' wealth from pre-modern to modern times, without allowing for the often less absolute and less extracted nature of ancient and medieval ownership and the way it was conditionally attached to functions and duties, which involved a certain greater, not readily measurable, sharing out of this wealth, after all.⁴¹

However reprehensible it was in many ways, there is an evident difference in this respect, as Marx saw, between the role of a 'feudal' proprietor and a modern absentee owner of a vast house in London and grouse moor in the Scottish borders today. Piketty does, indeed, acknowledge, citing Michael Young, that modern meritocrats assume yet more judicial and cultural control in consequence of their social position than did the nineteenth-century gentry of Jane Austen or Honoré de Balzac. They despise much more the indigent and poor, since this status is now regarded as 'their fault', rather than as an accident of birth.⁴² However, one needs to add that, traditionally, disparity of wealth *also* appeared more acceptable because ownership was correlated with high levels of humanist education and with the exercise of duty, honour and protection by law and arms of the property, work and status of the less well-off.

Equally important is the further point that recruitment from below by talent, honour and prowess into the upper and governmental classes or into their patronage was most certainly important from the time of ancient Rome through medieval knighthood to the early modern monarchic or aristocratic

civil service – also remembering here that the clerical hierarchy of the Church was yet more meritocratically based. Given all this, the real point of contrast is not the old inequality of legacy *versus* the modern inequality of supposedly pure merit. Rather, it is a matter of contrast of older *guardianship* exercised (at least in theory) according to social duty, with modern status disjoined altogether from honourable responsibility. Moreover, modern status itself has often been acquired in semi-dishonourable ways. The transition from status to contract has a dark side that today grows ever darker.

If it is allowed that the laws of capital are not the laws of the economic or even of the market as such, then we can see more clearly, in modification of Piketty, capitalism's chronic instability, and, therefore, not only the contingent role of social and political responses to this crisis-ridden flux, but also the never-banished haunting of capitalism by other economic possibilities. Such a haunting has more than spectral effects in the socio-economic realm. Thus in recent Western history we can recognise, with Piketty, not just the chauvinistic and economically false factor in the rise of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism, which was a political contingency. In addition, we can also acknowledge the defeat through law and propaganda of militant trade unionism in the 1970s. Herein is found a socio-economic contingency that we can put alongside the failures of Anglo-Saxon management, government development and investment strategy in the same period.⁴³ It then doubly follows, in accentuation of Piketty's perspective, that even though the laws of capitalism may be constant, and constantly non-ameliorative for most people (in default of technologically powered growth), that the eventual post-war return to their rule was not in any way fated. A more realistic assessment of the temporally slower British growth might have been made, and the post-war social *concordat* could have been renewed in more social market terms. Looking to the British shaping of the post-war German approach in the Rhineland,⁴⁴ many voices recommended this, including the possibility of offering trade unions more partnership, managers and shareholders more responsibility and workers more training and a greater stake in both their work and their firms.

When it comes to the recent situation, there is nothing inevitable about it either. We have already seen how the new power of inheritance is not simply a return to the more normative conditions of the nineteenth-century in the wake of mass war, but is also the result of misplaced Anglo-Saxon pride and the defeat of both labour-power and worker self-organisation, as well as establishment refusal to consider even modifications to the operation of the capitalist market. More recently, the newly increased stratification of capital ownership (both property and equity) has been joined and multiplied by the huge increase in income disparity. But again, the causes of this are economically, culturally and politically contingent. The fall of communism in Eastern Europe and its transmutation into an oligarchic hybrid in Russia

and China left capitalism without a feared ideological rival and removed any need to pander to those who might be attracted by socialism in the face of capitalist predations.⁴⁵ This in part allowed a new ideology of capitalist self-legitimation to grow and flourish.

Extremist meritocracy, exacerbated into a kind of generalised Hollywood star-cult, now meant that a culture supposedly based on ability must award extreme ability extremely much. Meanwhile, high salaries were taken to be the automatic result of education and applied talent in a self-confirming circle. In reality, international comparisons show that the much higher disparities of income in Anglo-Saxon countries can by no means be correlated with factors of merit. Once again it would seem that Anglo-Saxondom is in the grip of a dangerous cultural fantasy.⁴⁶ Dangerous because it is economically lethal: it was excessive levels of inequality that led to the speculative exploitation of the desperate by the extremely wealthy in the sub-prime crisis, and so to a global economic recession.

As we have already argued, the new compounding of inherited by earned economic disparity is generating a new aristocracy shorn of all vestiges of chivalry and honour. To some degree, this new aristocracy is in direct continuity with older ones of *ancien régime* bastard feudalism and nineteenth-century quasi-feudal industrialism. In this light, metropolitan meritocracy is the ruse of the landed and capitalised in an era of mass democracy and liberal rights. For now power must justify itself before the bar of competition, but much evidence would suggest that 'merit' can also be bought through inherited and accumulated advantage. The wealthy enjoy greater access to education and the power to grant legitimacy to their own modes of culture, while profitably palming off the populace with a debased mass variety. In either case, culture gets commodified and is, thereby, divorced from substantial social action and virtue.

This new cultural ideology and practice of a vacuous elite has combined with the contingent, if capitalistically logical, recourse to financialisation in order to compensate for both deficiency of profit and lack of demand. It has equally combined with the political underwriting of this recourse in terms of bank rescues and programmes of austerity for everyone else. Such a strategy can only further compound inequality and its consequent economic and social implications. As an alternative to austerity, it would indeed be logical, as Piketty recommends, to tax capital at a one-off high level, since the rich could readily afford to wipe out all our debts, which are moreover often internal rather than external – that is to say, debts of the populace to their *very own* rich. To the degree that capital is now international and would readily find means to evade such measures, then, as Piketty also suggests, we need an internationally enforced capital gains tax. Yet here he is rightly pessimistic – even if such a measure might be approached gradually through transregional

action by bodies like the European Union, who would enforce it, and who would successfully police the inevitable attempts at evasion? How, in any case, one might add, could this escape the sieving of capitalist wealth by commodification, such that all such taxes would perforce be either too great, discouraging enterprise, or too little and, therefore, not sufficiently inhibiting either inequality or the decline of demand?

Instead, in lieu of massive inflation or debt forgiveness by monetising some government debt (which may come in the end, since the stock of national debt looks too large ever to be significantly reduced), we are stuck with austerity. While fiscal discipline is ethically and economically important, austerity has rendered people yet more reliant on credit. Cutting public spending might have reduced budget deficits, but by slashing capital investment and local expenditure, it has depressed aggregate demand and national output, adding to the total burden of aggregated public debt, including long-term state indebtedness.⁴⁷ By contrast, austerity has done nothing to address the structural problems of many Western economies, such as low wages, low innovation, low productivity and low growth. While central bureaucracy has sometimes undermined both a vibrant market economy and civil society, strategic state investment in, and tax-relief for, infrastructural projects, research and manufacturing is indispensable for genuine and sustained production, which alone can reduce debt permanently.

5. CAPITALISM AS POLITICS

We have seen how contemporary late capitalism now manifests a kind of metacrisis that seems more to do with the difficulties of sustaining abstract growth as such – a growth for which any sum, even one extracted from material destruction rather than production, counts as ‘gain’. Unlike a normal economy that binds material value to symbolic meaning, the capitalist double movement of abstraction and materialisation tends to separate matter from meaning and reduce materiality to calculable numbers representing ‘wealth’.⁴⁸ Such a conception of wealth rests on the aggregation of abstract numbers that cuts out all the relational goods and the ‘commons’ on which shared prosperity depends.⁴⁹

These difficulties are by no means new, but they do seem now to have surfaced to an unprecedented degree. Quite plausibly, they have not so much to do with the ‘internal’ contradiction of capitalism (i.e. its need at once to extract profit from the worker-consumer, and yet ensure that she can go on consuming) as with the contradictions that inevitably ensue upon the setting of capitalist practice within an extra-capitalist margin that both precedes it and continues to accompany it. This margin is complex and various: it

includes uncapitalised economies, besides the social, cultural, political and international relations spheres, insofar as these remain external to a purely capitalist logic.⁵⁰ In a globalised post-traditional world that yet remains fraught with political and religious rivalries, where increasingly deskilled and deprofessionalised workers are seduced by leisure and spectacle, a global rate of growth may prove harder to sustain.

What new spheres are to be found to capitalise? How are political and religious passions to be quelled in favour of supposedly 'economic' ones? How is one to re-motivate working populations long depressed by poor pay, welfare reliance and quiescent passivity in the face of mass entertainment? Equally, how can one expect the oligarchic profiteers of neo-liberalism to suddenly change their habits and forego their privileges, even if a strictly objective capitalist logic might suggest that they need now to boost sustainable demand sacrificially if they are to guarantee a steadier long-term profit rate for themselves? A class and political power preference for financialisation can readily emerge, in defiance of even capitalist economic logic, which would remind the wealthy that capital in its inherent need for dynamism requires some increase of labour-power and demand if it is to be able to extract yet further value from it.

But the driving force of capitalism is ultimately as much or more political as it is economic.⁵¹ That is, it tends indeed to engender a class struggle between a few large owners-cum-power-brokers and the mass of petty owners, workers and consumers (including the middle classes) – however much this struggle and the lines of class division may constantly mutate. Therefore, today's growth of the super-rich cannot be met in merely 'rational-economic' terms. These people are not about to renounce their privileged interests to which they have become all too well accustomed, in the name of economic good sense. To the contrary, they now represent one side of an entrenched politico-economic culture, an ethos, to which they are so emotionally, not to say narcissistically, attached that this cultural allegiance has become an economic factor in itself, even if it is also an extra-economic one.

The other side of this culture is an extended and novel proletarianisation of most people, proceeding often under the apparently opposite guise of the bourgeoisification of the upper working class.⁵² This novel proletarianisation means the resignation of most people to a modicum of comfort and passive diversion, alongside routinised and uncreative work, married to increasingly poor social prospects and aspirations. All this has the effect of corroding character and undermining older virtues of craftsmanship and striving for excellence allied to ethos, while both manual workers and new professionals are haunted by the spectre of uselessness.⁵³

Given all this, financialisation is a logical response to the metacrisis that it, nonetheless, increases, for deeper cultural reasons than are usually seen,

besides the structurally economic ones. It has proved easier for the ‘new men’ of our times to offer the mass of people easy credit than to re-skill them or induct them into vocational commitment more likely to result in productive hard work and innovation.⁵⁴ Equally, it is easier to do this than to offer higher wages with expectation of increase that would encourage family solidarity, time spent by parents with children and a greater sustainability of familial relationships. For to do so would both eat into the easy extraction of surplus value through depressed wages and popular consumption of shoddy goods, and threaten the equality gulf upon which today a very dominant and ruthless few rest their sense of prestige and self-recognition. It would also tend to undermine the foundations of the reigning ideology of ‘meritocratic extremism’, which confuses merit with monetary return and even skill in monetary manipulation with the luck of the draw.

Within the older, normal cyclical operation of capitalism, the need for ever-greater return worked in antithesis to demand, alternatively against and for it, and likewise, inversely, the level of normal citizens’ income in relation to profit extraction. Today, on the contrary, a shared interest in endless credit expansion apparently binds ordinary citizens’ interests together with those of the super-rich, such that lack of real demand and deficiency of truly productive investment in the material economy are *positively* related through the demonic compact of debt. This is the case even though the interest of ordinary citizens is increasingly in bare survival, while the interest of the super-rich is in ever-further monopolisation of wealth and power. But this new positive bond of (erstwhile dialectically opposed though also positively connected) requisites for demand and profit does not betoken any shared positive *content* of the bond. On the contrary, since the bond is debt (with this fact itself contradicting at a meta-level the usual apposition of the debt of some to the assets of others), its content is negative: a new devil’s bargain to cement together, by a mutually repellent glue, a lack of solidly wage- and asset-based demand with an equal lack of real, concrete investment opportunity.

Capitalism’s founding amorality, aiming magically to distil public benefits out of private vice, was, indeed, a Faustian gesture.⁵⁵ But the sampling of the new elixir of financialisation represents a desertion of even its own amoral god of the extraction of abstract wealth by appropriation and division of the real material body of the earth. For this new elixir is proffered by a Mephistophelean sub-demon who whispers in the ears of financial magi that abstraction might perpetually be made merely from the already abstract – making yet more money out of money. Then the whole new order of the market and society is legally and politically underwritten by the third corner of this viciously negative, virtual triangle.⁵⁶ That third corner is the state, whose own increased indebtedness (in the face of a falling tax revenue from threatened rates of profit and an increased welfare bill to shore up a precarious

populace) confirms and legitimates that of the other two. Meanwhile, greater state debt also further exacerbates inequality, since government debt is upheld by wealthy bond-purchasers and benefits them alone.⁵⁷ And only this vicious triangle allows a vicious circle to be constantly re-inscribed around it.

6. SYMBOL, MATTER AND ABSTRACTION

We have seen that liberal capitalism does not represent the logic of the economic as such, but, rather, one particular economic system that acts out certain theoretical assumptions, peculiar to liberalism. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, these are threefold: the division of cultural symbolic reality into pure abstraction and pure materiality; the assumption that the well-being of any corporation, even an economic one, takes second place to the self-interest of the individuals who compose it; the view that human beings are basically self-seeking animals whose greedy competition for scarce resources can only be coordinated by fusing the invisible hand of the market with the visible hand of the state. Although financialisation drives the capitalist system to a new pitch of intensity, this occurs precisely through an exacerbation of liberal economic principles and a purer adherence to their implicit logic. They now demand further interrogation, but with specific respect to the way in which they tend to contradict, *not* dialectically, as for Marx, their own capitalist premises, but, rather, perversely the imperatives of human economy and exchange as such.

First, the dominance of abstraction is rooted in the tearing of culturally material things apart into a sign-aspect, on the one hand, and an object-aspect, on the other. This is unnatural, because the house I live in, for example, affords me at once material shelter and emotional significance. We naturally see everything in this integrated way. Yet our inherited capitalism depends for its very operation upon the sundering of thing from sign. Thus material things without meaning can be treated always as objects to be manipulated. When the land itself is treated like this, the surface of the earth threatens to become as naturally desolate as it is culturally desecrated. Marx failed to grasp this most crucial aspect of capitalist logic, because it is invisible to materialist, as opposed to realist premises (which unite matter to meaning via form, deemed to be an 'ideal' ingredient of any reality, as with Aristotle). The very idea of matter as a meaningless base is *produced* by liberal capitalist understanding, within whose remit Marx therefore remains.

Equally, when human beings are reduced to bodies without souls, they can be regarded as simply sources of labour supply. Even money itself, as Polanyi realised, in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, is treated over-abstractly.⁵⁸ Instead of being regarded as an instrument of exchange that measures

economic comparative value in accord with moral value, it is usuriously seen as something one should try to accumulate in its own right, and as something that can be validly bought and sold and so used to constrain people's natural freedom of choice. In this way, genuine meaning floats off into the ether of sheer quantification, while material reality is cruelly wrenched away from all affective attachments.

However, if globalisation encourages this nomadic abstraction, it also increases the way in which abstraction must in the end relate back to the real material economy. For if you live on one globe, there is eventually nowhere to hide, and over time even offshore tax havens afford no real refuge. Since we are embodied creatures, disembodied capital must in the end be securitised against material resources. Otherwise, we have no way finally to guarantee its value, without which it loses its purpose.

This scenario cannot, however, be read in over-optimistic terms of an inevitable collapse of the virtual into the 'real' material world, or as the revenge, after all, of modern foundations over post-modern delusion. This is the temptation of a certain simplistic Marxist materialism. Rather, it is the case that bare materiality is merely the reflex of the enterprise of pure abstraction: once sacred symbolic value has been transmuted into exchange value, things stand naked to offer themselves only as the crudest, most detached sort of use values. Quite simply, they become mere resources to be exploited for the extraction of further abstract value by whomsoever. Thus abstraction takes the lead and this concomitant mode of 'materialisation' is, indeed, but a reverse consequence of its process, although it is a consequence that always takes immediate effect and is clearly the negative aspect of abstraction's very possibility. This fact is starkly advertised in the moment of primitive accumulation, or the original bringing of things and people within the orbit of commodification. It marks a moment that not only stands at the outset but must later on be repeatedly resorted to for the enabling of capitalist increase, and today often takes the form of outright criminal seizure – whether in the Arctic, the Amazon or Siberia.

Therefore, current securitisation on bare material resources is well symbolised by the ever-further reduction of dwelling-space, which is a fundamental human need, to the nakedness of 'property' and 'retail estate'. Although it serves to anchor pure abstraction, it does not really escape it, but only makes further entries in its shadow-ledger of materialisation. These entries further appear to dissolve solid entities of resource and production into the ink of abstraction. Yet they can never be entirely written off in their concretion, and the more they are written up, the more they are released into sheerly insignificant corporeality. Nevertheless, the very reflex condition of ecological dereliction serves, and can be made to further serve, the primary drift to abstract accumulation of nominal wealth.

So recourse to material securitisation betokens no imminent collapse of the current system, which will no doubt treat even exponentially increased ecological hazard as an opportunity for an unprecedented speculative bonanza. Equally, every return to matter in order to find a fixable measure for monetary conjecture can only be temporary, since this very recourse must simultaneously evaporate the ground on which it temporarily treads. It is only human beings and not fate that can dissolve this spiral, if they should eventually tire of economic insecurity, cultural alienation and homelessness amidst nature.

Materialisation or 'spatialisation' is consequently exacerbated the more land as productive resource becomes less economically important than the sheerly instrumental fixed capital of landed plant, and the sheer abstraction of liquid capital as profit or return on financial loans. This tendency, unlike the tendency of return on capital to outrun growth demonstrated by Piketty, does, indeed, transcend the sieving of wealth by commodification. For the impersonal bent of capitalism as a process is thereby sustained and further compounded by the cultural-economic interests of a capitalist class increasingly devoted to pure financial abstraction through the destruction of concrete and symbolic value, which yields newly astronomical returns of profit and salary, less and less reined in by the requirement of material equivalence.

In consequence, one also gets the increased instances of the capitalist phenomenon of *simultaneous* over-production and under-provision (as de Sismondi noted before Marx).⁵⁹ For example, rotting stocks of food, and yet a starving populace, or less dramatically but more immediately, farmers and supermarkets in the West throwing away large amounts of food on the one hand, yet ever-greater numbers of food stamps and food banks on the other, or a growing stock of unoccupied houses owned by the super-rich and an increasing number of families priced out of the property market because of an apparent lack of supply.

But, of course, this process of abstract-material divergence, of the sundering of the bond between the symbolic and the real, goes clean against the instincts and ritual orderings of most human cultures. And although it is the condition of possibility for commodification, it cannot itself escape the contradictory logic of the commodifying process, which it allows and unleashes. The drift to abstraction is, nonetheless, constitutively linear rather than cyclical, and the more it is augmented, the more it seeks to ignore cyclical constraints (as it does to a new degree today). However, in the end it cannot evade the need for abstraction to be materially realised and measured, and so for the rate of return to answer, after all, to the rate of demand. Arithmetic numbers that pile up to infinity cannot be assessed or fixed as to ownership and liability, except by some ultimate tie to geometrically leached, yet still actual and concrete, material space.

Here one can say that a required bare reference of the abstracted arithmetic (monetary) sign to the denuded, meaningless, geometrised earth is the negative tribute that capitalism must perform pay to the integral symbolic truth of culture that it most denies. Even a monetary sign must make some minimal referential indication if it is to make minimal sense. And, inversely, material space, however leached, must be accorded some ideal significance in order to figure culturally at all. Moreover, in an unnaturally divorced, symbol-cleaving system of logic, the bias ultimately runs into the ground, even if abstraction appears to dominate aerially. Thus, within capitalism, mostly matter is mediated by abstract value, but for value itself to retain any finally measurable value whatsoever, it must ultimately be referred to the gold-standard of matter. Thus the value of the finest refinement in the end consists in the crudest dominion, the rawest occupation of terrain.

Herein, as we have already suggested, lies the hidden logic of the sub-prime crisis. It was not simply that finance capital found a bizarre new way to exploit even indigency by the bundling together, selling on and speculative hedging of mortgage debts. It was also that in extreme crisis, finance capital *needed* to do this sort of thing. Unrealisable, unplaceable and immeasurable abstraction must in the end anchor itself in matter. And logically it does so in the most barely reduced material sphere, which is the most measurably geometric as least contaminated by either symbolic resonance or abstract sign. This category certainly includes supposedly 'naked' natural assets, regarded purely from the perspective of appropriation, but so far un-appropriated. But it also includes the bare property of the poor or relatively poor, which is their minimal living space that they rarely ever own outright.

This claim may seem strange, because in the end housing was dragged into the world of extreme abstract speculation, compounding its lack of ascertainable measure, and thereby pulling the real material misery of millions in its wake. Yet the converse also remained true initially: a new ultimate launch pad for unlimited leverage became possible because the ultimate equity was so completely concrete. Just because it was really concrete, its abstract substitutes could be treated by all *as if* they were concrete: financiers were seduced by their own cathecting dream-illusions. Yet, paradoxically, a newly uncontrolled fantasy of the ultimate anchoring of the abstract in the concrete was possible because there really was an anchor in the end, however rusted and buried in the sand.

To summarise, capitalism tends by a linear drift to let abstraction and spatialisation pull away from each other in such a way that the two complicitous processes, nonetheless, cannot any longer be readily correlated. This circumstance translates into an increased difficulty of alternating, as already discussed, between a boost of the rate of return on the one hand, and a boost

of consumer demand on the other, in cyclical succession. In consequence, one gets, as today, a simultaneous crisis of both the level of demand and the rate of capital return. Yet, because correlation remains inescapable, and the transcendental straight vector of abstraction-spatialisation must still take a constant detour through the cycle of contradiction, correlation then takes an extreme form. Now, the most remote degree of abstraction must somehow be linked and referred to the barest instance of materiality. The high must meet the low, the richest the poorest, in a kind of perverse economic coincidence of opposites. This necessity is more generally exemplified by the remote anchoring and yet unmooring of abstract capital in seed patents, the ecosystem, third-world debt, child exploitation and welfare dependency for an increasing number.

7. THE ESSENTIAL FIRM

If our current economic system divides sign from thing, it also, in the second place, tries to divide the individual from the group. But there are limits to this trajectory also. After all, even bankers do not operate as lone rangers, but within firms. Why also firms and not just markets? Neo-classical economics was simply about markets: it concerned market equilibrium and the idea that markets automatically record exact information. But today, alternative traditions of economics are once more coming to the fore, which recognise that no system is stable in the long run, that (in reverse of the invisible hand) rational individual acting can sometimes produce irrational general results, and that the feedback of market information often arrives too late for the benefit of the individual speculator.⁶⁰

This is where the role of the firm comes into play. People have to get together and cooperate under both horizontal and hierarchical consensual norms, precisely because, within a firm, they can create for themselves a niche market that becomes relatively predictable and that supplies reasonably reliable information in sufficient time. Most economic activity operates in this institutional space and not through patterns of exchangeist negotiation. As the Italian economists Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni put it, ‘we work far more than we shop’.⁶¹

Yet, despite recognising the necessity of collaboration, economics for a while tried perversely to understand even the firm in individualistic terms. This encouraged an appeal to ‘public choice theory’, with its roots in the work of Enlightenment figures like Condorcet, and advocacy by influential economists like Kenneth Arrow and Amartya Sen in recent times. In Britain, ‘public choice theory’ helped shape New Labour’s political economy and has been applied to governmental as well as private organisations.

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For the crudest version of this theory, employees and civil servants remain utility-maximising creatures whose main aim is to cream off benefits of prestige and wealth for themselves. But even in the subtler variants, individual actors are seen as trying to realise their own goals in accordance with their own diverse capacities. This rules out any objective shared ends.⁶² In consequence, firms cannot trust their employees, giving rise to our current culture of targets, incentives, bonuses and the endless employment of new employees to check up on other employees. Ultimately, the workforce is reduced to a series of isolated automatons who have to follow rules and procedures rather than exercising substantive judgement about their actions and outcomes. The compliance culture and the system of surveillance have led to a situation where individuals, indeed, start to pursue their own narrow self-interest instead of acting in the firm's best interest, while serving equally as scapegoats for the top management.⁶³

At the same time, an anti-corporatist theoretical individualism itself reflects the increased individualism in practice of 'disorganised capitalism' or 'neo-capitalism' ever since the 1970s. In this model, partly encouraged by new technologies and partly by a reinforcement of the inherently individualist logic of capitalism itself, an older managerialist 'Fordist' model of production has been replaced to a considerable degree by outsourcing from central to satellite companies and networking between apparently more independent individuals and parties. Yet, in reality, this has disguised an ever-increased agglomeration and dominance of monopolistic firms, often at the global level, and often in the same mega-civic sites – as today in London, supremely. Their attraction of such enterprise has more to do with the money to be made from the spectacle of being seen to be in the right fashionable place than with any supposed creative benefit of huddling together. (In reality – to contradict current vogues – creative people need isolated peace and quiet as much as they need the stimulation of contact and teamwork.) The apparent but actually superficial disaggregation itself permits a greater control by a centre whose power benefits from the very fluidity and evanescent nature of its parts.⁶⁴

Equally, the preponderance of 'networking' ensures that a contractualist logic, fundamental to capitalism, increasingly operates at the intra-firm as well as at the inter-firm level. Often, this applies in such a fashion that seeming interactions at the latter level are in reality covertly manipulated interactions within the former, as for example with outsourcing, trading with subsidiaries or squeezing suppliers. And the supposedly greater scope for individual initiative that the new system seems both to encourage and to thrive upon is to a degree but another screen of delusion: for, in reality, what drives the system, and what it benefits from, is the attraction of the mere rhetoric of enterprise, and the mere trappings of difference to the various players within the system. Their greater energy and cooperation is recruited (as compared with Fordism)

to the degree that they are manipulated through the enjoyment of apparently increased choice within an always severely restricted range of options. These are more like ‘shopping selections’ than genuine opportunities for creativity – spectacular branding as opposed to genuine innovation and competition in terms of quality and ethos. In this way, the disorganisation of capitalism, by reducing the *esprit de corps* of the more organised firm, decreases trust and security and reduces even productive decisions to simulacra of consumer choices. In consequence, a capacity to innovate, which capitalism itself would seem to require, is in some measure compromised.

And yet this may only be a seeming. For the ultimate interest of capitalism lies not in the promotion of labour, or of all and every mode of human creativity. This is true despite the fact that it is only labour, in one guise or another, that can produce any sort of wealth, including capitalist wealth. It is, instead, in the creaming off of abstract wealth by owners of capital, however few or many. And this is perfectly compatible with the inhibition of human talent and creativity, the production of shoddy goods and even low standards of material infrastructure, food and clothing – as one sees so clearly in the most capitalist of countries, which is the United States.

Therefore an individualistic bias in both theory and practice is actually inimical to a genuinely free market, as opposed to a capitalist one. A culture of pervasive mistrust inevitably inhibits those qualities of initiative, risk and creativity on which competitive enterprise depends. Moreover, one can argue that an overly ‘liquid’ capital, which moves so fast that it can be increasingly indifferent to local limitations, is just as subject to the loss of ‘tacit knowledge’ only available at the local level, as Hayek argued was the case for central state planning.⁶⁵ If, for example, a speeded-up economy requires that people frequently change jobs, which now become so automated (in every respect) that they are not difficult to move in and out of, it will pay the price of losing that patient slowness that real creative innovation and prudential skill require.

Even capitalist wealth creation must deploy this patience in some degree, yet it can relatively easily dispense with the genuine conditions for excellent work, or just make instrumental concessions in certain areas and at certain times to ‘social benefit’, but always in the compromised interests of abstract accumulation, which will resort to short-cuts when it can. Capitalism as such has no permanent interest in seeing socially good business practice prevail over bad. However, the productive and exchanging economy, as more fundamental than one that is one-sidedly yoked to the concerns of capital, does have such an interest. The economic in the most basic sense, as the production and exchange of real wealth, is, indeed, contradicted by any inhibition of creative labour. Hence, while capitalism’s tendency to this inhibition is not

a contradiction within capitalism, it does place capitalism in contradiction to the economic as such and to a market economy in its purest sense.

Therefore the restoration of trust, the re-localisation of the economy, and the use of 'lighter' technology to empower individuals and small groups, rather than to render them evermore replaceable (a kind of alternative disaggregation to that of post-Fordist disorganisation), is actually in line with the logic of a free market, though not with that of capitalism. These things are also desirable in more properly social terms, and it is impossible to gain the sheer economic benefit without also gaining (or re-gaining) the social benefit. It is just this ethical sincerity for inherently ethical reasons, despite its additional pragmatic usefulness, that tends to prove beyond capitalism's remit.

So at a new dialectical limit, the market economy requires some re-embedding in a genuine social ethos for market economic reasons, even though this re-embedding will paradoxically tend to remove the very idea of such 'purely economic' reasons, which belong to a capitalist disembedding that needs to be overcome. But the proviso must be added that nothing dictates that even good economic logic will be followed: the swiftness of late modern capitalism has an enormous momentum that establishes a habit which can often survive the evidence of its economic insanity. The United States well illustrates the inertia of an extreme capitalist system: it survives and dominates despite the fact that it tends to quash local enterprise in favour of sluggish monopoly and engenders much material squalor and absence of real quality and choice, even for the possessors of moderate wealth.⁶⁶ As we have already suggested, the current recovery merely reinforces this tendency and exacerbates the twin crises of economics and ethics.

8. RESTORING THE PRIMACY OF THE SOCIAL

Modern economists claim that human beings must accept resource scarcity, especially in conditions of population growth. However, resources, as we have already argued, are only ever scarce in the short term. Over time, it is arguably the case that nature combined with human labour, ingenuity and creative production can generate an almost infinite flow of finite resources that help mankind meet real, objective needs and provide universal basic goods – food, shelter, health, education, friendship. Scarcity is nearly always something artificially engineered by both monopoly capital and the fabrication of fake desires. Indeed, cartels and monopolies generate rents that accrue to the few while restricting genuinely free and fair competition that can help generate prosperity for the many.

The myth of scarce resources ultimately rests on a perverse moral philosophy that we owe to Thomas Malthus. Surveying the deprivation and struggle of the poor from the comfort of his vicarage in the late eighteenth century, he denounced what he saw as the greed of a ‘reckless rabble’. That is why he attributed human vice to ‘the constant pressure on man from the difficulty of subsistence’,⁶⁷ which is exacerbated by growing populations – hence the modern, neo-Malthusian tendency to control reproduction through state intervention and market incentives. Thus Malthus presented a vision of ‘man as he really is, inert, sluggish and averse from labour unless compelled by necessity’.⁶⁸

So not, after all, so unlike Bernard de Mandeville before him, Malthus claimed that humans are naturally immoral and that, paradoxically, ‘moral evil is absolutely necessary to the production of moral excellence’ – another variant of the liberal logic of pessimism and necessity.⁶⁹ But where the libidinalised Huguenot Mandeville was content to see vice flourish to the end of common benefit, the prurient Low Church Anglican clergyman Malthus wished to promote a bourgeois version of heroic virtue in reaction to the spur of natural and moral evil. This spur was, above all, that of scarcity of resources, which was supposed to teach by fearful example the puritanical need for thrift, self-discipline and sexual continence. It is partly in consequence of this dual Calvinistic legacy of double predestination to both the festively diabolic and the dismally divine that the modern economy must demand at once an unnaturally excessive hedonism and yet a tight restraint of all our natural desires.⁷⁰

So what is in question is human nature. Like liberal political thought, modern economics assumes that mankind is fundamentally selfish and indifferent to mutual recognition or the public good, even if Mandevillian vice can be tempered by the pursuit of rational self-interest. Adam Smith, indeed, embedded his market in networks of social sympathy, but this embedding was limited by a double distrust. First, in the human ability to extend virtue beyond the ‘thick ties’ of family relations and friendship,⁷¹ and second, in human association, which Smith claims nearly always leads to the vice of corruption.⁷² For Smith, both markets and states ought to be amoral and neutral because only the pursuit of individual self-interest – without regard to the well-being of our butcher, brewer and baker, or they for us – can produce social benefit.⁷³

It is therefore little surprise that post-Smithian economics no longer locates the market within the realm of civil society or the moral virtues of civic life. Yet ethically construed markets may be also economically more profitable and socially more sustainable. A ‘civil economy’ model, which advocates this ethical inherence, is the only genuine alternative to the pessimism in modern economics about either individual or social motivations. The roots of this

model go back to the Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance, but it was explicitly articulated in the later Neapolitan Enlightenment by Smith's near contemporary, Antonio Genovesi.⁷⁴ The next chapter sets out a post-liberal alternative to liberal capitalism that renews the 'civil economy' tradition.

NOTES

1. Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Random, 1910), I, 9.
2. John Kay, *Other People's Money: Masters of the Universe or Servants of the People?* (London: Profile, 2015), 80–140.
3. We first developed this idea in an article entitled 'The Meta-crisis of Secular Capitalism', *International Review of Economics* 62:3 (2015): 197–212, on which this chapter draws.
4. Michael Lewis, *Flash Boys: A Wall Street Revolt* (New York: Norton, 2014); Nicholas Shaxson, *Treasure Islands: Tax Havens and the Men who Stole the World* (London: Vintage, 2012); Stephen Platt, *Criminal Capital: How the Finance Industry Facilitates Crime* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015).
5. Will Hutton, *How Good We Can Be: Ending the Mercenary Society and Building a Great Country* (London: Little Brown, 2015), 49–89.
6. John Lanchester, *Whoops! Why Everyone Owes Everyone and No One Can Pay* (London: Penguin, 2010).
7. Thomas Piketty, *Le capital au XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 662–65.
8. Tristan Garcia, *Form and Objects: A Treatise on Things*, trans. Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1914), 303–30.
9. Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
10. Karl Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi*, ed. George Dalton (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), esp. 'Aristotle Discovers the Economy', 78–115.
11. Seneca, 'On Benefits', in *Moral Essays III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), xvii–xviii, 158–59.
12. Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', *Past & Present*, 70 (1976): 30–74; *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003), 3–37; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002), 95–146.
13. Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).
14. Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
15. Colin Crouch, 'Privatised Keynesianism: An Unacknowledged Policy Regime', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 11:3 (2009): 382–99; Jacob

S. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

16. Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1976), 3–37.
17. Marcel Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité: le don, l'argent, la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 51–80.
18. R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), 79–132.
19. John Neville Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 1–115; Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
20. Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
21. Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984), 147.
22. J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196.
23. Burke, *Reflections*, 126. See also 260, where Burke notes the late repetition in France of English Protestant history: 'The long parliament confiscated the lands of deans and chapters in England on the same ideas upon which your assembly set to sale the lands of the monastic orders'.
24. 'If this monster of a constitution can continue, France will be wholly governed by the agitators in corporations, by societies in the towns formed of directors of *assignats* and trustees for the sale of church lands, attornies, agents, money-jobbers, speculators and adventures, composing an ignoble oligarchy founded on the destruction of the crown, the church, the nobility and the people. Here end all deceitful dreams and visions of the equality and rights of men', *Reflections*, 313. Pocock notes that if, in an imaginary conversation, Marx were to say to Burke that he had overlooked the rise of the middle class and of a new capitalist system of production, then Burke could reply that, to the contrary, it is Marx who has overlooked the more primary and inherently destructive role of speculation in the capitalist process.
25. Piketty, *Le capital*, 505–10.
26. *Ibid.*, 47–57, 206–16, 259–74, 368–70, 468–71, 500–5, 596–99, 642–65, 701–14, 740–44, 941–50.
27. *Ibid.*, 216–38, 270–74.
28. *Ibid.*, 53–57, 78–99, 259–70.
29. In contrast to Marx, Piketty argues that these returns must themselves be expanded beyond merely profit to include rates, royalties, loans, re-investments in firms and the added value of new economic and social opportunities for intervention and commodification. *Ibid.*, 19–34, 50–57.
30. *Ibid.*, 47–50, 176–79, 214–16, 270–74, 360–70, 529–35, 596–99, 608–13, 701–8; Thomas Piketty, 'Interview: Dynamics of Inequality', *New Left Review*, 85 (January/February 2014), 107–8.
31. Piketty, 'Interview', 103–16.

32. Piketty, *Le capital*, 355–58.
33. D.N. McCloskey, ‘Measured, Unmeasured, Mismeasured and Unjustified Pessimism: A Review Essay of Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*’, *Erasmus Journal of Philosophy*, 7:2 (2014): 73–115, quote 106.
34. McCloskey does not adequately consider Piketty’s point that capital is increasingly channelled in unproductive directions, not only of financial speculation but also of property ownership. Here she simply rehearses the obvious respects in which Ricardo has proved wrong, without properly facing Piketty’s contemporary evidence as to ways in which he is, after all, proving right.
35. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).
36. It is telling – and reeks of detached American utopian illusion – that McCloskey thinks modern mass warfare has nothing to do with liberalism, but is largely due to the intrusion of right-wing romantic ideology.
37. Piketty, *Le capital*, 794–97, 836–40, 883–91, 937–40; Piketty, ‘Interview: Dynamics of Inequality’, 103–16.
38. Piketty, ‘Interview: Dynamics of Inequality’, 103–16.
39. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1932).
40. Piketty, *Le capital*, 396–401.
41. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*; Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism*.
42. Piketty, *Le capital*, 662; Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958); ‘Down with Meritocracy’, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2001, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/jun/29/comment>.
43. Will Hutton, *The State We’re in: Why Britain Is in Crisis and How to Overcome It* (London: Vintage, 1996).
44. On the role of Ernest Bevin in the creation of the German economic model (including co-determination within corporate governance, a vocational labour market model in relation to craft and the banking system based upon regional and sectoral endowment), see Maurice Glasman, ‘The Profundity of Defeat’, paper given to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, 30 October 2013, <http://www.bluelabour.org/2013/10/30/285/>; to this one can add the key contribution of Allan Flanders who, drawing on the tradition of ‘ethical socialism’, shaped the post-war German settlement with the focus on workers’ representation on company boards.
45. Lanchester, *Whoops!* 1–33.
46. Piketty, *Le capital*, 524–29, 582–85.
47. For evidence on how austerity has depressed growth, see Òscard Jordà and Alan M. Taylor, ‘The Time for Austerity: Estimating the Average Treatment Effect of Fiscal Policy’, *NBER Working Paper 19414* (September 2013), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19414>.
48. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies*; Fernand Braudel, *La dynamique du capitalisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).
49. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Benedetto Gui,

‘From Transactions to Encounters: The Joint Generation of Relational Goods and Conventional Values’, in Benedetto Gui and Robert Sugden (eds.), *Economics and Social Interaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23–51.

50. Nancy Fraser, ‘Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode’, *New Left Review* 86 (March–April 2014): 55–72.

51. Antonio Negri, *The State-Form: Towards a Critique of the Political Economy of the Constitution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

52. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

53. Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); *The Culture of New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

54. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

55. Robert and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough? The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

56. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]).

57. Piketty, *Le capital*, 206–10.

58. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*; Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies*; Karl Polanyi, *The Livelihood of Man* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

59. Henri de France, *L’économique revisitée: Pour une plus grande profondeur de champ* (Toulouse: Octarès, 2003), chap. 8: ‘L’heure de Sismondi’, 179–90.

60. Colin Mayer, *Firm Commitment: Why the Corporation Is Failing Us and How to Restore Trust in It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

61. Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, *Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 159–52; Ernesto Screpenti and Stefano Zamagni, *An Outline of the History of Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 456–519.

62. Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). In Sen’s variant of liberalism, a competitive logic within public institutions is balanced by a bureaucratic statist concern to increase the ability of individuals to realise their ‘capabilities’ in both state and market activities.

63. Andrew Brien, ‘Professional Ethics and the Culture of Trust’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17:4 (1998): 391–409; Robert Hurley, ‘The Decision to Trust’, *Harvard Business Review* 84:9 (2006): 55–65; Graham Dietz and Nicole Gillespie, *Building and Restoring Organizational Trust* (London: Institute of Business Ethics, 2011).

64. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), 223.

65. F.A. Hayek, ‘The Use of Knowledge in Society’, *The American Economic Review*, 35:4 (1945): 519–30; *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1988).

66. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*.
67. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society* (London: Johnson, 1798), 349.
68. *Ibid.*, 363.
69. *Ibid.*, 375.
70. Thomas Carlyle had mainly the Malthusian perspective in mind when he dubbed economics ‘the dismal science’.
71. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Prometheus, 2000), II, ii, 125.
72. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Random Century, 1910), I, x, 2, 117.
73. Adrian Pabst, ‘From Civil to Political Economy: Adam Smith’s Theological Debt’, in Paul Oslington (ed.), *Adam Smith as Theologian* (London: Routledge, 2011), 106–24.
74. John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adrian Pabst, ‘The Paradoxical Nature of the Good: Relationality, Sympathy, and Mutuality in Rival Traditions of Civil Economy’, in *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, 173–206.

Chapter 4

The Civil Economy Alternative

Before detailing the character of a ‘civil economy’, we will briefly consider the three main economic options that are usually entertained today as resolutions to the current crisis of capitalism: (a) a broadly Keynesian ‘embedded liberalism’, (b) repristinated neo-liberalism and (c) the ‘social market’ based on a German model.

1. THE MYTH OF EMBEDDED LIBERALISM

Part of the reason for the triumph of liberal capitalism is that it has told an easily believable story of ‘the great enrichment’. According to this story, capitalism has been the biggest success in the whole of human history, providing untold wealth, eliminating disease and lengthening human life. But it is also generally admitted, especially by the New Right, that capitalism is intrinsically amoral.¹

The updated application of this story declares that until the 1970s, trade unions secured excessively high wages and made workers too unproductive. Meanwhile, governments extracted too much tax, spent too much on welfare and interfered too much in business. Once that was corrected by Reagan, Thatcher and their imitators, unprofitable industry vanished and the business of Wall Street and the City of London boomed. The promise was that a gushing spring of wealth in New York and London would progressively trickle down every provincial gully. Industry would learn from finance that it should be purely about making money, not also about making specific things and sustaining the traditions and well-being of a workforce. (For industry had always somewhat sustained this hybrid character of motivation, and in this sense been but impurely ‘capitalist’.)

What has the left had to offer in place of the story told by the so-called right, but actually by economic liberals? Only a modified version of it. After all, even Marx thought that capitalism, with all its evils, was a necessary stage in the evolution of society and that is what they still think in China today. The Western left goes further: capitalism will always be with us, the pact with the devil has to remain in place. For although our current system is an evil monster, its essential forces can be tamed and channelled through nationalisation and state corporatism, as for much of the post-1945 era. Thus was born the myth of 'embedded liberalism'.²

In fact, 'embedded liberalism' sowed the seeds of its own destruction at the hand of the neo-liberal revolution. For it accepted the neo-classical approach and sought to regulate capital instead of entangling it in strong institutions, productive activities and interpersonal relationships. Compared with *laissez-faire* capitalism that ended in the Great Depression of 1929–1932, the post-1945 Keynesian model sought to institutionalise a balance of interests between capital and labour and to restrict the domination of international finance. However, this relied far too much on the central state (bureaucratically administered borrow-tax-and-spend), and far too little on professional associations, regional banks and other intermediary institutions.

So the eventual failure of Keynesianism was predictable, because post-war Western governments were partially in thrall to liberal norms. Any notion of 'embedded liberalism' turns out to be a contradiction in terms, since liberalism by definition can only be auto-referring, rooted only in rootlessness. What may look like real embedding on the liberal model is the apparent subordination of market to state in terms of a social-democratic correcting for the inadequacies and tensions of unbridled capitalism. Yet such corrections are more likely to be further enabling devices for capitalist functioning, and they largely tend to share the mainstream economic assumption of private utility maximisation. More intangible goals of community belonging, work satisfaction and aspirations to cultural richness and beauty are here set aside. That is what the angry children of the unprecedentedly comfortable post-war era inchoately realised in the course of their various rebellions in the 1960s.

So during the 'Keynesian' period, whenever there was an economic crisis (as in the 1970s), the government intervened with a range of central measures: work programmes to generate demand, devaluation of the currency, modification of interest rates, nationalisation or subsidisation of agriculture and selected industries or the operation of a prices and incomes policy. But all these measures were undertaken mainly in the interests of governmental and capital power. They were not undertaken in order to render market exchange intrinsically more just and, thereby, less prone to class conflict.

Here it should be said, in agreement with Marx, that capitalist cyclical instability is the inevitable consequence of this conflict, since the endemic

lack of balance between return on capital and consumer demand is ultimately traceable to a lack of sufficient shared interest and perceived mutual justice between shareholders, management, workers and consumers. This is itself consequent, in elaboration of Marx, upon two 'movements': one is the ever-increased appropriation by capital interests of extra-market resources, property and productive labour. The other is the ever-extended subordination of all substantive economic purpose to the accumulation of abstract wealth, which, thereby, ever-further directs all accumulated human resources towards this sterile future end.³ The resulting lack of concrete common purpose and disparity of shared interest in economic growth ensures that a slow-burning struggle must ensue between different interests and classes. This is negatively evidenced by the relatively low degree of such tensions and an ensuing market stability over the long term in some northern European countries where there is a relatively great shared perception of justice in terms of economic distribution. The perception arises from the presence of higher wages, worker stake-holding, investor risk-sharing, a larger shared physical environment, a hitherto shared ethnicity and culture and more recognition of the need to integrate work with family life.

The more restricted social-democratic measures taken elsewhere were more clearly undertaken in resignation to supposedly inevitable market amorality, and in keeping with capitalist market assumptions. This was done in the fond belief that they were something more than the external political adjustments required by capitalism itself in one phase of its crisis-prone cycle – as Keynes, a Liberal, not a Labour man, knew perfectly well.

Whether during the Keynesian or the monetarist period, the amorality of this game was not questioned and yet the liberals on left and right continued naively to suppose that an amoral market monster can be securely held at bay. No genuine 'civilising' of the market itself was seriously entertained. And, in reality, all that was shored up was the legitimacy of capitalism, by dampening economic discontent with welfare palliatives. At the same time, this involved rendering the economic *agon* yet more normative through the mantra of equality of opportunity.

But today this liberal story is a lot less plausible. Over recent years, capitalism, and especially finance capitalism, has appeared evermore self-interestedly sordid. More significantly, it now looks as if it is not even working very well in its own pragmatic terms. Is the devil finally letting us down, not keeping his side of the bargain? Vast swathes of capitalism are starting to look incompetent as well as semi-criminal in terms of the extra-legal seizure of primary assets, the concealment of accounts and evasion of taxation. What is more, their immorality is often the very thing that renders them unworkable. For it increasingly appears to be the case that sometimes self-interested behaviour just serves the self-interested individual and does not

serve society at large, not even economically. Moreover, it often only serves business interest in the very short term. US and UK company law gives too much power to shareholders and thus helps to bring about corporate short-termism – depressing investment, innovation, productivity and workers' pay.⁴

2. THE FAILURE OF NEO-LIBERALISM

The failure of this amoral bargain casts doubt on the validity of liberal economics, which underpins not just late nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* capitalism but also the post-war Keynesian settlement and the neo-liberal combination of monetarism with fiscal austerity that has dominated the West in recent years. All three models share a further commitment to the presuppositions of neo-classical economics that rests on the utilitarian theory of 'marginalism' that runs into two problems.⁵ First, it disregards the intrinsic worth of individual goods and it rules relational goods out of the equation, thereby reducing everything to exchangeable commodities that maximise utility; second, as already argued, the quest for maximal utility is itself subject to the law of diminishing returns, since even qualitatively higher goods are treated as if we derived less satisfaction from increased consumption, whereas in this case the reverse applies.

The key question in contemporary Western politics is whether the main aim of government should be to increase people's freedom of market choice in accord with these curious assumptions, or whether its main aim should be to seek to encourage human flourishing or *eudaimonia*. The latter can be conceived in triple terms of those things in which most humans already think such flourishing exists, those which the best traditions have handed down to us, and a perpetual dialectical attempt (in the lineage of Socrates) to determine more precisely wherein such flourishing objectively consists. Without any trust that such objectivity can be discerned one would, of course, be back within the confines of liberal presuppositions.

If this diagnosis is correct, then the real issue of contention is, to reiterate, no longer 'state *versus* market'. The central theory of neoclassicism is that when the individual calculators of utility are acting rationally, then markets will achieve perfect equilibrium, balance or clearance. Insofar as they fail to act rationally, the state can make adjustments. This much is common to marginalists of both the right and the left: the difference arises in terms of how far it is supposed that the conditions for perfect market operation arise automatically through market processes themselves and how far they have to be engineered by the state. Thus both the invisible hand of 'providence' and the visible hand of the state are deemed to be seeking the same goal of perfect rational equilibrium that coordinates egoistic wishes, without any mutual

agreement as to the common good. In the case of both left and right, the reality of the aspiring and discerning soul has been tacitly abandoned in favour of the wilful and power-seeking manipulation of animal appetites – as Thomas Carlyle argued in his presentation in *Past and Present* of the first effectively ‘post-secular’ analysis of modernity.⁶

Can a new emphasis on the common good and the promotion of human flourishing be truly relevant to hard economic questions? It can, because liberalism also, as an indication of its fatal theoretical tautology, is subject to that very law of diminishing returns which it has itself articulated.⁷ We can see this especially with respect to finance. *At first*, as the history of the modern world attests, liberalisation of financial markets leads to growth, but in the long run, *too much* financial liberty tends to market anarchy and state coercion. The components of this condition include over-abstraction from the real economy; the creation of credit and debt that dissolves property and other assets into purely nominal value; self-interest that can be aligned to market failure rather than market success; the non-constraint of capital by labour; and a multitude of transactions that are only about shifting around the existing monetary symbols of wealth, not about creating new wealth, even in abstract terms. In the same way, the spirit of greed tends to replace small businesses with large and monopolising ones, which are reluctant to pursue real innovation for fear of damaging existing products and merely engage in an endless exercise of re-branding.

So if the quest for maximal utility is subject to the law of diminishing returns, then capitalism undermines a market economy that promotes qualitatively higher goods such as music, where attention and practice serve to heighten future enjoyment. Therefore, the basic assumptions of modern liberal economics occlude from view a basic part of our exchanged, produced and consumed reality – a range of goods that vary in qualitative intensity and satisfy our souls just because they fulfil our creative talents and natural desire for beauty.

Liberalism, by contrast, treats all goods as if they could really be subject to a flattening quantitative calculus, because they are seen as mere measurable stimuli for a soulless organism. Far from such an outlook representing the most basic, governing realities, it rather substitutes what Carlyle called a ‘sucedaneum’ for concrete and variegated interpersonal existence. This is akin to the way that Cartesian natural science substituted ‘bare extension’ for the secondary qualities, such as colours, of the formed world that we inhabit. As Carlyle declared, ‘It is your souls that lie dead [...] and are not souls at all, but mere succedanea for *salt* to keep your bodies and their appetites from putrefying’.⁸ Instead of vivid reality, liberal economists posit a grey simulacrum. Yet, thanks to mass manipulation, it becomes increasingly the case that the colours of quality get washed out of the lives of all but a few, who

can afford to paint their private lives in more interesting shades. To natural economic reality there indeed ‘succeeds’ a curious mechanical substitute.

And the mechanism is far less neutral than the primary, vivid world of various intensities. For the whole point of the grey machinistic calculus is that it can be more readily manipulated by the oligarchic few and their ‘professional’ economic advisers. The unnatural leaching of the economic realm can only be secured by the dominance of large primary powers that force all to think in terms of marginal quantification. Thus liberal capitalism tends to turn people into automatons devoid of character and creativity, ushering in first the Mechanical and now the Digital Age in which ‘nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance’.⁹ In this manner, the oligarchy seduces the masses to consume more and more shoddy goods whose appeal will, indeed, soon pale – causing them to seek to earn more in order to be able to buy a new variant or new seductive novelty. Just this logic has led to the contemporary dominance of large producers and massified consumers – the cartel capitalism of the contemporary West (not just the Anglo-Saxon countries) with big banks, large energy companies, media empires and various conglomerates that dominate the high street in every town or city.

The rise of ‘clone towns’ is directly related to the decline of independent shopkeepers, and small- and medium-sized enterprises, which tend to compete in terms of ethos and excellence as opposed to low prices based on poor wages and precarious employment conditions. These have been largely replaced by supermarkets and chain-stores, which eventually tend to have an economically deleterious effect.¹⁰ For one thing, they can afford to grossly under-price certain products, such as milk, in order to entice people into their stores rather than those of their competitors. Yet this illogically threatens the viability of their own farming supply chain and the sustainability of, especially, smaller-scale agriculture, upon which human health relies. Moreover, the imperative to stock ‘everything’ instead of specialising eventually leads (as we see today) to over-reach through customer confusion and the remaindering of unsellable items.

AQ: Please check if the sentence that starts with “By contrast” reads correctly.

By contrast, in the retail sector, as elsewhere, small businesses and midsized companies were once the foundation of the Western economic success, while even today family and smaller-scale enterprises constitute the industrial and manufacturing backbone of Germany, the West’s economic powerhouse along with parts of the United States. The German model of a ‘social market economy’ that combines robust growth with high employment and social cohesion is now widely seen as the best alternative to Anglo-Saxon market capitalism and ‘Asian-style’ state capitalism. However, starting in the 1970s, the Germans adopted their own version of the neo-liberal settlement by reviving the post-1919 tradition of ordo-liberalism, as the following section narrates.

3. THE LIMITS OF THE GERMAN 'SOCIAL MARKET' MODEL

By contrast with neo-classical, Keynesian and monetarist economics that all rest on marginalism, the 'social market' model that underpins Germany's economic success since 1945 draws on a much richer tradition of political economy that includes many elements of Catholic Social Thought.¹¹ Against both liberalism and Marxism, this tradition has sought to fuse ideas of the common good and human flourishing with new institutions in order to entangle the operations of both state and the market in the skeins of interpersonal relationships. This offers an important alternative to Keynes' political economy, which did not sustain the post-war *trentes glorieuses* precisely because it lacked the ideas and institutions that made Germany a continual success, as Maurice Glasman has argued.¹²

There is much that other Western countries can learn from the German model, in particular the importance of regional banks for channelling capital into productive activities and thereby involving it in longer-term investment rather than letting it roam around in search for short-term speculative profit; sector-specific arrangements such as wage bargaining and guild-like licenses to diversify the economy; vocational institutions to preserve and renew knowledge, trust and innovation, as well as to provide alternative avenues for labour market entry; a proper governance model for firms to broker cooperation out of the conflicts between the management and workers by allowing co-determination and workers' representation on company boards, plus the importance and honouring of place in terms of tradition and ethos.¹³

However, Germany's economy involves a compromise between Catholic Social Thought and ordo-liberalism. Faced with the crisis of *laissez-faire* liberalism in the Great Depressions of 1873–1896 and 1929–1932, ordo-liberals argued for a much stronger role of the state in ensuring that market competition produces outcomes that are both efficient and equitable. The state should enforce central regulations that create the conditions (*Rahmenbedingungen*) for free and fair competition in the marketplace, on the debatable assumption that where these prevail, they will automatically tend in the direction of equity and fair reward. Indeed, ordo-liberals assumed that a more genuinely post-feudal market would perforce be a fairer one, less intrinsically tending towards inequality.¹⁴ This follows Wilhelm Röpke's illusory view that the grosser tendencies to inequality within a market system were but the result of a feudal hangover.¹⁵ But in reality, capitalism relies upon, augments and de-ethicises pre-capitalist inequalities. Over time, and at an increasing distance from Nazi *dirigisme* and the exigencies of warfare, it is largely because of these incorrect assumptions that ordo-liberalism, becoming since the early 1980s evermore convergent with neo-liberalism pure and simple, has shifted Germany's 'social market' economy away from the pursuit of the common

good towards the defence of the combined interests of the largest players in the private and public sectors.

The ordo-liberal version of a 'social market' combines bureaucratic state control with an amoral economy that does not, after all, 'automatically' share the proceeds of export-led growth with ordinary workers, whose real incomes have stagnated for much of the past fifteen years since the introduction of the euro.¹⁶ These and other market failures are partially compensated by rationalised welfare and a significant role of the state in the economy.

It is, nonetheless, true that the German model still differs fundamentally from Anglo-Saxon capitalism that fuses a Benthamite utilitarian ethic with Rawlsian political liberalism. By contrast, ordo-liberalism weaves together a Kantian ethics of context-less duties with Weberian rationalist (and sternly amoral) statecraft and Bismarckian welfarism: strict rules, multiple layers of bureaucracy, and a Prussian desire for more efficient and quasi-military management of civilian populations thereby become evermore the order of the day.

At its core, this compound combines a large measure of Kantian formalism with a dose of Schmittian decisionism. Thus it dictates rules to the rest of the Eurozone based on the heinousness of national debt allegedly arising from fiscal profligacy and over-consumption (when in reality it was largely to do with a credit bubble, a heavily indebted private sector and reckless financial speculation).¹⁷ Meanwhile, it regards itself as a justified exception by virtue of its effective economic sovereignty, and, so, as uniquely permitted to run a persistent current account surplus sustained by domestic under-consumption (because of stagnating real wages and lack of investment), which in a different way is equally damaging. For this surplus, which amounts to over €250 billion per year or 8 per cent of national output, neither benefits ordinary German workers, nor is re-invested in the peripheral countries or even at home. In fact, the surplus was a cause of the crisis and is an obstacle in resolving it. Before the 2008 crash, it fuelled the irresponsible lending by German banks to Ireland and the southern Eurozone members, above all Greece. Since then Germany's depressed domestic demand (through excessive wage restraint) is exporting deflation to the heavily indebted countries, thus deepening their debt problems.

It follows that Germany's export mercantilism is largely responsible for the balance of payments crisis, which is the true reason for the Eurozone turmoil.¹⁸ The combined banking and sovereign debt problem was mostly a consequence of the trade imbalances between the Euro countries and uncontrolled financial flows between banks (within the Euro-area and between the Eurozone and the United States)¹⁹ – combined with the influx of substantial savings from emerging markets (especially in East Asia). Therefore, debt was the result of other structural trends – not the original cause of the Eurozone

crisis that is now undermining the remnants of the social market model. Moreover, Germany's export-led growth and persistent surplus cannot be adopted by the rest of the Eurozone or the Union as a whole because most Euro or EU members trade more with each other than with the rest of the world, which inevitably involves deficits; not all countries within a trading and monetary union can run a surplus at the same time.²⁰ Thus the current version of the German social market economy runs against the interests of European workers, including those in Germany itself.

Whereas the social market economy tends to restrict the role of the state to providing a legal framework for the supposedly neutral operation of competition in pursuit of abstract wealth, the 'civil economy' alternative requires that the state assist in crafting a different sort of market altogether.²¹ The purpose of a 'civil market' is not to engender growth as a purely quantitative sum, but the real wealth of human flourishing in every dimension – which dictates an imperative to a different sort of 'increase'. If such real wealth be pursued, then the first aim of all economic activity must be social benefit, with acceptable rates of profit related to such benefit, in terms of both proportion and rates of successful achievement. Accordingly, state promotion of economic development naturally includes at its heart an encouraging and rewarding of virtuous behaviour. From our post-liberal perspective, the latter is best understood not as a sort of moral *addendum* to purely economic activity, but rather a performing well of the economic construed to be the securing and distributing of human consumable and renewable benefit, as we argue in the following sections.

AQ: "economy" perhaps in the phrase 'as a performing well of the economic more'?
Please check.

4. THE CIVIL ECONOMY TRADITION

For over three hundred years, Anglo-Saxon and French economic theory has largely followed liberal presuppositions such as foundational self-interest and the separation of contract from gift. But certain Italian economists, standing in a more classically humanist and Christian tradition, have thought in more associationist terms. Accordingly, an economic contract itself can be a 'sympathetic' negotiation about shared value and community benefit as well as self-interest, which is itself more socially and, so, realistically construed.²² Here it is salutary to compare the thought of Adam Smith with that of his near contemporary, the Neapolitan philosopher-priest and 'civil economist', Antonio Genovesi.²³

Of course, Smith was no proto-Benthamite philistine, nor even an advocate of early capitalism. Indeed, he desired a market with few monopolies; modest prices; high wages; a vocational, not a functional (factory-like), division of labour; and one that tended to return more people to work in

the countryside. This almost 'ecological' factor in his thinking was driven by his insistence that a healthy economy puts concrete real wealth before abstract, notional wealth, and that the most basic of all wealth is human food.²⁴ A post-liberal political economy should critically embrace such objectives and reclaim Smith from both right-wing caricatures of him as a precursor of free-market neo-liberalism, and left-wing misconstruals of him as a proto-Keynesian social-democrat. He by no means thought that market equilibrium always results automatically, and therefore considered that it has to be constantly shaped by state intervention. However, in terms of just this notion of a cooperation of the 'invisible' and the 'visible' hand, he did to some extent anticipate neo-classicism, and one could even say that in certain (perhaps 'proto-ordoliberal') respects, he relied already too much on public intervention and did not allow for any direct relational and reciprocal social role in securing prosperity. Instead, he evacuated the social in favour of the economic and the political.

It is true that Smith still viewed the economy as embedded in a network of civil society 'sympathies'. However, by contrast with Thomas Reid, Burke, Cobbett and Carlyle, these sympathies were over-confined to a resonance with the other person's private needs and feelings and were not enough to do with the co-shaping of a shared sensibility. Therefore, the Glaswegian professor of moral philosophy did not allow 'sympathies' to enter into the economic contract itself. Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni are right to conclude that for Smith, '*the market* itself doesn't require them, and works even better without them (hence the praise of weak ties)'.²⁵ Economic production and trade based on contract is sundered from mutual sympathy and concern for the personal well-being of fellow 'economic actors'. Notoriously, it is not from the butcher's benevolence that I can hope to secure from him a supply of meat. The notion of 'cooperation without benevolence' negatively links Smith's moral philosophy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to his political economy in *The Wealth of Nations*.²⁶

It is just here that Genovesi offers a crucially different model, starting with his account of sympathy, which is much more expansive than that of Smith. For the Neapolitan, '[we are] created in such a way as to be touched necessarily, by a musical sympathy, by pleasure and internal satisfaction, as soon as we meet another man; no human being not even the most cruel and hardened can enjoy pleasures in which no one else participates'.²⁷ In terms of the economy, which is for Genovesi no exception to this rule that enjoyment inherently involves the convivial, this means that you and your butcher might well care about each other as neighbours, and this could influence even your economic transactions: 'For contracts are bonds and civil laws are also compacts and contracts'.²⁸ In this affirmation, we see how there is no strict distinction of formal law and individual free action, the political and

the economic, since both must always be informed by, and sub-serve, what Genovesi calls ‘public faith’ (*fede pubblica*): ‘Public trust is therefore a bond that ties together and binds persons and families of one State to one another, with the sovereign or other nations with which they trade’.²⁹ Public faith is not so much the aggregation of private trust (or individual fate) as a kind of universal sympathy that includes a genuine love for the common good.

Moreover, within more strictly economic terms, long-term considerations might temper any short-term selfishness. You and your local butcher would equally like each other to remain in place. Hence, by implication, both social and economic reasons could influence an agreed price: a ‘gift’ element might be added to its strictly indicated contractual setting, in terms that are realistic as well as imbued with mutual feeling. In this way, one can see how for the Italian civil economy tradition, the market itself remains more social and more directly mediated by interpersonal relationships. The operation of both the ‘invisible’ and the ‘visible’ hand is not seen in purely mechanical terms, but, rather, as building on an existing interpersonal network that constitutes ‘civil life’ (*vita civile*).

Smith (as we saw in chapter 1) followed Jansenists like Boisguilbert and Huguenots like Mandeville in regarding the heterogenesis of ends – the way in which goal-directed activities can lead to new goals that are different from those originally intended – as a ‘physical’ device of providence or nature to produce order from the amoral disorder engendered by fallen human depravity, even if he thought this impersonal artifice could be somewhat furthered by state action. By contrast, Genovesi followed the more Catholic humanist lead of Giambattista Vico in viewing deliberate intention and accidental result as complementary, in the sense that heterogenesis providentially supplements human virtue by building up public goods on the basis of private desires.³⁰ Accordingly, individual virtuous action, whose truth is a search for an equally constructed and relational upshot (Vico’s *verum-factum-bonum*),³¹ is itself a participation in the heterogenesis of the divine providential governing action. In practical terms, this means that a good economy must allow for a complex mixture of self-interest and concern for the well-being of others.³² So Genovesi recognised, like Smith, that intentions can lead to unexpected outcomes, but he followed his exemplar Vico in thinking that there was more continuity between original motive and unintended end than Smith’s Jansenist and Calvinist-influenced legacy allowed.

For Genovesi, an individual’s intended action already has a certain ‘onlook’ towards the formation of society (as when you and the butcher try to keep each other going). In that case, later actions can ‘read’ earlier ones in terms of their general social implications in a way that is impossible if an individual action is ‘blind’ from a social point of view. The latter is true when all you care about is feeding yourself as cheaply as possible without

any regard for the longer-term consequences of consuming junk food. So the Genovesan model envisages economic outcomes to be like the architectural ones of an ancient Italian city: the whole is beautiful, though never planned that way, because later buildings ‘interpret’ earlier ones. But the Smithian model envisages economic outcomes (ironically against Smith’s own ruralist intentions) as being something like modern Atlanta, Georgia.....

In terms of both contract and the ‘heterogenesis of ends’, it is arguable that much of the *actual* market economy of the modern world has operated more like the Neapolitan civil economy (whose influence on later Italian economics remained sporadically present) than like the Anglo-Saxon political economy. This means that perhaps we have never been as capitalist as we imagine – and, after all, much of the more relentlessly consistent capitalist practice has arisen but recently.

And while the Italian economy has often shown in exemplary practice some ‘civil’ features, sometimes Italian ‘civil economists’ react against the *lack* of social trust shown at many levels of Italian society and politics. For example, Genovesi stresses more than British or French thinkers the need for a conscious exercise of *fede pubblica* in economic life precisely because he is resisting the excessive *fiducia privata* of feudalism turned decadent and gang-like in southern Italy. Much of later Italian economic history can be regarded as a conflict between a good spirit of direct interpersonal cooperation and its perversion in the mode of the *mafia* and *camorra*. With the increasing criminalisation of global capitalism, which evermore falsifies the Franco-British sanguine confidence that market realism will engender a Weberian simulacrum of virtue, this local history now acquires a universal relevance.

As we have seen, the crucial concepts that distinguish Neapolitan civil economy from Scottish political economy in its Humean-Smithian version are those of reciprocity and civil virtue within the market domain itself. Reciprocity shifts the emphasis away from the ‘cash nexus’ to the social nexus.³³ For Genovesi, society is not primarily about the division of labour and the harmonious balancing of rival self-interest in the marketplace (as for Smith). Rather, human beings have shared needs that can only be satisfied through mutual assistance.³⁴ When properly placed in the context of ‘civil life’, reciprocity – which is governed by ‘sympathy’ – combines mutual duties with individual freedom and personal flourishing. Thus, in his correspondence, Genovesi emphasises conviviality: ‘It is a universal law that we cannot make ourselves happy without making others happy as well.’³⁵ Felicity is a paradoxical ‘ecstasy’ in which we are only perfectly happy ‘with’ others, beyond the seemingly exhaustive alternatives of either egotistic pleasure-seeking or altruism. Accordingly, Genovesi renders sympathy a yet more integral part of the pursuit of happiness than is the case, on the whole, for the

Anglo-Scots tradition.³⁶ In consequence, he can allow that economic activity is basically a pursuit of well-being, and yet understand this pursuit to have an innately cooperative dimension, which is not just a moralistic supplement.

If human beings are naturally political, social and gift-exchanging animals, they need to cultivate habits of personal and communal living that sustain the polity, society and the economy. Genovesi's civil virtues outflank the divide between political and moral virtues in thinkers like Machiavelli, which over time led to the liberal separation of the private, moral sphere from the public, amoral realm. It is for this reason that the Neapolitan tradition tempered the complacent agonism of their more northern contemporaries. Thus Genovesi insists that, in the long run a merely vicious pursuit of private interest à la Mandeville would corrode all public wealth.³⁷ Later, Gaetano Filangieri stressed that economic inequality has the same corrosive effect and that wealth cannot be defined in terms of a merely abstracted quantity:

Exorbitant riches of some citizens, and the laziness of some others, presumes the unhappiness and misery of the majority. This civil partiality is contrary to the public good. A polity cannot be said to be rich and happy save in that single case where every citizen through a definite labour in the course of a reasonable time is able commodiously to supply his own needs and that of his family.³⁸

There could not be a more ringing endorsement in the eighteenth century of 'the family wage' and concomitant justice in terms of prices and profit-sharing.

It is also significant here that Genovesi, while deploring the degeneration of guilds into self-serving monopolies, still upholds their role as tending to safeguard the standards and virtues integral to any particular trade.³⁹ In this respect, as in others, he continues to adhere to certain Aristotelian and Thomistic attitudes within his economic theory. And while he is more accommodating of returns of interest on monetary loans, his defence of them (however overly revisionist) remains within the basically Thomistic perspective of claiming that such loans must really be understood as investments within the enterprise that the loan has supported, and so the interest accrued as a just share of the profits arising.⁴⁰

Moreover, Genovesi himself extends the principle of reciprocity to the international context. For this reason, he appears to exhibit a certain ambivalence about the spirit of commerce in relation to his commentary on Montesquieu. On the one hand, he agrees with the Scots that a more developed commerce – by inter-entangling nations and revealing that the poverty of one is to the detriment of the wealth of another – tends towards pacification.⁴¹ On the other hand, he is more aware that commerce also intrinsically tends (as we argued in chapter 1) to de-sublimate back from economic into

open warfare where just reciprocity and, so, inter-cultural communion are not sustained.

The Italian ‘civil economists’ also differ from the Scots ‘political economists’ in their limiting of civic virtues to the ‘compensatory’ roles of the exercise of manners and governmental programmes of utility.⁴² Their more authentic humanism realises that the more that contracts between people remain relatively informal, involving a convivial exchange of benefits, the less you need the intervention of state control, because social embedding is sustained and enhanced by economic processes themselves. Here one can point out that if, after Mauss, gift-exchange is ‘the fundamental social fact’, then an element of economic contractual bond is already basic to the social bedrock.⁴³ It would then rigorously follow that if the economy is not civil, society as such will be but deceptively so.⁴⁴ That is why the undoing of the human bond by the individualistic and amoral version of the market then requires, as Polanyi saw, the artificial salve of state action if something like a simulacrum of human unity is thenceforward to be sustained.⁴⁵

But this ‘civility’ only appears as alien to the economy as such if we accept the ‘politically economic’ norm of economics, which scarcely corresponds even to the modern operations of market economy under this normative influence. In reality, a civil economy is also a more *economic* economy, more naturally functional and stable, because it is more in keeping with the psychic self-management of human beings. For example, it will be relatively freed from cyclical fluctuations or speculative bubbles that are ultimately to do with a clash of interests between capital and worker, producer and consumer, supply and demand. These clashes can be avoided or mitigated where economic contracts are habitually the subject of social, ethical and, sometimes, legal negotiation, and all parties feel that they have been fairly dealt with and share a common stake and pride in the success of an enterprise and the quality of its products.

5. CIVIL ECONOMY AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

In the face of the economic and ethical crisis of capitalism, we need to learn from traditions that always stood outside the totalising logic of modern politics and economics. It is here that the civil economy tradition and Catholic Social Thought (CST), which has sometimes been independently echoed by Anglican and Orthodox thinkers, can offer an altogether different story. This story challenges not just the story told by the right since the 1970s, but also the story told by liberalism about the whole of modernity.

Both traditions insist on the fundamental difference between the market economy *per se* and capitalism as its arbitrary distortion. The former means

functionally the division of labour, the freedom to work and to trade, to enjoy reasonable returns on investments and make reasonable profits that are justified in terms of degree of input, risk undergone, benefit secured and ultimate social well-being. It means teleologically the attempt to increase wealth in the real sense of trying to improve human life – make it more comfortable, exciting, various and fulfilling. Thus a pure market economy *per se* can properly be described as a civil economy, which really does pursue the common good: the good of each and every one of us as we concretely are in our families, workplaces, communities and associations.⁴⁶ Such an economy is not ‘capitalist’ in the sense of regarding the accumulation of abstract and aggregate ‘wealth’ as its proper goal and confining this accumulation to an appropriating minority, nor in the sense of imagining that the typical economic actor simply pursues the same goal for himself along with other modes of self-gratification.

But how can the typical economic actor be construed otherwise? Part of the answer is that a person can be both pursuing a reasonable profit for herself, and at the same time trying to offer to other people a social benefit, in response to socio-economic benefits that she herself is receiving in turn. One can trade in real human goals as well as in hard cash. Likewise, a contract can be a reciprocal agreement about a shared goal and value, not just the joint meeting of two entirely separate individual interests. The latter applies when I take a cab: I want to get to the station, the taxi-driver needs to feed his children. But it does not apply if villagers collectively agree to buy some vacant land to build a new village hall or if a town-council and a business consortium agree to financially support the growth of a certain industry as appropriate to the town’s needs and capacities. It does not even apply if I am familiar with the taxi-driver or offer him an unnecessarily generous tip.

The second element binding together the civil economy tradition with CST is the balance between competition and cooperation. Instead of a purely individualist and competitive contract that characterises capitalism, a civil market economy possesses a price mechanism that operates to a degree cooperatively as well as competitively. So, for example, it is not assumed that you would always charge the highest possible price that the market would tolerate. You might lower that price to help your neighbour because you did not want to destroy her and it would not even make *economic* sense to do so.⁴⁷

This involves the sustaining of a gift element within contract and so as a part of the social fabric. For example, if you refrain, for neighbourly reasons that may also be reasons of sustainable business, from charging your neighbour the fullest possible price, then there is a sense in which you are making her a discreet donation. Likewise, if you pay your worker rather more than you need to. Or if you offer your debtor a lower rate of interest than you might have extorted. In ‘for-giving’ him his debt, in keeping with

the evangelical exhortation (which had a much more economic ring than the substitution of 'trespass' might suggest), you are once more granting him a gift – in this case as a substitute for monetary revenge.

Alongside this fusion of contract with gift, the civil economy is a vocational economy. In general, people in all walks of life should do apprenticeships whose completion ought to be a condition of entry to the workplace. Various forms of professional association, or renewed 'guilds' (whose continued and revived role was supported by the English Levellers in the mid-seventeenth century)⁴⁸ should, as in the case of medical and legal representative bodies of professional peers, oversee both professional formation in apprenticeships and continued maintenance of high standards of practice alongside the protection of the workforce. Such guilds (into which trade unions need to mutate, thereby at once further ethicising their role and increasing their possible reach) can help ensure the quality of product and proper treatment of customers alongside the well-being of workers.⁴⁹

The third element that is common to CST and the civil economy model concerns the nature of the firm and the market. If social recognition is fundamental also for the economy, then trust is basic for the economic firm. One could say that the economic firm should constitute a sort of benign semi-monopoly, which prevents the emergence of malign monopoly. For on the basis of naked individualism, people strive for monopoly in order to produce the shoddiest possible products, buy the materials for those products as cheaply as possible and sell them as dearly as possible. In this way, they undermine competitors, and bad practice drives out good. But in the case of the firm that is a 'civil enterprise' or partnership between owners, managers, workers, consumers and suppliers, good practice can drive out bad in a tendency that is actually more stable and more profitable at one and the same time. One can see this for much of the history of a firm like the UK-based John Lewis retail partnership, and also those credit unions, mutualised banks and building societies that survived the de-mutualisation of finance as part of the 'big bang' in 1986. There are also many new examples, including social enterprises and 'fair trade' companies.

Such firms will tend to thrive in the long term, not by driving out *all* other competitors, but, rather, by forcing other firms to compete in terms of quality of produce, fairness of pricing and humane treatment of workers and customers. And a crucial aspect to 'quality of produce' is, as has already been mentioned, the fact that *real* goods (including 'relational goods' that we can only enjoy in common) are less subject to the law of diminishing returns.

It is perhaps at this point that ethical considerations about economics pass over into metaphysical and religious ones. For much of human existence, it can seem as if bad habits are more powerful than good ones. But in the end, we discover that the reverse is true, and that otherwise we could not survive

as social and linguistic animals. Where might one locate such self-sustaining and intensifying good habits? One thing that economic theorists often ignore is that many elements of CST – opposition to usury, the just price, the just wage, guilds, corporations, distribution of assets, the primacy of land as sacred, solidarity and subsidiarity⁵⁰ – exist in certain degrees in many parts of the world where they have been tried and successfully tested. This is, above all, true for two of the most successful economies in the last half-century – those of Germany and Italy (despite the recent problems of *both*). In different ways, they tend to define global lifestyles in terms of high-quality automobiles, machinery, food, cafes and clothing rather than the low-quality commodity consumerism of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The German and Italian models are not really the products of the rationalist Enlightenment, but of a Renaissance that remained in continuity with the Middle Ages and shaped elements of a somewhat alternative modernity whose scope could be greatly extended in the future.

What we mean by this is that they combine a Renaissance exaltation of the creativity of human labour with a neo-medieval sense of constitutional corporatism that is neither statist nor merely free-market but, rather, mutualist in character. Worker participation in management, control of entry conditions to labour by voluntary associations and high-status technical education are all predicated on a greater relative primacy of labour with respect to capital. And labour, not capital, is the dynamic factor in any economy, because it is to do with the release of personal, creative human power. This is quite different from the negative freedom of the Anglo-Saxon will – for creativity goes along with the power to judge and discern the aesthetic and social value of one's product. Herein lies the difference between Italian cars, food, fashion and design compared to their American equivalents. Of course, it will be objected that many American commercial products are excellent – but then certain aspects of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance survive in the United States also.

Other than Germany and parts of Italy, further examples for the successful operation of civil economy type models include Austria and the Basque country, as well as the new Economies of Communion.⁵¹ The latter operate in Brazil, Portugal and elsewhere, bringing together businesses, social enterprise and educational institutions in deprived areas so as to create a local economy that blends private profit with social purpose. Business profits are shared between three distinct kinds of purposes that are considered to be of equal importance. First, helping people in need by creating jobs in neglected areas that have been abandoned by the central state and the free market. Second, instituting a 'culture of giving' grounded in human relationships of mutual support. Third, sustaining and expanding the business that has to combine efficiency with solidarity. The objective is to fuse investment with

charity, and to change the market from within by locating the logic of gift-exchange at the heart of ordinary economic processes. According to some estimates, some 735 businesses have in recent years joined such ‘economies of communion’, with a majority in Europe (notably Italy and Portugal) but also more than 245 in the Americas. Small numbers, perhaps, but a concrete example of how ethical enterprise can be good business.

So, alternatives to capitalism are emphatically *not* medieval survivals or nostalgic throwbacks. As Antony Black has argued, it is rather the case that both ‘liberal’ *freedom to choose* (one’s career, living place, and marriage partner in particular) and the principle of *free association* are equally products of Christianity and equally things bequeathed by Christianity to modernity. The ‘modern’ can here be understood as the gradual emergence of a more technologically dynamic, more commercial and more urban society, as opposed to a rural and military one from the twelfth century onwards. As Black also argues, while the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment saw the one-sided triumph of ‘liberalism’, mutualism – including the constitutive socio-political role of the corporate guild and other intermediary bodies – persisted both in modern practice for a long time (for example in Germany and Italy) and in alternative but clearly modern theories. Examples include the work of Althusius in the seventeenth century (for all his excessive subordination of guild structure to a single sovereign centre), Otto von Gierke in the nineteenth, and Emile Durkheim in the twentieth century.⁵²

But what has all this got to do with advanced Western economies today? A good place to start is recent history. In the case of Victorian England, which engendered the real modern economic take-off, it is certainly true that there was a considerable Benthamite intellectual influence, which led to utility-maximising economic theory. Yet, in the complex reality of practice, there were Quaker manufacturers trying to care for their workers; regional banks operating in partnerships with cities; and a fusion of heritage and economic effort that combined cultural and economic flourishing. Despite all the Dickensian horrors, there existed a certain modicum of trust and common purpose, and quite soon people tried – however inadequately – to amend the worst horrors through extraordinary efforts of socially minded business and philanthropy. In that atmosphere of mutual help the Labour Party was first born – in tune with the real story of Western economic success and not in opposition to it.

It is, of course, possible to say that the bad practice of capitalism has produced an immense amount of wealth in terms of its own understanding of what wealth is. It has, indeed (though by accident, for that is not its intrinsic aim),⁵³ produced material benefits for many, alongside palpable exploitation, impoverishment, uglification and lack of meaning in work. One can argue about how far it could all have happened differently. But what is for certain

is that now a more extreme form of capitalism is simply not working well any more. Unlike the capitalist system of vice and exclusion, maybe virtue and inclusion can be more successful, even in economic terms.

This is the new story that a civil economy of virtue might be able to tell – a story whose narrative logic points to a new mode of action.⁵⁴ The centre of this action must be linkage of cultural renewal and civic pride with economic recovery. For if we remain sick in the West, then this is also a psychological besides an economic sickness. We need to recall who we are as cultures and nations and that means who we are in our localities and also across national borders. Without that kind of pride and self-belief, we will not want to work in the future to any purpose. And instead of relying mainly on state redistribution, we need to forge an economy that operates justly and fairly in the first place: both through the internal ethos of firms and professional associations and through a new legal framework that demands that every business deliver social benefit as well as reasonable profit.

But this does not imply that the state has no role. We need rather a new notion of the ‘public’ that slides between the social and state-direction or answerability. It is here that at the centre of the emerging post-liberal programme could stand the idea not of tactical government intervention but of the strategic shaping of new economic institutions: for example, of private/ public partnerships in infrastructural and public service broadcasting projects (now being disgracefully dismantled in the United Kingdom, as with Eurostar, Channel 4 and the BBC); national research-banks; technology trusts to promote and share new knowledge at the service of human needs; systems of apprenticeships; of entry conditions to work through the operation of professional bodies; of new technical colleges that offer a hybrid training, which combines academic knowledge with vocational learning; more visionary business schools; regional financing banks, and partnerships between such banks, local business and new city-based parliaments; renewed guild halls that could help not just with the exchange of good practice but also with new forms of cooperation in terms of ethical certification and greater ties between ethical enterprises across local, regional and national borders.

6. BUILDING A ‘CIVIL ECONOMY’ TODAY

The civil economy model has been developed and extended in new ways by Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI’s social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, along with the works of Bruni, Zamagni and other economists writing in this tradition.⁵⁵ More recently, civil economy ideas have helped to shape post-liberal economic thinking in Britain, Australia and elsewhere. In this section we explicate some key practical implications of a post-liberal civil economy

of virtue before we set out a number of policy ideas in the remainder of the chapter.

Anti-Usury and the Sharing of Risk and Rewards

Usurious interest rates allow banks and other financial institutions such as payday loan companies to make profits that are vastly disproportionate to the economic and social contribution of their lending activities and their risks. They also take advantage of the financial distress of many people who are left with no choice but to take out credit at interest rates that are economically inefficient and ethically indefensible. Therefore, the lending of money needs to be tied as much as possible to real investment, and banks made stakeholders and therefore risk-carriers in the enterprises that they fund. In line with the principle of reciprocity, a truly ethical economy would establish the sharing of risk and reward in all financial transactions – including house mortgages – between lenders and borrowers, investors and owners, shareholders and managers, employers and employees. In order to transcend capitalism's simultaneous abstraction and materialisation, at every level financial sign needs to be reconnected with material power in order to prevent the speculative, social and ecological threats of their disjuncture.

Lenders of money, from high street banks to building societies, should as much as possible be regarded as investors in the businesses they purport to back: as part-liaible for the risks incurred by borrowers on the one hand, and also as co-partners and advisors in the enterprises that borrowers undertake, on the other. This would involve a mutualisation of banking and real estate financing wherever possible. A loss of excessive economic power would be balanced for such bodies by an increase in social power, provided this is linked to an increased exercise of social responsibility. Equivalently, a slight loss of economic autonomy for the individual owner is balanced by three elements: greater shared economic security; heightened rights to a stake in the success of the bank to which one belongs; and an increase of influence over community agreements about the shape of the built environment and collective projects of many diverse kinds. Hence, such proposals retain the realism of an appeal to collective and individual interest, yet also require a cultural transformation in which people somewhat modify their aspirations – even trading some isolated power to choose against an increase in social power and community involvement. Since the latter allows more complex psychological satisfaction and more intense social recognition and conviviality, such a transformation is by no means inconceivable. But while it can be encouraged at the political level through new incentives and rewards, in the end this change in ethos requires a cultural renewal. And people cannot opt for what they have never been offered. The realism of renewal is that it

must perforce begin among a minority, whose convictions can, nevertheless, realistically prove contagious if they begin to be successfully exemplified in practice.

As to investment in manufacturing and other productive enterprises, the primacy of short-term shareholder value needs to be replaced with a legal requirement that companies pursue primarily a clearly stated purpose of long-term economic and social benefit. This is not, however, to be taken as a simple attack on the shareholder: rather, it would necessarily involve a favouring of the longer-term over the short-term shareholder – whose holding today may sometimes be a matter of indifferent seconds. Longer-term investment would be made more attractive in terms of both higher and securer dividends, and an increased measure of responsibility for the firm, that would tend to hold in check any executive exploitation. Equally, executives would be more empowered to guard against rogue shareholders who have not identified their own with the corporation's interest.

Just Wages, Just Prices and the Distribution of Assets

As part of this cultural alteration, the divorce of the meaning of material market 'growth' from its root meanings of organic, moral and spiritual growth should be called into question. If we could collectively imagine a shared scale of priority in desiring, we would also remove the scarcity-driven oscillation between the relative emphasis on the respective imperatives of consuming and production, demand and supply. For this shared scale would tend to infuse into transactions – prices, wages, shares – a greater sense of its natural justice, over and above prevailing market conditions. We could then have some sense of a 'proper' price paid for a thing of such and such moral as well as economic value; of a 'proper' wage or salary paid for such and such a social task involving different degrees of talent, labour, scope, risk and need for a strenuous exercise of virtue; of 'proper' shares in a firm as between the appropriately weighed contributions of owners, managers and workers.

All these things need first and foremost to become habitual through the growth of a new ethos. But at the same time, they should at the limits of claimed infraction come within the purview of law and judicial debate. For once a company is required to have a social as well as an economic purpose, then all contractual exchanges should by law be required to be equitable as to substantive content as well as to formal consent. Subsidies to large corporations need reducing in any case, but where corporations of all sizes are in any way subsidised, the degree of subsidy needs to be indexed to the degree of just economic practice. By the same token, sheerly financial transactions need to be taxed much more severely, and the proceeds given to the encouraging of research, technological and manufacturing development.

Far from all this being an infringement of a contract freely entered into, it is its very precondition. For where a contract is in any way unjust, or finally lacking in substantial purpose of human benefit, then this implies that some element of risk-taking, or of committed labour or of valid desire, has been alienated and removed in a unilateral and coercive fashion by one party from the process of market exchange itself.

Free Guilds and Vocational Entry Points to the Labour Market

What is also needed is a general re-creation and reinvigoration of professional associations, which still play a considerable role in countries such as Germany, Austria and Italy. Such institutions can instil an inter-firm ethos based upon the idea that one achieves self-respect and social recognition by making and trading something good and not by merely making money. Furthermore, it is the work of the guild that truly resolves the *aporia* of monopoly whereby state anti-monopoly legislation can often constitute an unwarranted intrusion within market competition that can even help to further the rise of alternative monopolies or cartels.⁵⁶ Here, once more it is Polanyi who had the vital insight: monopolies and cartels tend to be generated by the most free-booting and egoistic participants in the market. Hence a guild restriction of competition to those signed up to guild principles actually tends – through a paradox that resolves the *aporia* – to ensure competition by slightly restricting competition. It thereby achieves what the ordo-liberals desired, but failed to realise through an insufficient allowance of a justifiably corporatist dimension.

However, to avoid monopolistic corruption consequent upon guild operation itself we need a new idea of *free* guilds that enjoy no legally established sole right to trade. Licensing by a guild organisation could then become economically advantageous in the way that a Fair Trade label is today, because customers would receive, a certain guarantee of good quality of produce, fair treatment of all stakeholders in the enterprise, and of consumers themselves. This notion of a ‘free guild’ also helps to meet the objection that guilds cannot cope with *new* trades and industries, which arise with ever-increasing frequency (for example in the services sector). For the latter need not be inhibited by the vested interests of established corporations, yet at the same time are provided by them with a model of the benefits of submission to guild standards that they can then imitate. Equally, guilds might facilitate the continuity and transfer of pension and other entitlements between changing jobs and employers. Inversely, a certain subordination of technology to relatively stable human ends might be served by bringing new technologies within the scope of existing guilds: we could then more easily ask, for example, *what* social purposes the mobile phone and the computer precisely serve and under what best permissions and restrictions. Likewise a guild-encouragement of

the pursuit of more integrated ends might somewhat restrict in the future constant job-shifts related more to the distorted objectives of pure finance than to technological innovation and creative flexibility. Thereby the purposive conservatism of guilds could also have a radically protective function.

In addition, we need to put in place more robust institutions that initiate people into professions through vocational training – especially for professions such as law and banking that have lost this dimension in relatively recent times.⁵⁷ One might distinguish here between compulsory professional associations overseeing entry qualifications and then safeguarding a minimum of good practice, and the free guilds, which would be voluntary and exist in order to shelter and encourage more stringent standards.

A New Political-Economic Corporatism

If businesses, professional associations and other corporate bodies (for example universities) are to be officially encouraged to take social responsibility, then reciprocally they should exercise a share in political governance. There needs to be a more modern political participation through *métier*, alongside a more traditional (and ecologically crucial) one through terrain. This is a radical theme all the way from Durkheim via G.D.H. Cole to Paul Hirst, as well as a conservative one from Burke via Hilaire Belloc to Christopher Dawson.⁵⁸ It has been perverted into totalitarianism only when (a) it has altogether displaced the representative government of individuals and localities, (b) it has been centrally directed and made compulsory and (c) it has disguised a continued capitalist exaction of surplus value from workers with an organic gloss of *kitsch* falsity.

Here Pope Emeritus Benedict's support for stake-holding and share-distribution seems to indicate a break with the German Catholic legacy of Cardinal Ketteler's reading of 'co-determination' as if capitalists were the authentic equivalents of feudal overlords rather than people whose wealth had mainly been acquired through unjust exploitation. Thomas Carlyle had been more adamant about the need for transformation – if this 'feudal' equivalence, in a more democratic form, were now to hold: his 'Captains of Industry' were required in future to heroically subordinate their ownership and direction of resources to the more dispersed needs of now free workers.⁵⁹ But one can add to Carlyle that we also need far greater levels of participation in the ownership of the 'means of production' – though not outright enforced collective or democratic ownership, which always cedes to a tyrannical bureaucratic control by a new activist elite. These degenerations can be discouraged and even avoided if the churches and other religious and philanthropic bodies help to coordinate inter-corporate governance without all this being routed through the centralising administration of the state.

Fostering Virtuous Enterprise

The dominant business model of most advanced economies is based on two elements: (1) individual incentives that influence *ex ante* motivation – whether in the form of private sector performance-related pay and bonuses or in the form of public sector policies ‘nudging’ our behaviour towards greater efficiency and happiness; (2) individual rewards, usually conferred without regard to social, ecological or ethical purpose. The problem of the underlying logic is fourfold: First, it sunders *ex ante* motivation from *ex post* outcomes, which leads to the perverse situation of rewarding failure (bonus payments and golden handshakes even in case of losses or bankruptcy). Second, it privileges private self-interest and views social benefit merely in terms of indirect, unintended outcomes. Third, it designs incentives purely in extrinsic ways, and reduces the question of reward to a principal–agent relation whereby the principal rewards the agent and makes herself better off too (e.g. top management and large shareholders). Fourth, it separates monetary from non-monetary rewards, which divorces material value from symbolic worth.

In order to change all this, the idea that economic ends are not inherently ethical ones needs to be challenged. It is crucial that virtue be pursued for its own sake. Yet at the same time, virtuous behaviour may yield pleasure or even profit while also making a contribution to the common good.⁶⁰ For this reason, it is not inappropriate that it can also be publicly encouraged by monetary recompense (e.g. tax breaks, preferential treatment in terms of government procurement or public service tenders).

The Primacy of Land, Locality and Craft

Amid a general rural exodus, we need to remember that it is the countryside and the organic relation of the city to the countryside which most guarantees our animal rationality. The countryside is basic in terms of food provision, ecology and our sense of beauty. It remains, therefore, the focus of prime concern as to how we maintain our human creativity and sustainable economic innovation alongside our sense of wonder and purposive place within reality. A failure to comprehend the primacy of the land threatens the integrity of cities most of all, because a false primacy of the urban has encouraged an over-concentration of population and the rise of the sprawling mega-city (symbolised in London by the dwarfing of the sublime spires of the people’s churches by the monstrously vulgar temples to Mammon) which inevitably destroys its real function as the fulcrum of trade, craft and artistic flourishing as well as philosophical discussion. Instead, the mega-city has often become a site for debased modes of mass manufacture, monopolistic, self-serving financial services, middle-brow culture often masquerading as

the *avant-garde*, and media diversion of our attention from the real issues of power and complexity towards a trivial politicisation of personal life.

Intellectual failure with respect to our understanding of our place within nature has also a physical equivalent. The more that land is enclosed, the more also local ecologies are destroyed, as the earth depends increasingly upon one fragile global ecological balance. But in the end, of course, the global ecology of *gaia* itself depends upon the various local ecologies, and with their evermore reduced functioning, it would eventually collapse.⁶¹ We therefore need to grasp the ways in which new lighter and green technologies can permit once again a wider inhabitation of the surface of the globe. Rural and now remote areas can be brought to life once again, while cities can recover their functions as centres of human meeting, and concentrations of excellence and example.

But this means rejecting the fatalism that assumes that an evermore advanced economy requires an evermore automated labour and the gradual replacement of human labour altogether by anonymous processes. For this is not, in reality, the implication of 'progress', but rather of a liberal capitalist process directed towards the abstraction of profit instead of the genuine 'economising' of human effort towards the end of human flourishing. To its end, capitalism requires endlessly to save on labour costs, even though it must eventually reckon with a consequent decline in demand, which it is increasingly tempted to make up through the credit mechanism and modes of employment that tend evermore to modes of slavery without the security that was sometimes the slaves' compensation. But the pursuit of human flourishing suggests, instead, that technology should be used to extend rather than to displace individual human creativity. This makes sense both insofar as work satisfaction is an irreplaceable aspect of human existence (as opposed to the eventual tedium of leisure without contemplation), and insofar as the blend of craft with automatic process produces superior results. This is most abundantly true with respect to agriculture, where food quality and environmental sustainability benefit from a more labour-intensive approach that resorts less to drastic and rapid 'solutions' such as crop-spraying. And in all fields of production, this approach helps to ensure that fewer people are confined to those marginal, temporary and precarious jobs that are still required to paste over the communicational and organisational gaps, which even the most exhaustive extension of the automatic tends to leave in place.⁶² We need, therefore, to revisit attempts such as that of Glasgow at the turn of the nineteenth century to combine mass manufacturing with craft design.

Such moves would also strengthen the link of craft between city and countryside, as still pertains to some degree in Italy today. We also need something like the traditional Italian sense of locality, comprising city and *commune* as a relatively self-sustaining economy in accordance with an

AQ: The phrase 'To this end' seems correct in the context. Please check if the text 'To its end' is appropriate.

economic application of the subsidiarist principle. This should include the local owning and organising of energy companies, geared whenever possible towards renewables, in order to undercut giant private companies (which would be either mutualised or, if necessary, broken up). Such local economies are more stable and resilient and more productive of excellence and social solidarity. At the same time, their existence can drastically reduce global transport costs, which are only 'efficient' in terms of a near-hysterical search to reduce the price of labour.

AQ: Could 'the price of labour' be changed to 'the cost of labour'?

These things would increase the appeal of staying on the land in order to achieve a more stable agriculture and to sustain that rural beauty which is ultimately our cultural lifeblood. On the basis of a wider distribution of property, Western countries need to reinforce intensive small-scale farming requiring crop rotation, common grazing, a much greater number of agricultural workers and many practices of mutual assistance. All in all, this beneficial circulation would allow the emergence of a good natural and social ecology: a fine balance of interaction between person and person and between person and nature, as Pope Francis argued in his social encyclical *Laudato Si'*.⁶³

It is within *this* cultural soil that revolutionary Western advancements in technology and natural science were able to take root in the past, from the early Middle Ages onwards.⁶⁴ Hence there is absolutely nothing merely romantic about the insistence upon rural primacy, which (as we saw) was upheld by Adam Smith himself. To the contrary, romanticism here coincides with realism, because the long-term Western technological and industrial take-off is connected to the uniquely country- and town-based character of medieval civilisation. Pagan antiquity was focused on large cities and a slave economy that drained the wealth away from the countryside and depleted its resources, often leaving behind wildernesses, as the appearances of the Mediterranean littoral sometimes attest to this day. By contrast, the familiar 'patchwork' landscape of Europe attests to a productive 'infilling' that occurred in the twelfth century, accompanied by many technological advances in milling and ploughing. The same 'town and countryside' pattern helped to foment the more culinary and craft-based character of the French industrial revolution and even the early English industrial revolution in Shropshire and Derbyshire, just as the city and *commune* pattern of Italian human geography shaped the craft and design-based character of eventual Italian industrialisation.

Today it is possible to restore the primacy of land and craft in an extended ecological sense of a primacy of nature as a whole, and of humanity taken as a part of nature, albeit as wisely governing over it in order to perfect it through further beautification and intensified flourishing. Such a primacy would uniquely guard against the siphoning-off of real benefits for overly abstract urban purposes with a consequent leaching away of the meaning of nature,

which then remains as merely so much material detritus to be expropriated and exploited.

Securing the Wise Use of Land

We have argued that capitalism is a simultaneous abstraction and materialisation and that financialising destruction is a primary aspect of the capitalist logic. However, today materialisation in the mode of primary accumulation is becoming ever-harder to come by, and thus we see a speeding up of financialisation secured by already accumulated material resources, besides an increase in sheer speculation on the already abstract.

Yet in this situation, just as ultimate securitisation remains material, so too do ultimate rewards to individual persons, and to some degree even to corporate bodies. Ultimate rewards tend increasingly to take the form not so much of fluid resources, honours or titles, as of estates, hunting grounds, houses and possessions such as yachts – in what might seem like an almost feudal reversal. But such possessions are much freer of any ties or obligations than any ‘feudal’ domains – hence their tendency to exacerbate the dispossession of the many, local economic decline and ecological damage, as today with grouse-moors and excessive sheep-farming on high ground in the United Kingdom. Moreover, they are often not put to any even reasonably productive use and tend to remove from the public domain both land and property that might sometimes be used for greatly needed housing in both urban and rural areas.

In covert recognition of this materialisation of reward, neo-liberal policy, ever since Mrs Thatcher, has tended more and more to tax income and commodity rather than land. Post-liberalism ought to reverse this. Unproductive land and land owned sheerly for prestige or disproportionate and unshared private enjoyment should be heavily taxed, compared to land being put to good uses of all kinds. However, this would have to be imposed in a subtle and discriminating way. There would be no intention to repeat the disinheriting of the aristocracy (by the Tory party and in its own interests) after the First World War, which has had ambivalent consequences, including the eventual purchase of large estates by irresponsible (and usually left liberal) celebrities. Instead, the framing of any such measures would attempt to discriminate between genuinely rooted, responsible and ecologically and socially beneficial owners on the one hand, and distant, irresponsible and highly wealthy owners, on the other.

This would not be easy, yet it is essential in order to tackle both the new hoarding of land as reward and a more ancient process of dispossession that belonged to a more original primitive accumulation permitting capitalist take-off. The more equitable distribution of land itself should stand at the base of

a more equitable distribution of assets in general that tends to inhibit wage exploitation and restriction of independent social participation. Increased taxes on those who buy only to rent would be matched by stringently enforced local rent controls, aiming to prevent the current absurd situation whereby governments and banks subsidise exploitative landlords through welfare payments and student loans.

It is by embracing a specifically rooted vision of the common good that the West can address the metacrisis of capitalism. However, people will claim that this is not possible because the debt burden means we must ruthlessly retrench public social provision, while withdrawing all restraints on the market systems that generate growth and jobs.

To this extent they are right: the state of the public finances is not viable, as the service of growing debt levels reduces investment while transferring taxpayers' money to those who hold national bonds. Moreover, public credit creation has fuelled the very finance capitalism that triggered the global financial crash and plunged the West into the deepest recession since 1929–1932. But this problem is precisely the opportunity to change things. In the remainder of this chapter, we outline a series of approaches that could transform quarterly, cartel capitalism into a functioning and just market economy – starting with the issue of debt.

7. DEALING WITH DEBT

The key problem with the dominant, liberal conception of finance is that it treats debt as absolute and primary vis-à-vis assets, and, in consequence, privileges the interests of creditors over those of debtors. Such an inversion of the natural order and of common sense, which attempts to steer a course into the future by the light of the pole of destructive negation, follows necessarily from the liberal capitalist account of value as abstract. By this measure, if the sums in the dual-entry books do not yield a positive amount, an entire economy and society will then come to define itself in terms of lack. But to accept this scenario is to remain, in Carlyle's image, transfixed by the gaze of the sphinx, in deluded denial of the actually unprecedented natural and artificial surplus abundance that lies all about us. Thus, 'we stagger spellbound, reeling on the brink of huge peril' but quite unnecessarily, because we are seduced by contrived appearances and ignore the underlying reality of continued great wealth provided by labour and technological ingenuity.⁶⁵ This has, in consequence, become, again to apply Carlyle to a new context, 'an enchanted wealth', which 'belongs yet to nobody', by virtue of our fascination with abstract quantification and its mistaken fantasy (in keeping with

an aspect of modern mathematics questioned by the pre-critical Kant and others)⁶⁶ that negative sums are every bit as real as positive ones.⁶⁷

But were we to deny this fantasy, we would cease to see the merely nominal amounts ‘owed’ to creditors as more primary than these amounts possessed by debtors who have generally put them to actual productive use and, thereby, already turned them into *more* actual positive wealth. For example, the well-maintained, repaired and beautified house should surely be considered a collective asset that outweighs in the economic balance the outstanding amount of mortgage debt still owed (or perhaps ‘owned’) by its occupiers. By another, gift-exchange logic, indebtedness could be seen more as a positive personal and social bond, whose essence is a grateful promise to make a counter-payment in the future. Were building societies to construe themselves in this fashion as truly mutual, the occupiers could be considered as already part-owners and thereby investors in the mortgage company, who would reciprocally be held to have incurred an equal share of the risk of the loan. Licentious ease of credit is only allowed by the refusal of all responsibility and guilt on the part of the creditors and, therefore, the eventual complete non-ease of the debtor.

Under the currently prevailing logic, transfixed and enchanted by abstraction and negativity, the logic of easy credit is of a single piece with the inequitable separation of profit from risk between institutional investors and top managers on the one hand, and customers and employees on the other hand. By contrast, the ‘civil economy’ tradition, like primordial gift-exchange, views debt in more relational terms, and argues for arrangements whereby both profit and risk are shared more equitably among all the stakeholders: lenders and borrowers, investors and owners, shareholders and managers, employers and employees, producers and consumers, as well as suppliers and sellers. As the West and other parts of the world risk drowning in debt, the civil economy model offers a number of closely connected policy ideas.

In terms of public debt, governments should combine gradually induced (and not arbitrarily timetabled) fiscal discipline with a debt reduction plan that ultimately reduces the burden of interest rate payments and thus frees up resources for strategic investment and tax cuts for low-income families. Reducing debt in a realistic way will require an end to the old policies of tax-and-spend and excessive new borrowing. For near-bankrupt states that face debt default (in both Europe and the Global South), this means a dose of debt forgiveness by writing down the value of existing liabilities and a large measure of debt restructuring, starting with longer grace periods and maturity extensions. Parliaments in such states should legislate to restrict debt issuance by national, regional and municipal bodies, limiting them to low- or no-interest-bearing bonds primarily for capital projects. The issuance of such

bonds should be linked to devolving tax-and-spend powers to lower levels and reducing the size and costs of the central bureaucracy.

For indebted states such as the United States or the United Kingdom that do not face the prospect of debt default, public debt reduction will require, first of all, converting a number of bonds on central bank balance sheets to low- or non-interest-bearing debt, as Adair Turner has suggested. In this manner, the government would spend less on debt servicing (currently about £53 billion a year in the United Kingdom) and could use this fiscal leeway to reduce the overall public debt burden faster and generate growth based on productive activities that engender real value. Second, public bonds might be supplemented by GDP growth warrants in order to break the vicious circle of debt-deflation and link sovereign debt more closely to a virtuous cycle of shared prosperity. Growth warrants would provide an alternative to replace regular fixed or variable interest rate bonds, by offering a security that would use the growth rate of nominal national output as its interest rate (with some variation dependent on the country and expected inflation). Therefore, weak GDP growth would slow down the increase in public debt, whereas strong GDP growth would simultaneously benefit the holder of sovereign debt and the government.⁶⁸ The concerns about the pro-cyclical nature of this scheme are outweighed by the economic and ethical advantages of the reciprocal arrangements among stakeholders, which realign risks with rewards.

In relation to private debt, it is important to recognise that the majority of debtors have not fallen into debt by virtue of greed and the sheer squandering of resources, but much more by the need to provide positive assets for themselves and their children in terms of shelter, nourishment, clothes, books, toys, education and holidays. To assess their situation merely negatively is to ignore the fact that 'money owed' has already been 'alchemically' converted into physical and psychic positivities that benefit not only individuals and their families, but also the communities in which they are embedded, and, by extension, the nation as a whole.

Thus a measure of debt forgiveness in certain circumstances is ethically imperative and economically sensible as well as egalitarian, since it breaks the vicious circle of ever-greater debt and puts a floor under the increasing value of real assets such as personal saving funds and property, as well as the social and physical capital of businesses. Tying money to real assets and binding material things to a monetary mirroring more tightly linked to their symbolic social meaning helps restore the primacy of real worth over nominal valuation.

In addition to debt forgiveness, Western economies need debt restructuring, whereby the most short-term, high-interest government bonds, mortgages and consumer loans are converted into longer-term, lower and (in some cases) fixed-interest credit. Of course, certain creditors will effectively forfeit

some of their investment, but they stand much more to lose in the event of mass bankruptcy, the prospect of large-scale home re-possession and further financial crises.

Another proposal to deal with household indebtedness in a 'civilly' economic perspective is to convert mortgage debt into equity in order to reduce the risk of home re-possession and make the relationship between lenders and borrowers more reciprocal, as the economist Willem Buiter has argued.⁶⁹ Personal bankruptcy and home re-possession are economically costly, socially traumatic and culturally destructive, as they humiliate people and rob them of the symbolic meaning and emotional stability that a house affords its owners. Insofar as re-possessing homes frequently involves auction, it marks a loss for mortgage lenders too. By contrast, mortgage brokers and other professionals who receive their fee upfront are the main beneficiaries of the current system. For these reasons, debt equitisation makes both economic and ethical sense. Here we can learn from some principles of Islamic finance, in particular the idea of equity transfer. For a new equity mortgage, the bank's primary role would not be that of a money lender but, rather, that of the co-owner of the property that secures the mortgage. A more mutualist contract could be drawn up along the following lines. Based on a 25- or 30-year mortgage, the borrower/tenant would pay the bank a rental fee that could be indexed on, or linked in some other way to, the local market for rented properties. This would replace the service of interest and, therefore, not be calculated in relation to central banks' rates. In addition, a periodic payment would transfer part of the equity in the property to the borrower/tenant.

Similar restructuring programmes could be extended to other sectors that are crippled by debt, including commercial real estate and consumer loans. This would help restore the primacy of people's savings and investment over the servicing of debt – in better abstract reflection of the natural primacy of the positive at the concrete level. In this manner, a more relational conception of debt would also prevent the destructive bubble cycle whereby debt-financed speculation leads to a huge hike in asset and commodity prices and creates trillions of dollars in fake wealth.

The civil economy model can also be used to demonstrate the economic and ethical case for converting debt into equity in relation to banks' liabilities and sovereign debt.⁷⁰ Instead of a taxpayer-funded bailout, banks and other systemically important financial institutions should be re-capitalised through mandatory debt-to-equity conversions via special resolution mechanisms that either already exist or would have to be created. The overriding occasion for this recommendation is that the unsecured creditors of banks and other financial institutions have benefitted for decades from free default insurance. Their free-riding on government bail-outs underwritten by the taxpayers has created perverse incentives for excessive risks and rewards without any

responsibility or obligation towards other stakeholders. By turning unsecured creditors into shareholders and stakeholders who for a certain period would not receive dividends or the right of share repurchases, the conversion of debt into equity would create a more economically and ethically viable model of risk- and profit-sharing.

8. REWARDING WORK: FAIR WAGES, JUST PRICES AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS

A post-liberal political economy requires an ethical as well as economic negotiation of wages, prices and profits among owners, workers, shareholders and consumers who would all be given the opportunity to acquire real political and economic stakes in every enterprise. Such practices would be encouraged by different corporate governance arrangements that favour the representation of estranged interests and the participation of all stakeholders; legal and taxation arrangements that incentivise risk- and profit-sharing models; and greater involvement of professional associations and courts of justice in arbitrating disputes over such matters. We cannot trust either the state or the capitalist market to deliver these new arrangements, and we need to make this matter something that comes first within the advisory power of professional associations and other economic corporate bodies – defined by their pursuance of social and political, alongside economic purpose. Guilds could be organised according to sectors and regions (including cross-border), defining standards and offering advice to those firms that voluntarily belong to them.

To reverse growing asset and income inequality as well as the de-professionalisation and the proletarianisation of the workforce, ownership of capital – whether of property and plant capacity, or of financial investment in one's own or other firms – needs to be far more widely distributed through employee-ownership and other forms of stake-holding. In this manner, assets can supplement wages and salaries, and provide an extra layer of security. Everything possible should be done through local banks, credit unions, mutual manufacturing investment funds, cooperative housing associations, worker share-ownership, and so forth to ensure a general re-professionalisation of the population. National and local government should deliberately encourage the emergence of such institutions by offering tax advantages, privileged conditions of access to credit and so forth.

In terms of specific policy ideas, this includes, first, ensuring a genuine 'living wage' at the national level, while empowering the negotiation of higher 'family wages' that will vary according to location and area of activity.⁷¹ Besides the small negative impact on employment and the very

large positive impact on reducing welfare dependency among the ‘working poor’, paying the living and family wages can begin to generate a virtuous circle: higher household income, lower personal debt, more consumer spending, higher tax revenues and lower spending on in-work benefits, which in turn offers scope for tax cuts for low-income families and small businesses. A higher-wage economy tends to involve lower staff turnover (and hence lower costs of hiring and firing), higher staff morale, more incentives for efficiency savings and for innovation, as well as higher labour productivity.

It follows that one needs, in the second place, some kind of index between wages and productivity growth such that a flourishing business with sustainable growth/performance shares its prosperity more evenly. Labour productivity is notoriously hard to measure, but if executive pay is linked to performance, then it should be possible to extend this to all employees. Third, wage and salary level should be more yoked to a dimension of stake-ownership. That could include the award of shares in the business for a private sector enterprise or a sharing in the budget surplus for a public sector organisation.

Fourth, Western countries need to distribute ownership of capital far more widely than is currently the case – whether ownership of property and plant capacity, or of financial investment in one’s own or other firms (including universally portable pension funds).

9. MUTUALISING WELFARE

From a civil economy perspective, the post-war Keynesian and the neo-liberal welfare settlement represent two sides of the same coin. In different ways, both rely on the strong state and centralised power at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation. Both also fragment mutual organisation and undermine the pursuit of reciprocal benefit based on contribution and reward. Together, they produce our present reality, which is continually controlled by impossibly distant external forces rather than created through our own efforts, individual and communal.

In the wake of such manifest failure, and the comparative international evidence of the permanent underfunding that ensues upon a purely tax-based system, there is an even greater case for mutualising social security. This is not just about linking rights to duties but also about reciprocal assistance based on personal need and decision making taking place at more proximate levels.

If we are to escape from state indebtedness, which we have seen to be a crucial component of capitalist logic, welfare can no longer rely either on a policy of tax-and-spend (plus borrowing) or on rationalisation through

outsourcing to the private sector, which in any case results in cruel negligence. The alternative to both means testing and a ballooning welfare budget is a twofold contributory model: first, an expanded version of the current National Insurance system to insure everyone against risks such as unemployment and long-term care; second, funding both health and social security by creating a new insurance system (modelled on health care mutuals in Scandinavia, Germany and France) – with a contribution from general taxation (much lower than the current health budget) to cover those who cannot pay for health insurance. It is clear that people are more willing to make substantive contributions when these are more specifically directed than is the case with tax.

To avoid central government meddling and a permanent managerialist revolution, the health care system should be run as a mutual trust accountable to its members (especially patients and front-line staff), with a much greater role for health care cooperatives that are co-owned by patients or citizens (not just partnerships among qualified professionals).⁷² In the same interests of a relational and holistic approach to the integral person, social and health care should be combined: the relevance of this to the elderly is particularly clear. By the same token, a mutualised social security system should also shift the focus away from a reactive approach that mostly deals with the effects of problems (e.g. unemployment or ill-health) towards a proactive stance that tackles the root causes by adopting a strategy of early intervention.⁷³

As to unemployment benefit, we need both greater generosity and also a more genuine and well-judged beneficence. First, benefit should be indexed to insurance contribution, to ensure that the relatively well-off do not suddenly fall into relative destitution, which does no one any good and may cause people to fall further into despair, incapacity and even suicide. Second, as to the chronically and long-term unemployed, we should abandon all tedious, unkind and time-wasting talk of threats and sanctions. Certainly work should pay more and provide a strong incentive to get back to work, and certainly too many families are surviving on benefits through more than one generation. But this is primarily a problem of the development of bad family habits in the face of general economic collapse and regional economic decline and not usually just the fault of individuals: the real economic problems should be collectively addressed and families and localities holistically assisted. Of course, there will always remain some cases where there is no work to be found or people are temporarily or permanently unemployable. This has to be just accepted and no one can be allowed to starve or suffer a lack of basic comforts and necessities.

But beyond such basic provision the long-term unemployed should be offered either educational programmes to undertake, or socially and environmentally useful tasks to perform by the local council, in return for increased

benefit. And further, to remove from this any possible stigma, and to assist all those who do not want to undertake conventional work, such as emergent writers, artists, composers and actors, the taking on of all such modestly paid roles should be regarded as a normal, acceptable option for citizens in general.

After all, if we can, as we should, begin to adopt a human, educative and restorative approach to the imprisoned, then all the more should we do so in relation to those out of work.

10. ACHIEVING VOCATIONAL, ACADEMIC AND ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE

Raising wages alone will not deliver the long-term solution that those trapped in relative poverty need. Different solutions are required to enable all individuals to properly develop their skills, talent and character. For those stuck on low pay and in critical working conditions, one idea is to foster longer-term work contracts as well as personal and professional development that will open up new opportunities. However, many people are excluded from viable and justly rewarded jobs by a major skills gap. On the one hand, many employers need skill sets that are rare to come by and, on the other hand, many people have rare talents and skills that employers do not recognise. This mismatch is damaging to individual flourishing, employment, entrepreneurial success, shared prosperity and competitiveness.

To correct it, Western countries (especially the United Kingdom) need to promote a more holistic education – not just harness restricted and under-developed skills for narrow state-administrative or market-commercial purposes. For decades we have sustained in many ways the worst of all educational worlds: an excessive focus on transferable formalistic academic skills in conjunction with the wrong kind of subject-specific specialisation – narrowing people in their substantive theoretical scope, and, yet, not eventually preparing them for a specific practice. As a result, pupils are woefully lacking in general knowledge and culture, but not inducted into any specific vocation either. This is an aspect of an ever-greater division of labour and the expansion of low-skilled service-sector jobs.

To amend this situation, we need first of all a new system of through-life education and training, offered to all as a national civil right, however this might be variously funded and delivered. It would start with early years intervention and programmes for disadvantaged households, followed by a broader primary and secondary education, less specialised higher education and a much greater provision of vocational training.⁷⁴ It would include hybrid pathways that fuse academic knowledge with vocational induction for professions that require both, such as law, banking and finance.⁷⁵

Second, all countries require a national programme for on-the-job training and mentoring. In the case of the United Kingdom, together with the participation of employers' associations and trade unions, a new Royal Commission needs to re-think and revamp lifelong learning. This approach, grounded in common ownership, would ensure that employers can more readily find skilled and adaptable employees, while workers could equally find fitting and properly remunerated labour. By tying employment and education firmly together, we can help people escape powerlessness and cycles of debt and demoralisation, while ensuring that both the public and the private sector are well supplied with skilled labour.

Third, Western countries (and especially Britain) need greatly to expand the provision of apprenticeships within and across different sectors, industries and manufacturing productions. Sectors like the car industry in Europe offer a good example of how apprenticeships could allow young people to learn their trade in more than one country. In this manner, mobility would help the spread of good practice and create new networks of professionals. Here, the rest of the West can learn from Germany's apprenticeship programme, at the heart of which is the idea of blending hands-on vocational training with academic learning at a local technical college, which is monitored by local chambers of commerce – a role that in Britain could revert to guildhalls. It can also learn to offer apprenticeship and training for almost every job, however humble it may be considered – thus, for example in Germany, construction workers who train for at least three years are required to develop broader practical skills such as management, civil engineering and carpentry; lorry drivers are trained in logistics and foreign languages; shop assistants learn about all aspects of the retail trade. In every case, this encourages both more work satisfaction and a better service to customers.⁷⁶

Fourth, new institutions are needed that can help build and sustain a vocational economy, starting with greater employer and employee cooperation at the local and the sectoral level (under the aegis of a renewed and expanded guildhall structure). This could extend to a new national Vocational Fund that could bring together all estranged interests to explore ways of raising product quality and workplace standards – including government (as a major procurer), business, the trade unions, universities, colleges and training associations.

11. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND COMPETITION POLICY

In the face of a loss of trust in professions and the growing number of corporate scandals, there is now throughout Western countries and elsewhere a

considerable growth of alternatives to stock-listed companies: social enterprises; mutual businesses, cooperative ventures linking owners, workers and consumers; hybrid firms pursuing both profit and charitable goals; voluntary membership in new modes of guild (e.g. *Compagnie delle Opere* in Italy) of mutual support networks between companies who also uphold certain shared values of production and treatment of workers.⁷⁷ The common factor here is the qualification of sheerly economic motivation and the re-embedding of the economic in the social for partially *economic* reasons that have nonetheless to do with the pursuit of greater financial security.

But only a groundless ‘economism’ would rule out the idea that we are also witnessing a certain, if sectorally confined, change in ethos – a growing desire on the part of some people to combine the pursuit of material well-being with honourable social service. As already suggested in chapter 2, where wealth commonly prevails, one starts to need other markers of prestige. And the more honour itself becomes a currency, the more consumers will ally themselves through their choices to an honourable style of life⁷⁸ – to fair trade and fair treatment of workers, which tends to go along with reliability of product and fair treatment of the consumer herself.

This is directly relevant for a post-liberal civil economy in the West. Its particular brand of cartel capitalism has produced an economy where most markets are dominated by a small number of players and the barriers to entry are far too high. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that, in many areas, from energy to banking to groceries, the West has a type of monopolistic *rentier* capitalism rather than a properly functioning market economy – a system in which certain individuals or small groups cream off excessive profits through price-fixing, monopsony (excessive buying power through market dominance that crowds out modest-sized businesses and drives down prices paid to suppliers) and other anti-competitive practices. Such a situation conspires against innovation and is detrimental to the smaller enterprises that most of all generate growth, provide employment and spread prosperity.

The argument that globalisation requires a cost-centred ‘race to the bottom’ is nonsense, as developed economies will never be able to compete for ordinary jobs with low-wage countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia. On the contrary, the only route towards sustainable, high growth is to compete in terms of both quality and responsible behaviour. As Genovesi showed in his *Lectures on Civil Economy*, what matters is not the absolute cost of labour or the relation between foreign and domestic production of goods. Rather, what matters is who you share your labour market with. Paying higher prices for locally produced goods not only encourages domestic manufacturing, industry and a greater division of labour within one’s polity, but – since traders are interconnected – it also raises real wages in all trades from agriculture and manufacturing upwards, promoting both higher productivity and greater economic justice. In this manner, we

can realign fair wages with just prices and defend the interests of all stakeholders, including workers, suppliers and consumers.

By emphasising location and vocation equally, democratic decision making would be fused with a legitimate role for hierarchy in terms of professional excellence and judgement. Without such a new institutional structure, local manufacturing and industry cannot thrive in an increasingly globalised, interdependent world and are quickly swamped by the control of more distant elites, subject to no democratic checks whatsoever. Above all, the West requires a new strategy to foster innovation, including new public ‘trusts’ for the pooling of technological knowledge to replace the current patenting system.⁷⁹ That is because at present, the dominant model favours large private corporations over smaller, more innovative and social enterprises.

In relation to competition, the following reforms are required.⁸⁰ First, a new legal and regulatory framework of competition policy that links the prohibition of monopoly, monopsony and rent-seeking behaviour with the promotion of new market entry and lower consumer prices connected with higher quality (as with organically produced food, where falling price levels now make it increasingly affordable). Second, a broadening of competition rules and regulations beyond the sole goals of either more business efficiency or more consumer welfare in the direction of promoting market diversity, a plurality of business models and supply-chain resilience. This should be coupled with a recognition of social, environmental and ethical purposes in economic activity. Third, a widening of the competition framework to defend the rights of not only consumers but also owners, producers, suppliers and the members of communities where business activity might generate adverse social, environmental or cultural impact.

12. SHARED VALUE AND GOOD BUSINESS

In the period roughly from 1990 till 2015, an increasing proportion of the value generated by economic activity has been concentrated in the hands of top managers and shareholders in the form of corporate profits. Since 2002, large corporations have been net savers rather than net investors. It is precisely the obsession with profit maximisation that has undermined the ability of enterprise, both large and small, to generate shared prosperity. This, combined with the alignment of extremely high executive pay with short-term shareholder returns, has reduced long-term investment in production, research and development, innovation, training and infrastructure. Many Western businesses are suffering from a lack of strategic vision, a lack of honourable leadership and a lack of commitment to the long-term sustainability of a company and its ability to optimise profits over time.

In terms of concrete policies, we would argue for extending and transforming the notion of ‘shared value’ that is now embraced by certain business theorists, who argue that attention to the social and environmental welfare of business partners and the hinterland promotes rather than hinders economic profitability.⁸¹ As they point out, even large corporations are today sometimes ahead of most theory in some of their practices, which tacitly acknowledge the market limits of globalisation. Even firms as ruthless and monopolistic as Nestlé in Europe, Unilever in the United Kingdom or Wal-Mart in the United States are starting to see the economic costs of socially and ethically unsustainable action. If one over-controls one’s labour force, shifts one’s labour base too often, pays suppliers as cheaply as possible, extends the division of labour round the globe, buys out local rivals and fails to benefit local communities, schools and ecologies, then eventually the costs outstrip the benefits. One is left with unreliable and non-innovative workforces, poor-quality suppliers, botched components shipped round the globe at enormous cost, falling demand in local hinterlands and weak local supplies of talent in increasingly impoverished and undesirable habitats (as with corporate scandals such as in Bhopal in the past or BP in the Gulf of Mexico more recently).

Thus it becomes possible to argue that the pursuit of long-term stable and steadily augmenting profit *requires*, for strictly economic reasons, an attention to mutual benefit. Corporate contributions to social and ecological costs should not, therefore, be thought of as ‘coming from without’ and as *constraining* business, but rather as naturally embraceable by business and for purely business reasons. On this reasoning, one should be able to persuade businesses to ‘cost in’ the social and environmental demands that their economic projects make, or to compensate for the social and ecological deficits that they tend to cause, without any need either for any draconian legal constraint or for fiscal encouragement.

However, we should rightly question the tendency of ‘shared value’ theorists to suggest that ethical considerations should be pursued *only* for reasons of a strictly economic cost-benefit calculation, because there is an economic as well as moral flaw in this very claim. The problem is that, from the outset, the lure of ‘bad practice’ – of social, psychological and ecological depletion – as a way of cutting corners and, so, costs, has been one driving motor of capitalism as such. For example, the underlying perverse logic propels massive ‘primitive accumulation’ of as yet non-capitalised lands and people, with little given back to either in return. This process has been endlessly repeated and intensified ever since the beginning of the Western-imperial era. And even in the case of later steady-state capitalist practice, a continued appropriation of environments, communities and individual people remains a fundamental source of its unprecedented profitability.

If, for example, one removes from people their tribal lands, then those left destitute may be constrained to work cheaply for their new masters. Or if one lays claim to ownership of a hitherto common stretch of riverbank, then there is no need to face the expense of compensation. While one claims to ‘own’ this water-frontage, one equally ‘disowns’ the polluting detritus that now flows down the river into the sea, and fails to ‘cost in’ this adverse ecological factor. This occurs alongside the extraction of surplus value from labour, as noted by Marx. One can accept the latter notion in a qualified and expanded sense to mean the denial to workers of a fair share of profits (rather than a wholesale denial of the legitimacy of returns to shareholders) and of ‘surplus desire’ from consumers (when excessive prices exploit situations of either scarcity or over-aroused desire through the lures of fashion, glamour and advertising).

Thus the ‘shared value’ theorists remain capitalist theorists just to the extent that they deny the need to supplement supposedly amoral motivations as the prime economic ones and ignore the way in which immoral practices are actually constitutive of capitalism. Nevertheless, they are not wrong to suggest that such bad practices can be eventually self-defeating, even in capitalistic terms. For while they tend to favour the making of a quick buck, they equally tend to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs of sustainable profitability. Therefore, although it is true that capitalism is partially built upon a tendency of bad practice to drive out good, it is equally the case that, even in its own terms of success, it can constantly give rise to an opposite process, whereby good practice drives out bad.

This may be exactly why capitalist history offers such striking proof of the greater success of relatively ethical enterprises at certain times and in certain circumstances – like those of the Quakers. In this sense, the modern economic market *already is* to some degree a competition in virtue as well as in naked force and persuasion. There can be a genuine encouragement of honourable demand for the most honourable suppliers and modes of supply that remains within a market logic of free exchange of goods and labour. One can call this the element of ‘civil’ economy that may be encouraged even within capitalism, while still looking for a more normative dominance of good practice that would break with capitalistic norms.

Such a break can be genuinely and realistically entertained precisely because the ‘shared value’ theorists fail to see that capitalism is also – and arguably more primarily – constituted by bad practice driving out good. This is for two reasons: First, as already mentioned, it can be in one’s short-term interests of rapid profitability to cut corners in order to decrease costs. In particular, a business may make a sordidly rapid and exploitative profit in one domain, solely in order to accumulate quick capital to be invested in another. Indeed, it may initially flirt with marginally criminal economic activity

and then advance to a less momentarily spectacular but steadier income based upon more respectable trading and an increase in shared value. Thus Wal-Mart, having made its ruthless pile, is not surprisingly growing more benign in order to head off a damaging ill-repute. In the same way, Nestlé now offers 'fair-trade' coffee and no doubt we will live to see the organic McDonald's burger farmed from free-roaming and humanely hunted bison.

The second reason is that, once damage has been done through bad practice, sometimes it cannot be readily undone. The tribes have lost their lands forever; the fish upstream no longer spawn; the local artisanal businesses and traditional skills handed down over generations for centuries have finally been lost. Wal-Mart, for example, might find it an uphill struggle to try to put back in place the local working, self-educating, saving, and exchanging culture that it now self-interestedly sees that it requires after all. Its insight may arrive too late. This point is perhaps not unrelated to certain dimensions of the economic crisis in Anglo-Saxon countries: a totally thinned-out culture proves too poor a soil to support a richly flourishing local, regional and national economy.

From these two points about the likely place of bad practice within capitalism, it follows that while, yes, the ethical runs *with* and not against long-term business interests, it must still be pursued for its own sake if it is more generally to prevail. This means that 'shared value' must also combine motivational priority with the profit motive, beyond the norms of capitalism as such. In turn, that would rule out a systemic justification for exploiting labour and the consumer, besides land and community. In this way, one would have moved beyond a specifically capitalist market system in the sense of one that puts the accumulation of commodified and appropriated wealth before a growth in the real flourishing of both humans and nature in general.

However, realism is here doubly on the side of the ethical, beyond the Harvard Business School purview: for unless virtue is embraced *as* virtue, and not simply for reasons of self-interest, whether liberal or utilitarian (Kantian or Benthamite), it is unlikely to be embraced at all. It was, after all, not merely simulated Quakers who built model factories and workers' villages. Therefore, in *merely* economic terms, one requires a detour through the 'extra-economic' in the interests of the economic itself (assuming here, for the sake of argument, the dubious generally accepted understanding of the economic as in itself 'amoral'). Or one can put this the other way around: if a good working and trading ethos is pursued for its own sake, then ethical practitioners will embrace market success because it can extend a shared human flourishing.

For such a dual embrace to occur, one requires a slow development of the habits of shared practice both within businesses and between them. However, although this growth in a good ethos is primary, it is not entirely or always

sufficient. For all human beings require the just exercise of law as both stick and carrot, in order to compensate for our endemic moral lassitude. This is one point at which a new embrace of the primacy of ‘social’ or ‘socialist’ solutions by no means neglects the role of the state and of legality. In particular, even though the ‘costing in’ of social and ecological costs should be embraced by businesses for internal reasons, they should also be insisted upon by legal and fiscal measures. Following the same line of reasoning, with respect to the treatment of workers and consumers, a post-liberal political economy should legislate to inhibit movements of labour and capital that drive down labour costs. This could be done through specifically targeted setting of minimal wages (for example in the construction industry), local direction of capital via national and regional investments banks and perhaps, *in extremis*, reciprocally negotiated limits of labour movement between states within federal entities of various kinds (the European Union and the United States, for example). By the same token, governments, and especially in the United Kingdom, should acknowledge the economic as well as obvious political and social importance of ensuring that a reasonable number of strategically important business and manufacturing concerns operative within their countries remain under domestic ownership.

Equally, a civilly economic approach should intensify anti-trust laws, support some levy on financial transactions (both at home and abroad) and seek to impose firmer divisions between the high street and speculative arms of financial trading. And it should advocate the severe curtailing of limited liability for both business and finance, in order to ensure that insane risks are less likely to be taken by persons whose own wealth is ultimately implicated. It is, though, a nominalist mistake to regret the ‘fiction’ of corporate personality, since this (finally Christian) legacy acknowledges both operative character in common and the importance of liberties collectively held and exercised, besides serving to limit the liberal collusion between individualism and unrestricted state sovereignty. Nevertheless, this actually realistic notion is abused if corporate personality is seen, in *completely* fictional terms, as operating altogether independently of the individual persons who compose it in succession through time. This impersonal diachrony gone mad tends, indeed, to licence irresponsibility and to allow individual folly to hide behind a disownable mask. We need, then, a balance between a limitation of liability to allow enterprise undertaken in solidarity with others and a finally locatable personal responsibility in order to guard against unnecessary risks and the subordination of real economic purpose to purely speculative one.

As already suggested, to demand that risk, as well as profit, enter fully into the processes of contractual exchange is surely to insist on an *extension* rather than a diminution of market principles. Otherwise, without this element of social and ethical balance that constitutes a genuinely civil economy, one has

a reality in which profit is increasingly privatised only because risk and not benefit has been socialised.

13. CIVIL ECONOMY AND THE POLITICS OF VIRTUE

The civil economy model can be summarised as follows. Overwhelmingly, it ties economic profit to ethical and social purpose, and seeks to ethicise exchange. In the same spirit, it replaces the separation of risk from reward with risk- and profit-sharing models. In both respects, it publicly requires an economic pursuit of honourable practice and genuine benefit rather than just abstract wealth and power. It assumes that the seemingly ‘other-worldly’ and soul-regarding pursuit of the truly good is, in fact, in natural alignment with the various goods of concrete flourishing (work, housing, food, health) and higher fulfilment (work satisfaction, subtle cuisine, beautiful environment, educational development) that human beings everywhere naturally seek. For this reason, it believes that the real economic task is the shared coordination of all these pursuits in terms of a ‘common good’.

Just because human beings naturally pursue real flourishing and stable, relational goods, the pursuit of virtuous economic practice is not merely desirable for its own sake, but is also more practically effective than an apparently pragmatic amorality and misplaced cynicism as to people’s most consistent motives. Thus honourable behaviour – economic justice seen to be done – simply because it inspires and runs with the natural grain of human endeavour, tends to foster higher innovation, higher productivity, higher growth and higher remuneration. This is only utopian in terms of the current capitalist logic and liberal ideology, but it can be achieved under the carapace of a different set of practices that combine novel incentives, rewards and sanctions with the shaping of an altogether different cultural habit. Of course, this *sine qua non* is the hardest of all to attain and the least subject to blueprint, which is not to say that it is totally immune to a purposive and deliberative shaping.

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29. *Ibid.*, 341, n121.
30. Bruni and Zamagni, *Civil Economy*, 82–86.
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33. Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: James Fraser, 1840).
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59. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 265–71, 208–18.
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74. This can be contrasted with the current shocking underfunding of 'sixth-form colleges' that educate many 16–18-year-olds in the United Kingdom today.

75. See chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion.

76. We are indebted here to the work of Tess Lanning, formerly a research fellow at the IPPR.

77. Bruni and Zamagni, *Civil Economy*, 197–232.

78. We owe this idea to Arabella Milbank.

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Part III

POLITY

Chapter 5

The Metacrisis of Democracy

1. THE LIBERAL PERVERSION OF MIXED CONSTITUTION

Western democracy has in the past faced periodic crises characterised by a collapse of public trust in politicians, a lack of popular participation and a deep scepticism about whether the democratic system can cope with pressing problems or serve the long-term interests of a country as a whole. But today's crisis is qualitatively different insofar as it concerns a doubt as to whether we still live under a substantive democracy at all and whether democracy and liberalism are mutually compatible. This 'metacrisis' is, however (as in the case of the metacrisis of liberalism and capitalism), but the upshot of an ever-increased unravelling of the founding logic of liberal principles – in this case those of representative democracy.

The latter, it has now been cogently argued by several scholars, is actually a misnomer insofar as the only true democracy was always in the past understood to be direct and participatory: thus in ancient Athens political actors were often chosen by lot rather than as elected representatives.¹ The modern, liberal system is best described as unqualified 'representation' because it is, in reality, a hybrid of a democratic and a necessarily aristocratic or oligarchic element, given that representatives have rarely been conceived as simply mandated by the people, but rather remain trusted actors, ideally supposed to be men and women of outstanding ability, integrity and virtue.² In this way, the liberal constitutional settlement did not, after all, wholly abandon the ancient logic of 'mixed constitution', which we will suggest below is the unavoidable grammar of any complex polity as such. For this logic, human rule over humans always requires a balance of the consent of 'the many' with the advice of 'the few' (however constituted) and the executive decisions of 'the one' (or his representatives), which normally has to be in some fashion

literally embodied in one person, as it still is today, throughout the world, in the mode of monarchic, presidential and prime ministerial functions.

Traditionally, this mixture was variously allied to a notion that ‘the many’ might concur in and help to shape the discernment of the just and good by ‘the few’, and that ‘the one’ would act upon the basis of this wisdom. It therefore assumed a shared horizon of purpose, even though it was also felt that constitutional balance would tend to guard against the respective vices of the three parties: the potential tyranny of monarchy; the factional divisions and interests of aristocracy; and the anarchy and violence of the masses. Such balance was not a negative, liberal safeguard – rather, it was but the reverse face of a positive, organic vision of naturally combining contributions: monarchy yielding political unity and defence; aristocracy, wise counsel; democracy, not merely consent but much more vitally ‘liberty, and the courage and liberty where industry begins’.³

For this vision also, sovereignty, and even legislation in the broadest sense, was thought of as distributed across all three functions, with each preserving certain prerogatives. Inseparably linked to this distribution of sovereignty, especially in the medieval as opposed to the classical era, was the idea that ‘the few’ do not just offer their own wisdom but also embody or ‘represent’ the interests of various local and corporate bodies. ‘Representation’ is a term that was first coined within Christian theology in sacramental and Christological contexts, and from the outset it had a double face: the representation of the central power by local ‘representatives’ like bishops, but also their representation of their own people to the centre and ultimately to God – just as Christ, God in human form, was taken to be the representative of both God and humanity.⁴ This paradigm naturally meant that representation assumed a certain common symbolic and axiological horizon. In this, now more decentralised way, ‘the many’ were not represented as an aggregation of individuals, but, rather, as individuals always found in natural or legally recognised smaller groupings that tended already, at a microcosmic level, to operate both a mixed and a representational logic: ‘The representatives who appeared in parliament were not representatives of inorganic collections of individuals, they represented shires and boroughs. ... The county was already a highly organised entity. County and county court were one’.⁵

The rights of these bodies were part of what was recognised by Magna Carta, alongside demands that barons reciprocate in their treatment of sub-vassals and freemen the securities and liberties that they were demanding of the King.⁶ In most Western European states, these lower, commoner representatives eventually also came to be represented at either regional or national level in *cortes*, *parlement* or *parliament*. In this way, the circle was closed: just as mixed government implies decentred distribution of sovereign power, so also this distribution came to be fully represented at the heart of the polity.

Usually, liberal representation is taken to be an advance upon this broadly described medieval system of government and to have guaranteed more peace, balance and liberty beyond its vagaries, besides a greater granting of a political voice to the many. But there are several problems with this claim. First, there was no complete break with the older system in the early modern period, nor even the eighteenth century. In reality, eighteenth-century whig Britain relied upon an uneasily organic mixture of executive, legislative and judicial powers, rather than upon a 'balance of powers', which Montesquieu mistakenly identified to be at work therein.⁷ The same thing was true for so-called 'absolutist' France, once one has realised that its 'checking' functions were more distributed in the many regional branches of *parlement* and that it possessed, correspondingly, a far greater degree of survival of local and corporate independence.⁸ Power in Britain was relatively more contested at the centre, in France more so at the peripheries. But even these are but relative contrasts.

Second, as some English Tories and, later, Burke realised, the liberal irruption against this inherited system involved a destruction of diversely varying corporate liberties and privileges, often perceived as 'irrational' and merely customary. But in this way, many highly substantial modes of participation and popular influence were destroyed – especially if we remember that individuals do not possess any real democratic power when acting alone. This raises a considerable doubt as to whether there is unambiguously more democracy in modern times than in the past – especially when we realise that 'representation' in medieval England, even if it excluded outright serfs (of whom there may have been far fewer than once thought), extended right the way down, at least in principle, to the sub-vassals or freemen of the *vill* and manor who acted for example as constables, churchwardens or ale-tasters.⁹ Such units were in any case represented by knights or lords.¹⁰

Liberalism, instead, is only able to recognise (as Hobbes saw with ultimate clarity) as politically relevant either the literal individual who is a human person or the artificial, aggregate person of the state – a fiction that must be sustained through a monopolisation of power by the fiction's real personal embodiments. Leviathan's absolute sovereignty is necessary to guarantee the social contract and the negative peace of a cessation of natural hostility. The freedom of the contracting individual is the prime site for liberal ideology; the sovereignty of Leviathan, as the expression of mass will, is the prime site *at once* for the ideology of absolutism and the ideology of modern 'democracy'.

Suspended between the many real wills and one, armed fictional will, liberalism has, in principle, extirpated mixed government. Just for this reason, the shadow of absolutism always lurks over it. And it turns out that in eighteenth-century England the absolute sovereignty of Crown in Parliament, as insisted upon by Blackstone over against the power of precedent, amounted

more to the absoluteness of the royal prerogative (which had in many ways a *wider* extension than that of the French monarch) than to the absoluteness of Parliament.¹¹ As Nicholas Henshall explains:

The king continued to appoint ministers, make war and peace, grant pardons, issue charters, incorporate companies, coin money and willed all the other powers subsequently listed by Blackstone. Legislation in the English [as opposed to the more extended French sense, which overlapped with the executive function] sense was ragged indeed. Some Georgian statesman believed a time would come when there were no laws left to be made.¹²

And in this respect we encounter a further aporetic oscillation as to whether this ‘absolutism’ will be conceived in the name of an active governing authority, or, rather, in the name of a ‘imprescriptible’ and essentially unaltering law, which in a sense renders government or statute unnecessary, save as a judicial application.¹³ Whether the ruler or rule itself be taken as absolute, either could be seen as purer safeguards than is democracy of a contractual, market freedom of the individual.

On this scheme then, mixed constitution is, in reality, abandoned. The ‘republican’ role of the few is excised; the *political* as opposed to the economic role of the many is rendered redundant. Instead, liberalism at its Hobbesian heart is really a suspension between the entirely political one and the depoliticised many.

Nevertheless, as we saw in chapter 1, both Locke and republican theorists argued, contrary to Hobbes, that political representation was necessary to preserve the economic liberty of the few and the free consent of the many. In this sense, they sustained elements of both aristocracy and democracy and, therefore, offered a bastardised mixed constitution. Bastardised in theory, and in practice partially corrupted, because the aristocratic function tends to become reduced to the guarding of negative freedom, with a concomitant diminution of the link of aristocracy to local corporate privilege, which is necessarily political, representational and guild-guided as well as economic. For this reason, though Montesquieu was wrong, he began to be right and was consciously adopted as right in America. Without the bond of teleology and virtue, the three constitutional elements came to be seen as having innately disparate interests, including the notion that intermediate corporate interests were necessarily at variance with those of the centre.

In this way, ‘mixture’ came to denote in the main not the cooperation of the needed different parts of a social body (with the checking function being necessary though secondary) but, rather, a negative ‘balancing’. One can see this as having taken four main forms: first, the division of rule, as in the United States, between the executive and the judiciary (with the further negative

balance of senatorial and popular congressional) powers, which leads in the end to rival sovereignties and, so, to both conflict and stasis. Second, with the lapse of a shared symbolic horizon, representation is aporetically caught between sheer mandation on the one hand and mere substitution on the other. This means that there is a permanent threat either of oligarchic rule or of an anarchic mode of democracy. Third, and in consequence, the interaction of the three ancient elements tends to be displaced (in the nineteenth century, but already anticipated by Machiavelli) by a permanent ‘class-struggle’ between the potentially democratic many and the potentially oligarchic few. Karl Marx failed to see that only capitalism produces endemic, necessary and foundational class-conflict. Fourth, and overridingly, there remains always the real bipartite constitutive tension of liberalism between the political one and the economic many. If sovereignty lies originally with the people, then how can it be so alienated that they may only express this through an unquestioned sovereign centre and an unquestioned legal formalism that is self-sustaining and totally outside popular control? Above all, in the case of the United States, it is unclear who is really in charge – the people or the divided powers at the centre, constantly contesting, but thereby reinforcing through patronage and lobbying the single power of the centre as such.

If today we can validly speak of a metacrisis of the liberal state, then this is just because this bipartition is threatening finally to shatter the lingering tripartition of the ancient Western constitution. This lingering alone *upholds*, against a latent Hobbesian logic, democracy as one dimension of representation, whose other dimension is necessarily aristocratic. It is our contention that all the usual suggestions for saving democracy in reality increase this bipartition, insisting that the one more accurately and immediately reflect the many. Thereby, they only reinforce its ultimate liberal logic of removing any political relevance of the many – and so of democracy – altogether.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL MIXTURE SAVES DEMOCRACY

It follows that one can only save democracy through paradox: by trying to restore, albeit in a more democratic way (which Christianity has always innately demanded), a genuine ancient constitution, pivoted about shared *telos* and virtue. The state must, indeed, become once again a true (and not ideological) *universitas*, or community of common purpose, because any mere Oakeshottian *societas*, or bond of only formal agreement, now manifestly secures a community confined to the economic participation and banned from real political participation.¹⁴ It is not possible, as both Otto von Gierke and John Neville Figgis half allowed, to have a political unity of corporate bodies sharing sovereignty if the political whole be not also conceived

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in a corporate or ‘universal’ rather than ‘social’ fashion, in Oakeshott’s specific sense. For one thing, as Augustine realised, *any* social formation has also the ‘universal’ dimension of unification round a shared object of desire (even if this be the shared liberal desire to pursue individual desire only).¹⁵ For another, if the political state be merely neutral with respect to the purposes of the communities it contains, allowing a kind of liberalism of groups rather than of individuals, then this neutrality will tend to erode both the public pursuit of these purposes and their primary reality for the members of such communities, as we see today with the dissolving and privatisation of religious belief.

Inversely, a polity that is in itself a corporate *universitas* cannot be sustained if its purpose is not participated in and variously exemplified by sub-groups. For without their mediation, citizens will tend to become mere individuals and their perception of the state will be that of a single ‘social’ force over against them. Just for this reason, the pre-Christian, relatively non-plural and in a sense ‘proto-modern’ polities of the ancient world – both the Greek *polis* and the Roman Republic and Empire – tended already towards this sort of sophistic disintegration. Therefore the real alternative is between state as *societas*, mediating individuals or merely instrumental composing groups, or the state as corporation, itself composed of sub-corporations.¹⁶

For accidental reasons, Britain sustains in some areas certain features of this classical and gothic antiquity. It escaped revolutionary settlements, which were themselves the results of accidentally successful rebellions and no historical inevitabilities whatsoever.¹⁷ Nevertheless, also for the contingent reason of Henry VIII’s state-led and parliament-endorsed Reformation, England’s parliamentary sovereignty has been itself in some sense the most ‘absolutist’ and the most abolishing of intermediate associations and local government, which survive till this day better on the Continent. Just for this reason, the United Kingdom has tended to oscillate between a dogmatism of the absolute power of Crown in Parliament on the one hand and an equal dogmatism of the absolute rule of law, on the other.¹⁸ In this way it is also inescapably a *modern* constitution, though unwritten, and equally subject to alternative executive or judicial capture.

All the same, since neither of these visions has ever triumphed in practice, it retains a certain mixture at the centre that is organic rather than agonistic and ‘balanced’. In practice, as Burke envisioned, precedent, statute and equity remain a seamless whole, refusing any illusory ‘foundationalism’ of, respectively, positive precedent, positive authority, and moral authority reduced to a set of formal rules about rights. Law in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and, now, independent Eire (and in Scotland in a different Roman version) remains benignly ‘tautologous’ and unfathomably self-founded.¹⁹ Law is not arbitrary custom, again as for Burke, because the transcendent, eternal divine

law expressing the intrinsic Good can be gradually mediated by interpreted custom through time.²⁰

It is in part for this reason of accidental antique survival that we focus especially on the contemporary fate of the British constitution below. The usual arguments to the effect that it should ‘modernise’ and assume a specific written form like the constitutions of other countries miss the point that their liberal models are themselves now proving inadequate. And one can in any case note that only the United States possesses a truly unrevised constitution – the many revisions undergone in Continental countries belie any rationalist notion of an absolute distinction between constitutional law and the normal law of statute. Moreover, the polities of other countries (including some established by the United States) more often follow versions of the British parliamentary system than the American division of powers, even if they hybridise this with a presidential model – though precisely, one could argue, in order to sustain a ‘monarchic’ moment.

But in the case of all liberal constitutions, liberalism is here also hollowing itself out, because it is poised between the double void of two mere wills – that of the many and that of the one. Between their sway falls, inevitably, not a third vacuum, but, rather, the inextinguishable substantive space of loyalty and collective belonging, without which human beings cannot even form language communities. Unrelated to the good, to transcendence or to the universal, these have often taken, and continue to take, unpleasant, atavistic forms. But with this unsavoury substance, the liberal blandness of mere form is in constant collusion. To escape it, one can only try to recover the sublimated substance of the true mixed constitution.

The United Kingdom is in some ways well poised to set an example here, by the very reason of its apparent belatedness, and can now leap ahead of the more drastic fate that is overtaking the newer constitutional rivals. Yet at the same time, this advantage should not be exaggerated. The equally modern British legacy of ‘common law sovereignty’ is recovering and forming a devil’s alliance with the German exportation of the legally dominated *Rechtsstaat* where democratic anarchy and oligarchic oppression are avoided only at the cost of an inflexible legal rigorism and the thwarting of democratic expression.²¹ Simultaneously, the absolute sovereignty of Crown in Parliament, like- AQ: Please note that ‘Crown in Parliament’ has been made consistent.

To the contrary, we must urgently reverse the shocking miseducation of the British people in this respect, and connect British self-government with shared sovereignty and federalism of the Roman legal legacy. Yet,

ultimately, any absolute Germanic-Romanic contrast is an illusion: the truth is that such importation could also help us recover the real high medieval, non-absolutising spirit of the English common law, which owed much to Roman, feudal and Canon law sources.²² Often, under ecclesial influence, as with Magna Carta itself, the original tradition of English liberties and English representation was inseparable from an acknowledgement of the real ‘personality’ of corporate bodies, rendering England herself, like Christendom as a whole, a ‘community of communities’.²³ In many ways it was the strange division of Europe into the entirely overlapping jurisdictions of secular *regnum* and ecclesial *sacerdotium* that in the medieval period prevented any emergence of absolute sovereignty and upheld the primacy of the rule of law in a way that did not render this a sovereign ‘foundation’. Instead, it left it as inseparable from pre-legal custom at one end and the actual enactment of statute, at the other.²⁴

This point should today be related to the new resurgence of religious loyalties, too often in an atavistic and ideological manner. A post-secular approach needs to see a certain dialectical inevitability here, and to allow that public religiosity can be chastened but not removed from the scene. At the same time, it should further see that the major world religions themselves offer a certain critical chastening of loyalty through its pivotal link to transcendent norms that allow for a certain self-checking. Thus, in the case of the United Kingdom, the continued and theoretically central religious aspect of its constitution should also not be seen as an embarrassment. Rather, if the Anglican settlement is given (in continuity with Hooker, Andrewes and Laud’s decisive ‘reforming of the reform’) a more Catholic than Protestant gloss, it can once more act as a carapace for the protection of substantive corporate liberties and a wider political participation.

3. LIBERALISM UNDERMINES DEMOCRACY

Today liberalism poses a triple threat to democracy. First of all, liberal forces favour the rise of a new oligarchy composed of both old elites and ‘new classes’ who have abandoned any code of honour and consider themselves beyond the rules, on account of shallow claims to meritocratic superiority. Second, the same forces, with seeming contradiction, exacerbate the resurgence of populism that is connected with the liberal indifference to truth and goodness, as well as the triumph of a global capitalist ‘spectacle’ that drains everything of its particular meaning. Given this double drift, it is the rights of mass manipulated feeling that incrementally and inevitably acquire universal legitimacy, however much elite liberals may tremble at its predilections. Third, in counterpoint to this massification, liberalism, with its cult of

aleatory preference, reinforces the spread of a new anarchy in terms of social atomisation and exacerbates the increasing inability of the modern sovereign state to command the loyalty of its citizens.

In this way, beyond even a modern parody of the ancient, a more nakedly liberal late modern era pulls the now debased ‘many’, the tyrannical ‘one’ and the merely opinionated ‘few’ substantively apart. But the resulting confusions and tensions can only conspire to increase both the insecurity and the resultant further-assumed power of the directing ‘one’, which is also the most elite ‘few’, now drained of any even lingering aristocratic sense of virtuous responsibility. Thus liberal democratisation has coincided with the self-serving rule of elites who behave like an exclusive mob rather than leading by example. Liberalism’s increasingly authoritarian response to popular resistance tends to combine direct state dominance with indirect market commodification and a ‘culture’ of spectacular mass surveillance and social control. Taken together, the now doubly parodied, late modern forces of oligarchy, demagoguery and anarchy conspire to engender a new ‘democratic tyranny’ wherein key traditions, institutions and embedded practices are swept aside. Instead of peace and prosperity worldwide, liberalism is increasingly associated with war, economic exploitation and the decline of both local and high cultures.

Thus liberal democracy is undergoing a metacrisis (again, not a ‘final’ crisis) whereby the modern oscillation between the sovereign power of the state on the one hand, and the sovereignty of self-possessed citizens on the other, removes people from their embeddedness in families, communities and traditions. The attempted removal of substantive loyalty legitimates the liberal claim that only the visible hand of government combined with the invisible hand of the market can save society from the anarchical ‘state of nature’, which liberalism really produces as its fantasised presupposition.

4. THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION

Democratic representation has been undermined by the liberal emphasis on the formal separation of power between the three branches of government. This in reality privileges the executive, which tends to usurp the powers of the national legislature, just because it is not seen as an organic expression of legislative representation, whose necessarily ‘exceptional’ decisions are still concerned with national justice and identity and not merely with national (degenerating to the government’s own) survival.²⁵ While globalisation has empowered multinational corporations and many unaccountable supranational organisations that limit national sovereignty, it has also given rise to a new system of transnational governance in which the executive is key.

Governments remain central to the exercise of power, as they retain the prerogative to implement international agreements, laws and regulations within their respective jurisdictions, and often without much parliamentary scrutiny or judiciary oversight.²⁶

Meanwhile, the liberal tendency towards oligarchy is differently reinforced by an *arriviste* aristocracy of lawyers and judges who are becoming part of the 'new class' operating without honour. The judiciary seems unable to resist the temptation to aggrandise its jurisdictional power and either to help the executive to impose uniform laws, with too little respect for circumstance, or to compose these laws for themselves out of a questionable claim to be checking inflated governmental authority.

This is particularly true of the judiciary across Europe, including Britain (and often in conjunction with the judicial activism of the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights), and even more so in the United States with the Supreme Court, which in the 1954 *Cooper v. Aaron* case simply stated that the 'US Constitution says what we say it says'. Just as some British judges are now suggesting – with seeming contradiction – that it is the process of law itself that sovereignly authorises the sovereign power of the Crown.²⁷ In the United States, it is also the case that federal judges can exercise executive functions and deploy tax-raising powers – as in Kansas City where a federal judge took charge of the municipal school system and doubled local property taxes against the express will of residents who, according to Missouri state law, had to be consulted and had voted no.

Democratic representation suffers at the hands of the 'judicial aristocracy' because, as Tocqueville pointed out, the latter has, in the end, a much greater affinity with the executive than with the people and privileges public order over all other considerations: 'the greatest guarantee of order is authority. One must not forget, moreover, that if they [lawyers] prize freedom, they generally place legality well above it; they fear tyranny less than arbitrariness, and provided that the legislator takes charge of taking away men's independence, they are nearly content'.²⁸ In a country where, as a result of separating state from church and instituting a civil religion, there is no higher authority than the constitution and its guardians (executive and judiciary), democracy is dominated by what Tocqueville describes as an aristocratic class of magistrates and lawyers who 'form a power that ... envelops society as a whole, penetrates into each of the classes that compose it; works in secret, acts constantly on it without its knowing, and in the end models it to its desires'.²⁹ Europe is fast catching up in terms of becoming a characteristically litigious culture.

There are at least two fundamental reasons why, in a liberal system, democratic representation is undermined by the quasi-monarchic behaviour of the executive and the quasi-aristocratic power of the judiciary. The first is

that an overly 'independent' executive is forced to grow on its own account, like the American presidency or the British prime ministerial office. And the expansion of new technological capabilities exacerbates the entire tendency to algorithmic self-regulation and simultaneous openness to surveillance and remote manipulation.³⁰

The other reason is that a self-expanding executive and judiciary will tend to protect themselves through secrecy. This is negatively witnessed by the fact that, whether in the case of the financial crash or phone hacking and the MP expenses scandal in Britain, debates in parliament and in the press quickly focus on personal greed rather than systemic dysfunction. A few heads roll, but most of the senior figures get away with it and the system remains largely intact. The public profession of liberal values such as 'transparency' and 'fairness' has created a procedural façade that barely masks an all-too-visible complicity among numerous politicians, bankers, regulators, business tycoons, journalists and policemen who collude to undermine civil liberties and expand the authoritarian market-state into evermore areas of life.

In the face of this moral vacuum, we are starting to see that the romance of virtue and teleological purpose is no mere luxury. For, given this void, people are turning to various *ersatz* romances that articulate at once their spiritual and their material discontent. Typically, these debased romances pivot upon blaming an unlikely other for modern discontents – people of different colour, class or creed. Amid the collapse of democratic representation, popular responses consist in a combination of anger, alienation, apathy and scapegoating.³¹ Moreover, as Colin Crouch points out, 'the active engagement of the ordinary population is not wanted, because it might become unmanageable; but their feeling of exclusion is also feared, as that might lead them into equally unmanageable rebellion, or at least to an indifference undermining the legitimacy of those elected to rule'.³² Hence we see concerted calls by the mainstream parties to boost voter registration ahead of national polls, but few efforts aimed at a proper longer-term engagement with the electorate.

Another indicator for the collapse of democratic representation is the demise of mass membership of mainstream parties and their mutation into cartel parties that represent narrow and priggish ideologies, single-issue causes such as ecology, or sectional interests such as corporate capitalism – or both at once.³³ As the late Peter Mair observed, there has been a transformation of both the goals of Western political parties and the way in which they govern: since they view the accession to power as 'not only a standard expectation, but also an end in itself', political parties have ceased to be socio-cultural movements but, instead, 'have become more office-seeking agencies that govern – in the widest sense of the term – rather than represent; [that] bring order rather than give voice'.³⁴

A further indicator for the collapse of democratic representation and the emergence of cartel democracy is the nature of party funding and the influence of wealthy donors, especially in the United States – whether on policy, on the selection of candidates, or the wider direction of the party. The increasingly close ties between politics and business elites confirm that power in the modern state rests largely on clientelism, with private patronage dictating public policy without any effective parliamentary accountability or popular participation in the process.³⁵

With the collapse of popular participation, the executive has been free to suspend core constitutional provisions as part of the global war on terror. This tendency of liberal democracies to operate in a permanent ‘state of exception’ evokes parallels with the collapse of democracy in the 1930s. As the late Sheldon Wolin rightly remarked:

Democracy [then] signified not an active citizenry but a politically disengaged and alienated “mass”, whose support was useful for conferring legitimacy on dictatorship and extending its control over the population. An artful combination of propaganda flattered the mass, exploited its antipolitical sentiments, warned it of dangerous enemies foreign and domestic, and applied forms of intimidation to create a climate of fear and an insecure populace, one receptive to being led. The same citizenry, which democracy had created, proceeded to vote into power and then support movements openly pledged to destroy democracy and constitutionalism.³⁶

Amid the rise of populism and the resurgence of nationalist forces, democracy faces another existential crisis, which unqualified liberalism is exacerbating.

5. THE NON-MEDIATION OF LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

The global spread of democracy after the end of the Cold War has coincided with the debasement of democratic models in the West. The main reason is the complete fusion of democracy with liberalism, which goes back to the rise of neo-liberalism and its adoption by the elites.³⁷ As we have already seen, and as Chantal Mouffe has observed, ‘There is no necessary relation between these two different traditions [the liberal and the democratic tradition], but only a contingent historical articulation’.³⁸

Liberalism is about the individual will; democracy is about mass will, directly or representatively expressed. The former may not require or even disdain the latter; the latter may entirely override the former. Whenever this intrinsic diversion at depth manifests itself on the surface, it tends to be arbitrated by the power of the central state that is ruled by elites who

act as a self-interested party to form what is, in effect, a third, oligarchic, quasi-aristocratic and dishonourable basis for our current political order. But this constitutes less a mediation than an opportunistic attempt to divide and rule.

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For it would only be possible to mediate, rather than to overrule and subvert, the more valid concerns of both liberalism and democracy in terms of some sort of extra-voluntarist understanding. Such an understanding would have equitably to exceed a merely temporary consensus as to just when, where and to what extent we should balance spheres of individual decision with spheres of shared determination. Equally, one can only justify the role of democracy, or of collective assent, if one assumes that there is, in fact, an objective common good, including a region of shared substantive flourishing to be sought – to whatever degree its nature must remain a matter of continual debate and discernment. Thus, paradoxically, the real rationale for democracy is *extra*-democratic: the legitimacy of popular assent consists not in an aggregated will (because we have known ever since Robbespierre that this can be anarchic, tyrannical and anti-human). Rather, it consists in the likelihood that a relatively well educated – morally trained and informed – populace will be better able to sift and refine proposals as to what is ‘best’ for them by genuinely ‘aristocratic’ thinkers and innovators at every level.

It is also crucial that the good not only be done, but that it be done willingly and with general assent – else it will be constantly and inevitably thwarted. Without this extra-democratic rationale for democracy, democracy will be identified with a new kind of mass tyranny. And it will appear redundant in the face of ‘invisible’ government by the hand of the marketplace that avowedly acknowledges only the rights of choice and of court judgements, and executive decisions recognising solely the ground of ‘human rights’ as according any sort of legitimacy. In this burgeoning liberal utopia, popular democracy is rendered superfluous because a ‘private democracy’ of each and every one is, instead, allowed tacitly to triumph.

In reality, this utopia is undermined by the irrepressible face of populism, or the coagulated voice of that majority who are relative losers to the victors in the game of privatised ‘market democracy’. Yet, as a result, all the more power eventually accrues to these economic victors who are becoming one and the same group with the political oligarchs. For only oligarchic power can, in liberal terms, mediate between liberalism and populism through a mixture of palliatives and increasingly authoritarian security measures that serve to keep populists at bay.

In this way, the impossible, and, therefore, always oligarchically subverted convergence of liberalism and democracy in the West has not only nearly extirpated the lingering remnants of the ancient mixed constitution, but also destroyed what is best about the liberal and the democratic tradition

themselves. For lack of a teleological balance between the two, in terms of a discernment of the common good, they tend, rather, towards mutual destruction, to the accruing benefit of the unacknowledged third foundation, which is oligarchy.

This accrual means that the sophistic culture of spin, PR, focus groups and endless media stunts, which has come to dominate Western democracies over the last half century, has turned politics into a mass spectacle that makes a mockery of democratic representation. Without a genuine debate concerning substantive shared values, there can only be market mediation of an anarchy of desires – of course, ensuring the triumph of a hierarchy of sheer, if subtly exercised, force. The hierarchies of liberalism are, in fact, absolute spatial hierarchies of fixed power and control rather than organic hierarchies of shared purpose that grant dignity, necessity and relative autonomy to persons of every degree. Thus one can climb up the ladder of power but only in order to displace someone else, exert more of one's own will and ensure that the lower rungs are instrumentally subordinated. The purpose of control here is simply utility and not the sharing of excellence.

This is reflected perhaps most clearly in the commitment to social mobility as the shibboleth now most beloved of liberals.³⁹ Since the mock-hierarchies of liberalism concern the quasi-material organisation of individual or collective power at the expense of interpersonal relationship and mutual flourishing, social mobility is about acquiring transferable skills that enable some young people to fetch a better market price and move as far away as possible from those they love and know. Of course, most young people will be left behind in an 'edgeland' (physically manifest in strips of ragged nature linking bleak islands of debased urbanity)⁴⁰ now further robbed of both identity and guiding talent.

One can contrast the liberal hierarchy of meritocratically justified force and competition with certain aspects of traditional and organic notions of hierarchy that were in principle less oppressive, albeit in practice insufficiently guarded by a more developed sense of personalist democracy against tyrannical degeneration – although this sense was there in germ. In a traditional hierarchy, different levels of achievement are not despised, and the criterion for being 'on the top' is more architectonic than formally superior or controlling. Thus, for example, a literal architect is, indeed, finally in charge, but would be impotent without the no less refined skills of the craftsperson or engineer. At the same time, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas argued, members of an organic hierarchy have a strong sense of belonging and contribution (allowing a sense of self-worth and appreciation even to the humblest).⁴¹ Meanwhile, general needs and complaints can be articulated through known channels of representation, extending to the lowest rungs, and it is relatively clear, at every level, who is to be held accountable. In contrast, a totally fuzzy

and fluid situation (as fatally recommended by many radicals of the 1960s) is subject to unhealthy oscillation between anarchic *anomie*, failures of decisiveness, responsibility and representation on the one hand, and extrinsically enforced alienation and domination by a usurping 'representative' but scarcely accountable force, on the other.

It is in this respect, just because market relations are themselves fuzzily and fluidly competitive and anarchic, that liberalism relies on a secret and brutally hierarchical commanding of people's desires by manipulation. If nothing *should* be desired, then desires can only be *forced*. And if no desire is ever unexampled, or free of imitation, then people can only find out what they 'should' desire, or even about the possible objects of desire, from the very 'mass' processes that are supposed to represent only the generally assumed and supposedly unquestionable desires of the people. Thereby, atomistic liberalism turns proper political representation into a spectacle of general mass opinion. In liberal democracies, since only what is generally represented is regarded as publicly valid, the spectacle of representing always dominates the purportedly represented people. This ensures that what they think is always just what they are already portrayed as thinking. Thus liberal democracy is doomed to specularly: citizens are increasingly reduced to being consumers and passive spectators, with the result that the represented themselves only represent to themselves the spectacle of representation.⁴² It was Tocqueville who first noted that in America, the freest society on earth, there is least of all public debate, and most of all tyranny of conformism to majority tastes and preferences.⁴³

As to the content of public opinion, the same indifference to substantive values ensures that often it is the exploitation of opinion that wins the day. Thus, increasingly, liberal-democratic politics revolves around a supposed guarding against alien elements: the terrorist, the refugee, the foreigner, the criminal, the dissident, the welfare-scrounger, the shirker, the spendthrift, the non-'hard-working family' and those deemed deficient in 'entrepreneurship'. Populism seems more and more to be an inevitable, if ironic, consequence of liberal emptiness of purpose and its founding assumption of a reactive warding off of violence and evil. In consequence, a purported defence of liberal democracy is itself deployed in order to justify the suspending of democratic decision making and civil liberties.

So this is not just an extrinsic and reactionary threat to liberal values. On the contrary, it is liberalism itself that tends to cancel those values of liberality (fair trial, right to a defence, assumed innocence, *habeas corpus*, a measure of free speech and free enquiry, good treatment of the convicted), which it has *taken over*, but which as a matter of historical record it did not invent.⁴⁴ For the principle of liberality, as we have previously indicated, itself derives, rather, from Roman and Germanic law transformed by the infusion of the Christian

notion of charity, which, in certain dimensions, means a generous giving of the benefit of the doubt, as well as succour, even to the accused or wicked. These substantive values relate to the dignity of the human person, rather than the collective projection of inwardly subjective bias, and to processes of relatively egalitarian inter-relating, which are part and parcel of a substantive democracy. But liberalism replaces a sense of respect for each person in her uniqueness and concrete set of interpersonal and ecological circumstance with formalistic, procedural standards that are but a shallow mask for pure power. ‘Liberalism puts democracy in crisis’, as Marcel Gauchet has said.⁴⁵

6. DEMOCRACY UNDERMINES LIBERALISM

But if there is no real mediation, then the reverse is equally true. Democracy also threatens liberal principles such as incontestable property ownership, the rule of law and the rights of individuals defined as belonging to a recognised minority. Like atomistic liberalism, unqualified democracy has a kind of spatial bias: it supposes that we are all contracting and compromising individuals within a sort of eternalised *agora*. But this is to deny *life* – indeed, it is part of the culture of death of which Pope John Paul II spoke – for life flows as a perpetual *glissando* through time. Life is not simply democratic, because it is both spontaneously creative and giving: with the arrived child, something new emerges. We must give to this child nurture, but from the outset the child reverses this hierarchy by revealing her unique creative power of response. No social contract can be involved here, and for this reason, pure unqualified democracy tends to deny the priority of time, the sanctity of life, the importance of the child, old age, death and political participation beyond mere synchronic procedure. Democracy’s ‘normal’ person is rather the freely choosing and contracting, Audi-owning autonomous 31-year-old. But *no* human person is forever like this; it is, rather, only a moment in a coming to be and passing away.

However, in a further permutation, there can also be a bad modern, liberal mode for the dominance of time over space. For it is actually the case that pure spatialisation will *also* tend to subordinate every given spatial form to the process of time leading towards the future. But this is not the time of gift: rather, the empty time of pointless accumulation of a new spatial hoarding of ‘power’ or ‘wealth’. Equally, and ironically, it is a time of utilitarian ascetic sacrifice, as the great French poet and thinker Charles Péguy pointed out in the early twentieth century, to a future perfected happiness that, by definition, will never arrive, since the future always remains to come.⁴⁶ Hence, pure contractual democracy is spatial, and, yet, it also nihilistically evacuates material space in favour of an abstract time that is perpetually postponed.

Thus by ignoring the time of gift, purely representative democracy fails to consider the necessarily constitutive cultural dimension of transmission, learning and guided debate. For this it inevitably substitutes a formalism of spatial aggregation and temporal agglomeration in such a way that form itself must substitute for the removed possibility of content. In consequence, all that can finally be voted for is the triumph of the will – the collective will, which, in order to be ‘collectivised’ without real educative influence or debate, must be shaped and led by a secretly or avowedly tyrannical leadership. From Rousseau onwards, the ‘general will’ and the role of the overruling ‘legislator’ are necessarily linked.

Liberal, formally representative democracy is therefore self-subversive unless qualified by seemingly opposite supplementary factors of both ‘aristocratic’ guidance and informal and dispersed popular participation. But a *purely* participatory, direct democracy, without representation, is an illusion under any conditions, ancient or modern. For, prior to the complex decisions made for itself in whatever ways and by whatever means by the multitude, there always lie persuasions attempted by the ‘few’ – historically ranging from the local squire and the innovative peasant to the upstart agitator. At the same time, the execution of these decisions involves, once again, heteronomous interventions by both the ‘one’ and the ‘few’, since all cannot attend to the business of all, for all of the time. If there are no criteria for the legitimate operation of these processes of ‘aristocratic’ and ‘monarchic’ education and mediation, then the covert and tyrannically perverted operation of these processes will corrupt any ventures in extended democratic participation, which most certainly should be promoted and nurtured in the future.⁴⁷

For there is simply no truth in the liberal (and Marxist) assumption that, once freed from the shackles of oppression, people will ‘by reason’ choose equality and justice. To the contrary, in the light of a mere reason that is not also a vision of the good, an attraction towards it and a faith in its ontological possibility, people may well choose to prefer the petty triumphs and superiorities of a brutally hierarchic *agon* of power. They may opt for the sheer excitement of a social spectacle in which potentially there remains always the scintilla of a chance that they may themselves be exhibited in triumph – a chance that appears vastly increased by the allure of social media. This is exactly why the vast numbers of the poor in Europe and the United States are not waiting to rise up in revolt.

For a kindred reason, ‘pure’ democracy would be a *mise en abîme* – a permanent positioning in the void.⁴⁸ One would have to have endless ‘primaries’ before ‘primaries’ in any electoral process. Instead, it is, in reality, inescapable that at the end of the line someone always puts herself forward as a ‘candidate’ (in some sense) and stands up and says something that no one has voted on or contractually agreed that she should say. Unelected and

spontaneous ‘offering’, besides informal reciprocity, always precedes both organised choice and official contract. The reason is that no formal pre-arrangements can entirely control the content of what we propose to others in our words and symbolic actions, which inevitably sway them in a certain fashion. In the United States, part of the problem is that there is a yearning for the madness of pure democracy: thus, for example, there is no ‘monarchic’ body that organises boundaries of voting districts, because this would be considered ‘undemocratic’. In consequence, this task is left to the reigning political parties, and the resultant gerrymandering is seen as just a fact of life. In this way, the lure of the democratic abyss abolishes democracy, whereas some admission of ‘aristocratic’ and ‘monarchic’ principles (as in Britain, Australia and Canada – at least hitherto) actually secures the space of its possibility.

It is precisely the destruction of this space that has plunged Western democracy into its metacrisis. The same abyss exerts its fascination when governments obfuscate the irreducible moment of extra-democratic final executive decision, which they should be obliged to take responsibility for. This has been done in the name of appealing to ‘opinion-soundings’ that purport to gauge not just what the people want (as though this were a pre-influenced ‘given’) but more crucially what they will permit a government to get away with. Such apparent sensitivity to public opinion, in reality, subverts democracy, because it fails to acknowledge that democracy operates through an exchange of *trust* that also exceeds an impossible ‘absolute’ democracy. A government has been trusted to take its *own* decisions on the basis of justice and integrity, precisely because the electorate has previously endorsed its general principles, record and ethical character. No plebiscitary process of whatever kind can displace this ‘monarchic’ need for self-grounded decision taken under some overarching oath or covenant with the people that goes beyond mass opinion and majority decision. The reason is that the people can never collectively be placed in the exact position that an executive power should occupy: of being (ideally) of the right human type, having enjoyed the right experience, receiving the right information, being able as an individual or small-group mind to arrive at a complex conclusion on the basis of complex reasoning. Alongside the contemporary subversion of legislation and democracy by the executive, therefore, one can also (and with no contradiction) detect a subversion of the executive’s own true function.

For if a government pretends not to decide, or not to have to decide, it will always, in reality, decide in a disguised way through manipulation of opinion, or the following of the most debased mass opinion, or else of the course that it can most easily get away with. And where a government has no sense that it has a duty to decide for justice and the long-term national and global good that is in excess of democratic norms, its horizon for decision will be only

that of increasing its own power and influence. Today, party-political and corporate-capitalist concerns have largely displaced that long-term linking by a political class of its own interests with that of the nation as a whole as recommended by Hume and Burke.⁴⁹

It is, above all, this necessary pandering to a populism that it has itself both provoked and promoted that tends to ensure that a government theoretically guided by the lodestar of pure democracy will override the interests of minorities and the protection of individual freedom of conscience. By contrast, it is government that retains a sense of its extra-democratic duty to take just decisions that will tend to try to balance the desires of majorities with the legitimate interests of groups and individuals. For this reason, one needs to see the frightening rise of untrammelled central power not only in terms of a *democratic* deficit, but also in the sense of a *liberal* deficit. By that we mean not the more limited, ego-based liberalism of a Locke or a J.S. Mill, but, rather, a much older concern for ‘liberality’ – for a generous balancing of the claims of individuals with those of the collective and a respect for cautious procedures that tend to inhibit arbitrariness. All this has to do with extra-, but not anti-democratic, considerations about the nature of honourable and decisive ruling.

Just for this reason, what, for liberals, is the anomalous contradiction that the British Prime Minister is at once the representative of a popular mandate and, yet, the mediator of the sovereign power of the Crown, is, in reality, an advantage. It holds together the executive with the legislative function, just as it traditionally combines royal council with popular representation. The latter had been primarily extended, during early modernity, in England as in France, *not* as the result of baronial or popular struggle, but as a function of the better operation of royal power itself. This representative council was also a court (again like the French *parlements*), thereby also ensuring that the judicial, interpretative function can share in the legislative function. Tony Blair’s ill-conceived reform that removed the Law Lords from the upper house has therefore destroyed a vital link between legislature and judiciary. In consequence, the novel and unnecessary British Supreme Court has become a temple to the new common law constitutionalism, which is actually a common law foundationalism, increasingly and bizarrely merged with a foundationalism of ‘rights’ that are regarded as immune to either precedent or equity.

Both the prime ministerial and the lordly judicial function can, at least in principle, inhibit the erosion of liberality by democracy. For not only does the link to the Crown tend to uphold the need for government to take decisions and to take full responsibility for those decisions. It should also tend to ensure a greater attention to continuity of political and social projects grounded in long-term and well-sifted, implicit and widely shared (and so

truly democratic) desires. This occurs beyond the see-sawing vagaries of electoral politics, which can often mean too much chopping and changing and too little radical reforming ambition as to the projects that get proposed and pursued – think of the endless top-down re-organisation of health care or education without ever tackling the structural problems of a lack of excellence, ethos and vocation.

Somewhat in the same fashion, the idea that the same people, the Law Lords, may both vote on legislation and apply it in practice is not some sort of corrupting anomaly, but, rather, a salve against the ultimately false division of legislation from applicative judgement. Such a division favours the conceiving of law as impersonal rationalistic rule without exception, or alternatively, the conceiving of court judgement as mere inflexible application of a past decision, not regarded as implying any latent germ of general principle or as imbued with the original spirit rather than letter of statute – as for the false, Coke-recension of the common law legacy. It is, to the contrary, a boon to have, at the apex of the legal system, men and women who are themselves involved with legislation that must attend to first principles, to natural law and an ethical horizon. Such an intertwining of functions can then somewhat percolate down the whole legal hierarchy. Inversely, the involvement of legislators in judgement can help to ensure that law envisages from the outset some of the complexities of application in specific situations and to specific persons. It is in part for this reason that the House of Lords has often proved such a good – and liberal and democratic – amender of laws proposed by the lower chamber.

So when unqualified by more objective considerations concerning a continuous pursuit of the common good, liberalism and democracy tend to undermine each other. In consequence, taken together, the unstable hybrid ‘liberal democracy’ engenders, instead, an oligarchic simulacrum of the necessary and unavoidable influence of ‘the few’ and the decisions of ‘the one’. In order to resist this oligarchy, one cannot simply appeal to ‘pure democracy’, since this appeal is just what leads, dialectically, to the oligarchic decay. Rather, one must seek, in various and unpredictable ways, to re-invent genuine executive and judicial functions in close proximity to the legislative.

7. LIBERAL POLITICS AS CAPITALISM

But how does our analysis of the metacrisis of democracy relate to our earlier analysis of the metacrisis of capitalism?

Central, of course, to liberal democracy’s recent self-corruption has been its response to 9/11, as already indicated. By launching a ‘global war on terror’, Western countries have declared a ‘state of exception’ and suspended

core constitutional provisions such as *habeas corpus* in order to protect the constitution from what they believe to be an existential threat.⁵⁰ But when the executive decrees the ‘state of exception’, the conceptual difference between democracy and tyranny enters a zone of ‘in-distinction’ where formal democratic structures remain in place, but the lived differences between democratic and despotic rule begin to dissolve. The fundamental reason is that modern sovereign power blends the juridical-constitutional model of state sovereignty with the ‘bio-political’ conception of power in terms of domination over life itself, thereby ensuring at once that such life, including human life, may be granted exclusively ‘civil’ or ‘human’ rights, or else be denied even its natural given existence through brutality or destruction.⁵¹

Such a conception, it could be said, represents the rising to the surface of the very deepest stratum of liberal assumption. This concerns at once the primacy of the natural – ‘given’ amoral liberty, ‘given’ pleasure-seeking and pain avoidance, ‘given’ power-seeking – and, yet, its sharp division from the cultural order. Aporetically, the latter is later and less fundamental with respect to subjective ‘right’. Yet, at the same time, it is in practice prior and all-consuming, since only by supposed Hobbesian contractual aggregation and mutual tempering of natural forces can ‘right’ be recognised or enforced at all. In this way, exclusively civil right, denying real natural law, is, nevertheless, ironically nothing but raw, amoral nature, compounded and mythically validated as ‘Leviathan’. The self-identity of this beast is naturally and anarchically forceful, and, yet, by this very token, its entire aim and *raison d’être* is artificially to dominate and alter ‘all other nature’, especially the biosphere. This then plays out, for example, in the genetic manipulation and patenting of crops, or, equally, the various compounded attempts to unharness all links between human sexuality and procreation. The fact that few people worry about the de-personalising implications of removing children from specifically human and gender-reciprocal origins in physically mediated elective love is a sign of just how far extraordinary and peculiar liberal assumptions are now seen as unremarkable.

In consequence, one has to go further than simply observing that both liberal democracy and capitalism are governed by the same basic dialectical tension. It is true that capitalism oscillates between accumulative expansion and over-accumulative contraction, just as democracy oscillates between constitutionally guaranteed popular sovereignty and constitutionally sanctioned absolute sovereign power exercised by the executive alone. But, in reality, there is something far more fundamental than this dialectical process at work. For this reason one has to move from the perspective of crisis to that of metacrisis.

Both democracy and capitalism claim that unity emerges naturally out of multiplicity. The argument is that a natural multitude of rival individual

egos will somehow produce a single artificial order, either based on a social contract (Hobbes and Locke) or via pre-contractual innate passions of sympathy and benevolence (Smith and, in some sense, Rousseau). In either case, the violence of competing self-interest is regulated by appeals to self-preservation, but this original violence also needs policing via the law (Carl Schmitt) and the central state monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force (Max Weber). So from Hobbes via Locke, Kant and Rousseau to Weber and Schmitt, modern biopolitics has not just extended political power to all areas of natural and human life but also, according to a logic just outlined, subordinated the sacredness of life to state and market power, thereby reducing life to 'bare life'. Similarly, capitalism splits the naturally symbolic combination of thing and sign as 'gift' through a symbolic abstraction and materialisation. The dominant modern conceptual dualities and ideological paradigms have, indeed, at every level entered a zone of 'in-distinction' where nominal differences remain in place, but where real boundaries vanish – between the state and the market, 'left' and 'right', mere nature and pure artifice, democracy and despotism.

In the face of the liberal slide into a new form of democratic despotism, it is now the hour to recall the classical tradition, which tended to predict just such a slide of a 'democratic' ethos into tyranny. It recognised that no complex polity can avoid the interplay of decision, advice and assent. As we have seen, where the co-constitutive role of the first two is denied, they are perverted in the hypocritical name of the third which then in consequence itself loses its role and integrity. Tyranny is the oppressive rule of the 'one' and the 'few' that follows upon the spurious claim to rule only in the name of the 'many'. As the next chapter suggests, it is not liberalism that can offer more genuine representation, but rather a renewal of mixed constitution.

NOTES

1. Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8–41.
2. *Ibid.*, 132–160; Monica Brito Veira and David Runciman, *Representation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 29–61.
3. King of England, Charles I, *His Majesty's Answer to the XIX Propositions of Both Houses of Parliament* [1642] (London; Robert Barker, 1642), 9. We indicated in chapter 1 that though this astonishing text was Charles's reply to the 'Humble Petition' of Parliament which set off the Civil War, Royalists quickly disliked its non-absolutist account of the constitution, whereas its ideas can be found reflected in the later thought of both whig republican and tory 'countrymen'. Concomitantly, it was taken up by parliamentarians, though bent in the direction of a claim to the

prime sovereignty of the people, as represented by Parliament. Yet a tension between that theory and the ‘republican’ one of the shared sovereign rule of the three powers persists up to and beyond the writing of the American constitution. See further, note 10 below.

4. It seems to us a distortion to attribute ‘representation from below’ only to later secularise theorists like Marsiglio of Padua, as do Monica Brito Veira and David Runciman in their nonetheless excellent *Representation*, 1–28. See John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 170–218.

5. F.W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

6. The idea that this was merely a ‘baron’s charter’ is one of those shallow debunkings that demands to be debunked in turn. For a balanced view, see ‘Magna Carta 1215, an English translation’, by Nicholas Vincent in his *Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 111–24.

7. Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), 153.

8. *Ibid.*, 8–16, 52–60.

9. Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (London: Penguin, 2015), 92: ‘Work on a manor was to a large extent collective and remarkably participatory: the community regulated activity, rights and duties through juries, assemblies, by-laws and customs. Senior villagers held offices such as constable, churchwarden or ale-taster. The Anglo-Saxon tithings, responsible for mutual good behaviour, still existed’.

10. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England*, 86–88.

11. Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 136. Blackstone is cited as saying, ‘In the exertion of lawful prerogative the king is and ought to be absolute; that is so far absolute that there is no legal authority which can delay or resist him’. As Henshall comments, one might suppose that one was reading Bossuet. Nevertheless, Henshall exaggerates insofar as he fails to distinguish between two positions: first, an English dividing of the power to legislate, which reserved something to the royal prerogative, as in the *non-absolutist* shared-legislation views of Charles I (as already cited), many Laudians, early royalists and later Jacobites (as Maitland noted); second, the truly absolutist perspective, after all, of Jean Bodin. He was the perfecter of the theory of ‘sovereignty’, who insisted that the king was absolute over *all* laws, but not over all *contracts* with private, property-owning and, indeed, ‘self-possessed’ individuals, which he was bound to observe. Bodin saw this as distinguishing European *monarchie royale ou légitime* from Asiatic *monarchie seigneuriale*, based upon unqualified eminent domain. In this respect, Hobbes fundamentally agreed with Bodin, and like him can, therefore, be characterised as an absolutist thinker. See Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 126–28; Maitland, *A Constitutional History*, 298–300; Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, trans. Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Michael Oakshott, ‘On the Character of a Modern European State’, in *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 252–56.

12. Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 137.

13. Martin Loughlin, *The British Constitution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20–22.

14. Oakeshott, 'On the Character of a Modern European State', 185–326; 'On Being Conservative' in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 406–37.
15. Oakeshott notes, only to reject, Augustine's re-definition of Cicero's more 'liberal view of *societas*': 'On the Character of a Modern European State', 13, n. 1.
16. David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
17. J.C.D. Clark, 'Some Counterfactuals', in *From Restoration to Reform: The British Isles 1660–1832* (London: Vintage, 2014), 293–99.
18. Loughlin, *The British Constitution*, *passim*.
19. Bruno Latour, *The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil d'État* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 256–66.
20. Christopher J. Insole, 'Burke and the Natural Law', in *The Cambridge Companion to Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 117–130.
21. Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*, 52–54, 55–62, 84–85, 118–19.
22. Edwin Jones, 'Common law and the Isolationist View of the English Past', in *The English Nation: The Great Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), 11–136.
23. One can argue that Maitland remained, despite his opposition to the much more whiggish Stubbs, still too insular in failing to see that the Canon law invention of 'fictional persons' did not belie the reality of a true, substantial corporate character, since it was ultimately traced to a Christological and sacramental power to creatively bring about new realities, as shown by Ernst Kantorowicz. This conception naturally allows that a corporate body in one sense emerges of itself and, yet, in another is not present until it is legally and politically recognised. Such a view accords well with Bruno Latour's observation that there is no 'social basis for law' since society is always already utterly permeated by legal categories (see n. 19 above). And yet, inversely, law never escapes from the pre- or quasi-legal of the customary. Ernst Kantorowicz, 'The Sovereignty of the Artist: A Note on legal Maxims and Renaissance Theories of Art', in *Selected Studies* (Locust Valley: J.J. Augustine, 1965), 252–365.
24. Maitland, *The Constitutional History*, 101–102.
25. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
26. Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); John Gray, *False Dawn. The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta, 1998).
27. Loughlin, *The British Constitution*, 112–116.
28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), Vol. I, part 1, ch. 8, 253.).
29. *Ibid*, 258.
30. Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, Solutionsism and the Urge to Fix Problems That Don't Exist* (London: Penguin, 2014).
31. Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing-out of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013); for detailed figures, see <http://www.parliament.uk/about/>

living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/chartists/contemporarycontext/
electionturnout/.

32. Colin Crouch, *Post-democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 22.
33. Richard Katz and Peter Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1:1 (1995): 5–28; Peter Mair, 'Partyless Democracy. Solving the Paradox of New Labour', *New Left Review*, 2 (2000): 21–35; Anthony Barnett, 'Corporate Populism and Partyless Democracy', *New Left Review*, 3 (2000): 80–89; Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, 'Partisan Change and the Democratic Process', in Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (eds.), *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 261–85; Richard Katz et al. 'The Membership of Political Parties in European Democracies, 1960–1990', *European Journal of Political Research*, 22:3 (1992): 329–45.
34. Peter Mair, 'Ruling the Void? The Hollowing of Western Democracy', *New Left Review*, 42 (2006): 47–8.
35. Christopher Clapham, *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State* (London: Frances Pinter Limited, 1982); Carl Boggs, *The End of Politics: Corporate Power and the Decline of the Public Sphere* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001).
36. Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 53.
37. David Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
38. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 3.
39. Michael Merrick, 'The Labour Family', in Ian Geary and Adrian Pabst (eds.), *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 247–8.
40. As so well described by the poet and novelist Michael Symmons Roberts.
41. Mary Douglas, 'The Myth of Primitive Religion', *Commonweal*, 92:2 (9 October 1970): 41–44.
42. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995); Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
43. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 232.
44. John Milbank, 'Liberality versus Liberalism', *Telos*, 134 (2006): 6–21.
45. Marcel Gauchet, *L'avènement de la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), vol. 2, *La crise du libéralisme, 1880–1914*, 18.
46. Charles Péguy, *Clio* (Paris: Gallimard, 1932).
47. Lord Hailsham, 'Elective Dictatorship', *The Listener* (October 1976): 496–500.
48. Claude Lefort puts this well: 'La démocratie moderne est le seul régime à signifier l'écart du symbolique et du réel avec la notion d'un pouvoir dont nul, prince ou petit nombre, ne saurait s'emparer ; là où se profile un lieu vide, il n'y a pas de con-jonction possible entre le pouvoir, la loi et le savoir ... ; l'être du social se dérobe ou, à mieux dire, se donne dans la forme d'un questionnement interminable', in *Essais sur le politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 268.

49. John Milbank, 'What Lacks is Feeling: Hume versus Kant and Habermas', in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 322–46.
50. Jean-Claude Paye, *Global War on Liberty* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007).
51. Agamben, *State of Exception*.

Chapter 6

The Mixed Constitution Alternative

1. RENEWING MIXED GOVERNMENT

We have seen that, in order to meet the metacrisis of liberal democracy, Western politics needs to return to certain older themes of its constitutionalist legacy, but for radical and not reactionary reasons.

A mixed constitution outflanks in advance the tendency of liberal democracies to oscillate between debased popular will on the one hand, and the power of the executive allied to the oligarchic interests of a few, on the other. Even today, despite much erosion of the West's best traditions, freedom under the law and public cooperation offers resources potentially to create a polity that pluralises politics and extends the public realm beyond the modern duality of the state *versus* private association. Such a civic covenant might encompass the peoples and nations within and across different countries, in a double refusal of both autonomous nationalism and suppression of regional identities and self-government.

As we have seen, what is missing from liberal democracy is the crucial mediation of 'the few' – virtuous inspirers and architectonic leaders that act honourably and lead by example in all sectors of society, in natural alliance with the diverse corporate groups that they tend to embody. For the problem is not exactly 'elitism', but rather our dominance by technocratic and monopolising elites. What we need, instead, is more genuine elites (at every level and in every field) who operate not through the attempted manipulation of individuals, but, rather, via the educative influence of persons and groups who are, thereby, inducted into the further exercise of their own creative capacities. Freedom is not a given, but, instead, a gift that can be provided for all and in diverse ways through the right processes of formation.

So an enhanced role for 'the few' does not merely concern that of virtuous, rather than corrupt, elites. It also concerns the relative self-government of regions, minority groups and free associations. This should occur not just in their own interests and in terms of their own natural rights, but also in terms of what they can, thereby, contribute by example and influence to the political whole. For this whole is properly thought of as a dynamic synthesis rather than as a given totality or top-down imposition. Its architectonic rule should emerge and be elicited from the subordinate diversity itself, rather than being abstractly forced upon a passive or recalcitrant social body.

For this reason, mixed government involves not the separation but, rather, the organic cooperation of powers at the centre. Whereas separation only compounds the dominance of the executive, while yet sterilising the potency of the centre, organic cooperation involves a balancing of central with local power. But such balancing provides a mutual check without eventual state usurpation only if there is also the sense of a symbiotic shared operation.

In its current predicament, Britain and other Western countries require new constitutional settlements that recover the natural link of mixed government with modern traditions of sovereign pluralism and federalism. Whether at the level of over-centralised states such as the United Kingdom, France and Spain, or at the level of supranational groupings such as the European Union, what is needed is the equivalent of Royal Commissions or constitutional conventions with strong parliamentary and popular involvement tasked with setting out a complete re-balancing of power between capitals on the one hand and localities and regions on the other hand. Transforming the centralised, unitary state into a federalised, plural polity would carry through the logic of devolution based on the principle of subsidiarity, which means locating powers at the level that is most appropriate for the dignity and flourishing of the person. This tends to be in lower tiers such as regional or local government, neighbourhood councils and even the parish level, but it can, of course, require action at higher levels of supranational and global institutions for problems such as migration, cross-border crime, terrorism, environmental devastation and financial regulation. Thus devolution inwards, properly understood, also entails, as its logical inverse, extension outwards. Over time, this requires a much greater international involvement on the part of traditionally reluctant countries, above all the United Kingdom.

2. MIXED GOVERNMENT AND PLURALISM

Beyond the Secular Settlement of Left *versus* Right

Historically, much of Western politics was a battle between a Conservative and right-wing advocacy of 'the one' and a Liberal and left-wing advocacy

of ‘the many’ – even if right and left can sometimes change places in this respect. By contrast, as we have already seen, ‘socialism’ was not originally situated on this spectrum at all.¹ It rejected the ‘conservatism’ of those who advocated a return to the entirely modern, unity-obsessed, technocratic and ‘spectacular’ *ancien régime*, but also criticised the new tyranny of liberal industrial modernity, obsessively concerned with the emancipation of the dispersed ‘many’. For this reason, it tended to resurrect, yet democratise, the role of ‘the few’ – skilled elites in different crafts and professions that can uphold ethos and excellence, alongside the self-government and self-organisation for shared ends of trades and localities.² Socialists like G.D.H. Cole argued for a more radical version of mixed constitution that properly democratises the entire economy through the interplay of participation, advice with foresight and overall coordination at many different levels.³ The original Labour movement in Britain, thereby, sought to develop the best surviving traditions of mixed government by building a more plural and organic commonwealth through a more democratic and egalitarian rendering of English and cognate Celtic traditions.

This means that, in seeking alternatives to liberal democracy, we need to be critical about the secular settlement of both left and right. They exist in a liberal space, which attempts a bipolar subversion of ancient tripartition – suppressing the role of the few in the name of a suspension between the one and the many. The tension between left and right makes sense only within this subversion and suspension. Thus it typically concerns the irresolvable tension between the freedom of the individual and mass decision, the primacy of the political unity *versus* economic variety, and the class tension between oligarchic and mass forces. *Each* of these poles can and has presented itself in either ‘left-’ or ‘right-wing’ guises. Socialist and associationist alternatives need, therefore, to think outside this shared paradigm concealed by a supposedly absolute opposition. And that means recovering in a new mode the ancient tripartition.

Restoring the Rule of the Personal

The three elements of antique mixed constitution – monarchy, aristocracy and democracy – tend to be more ‘personally’ mediated by representatives who also attend to the needs and flourishing of people in their personal peculiarities by ‘economising’ their rule in a ‘pastoral’ fashion beyond the mere imposition of legal edicts. Today, renewed personal rule, in refusal of the increasingly inflexible reign of an often prissy normativity, can therefore blend, in a likewise equitable fashion, the social, the political and the economic. The Christian version of this rule in a sense revived and universalised the ancestral local, tribal wisdom of reciprocity that confirmed its social rule

by personal proposal or offering with regular (economic) circulation and democratic (political) acceptance. In this manner, it intensified the personal dimension by combining it with the symbolic in requiring that the voice of the guiding king or aristocrat be also the voice of the representative of the people. For with the new prominence given to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which all can exercise (unlike Homeric military prowess, or Aristotelian magnanimity of the noble and wealthy), the voice of the people is now regarded, not as 'correct' by entitlement, but rather as proximate to the truth through wide consensus and harmony of dispersed practice.

As Krzysztof Kieślowski's film *Blue* suggests, liberty, equality and fraternity, if they are to escape liberal *aporias*, require a grounding in the 'theological virtues'. For, in order to pursue justice, we must believe that the discovery and implementation of justice is objectively possible, just as we must believe in the reality of the human spirit and hope that all the capacities of each and every human spirit will eventually be fulfilled. If this faith – in the sense of trust (*pistis*, in Plato) – is justified, then 'fraternity' will prove more than a vain sentimental gesture through the realisation of charity in human reconciliation.

These beliefs and hopes undergird the longer-term practice of representative government in the Western legacy precisely because it is personally mediated. Right up to the nineteenth century, almost everyone assumed that all human rule, of whatever kind (including the most democratic), was by 'divine right'.⁴ Legitimate government must govern and judge in the name of the good and not merely in the name of the people. Popular mediation of the divine will was seen as essential, otherwise the sovereign (however constituted) might rule in the name of all-too-acceptable evil, or more probably in the name of its own manipulations of the popular voice. At the same time, legitimate government submits in various ways to the people's judgement in terms of its own discernment of the nature of goodness.

This can sound less democratic than our current assumptions, but, in reality, it far more safeguards the real exercise of the democratic component of representation. For without any belief in the legitimation of authority through participation in the good, the inevitable 'alienation' of power exercised by representatives can only be self-interested and must augment the entrenchment of an oligarchic class. Since that which is 'proposed' to an electorate is not itself democratically decided, without the shared 'third' horizon of discernment of the public good, the only common language between represented and representatives must be one of naked power. Accordingly, the competitive tension between the government and people becomes, in principle, irresolvable, such that genuinely democratic conversation, rather than warfare by the other means of language, is rendered impossible. Where this conversation is truly nurtured by dialectical and educative discernment of the

truth, it should become far more possible to escape the ironic limits of faction and work towards a genuine political representation of the entire social body in all its corporate diversity. In this manner, we can begin to address those neglected if widely perceived issues of environment, poverty, transport, formative education, crime and so forth, which are for now perpetually relegated to second place and so in practice never really dealt with.

Constitutional Corporatism

As we saw in the previous chapter, pluralism is subtly falsified if it does not allow, in an Aristotelian spirit, that the overall political formation is always already there, or at least anticipated. For this reason, the organicism of pluralism and the organicism of the political whole as a mixed constitution naturally hang together. As we also saw, autonomous and democratically self-governing associations – in their dispersed and plural ‘fewness’ – combine in a microcosm the virtuous guidance of ‘the one’ with the assent of ‘the many’ around shared notions of excellence and ethos.

Inversely, given the natural combination of the two organicisms, neither representative nor associative democracy will work except under the carapace of a sense of government as ultimately answerable to the ‘divine right’ of objective justice. That must be secured by an executive monarchy or presidency in combination with the judicial role of the wise who need not necessarily be formally elected in order to be counted as representative. Ineluctably, this group is an auto-forming and self-reproducing ‘club’.⁵ But to see only danger in this truth is to overlook its necessity and non-preventability, since we all live in time and must first be inducted before we can decide for ourselves. To be sure, this process is habitually subject to corruption, but then that is partly why it is so crucial that all education (as the Ciceronian tradition insisted) be allied to formation in virtue. Just this extra-democratic communicative and shaping process through time paradoxically enables the democratic element and its extension.

It does so in three ways: first, by better guarding against propagandistic manipulation of opinion than liberal representation, which is readily capturable by oligarchic interest; second, by reminding us that democratic debate should be an attempt to discern the objective truth and not an airing of arbitrary emotions or prevailing prejudice and finally, by helping to sustain and shape spaces for popular involvement and participation outside the increasingly warped mode of formal representation. In negative confirmation of this thesis, one can note that the purer, more liberal and revolutionary democracy of the United States is deficient, at least at national and state levels in terms of democratic involvement, liberty of opinion, freedom of the individual, security of the citizen, welfare provision, humane punishment and social equality.

But neither the recognition of group rights nor the supplementation of representative democracy by corporatist and monarchic-aristocratic governance by any means implies a neglect of individual rights. Rather, in order to avoid a slide into ‘democratic despotism’, it is necessary to defend individual rights in more ‘personalist’ terms, which regard the individual not in isolation, but as the most basic rung in a subsidiarist vision that is in continuity with older ‘distributist’ notions of dignity and honour.⁶ The need to defend the individual person sometimes formed the basis of a radical popular argument for monarchic as against merely aristocratic power: the one must sometimes defend the many against the virtuous few turned corruptly oligarchic.

This is one of the reasons why alternatives to ‘democratic despotism’ may in fact involve, in the British case, a strengthened role for the Crown taken in the abstract,⁷ or its equivalent in a republican system. The monarchy remains divided today between a more authentic, if elusive, role of ultimate guardianship, and a danger that it will be entirely recruited by the capitalist market spectacle and the liberal state machine and so reduced to a largely ceremonial kitsch function.⁸ The latter development could help spell the end of democracy, whereas the former shelters an alternative future in which monarchy or Republican presidency could play a role in constantly mediating between mass participation and virtuous leadership, as between populist causes and minority interests and concerns. Some of Prince Charles’ interventions in public debate have demonstrated a sense of this possibility.

The Gift of Rule

To say all this is to ask that we subordinate also political contract to reciprocity or gift. A government may be contractually legitimate as elected and its laws may be legitimate as proceeding from sovereign powers, and yet engender tyranny – as the Nazi and Fascist examples show. So beyond this formalism, which can only think of the people as a compounded mass of individuals, it needs to be supposed that truth (to the degree that it is already perceived and embodied) usually lies with the people in a more dispersed and variegated way. Different people and different groups have diverse talents and insights – these they effectively share for the good of the whole body politic. It is in keeping with these dispersed roles and functions that the people should variously proffer the fruits of their insight and talent to the sovereign representatives who act in their name and, thereby, enjoy proper popular assent. Just as a gift is a thing as well as a sign, so also a chain of personal relations is equally an organic compound of things, works and instruments, even though an organic whole is not ‘closed’ to further relation, like a collective aggregation.

Inversely, the sovereign power must think of itself as acting reciprocally and distributing gifts – gifts of ordering and nurturing, not simply as imposing a fiat in order to expand the utility and productiveness of a nation-state and its people. This is an outrageous notion – for example, the view of successive governments that Britain should only accept skilled or exploitable immigrants and refugees who can increase national output – often at the consequent expense of indigenous citizens whose potential is neglected. A government that gives must rather pursue the intrinsic fulfilment of its citizens and residents. To rule in this way means that the ‘subjects’ of rule can participate in the ruling and can appropriate its task to themselves. To be thus properly ruled renders them, indeed, ‘subjects’ even in the ontological sense since, thereby, something is proposed to them that can form their own good if they respond to it. And no one is self-originated or self-possessing.

So to be a subject of a ‘crown’ is actually a more radical idea than to be a citizen of a republic in the contractualist sense of Rousseau (though not in the ancient Roman, or aspects of the modern French or American, sense). For the liberal citizen is a natural individual before the State comes into being, and a citizen only as co-composing the state. This means that she is always implicitly threatened by ‘the state of the exception’ and ‘bare life’.⁹ If she lapses back into being a natural individual like the denizens of Guantánamo Bay, she now lacks all human dignity. This will only be granted to her as long as the contractual co-composition of the state holds good.

By contrast, if there is, metaphorically speaking, a ‘constitutional monarchy’ (we are not advocating its adoption everywhere in the literal sense), then according to natural law and not just natural right, the sovereign authority is only ‘subjecting’ human beings because it is obliged to offer them the gift of good and just coordination of diverse talents and needs. St Paul de-sacralised and redefined human rule as only concerned with justice and not with the totemic protection of religious power or a sacrally bounded domain (all *termini* being in origin sacred).¹⁰ Hence, no human animal can fall outside this beneficent subjecting (in principle), which is in excess of contract. For this reason, the Christian principles of polity stand totally opposed to any idea of the ‘nation-state’ as the ultimate unit, and, rather, favour at once natural pre-given persons, ‘regions’ and nations (not defined by statehood) on the one hand, and the universal human *megalopolis* on the other. This positive feature of ‘monarchy’ does not, of course, mean that the ‘monarchic’ power should not be in some sense always elected or proclaimed. To the contrary, it should be regarded as able to give rule because it has, in part, first been constituted by the mass donation of varied talents and points of view.

Reciprocity or gift-exchange is a particular mode of politics. Its spontaneous formation of an ethos and of tacit conventions restricts, without entirely removing, the need for the operation of codified and enforceable law.

Monarchy in some sense enters into the picture here, because mass popular movements, along with the centralising ambitions of ‘the few’ can tend to subvert the more genuine operation of local participatory democracy. Here the function of a somewhat ‘transcendent’ single power should be to secure, uphold and intervene occasionally in favour of the subsidiary dispersal of power to its levels of appropriate exercise – of which Prince Charles’s various charitable trusts are a certain example. In this manner, the function of the rule of ‘the one’ that we are invoking runs against, rather than in support of, the modern doctrinal and practical upholding of an absolute sovereign centre. The latter tends to ensure that even a supposed rule of the many – ‘the sovereignty of the people’ – is, in reality, an *over-emphatic* rule of the one.

The following sections attempt to describe post-liberal constitutionalism in more detail, using the example of the United Kingdom. Parallel examples and proposals could be taken from and applied to other countries, but we have already seen why the reworking of Britain’s apparent constitutional outdatedness may be especially relevant to the renewal of the human political future.

3. A NEW FEDERAL SETTLEMENT

Britain, one can argue, has never been an unqualified nation-state and never completely acquired the crucial marks of modern statehood – the sovereignty of the people, citizenship, ‘police’ control by the state, juridical formalism, state-administered finance and civil politeness.¹¹ (The absence of the latter may be why the British are still so cheerfully rude and robust in debate.) Instead, even the British empire – as earlier the Spanish – arose in continuity with its medieval empire, where a group of diverse local territories, ethnicities and cultures was already held together, albeit in problematic and endlessly contested fashion, by a common set of symbolic loyalties. Even after the rise of a monarchic absolutism, in considerable consequence of the King’s appropriation of headship of the English church, Tudor statecraft, far from straightforwardly inaugurating state centralism, often extended royal reach by supporting the relative independence of local and vocational institutions: by giving the Greenwich Maritime College land and authority, by enabling the Royal Exchange in the City of London to compete with Amsterdam, and by endowing both King’s College and Trinity College in Cambridge with specific professorships in key sciences in order to catch up with the European Continent – as Maurice Glasman has argued.

It was not otherwise in France, where absolutism was initially *less* in evidence by virtue of the continued allegiance of the Church to the Pope. From Francis I onwards, the Valois and then the Bourbon kings administered their

terrains more efficiently by bolstering the power and prestige of local corporations and *parlements* – whose functions as we have seen, extended, contrary to myth, to legislative and executive as well as judicial functions.¹² Today, this early modern legacy points to the importance of a strategic state that can endow localities and restore vocations, such as regional and city banks or specifically orientated technical colleges. Yet, with the irreversible decline of the modern nation-state, it also needs to do so in a more neo-medieval spirit, prepared truly to share sovereignty in a federated manner with regions, corporations and adjacent foreign territories, as in the case of the European nations and the European Union.

In the case of the British Isles (in the long term not excluding the already troubled Eire, lacking sufficient influence over a London whose dominance it cannot really escape), this implies the need for a new, overarching federal settlement. Such a settlement cannot be a top-down, ‘one-size-fits-all’ construct by the Westminster elites, nor conformable to a liberal formalist fairness that just does not fit the complex facts, but has to reflect the country’s diversity.

Transforming Local Government

The starting point for a new constitutional arrangement that can revive democracy in Britain is a renewal of local government, which has been emasculated for decades – losing many of its traditional responsibilities for education, health, housing, transport and much besides. With the exception of London, it has been reduced to little more than a managerialist bureaucracy.¹³ Self-government of towns and cities should happen for all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland and Wales, where devolved powers do not provide sufficient opportunities for greater local autonomy and popular participation.

Britain needs to establish a system of mixed government also at the local level by way of the following three transformations.

The first would strengthen the microcosmic rule of ‘the one’ through the introduction of directly elected mayors. London mayoral elections have revived democratic debate not just in Greater London but nationally. In France, there are nearly 37,000 mayors in 13 regions (following President Hollande’s 2014 reforms), and mayors are by far the most popular politicians across the country, including those from the mainstream parties – even though they are not directly elected but, rather, stand in local elections as the heads of party lists.

The second transformation of local government relates to the microcosmic role of ‘the few’. Currently, the dominant model combines a politically powerless council with an increasingly managerialist bureaucracy. Councils are run like quasi-companies by CEO-type figures (on six-figure salaries)

who focus on short-term results for their supporters rather than long-term outcomes for the locality as a whole. The alternative is to create a bicameral model, with the local assembly functioning as the lower house that represents democracy locational and a newly established upper house that represents democracy vocational. The natural institution to fulfil the latter role is the old guildhall that still exists in many towns and cities across Britain. An expanded version would allow all the professions and trades to be represented and to contribute to local decision making, including key decisions about levels of taxation and spending.

Taken together, directly elected mayors and a bi-cameral assembly would be a better institutional platform on which to locate place-based public sector spending, and integrate the competing and conflicting arms of the central state that rules over cities and localities.¹⁴ For such a new structure to work one would require the merging of existing wasteful overheads and the pooling of resources into a single fund whence decisions and spending can be re-directed in ways that address different needs in different contexts – housing, transport, skills, mental health, education. Key to this are new ways of combining bottom-up, community-based solutions with larger-scale models of delivery – for example, by bringing together voluntary associations and social enterprises under the guidance of the mayor, the assembly and local civil servants. In this manner, local government neither provides all services, nor outsources them to the cheapest for-profit supplier, but, rather, promotes mutualist arrangements by connecting and coordinating different providers and stakeholders.

The third transformation of local government aims to strengthen the micro-cosmic rule of ‘the many’ by giving citizens a much greater say over how their representatives are elected and how they are governed. Here we suggest open primaries for candidates in both mayoral and municipal elections and town-hall meetings (at the appropriate level) where residents can put forward suggestions about key priorities (not unlike participatory budgets in certain cities, such as Porto Alegre).¹⁵

Devolution to Regional Assemblies

In addition to the transformation of local government, Britain requires real regionalism if she is to become more democratic – including city-regions where appropriate (as for Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol and Newcastle) that help reconnect urban spaces to their rural surroundings. This is true not only for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where politicians in the capital cities denounce the elites in Westminster while concentrating powers in their own hands. Above all, it applies to England whose regions currently lack any proper constitutional recognition and political status.

As to devolution to either counties or regions, it is wise to remain somewhat agnostic. England is much smaller than France and, therefore, has been less naturally divided into regions, but, rather, into smaller units, the counties, which all refract a decidedly English identity. Yet, at the same time, the sense and reality of county identity has today somewhat lapsed in favour of a broader sense of region, which itself has an earlier historical root in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumberland, Mercia, East Anglia, Wessex and the yet smaller kingdoms of the South East. These roughly correspond to the regional divisions from 1994 and operate some dissolved political functions.

In addition, any realisation of some parity in terms of self-government between England and the Celtic nations, which the English will understandably demand following the granting of Scottish home rule, has to occur at the level of substantive population blocks. For it to occur at the level of England as a whole would probably destroy the Union and would not be compatible with demographic asymmetry. At the level of population, though not to the same degree at the level of cultural identity, the English regions have, therefore, to be considered the equivalent of the Celtic national areas. Attachment to them is quietly stronger than might be apparent, and resistance to regional assemblies is more likely to do with indifference to party-dominated political processes than to ancient areas. The trick then is to 'politicise' existing cultural attachments and this could readily arise if regional assemblies became speedily associated with local pride, increased economic development and popular involvement in shaping regional character. It can also be added here that, however desirable city-regions may sometimes be, they can run the risk of a local metropolitan overriding of the many middle-sized towns that tend to form the chains of conurbations, especially in the north of England.

4. CROWN AND POLITY

Amidst a crisis of trust in public institutions such as political parties, parliament, the press and the police, in the United Kingdom the generally still trusted and admired monarchy can potentially shelter some new forms of popular political, social and economic involvement and participation beyond formal representation. However, today as already said, the British monarchy remains divided between two rival roles: an authentic traditional role of holding elected politicians to the higher standard of the common good both symbolically and by private admonition on the one hand, and a danger that a mere 'dignity' of the royal family is too easily co-opted by the capitalist spectacle and the liberal state machine, on the other. It can be argued that if

the latter role prevails, then the monarchy should be abolished, but that there may lurk a radical potential in the former.

Constitutional Monarchy and Parliamentary Democracy

For liberals, the separation of powers between the three branches of government provides the most effective limit on any form of political absolutism. But constitutional monarchy, or a republican presidential equivalent (as in France), can achieve this aim to a superior degree. Just as royal powers have in the past come to be restrained by parliament, so too the King in Parliament can today operate as an inverse check on the democratic despotism of the elected executive. For the constitutional monarch to whom the Prime Minister and his government is answerable stands for a deeper principle than that of the elected politician – the endurance of Britain's four nations in unity and time from the past and into the future beyond any electoral cycle and short-term factional or ideological interests. The Queen or King symbolises the polity as crown and personifies it as monarch. According to this conception, she or he implicitly holds politicians to a more transcendent standard. The monarch, or executive-transcending president (with their advisers), can force attention to questions concerning the true long-term nature of national flourishing upon a secular politics otherwise always liable to succumb to the lure of the partisan and to causes more temporary than seriously enduring.

Since democracy by itself is not sufficient to ensure the survival of democracy, monarchical succession paradoxically supports democratic rule and guarantees continuity in relation to the salutary alternation of different parties in power (as the history of Scandinavia and Benelux, besides that of the Commonwealth, tends to confirm). The monarch and the institutions emanating from monarchy can embody the interests of the country that face the constant threat of being either manipulated or simply ignored by temporary majorities.

Just as the Crown can potentially balance the oligarchic usurpation of executive power by legislating ministers, so also it can balance the usurpation of both legislation and executive by the judiciary. Often, this occurs in the name of 'human rights'. Instead of the judiciary being restricted to the application and interpretation of distributive measures taken by sovereign legislation, 'rights' standing alone have started to be treated as absolute and foundational and, yet (contradictorily), infinitely expansive, which in effect turns the courts into an original arm of government.

Today, in the name of rights and international corporate norms of property that begin to uphold a shadowy liberal super-state, national judges, as argued in the previous chapter, are either subordinate to, or in league with, international courts. These bodies are too much in danger of becoming

quasi-legislatures, given the weak powers of supranational parliaments such as that of the European Union and the matching impossibility that nationally elected politicians would ever be able to deal in sufficient detail with all the arising detailed questions of European-wide or even global policy. And there is surely no justification for the segregating out of ‘rights’ issues from those of justice in general. For, on the one hand, the clash of equally ‘absolute’ rights becomes non-adjudicable if questions of distributive justice have been bracketed by a court of rights, while on the other hand, the legitimate claims made by individuals and the particular interests of individuals as persons may be relatively neglected by a court of justice that does not see rights as falling within its purview. If legislative, executive and judicial powers should not be absolutely and formally divided, but persist in symbiosis, then equally the judiciary should not be internally divided from within – between areas of supposedly absolute and supposedly merely comparative treatment of human persons in dispute. Re-emphasising the mediation of the one, indivisible commitment to justice, as symbolised by Crown or Presidency, can assist in the restoration of this integration.

In parallel fashion, constitutional monarchy can help to sustain democracy and mitigate elective dictatorship by mixing the rule of ‘the many’ with the rule of ‘the one’.¹⁶ The power of the Crown operates in principle as a kind of umpire, which ensures that democratic processes themselves follow certain principles of justice and rules of fairness. By virtue of itself being constitutional, held to upholding the law and to a drastic sharing of power, monarchy secures the knot of the wider constitutional framework within which it is situated. It is surely no accident that constitutional monarchies are renowned for their respect of the constitution and the institutions of the law, as well as for the overall levels of economic development and human flourishing. Seven of the top ten and sixteen of the top twenty countries in the world, in terms of quality of life, are constitutional monarchies. This is all the more remarkable when one realises that republics outnumber monarchies by a ratio of 5 to 1 (150 vs. approximately 31).¹⁷ It is also striking that some Islamic monarchies (where they are not subject to Salafist subversion) offer a certain balance between conservation of Islamic tradition and influence on the one hand, and secular rule on the other (as in Jordan and, to a lesser extent, Morocco). This balance notoriously evades the republican formations in the Middle East that tend to lapse into either secularism, absolutism or theocracy.

Of course, there are factors explaining these performances that are unrelated to the monarch. Yet constitutional monarchy is one factor, since it can sustain a democratic dimension while preventing it from overriding sectional interests in the name of a single power or source of authority – including numerous ‘civil society’ initiatives under royal patronage. In the case of the British nations, the monarchy – together with Parliament and the Church – has

helped to create and defend a space between the individual and forms of free association on the one hand, and the institutions of the state and the market on the other hand – the ‘complex space’ of corporate bodies and intermediary institutions.¹⁸ Constitutional monarchies are, arguably, better at promoting civil society because they are non-revolutionary regimes that adapt rather than ossify (as with absolutist systems) or lapse into internecine violence (as with republics that emerge from revolutions and do not later modify).

Personal against Impersonal Rule

The personal rule of the monarch exceeds the impersonal forces of the nation, the state or the market, reminding us at the top that the entire edifice of structure and process is in the end a human work, a human emergence, dependent on an amalgam of private human decisions. For this reason, monarchy can today symbolically and actively uphold the sanctity of labour (human beings are first and foremost workers), land (the shared commons) and life (the dignity of the human person). The House of Windsor has to some degree already, and commendably, started to take on this international role¹⁹ – even if it could be greatly extended, to potential global benefit, potentially somewhat reviving at a supranational level the lapsed (but arguably theo-politically indispensable) role of the Holy Roman Emperor in the older polity of Christendom.

The monarch represents the common good because her single personal frailty at the apex of the political organism witnesses to our human existential isolation. In the end, all of us, however situated or coerced, must constantly decide for ourselves and, so, alone. We do so in the face of a merely internal witness who, if also other to us, must be our divine centre of true identity that is also beyond ourselves as our creative source (as of every other creature).²⁰ The finally ‘sovereign’ power of the Crown implies some power to override the usual norms, in an emergency of warfare or revolt, or else of attempted subversion of constitutional freedom (even by an elected or populist power). This can seem scandalous because it is ultimately unchecked. But it is just this uncheckedness that (as so often witnessed in Shakespeare’s plays) most allies kingship with the naked situation of everyman. Here our lone non-answerability coincides with our ultimate answerability to ourselves and to God. Just because we are ultimately alone, we are also without excuse or alibi.

The political equivalence of this is just the point where the monarch or her immediate representatives stand for the nation and so are nakedly confronted with the question as to what this nation is for and, so, what it is supposed to do and how it is to compose itself. What is its general good and how does that relate to the good of humankind in general? The monarch, her advisors

and ministers can be sometimes crucially freed of the alibis of representative consensus and formalistic norms of balancing competing wills or utilitarian norms of distilling a kind of order out of people's baser instincts rather than their pursuit of virtue. As such, lone (but not unqualified) sovereign power at the top (with nothing further human between itself and the heavens) occupies just that space where we have to ask: What are we – all of us – *for*?

Those who dispute the existence of this objective good to be discerned (albeit problematically) and pursued (albeit haltingly) are at best inconsistent. For they view individual rights and representative democracy as goods, but cannot tell us why this might be so. And the objection that we do not need any single symbolisation of the pursuit of the good at a hierarchical summit (whether by monarch, president or prime minister) ignores the role of symbolic mediation in human coming-together and the fact that collective decision can only be mediated by a once-more individual voice. Here Rousseau was, after all, considerably right: the general will has to be mediated, expressed and interpreted finally by the individual voice of 'the legislator' if it is to be at all coherent.

Monarchy beyond the Sacral-Secular Divide

As already intimated, the monarch straddles the sacral-secular divide, for the King possesses this power by the double virtue of his sovereign sway over the integrity of the realm and of his baptism. This means that he is answerable to a higher authority than simply his own private inner conscience. Roger Trigg puts this well:

In England, the Cross on top of the Crown, coupled with the symbolism of the Coronation service, demonstrate the fact that temporal power is not the final source of authority, but is itself answerable to a higher Power. The Queen, personifying all government in this land, is subject to principles and standards that are not the making of herself or her ministers. All are under the ultimate judgment of the God who created all. Denying that is to make something else, whether the interest of the stronger, or the fickle will of the people, an untrustworthy guide.²¹

Such divine answerability helps to secure the sense that Britain remains an *imperium* not reducible to any mere 'nation-state' that is rife with nationalism, exceptionalism or supremacism. For British patriotism and pride in her indigenous culture is not divorced from a sense that its unique culture has value only insofar as it continues traditions that it inherited but did not invent – the Christian fusion of Greco-Roman reason with biblical faith, the principle of free association in Germanic common law, the Latin sense of equity and participation in the *civitas*.

As Defender of the Faith, the monarch provides a sense of unity that is real *precisely* because it is symbolic (which Bagehot failed to understand). Perhaps Richard Hooker's most famous statement is that it is a 'gross error' to suppose 'that regal power ought to serve for the good of the body and not of the soul, for men's temporal peace and not their eternal safety, as if God had ordained *kings* for no other purpose than to fat up men's souls like hogs and to see that they have their mash'.²² On the contrary, for Hooker the Crown in the person of the Monarch as the head both of Church and state is in part responsible for human virtue in its entirety for two reasons: first, she is the mediator of the Christological convergence of the divine with the human; second, she is the symbolic representative of human integrity and therefore one who rules with legitimacy only because she turns the usages of the earthly city towards the ends of the heavenly.

The fact that the monarch is the supreme governor of the Church of England extends this gift of ruling to the ecclesial polity too. Unlike the absolutist tendency of the US executive and the Germanic judicial *Reichsstaat*, the British constitution can balance the coercive powers of the state with the persuasive powers of the Church precisely insofar as both co-constitute the public realm. The establishment of the Church means that a merely suasive authority, which derives from beyond the political and beyond the human, is granted a significant political status in such a way that the more purely political becomes 'self-denying'. Otherwise, only the coercively authorised is granted any political status and political authority becomes tautologous within a circle ultimately closed by mere force. The religious grounding of the British settlement is clearly one important source for its habitual moderation and tolerance, since it is bound to regard all human standards and proposals as being of merely relative worth. By comparison, a purely secular settlement tends to oscillate between a tyrannical absolutising of one faction on the one hand, and a drift into anarchic relativism on the other.

5. THE POLITICAL ROLE OF ARISTOCRACY

A constitutional monarchy, or else a constitutional presidency, could and should provide spaces in which citizens can participate in the governance of the public realm outside the formal mechanisms of liberal representation that are in crisis. But, of course, monarchy (and in an extended sense, presidency) is not really separable from an aristocratic principle in the broadest sense. Monarchy emerged because it stood at the apex of an aristocratic order. So before we propose reforms of the British monarchy's political involvement, we will provide a qualified defence of the aristocratic role.

Power and Accident of Birth

It might well be objected that a greater political role for the monarchy flies in the face of the fact that many monarchs in history have been weak, foolish or brutal. But the answer to this is that it poses a counter-naiveté yet more naive than the apparently obvious naiveté that it seeks to oppose. For there *is* no freedom from the accidents of birth and placement relating to talent. Our apparently thoroughly sifted systems endlessly throw up the incompetent, indigent and even half-mad in positions of crucial power. This exigency is compounded by the fact that the downside of meritocracy is the tendency to advance the ruthless and self-regarding. Even when they have been supposedly ‘found out’ at an early stage, it is extraordinary the way others will take people at their own self-estimate and submit to their incessant pursuit of a sense of self-entitlement.

In the face of this socially existential truth, there is a certain need to balance meritocracy with inherited rights that also involve inherited and, therefore, more objective responsibilities. It is equally necessary even sometimes to meld an aristocracy of virtue with an aristocracy of birth, which can help to ensure the greater tying of public and family destinies to that of the public as a whole. Indeed, for all the partial abolition of the privileges of formal aristocracy (only partial, even in France), this generally means their replacement by an upper tier of the bourgeoisie and then various successor cadres. These classes still, in effect, and inevitably, sustain advantages of birth, which cannot be abolished without removing also the general public benefit of inherited tradition, or by intolerably weakening the institution of the family and increasing the power of the state to intervene in its affairs. The interests of the polity as a whole, for example, lies in their being a supply of good lawyers, and if this is in part aided by dynasties of lawyers (as music was enhanced by the Bach dynasty), then it is superficial to suppose that this is democratically problematic. Political society is not a kind of individual sporting competition in which ‘equal access’ to the legal profession is more important than its excellence, even though a strong degree of such access, indeed, guards against the lapsing of the dynastic into decadence. Here law is but one example; one could equally speak of farmers, house-builders, artists, academics, ecologists and even bankers.

The problem today is, rather, the reduction of the role of inheritance to land, cash and privilege, uncoupled from any sense of inherited duty and identification of the ‘leading’ role with the public good. Yet, if virtue, of course, more primarily defines aristocracy than does lineage (in every sense), then it needs also to be seen that virtue as such is inseparable from succession. Thus the natural aristocracy of talent and virtue cannot be sundered (as Burke argued) from the aristocracy of birth in the widest sense of familial

legacy, even though good education can democratically make up for initial deficiencies. This point sounds far more incendiary than it really is: for we are temporal and influenced creatures, and parental and local influence cannot be escaped, nor should they be escaped for fear of a destruction of all excellence in the name of a formal flattening. Specifically, parental influence can be both the greatest force for good and the greatest force for evil – which is why the parenting of parents, their support and assistance, should be a social priority. This does not mean any sort of nannying, ‘expert’ interference, but rather the encouragement of a wider and previously natural neighbourhood support for families and a general sharing of the child-rearing task, which has now become well-nigh impossible for working families, and in the climate of hysteria over appalling child abuse.

Aristocracy and Politics

All this constitutes one roundabout approach to the truth that one cannot readily separate the role and reality of monarchy from the role and reality of inherited aristocracy. No – but then in principle, the link of personal ties to the land should serve to create a class that connects its own interests to the common good, including the ecological good.

Of course, ever since the whig ascendancy in the eighteenth century, this link has been subverted and poisoned: land has been capitalised and agricultural interests have been thoroughly conjoined with industrial and financial ones.²³ Part of the answer to this corruption is, indeed, a ‘left-wing’ one – much greater distribution and mutual, public ownership of all lands – wild, agricultural and exploitable. Yet, short of an undesirable and anti-creative, anti-personal abolition of all private property, it remains crucial as far as possible to conjoin ownership with public interest through a sense of inherited or received ‘guardianship’ or ‘trusteeship’. This principle has informed originally radical, and continually publicly beneficial, ventures like the National Trust (ultimately inspired by both Coleridge and Ruskin). However, we need to take the further step of constitutionalising such bodies by allowing them the full status of incorporation, removing the English empirical and post-Reformation common law muddle of the ‘unincorporated association’, as if there were really any regular union without a certain implicitly regulated and, so, ‘legal’ status.²⁴ Such a conjoining of ownership and guardianship through more explicit incorporation (often under Crown protection) of beneficial associations, though genuinely ‘radical’, remains also a conservative and aristocratic principle. Today we need large landowners to recover their sense of responsibility, perhaps mainly through ecological commitment, so long as this retains a humanist and aesthetic concern for the environment, and is not swamped by an impersonal, bio-technologising concern with mere

‘conservation’.²⁵ Some large estates need to change along these lines and others (especially in Scotland) should be mutualised and, if necessary, be broken up for wider public usage.

But more crucial than the restoration of a true sense of hereditary aristocracy amongst the upper classes or landed *arrivistes* is the ‘democratisation’ of the aristocratic principle itself: the distribution to smaller landholders and even to mere householders of a sense of holding something in trust for future generations and of a link between one’s own fortune and that of one’s property, surroundings and community. Undoubtedly, more locally based economic communities, besides more labour-intensive green agriculture, could help in this direction by creating a more settled, locally rooted population in the future. Such an aspiration can sound nostalgic, but, in actuality, it is in dialectical harmony with ever-increasing globalisation. In a world where it matters less where you live because of instant communications and rapid transport, it becomes evermore possible to stay most of the time in one place and it is also more desirable to do so, in order to balance an appropriate sense of the international with an equally crucial sense of rootedness.

6. THE POLITICAL ROLE OF MONARCHY

These remarks concerning aristocracy are necessary for a full defence and exposition of the monarchic role, which, indeed, makes no sense unless it stands at the apex of the aristocratic – however distributed. Yet at the same time, monarchy also transcends it in such a way as to ‘meta-aristocratically’ identify its personal interests with the entirety of the ‘many’ rather than simply those of the local ‘few’, here and there. The monarch is born into an entire tradition and formed from birth into this unique role. Moreover, as again with aristocrats by birth in general, natal accident has a certain democratic aspect. The ruler by birth is, thereby, ‘anyone’ called forth from the human mass, like the juror in a court of law simply *as a human person*, to be a general human representative, or the political representative by lot in Athenian democracy. The crucial judgements made here, even in an emergency, may be all the better if emerging from a representative ‘ordinariness’, provided the person has both the intelligence and the humility to attend to wise and popular advice. *Monarchism is a humanism*, one might say.

Monarchy and Civil Service Reform

The same set of considerations about excellence and virtuous leadership should be applied to considerations of civil service reform – the first proposal regarding the renewal of the monarchic (or, elsewhere, presidential) role in

the political order. Britain today faces a decline in the quality of the civil service that is consequent upon the routinisation of its role and its undermining in favour of the role of political parties and private government advisors. What is required, instead, is that once more civil servants should mediate between elected powers and the more continuous powers and institutions. In order to counteract the erosion of the sense that they simultaneously serve and temper the will of Parliament, Britain needs to reinforce independent lines that link them to the Crown and powers emanating from the Crown.

Such moves could increase substantive democracy at the seeming expense of formal democracy, since it would restore civil servants' capacity to have a sense of the long-term public interest somewhat independent of that of elected politicians – who are, after all, far more 'here today, gone tomorrow'. Restoration of civil service ethos and continuity could also be served by the setting up of Higher Education programmes (aimed to fuse expertise and ethical considerations) leading into this sort of role at central and local governmental level or in the world of business. Such a development might at once help to increase bureaucratic calibre and increase democratic access. Here again, dynasty and recruitment are not necessarily in antithesis.

Re-Imagining the Privy Council

The second proposal is about reforming the Privy Council itself. Historically, the Privy Council used to have extensive executive, legislative and judiciary functions – another component of mixed government at the heart of Britain's polity. By the same token, it was sometimes used by the Sovereign to circumvent both Parliament and the courts both tyrannically and also in order to uphold equity against the formalistic inertia of common law precedent. Today, its key decisions are in the hands of the cabinet. While the Sovereign may in principle appoint anyone a Privy Counsellor, in practice appointments are made on the advice of the government of the day and tend to be confined to senior members of Parliament, the judiciary and the Church of England. The ensuing problem is that in its current configuration, the Privy Council is largely an extension of the writ of the executive, as the Prime Minister effectively decides who attends the Council's meetings.

Moreover, the actions taken by the monarch-in-council are a mere formality, approving every order that has been drafted by the relevant government department. Instead, membership might be extended to a much greater array of people representing towns, cities and regions, trade unions, businesses and professions as well as different faith groups. Instead of being a formal mechanism to rubber-stamp government decisions, the Privy Council could serve as a body where different groups or institutions offer advice and the Crown takes a more active role – scrutinising government proposals and

asking critical questions about whether proposed actions serve the country's long-term interest.

The main reason why this is democratically desirable is that it allows many different people to be temporarily involved in governing processes that concern them and to which they can valuably contribute. A rotating presence of many different people from all walks of life and all parts of the realm can help to qualify the rule of central representation with a more direct democratic involvement of more local, temporary and informal delegates. So again this proposal is a dilution of democracy only for wooden-minded and knee-jerk 'progressives' who identify democracy with a univocal and unilateral equal spread of formal rights and representation. In reality, by further 'increasing the mixture', it could increase substantive citizen involvement.

Royal Commissions and Royal Colleges

The third proposal is connected to this point and concerns Royal Commissions. To re-balance power away from the executive and defend the long-term national interest, a number of royal commissions addressing key questions should be created, including education and lifelong learning, family, housing, environment, industrial policy and an export strategy. More specifically, the House of Commons should be able to establish royal commissions by majority decision on a free vote by all MPs and also consider its recommendations according to a similar mode. One possibility is that the Backbench Business Committee could be given a right to propose the creation of royal commissions and draft the terms of reference and the timeline.

The fourth proposal in relation to the political role of the monarchy is the creation of royal colleges for many more professions than is presently the case, including in the service sector where there is far too little professional self-association and under-representation in the economic governance of the realm. Royal colleges and their charters can be vital institutions in fostering professional ethos and a commitment to excellence. Their remit could be expanded to co-determine (together with legislation passed in parliament) who has a licence to produce and trade, and on what conditions such licenses can be revoked – for example, for certain financial institutions in case of persistent criminal activity.

Thus the Crown, or its symbolically sovereign equivalent in other countries, can update, re-invigorate and further democratise its traditional role: first, as an arbiter, helping to enforce constitutional provisions and the rule of law, which all must abide by; second, as a mediator and guarantor that the common good and the long-term national interest are taken into account by government, parliament and the judiciary; third, as an enabler and connector of people across the realm, working for the civic renewal of the United Kingdom.

Unrealistic? But otherwise the monarchy will die away in time or else be reduced to the apex not of aristocracy, but of the capitalist spectacle. To see the actually realistic nature of these suggestions requires conversion from the whiggish assumption that the liberal, revolutionary model for modernity is the only possible model and from the empirically falsifiable view that constitutional monarchic paths to the modern have been by comparison an anomaly. To the contrary, in Britain, Scandinavia and the Low Countries, they have provided successful and balanced paths, often inciting more radicalism than republics. By contrast, the latter (and most notably the United States) quickly tend to turn statically conservative in terms of appeal to their revolutionary founding moments, which does not have the pliability of appeal to primordial and unfounded (since it is always already begun) tradition. There is simply no logical or actual reason why these paths cannot be repaired, re-signposted and re-trodden towards a subtler future.

7. REFORMING PARLIAMENT

Going back to Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh century, the rule of the ‘few’ consisted in central national guidance by the wise. The assembly of the *Witenagemot* or ‘meeting of wise men’ anticipated, though it was probably not the genetic precursor of, the upper chamber of the British Parliament.²⁶ This body, coupled with the rule of the ‘many’, eventually mediated by the House of Commons (a much later arrival in the late fourteenth century),²⁷ progressively limited the power of the ‘one’.

Today, at its best, the British second chamber still promotes a politics of wise council that can counterbalance political party interest and excessive executive domination. In its current configuration, however, the Lords generally falls well short of this ideal. Its composition reflects the ruling business elites and governmental classes much more so than it does the people and society at large. Yet, to restore and renew this ideal function, the political traditions of pluralism and associative democracy provide a better resource for genuine reform than the formalism of majoritarian, electoral representation.²⁸

The House of Lords can be regarded as the natural, organic place for the culminative representation and participation of civil society in the political arena. By representing cities, regions, professions and faiths, a properly configured House of Lords could help to encourage and coordinate a pluralisation of power and ‘civilisation’ of markets by re-embedding politics and the economy in social bonds and civic virtues. So in principle and, to some extent, already in practice, the House of Lords embodies the ultimate top-level rule of ‘the few’ as ‘guidance of the wise’. As such, it is uniquely positioned to uphold and strengthen the mediating role of localities, communities,

professions and faiths. A wholly or mainly elected upper chamber would, by contrast, largely destroy this distinctive character and transformative potential.

Changing the Composition and Selection of the House of Lords

In terms of composition, the second chamber reformed along these lines might comprise the following:

1. Representatives of all faiths in recognition of the contribution that religious communities make to community cohesion and the public, common good.²⁹
2. Representatives of towns, cities and counties to enhance the presence of localities and regions at the centre.
3. Public and private sector employees such as doctors, nurses, teachers, managers, administrators and workers.
4. Distinguished figures from an array of sectors and professions, including universities, trade unions, the civil service, the armed forces, the police, business, law, sports, the arts and the sciences.
5. A continued self-elected number of representatives of the hereditary peerage, whose role must be re-thought in terms of the ecological guardianship of land and local culture, in the manner already argued.

In terms of designation, an associative Lords could be in part elected, in part appointed and in part nominated. Currently, the mode of determining membership is mainly top-down, with the power of nomination and appointment in the hands of ministers and mandarins. A reformed upper house, by contrast, should combine local and regional with professional and religious representation through the participation of members who are designated by their peers and/or elected by their constituents. For example, some members in the Lords could be nominated or elected by citizens locally and regionally from the country's largest prisons, hospitals, schools and estates.

Moreover, just as certain bishops are members *ex officio*, so too other religious leaders would automatically join the Lords – for instance, the Chief Rabbi or the head of the Muslim Council of Britain. Similarly, trade unions and employers' associations would also have the right to send their duly elected representatives to the second chamber. However, there would be no fixed quotas, and all members would have to be confirmed by a re-configured appointments panel. In order to limit and over time reduce the size of the House of Lords, party leaders would be much more constrained in the number and profile of people they can propose (especially celebrities and wealthy donors).

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‘Association of Associations’

An associative Lords would not just enhance the legitimacy and authority of the upper chamber. It would also have the potential to transform the polity as a whole. In virtue of representing society in all its diversity, such an upper chamber could play a crucial role in fostering civic participation across the land. The presence of religious leaders would ensure that in matters of public importance, the voice of faith is heard. This is crucial, because no vibrant democracy can exist without a commitment to universally objective and transcendent standards of truth (however this be metaphysically understood) – even if these are never fully known and always deeply contested. Similarly, the membership of elected representatives from cities and counties would provide an impetus for greater devolution and more local democracy. That is indispensable to the survival and flourishing of the British Union, which was not originally a unitary state, but has effectively become so.

By recognising the contribution of professions to the common good, an associative Lords would also help promote the self-organisation of workers, employees and managers – starting with a reform of trade unions and employers’ associations that are dominated by their bosses to the detriment of their ordinary members. In this respect, an associative upper chamber could serve as a ‘meta-guild’ or a ‘corporation of corporations’. In practice, this means that the Lords would defend the autonomy of guilds and associations, which were, historically, a key pillar of the polity.

In a similar vein, guilds sought to develop and protect standards of excellence and honourable practices, if necessary by means of punishment and exclusion, based on an ethos that combined extensive rights with strict duties and moral codes. Frequently organised as confraternities, craft-guilds participated in the life of the polity based on their own distinct ‘legal personality’. In reviving such a sensibility, an associative Lords could encourage the introduction of a proper constitutional status for professional and other associations (linked to the creation of royal colleges with royal charters).

Finally, an associative House of Lords would support the Commonwealth at home and abroad by providing a sense of organic unity and concrete forms of cooperation. The Commonwealth no longer forms an empire, yet it constitutes more than a glorified free-trade zone; it is, rather, an interlocking union of nations whose cultural unity exists independently of the ultimate sanction of a single sovereign centre.³⁰ In this way, it offers some potential for the extension of the primacy of the principle of association into the international realm. The House of Lords, reconceived as an internal ‘association

of associations', could also be a fulcrum for extending associative rather than purely political, purely economic or merely cultural (though culture is central to association) bonds to the relations between different countries and civilisations.

Of course, the crucial objection here is that no government has any self-interest in carrying out this or any other reform of the Lords. But just for this reason, an associative reform might be more achievable than the liberal kind. For no real interest-group campaigns for the latter, whereas the former can potentially become linked to the causes of localities, professional bodies, trade unions, churches and other faith groups. Possibly, this change can only be promoted if the bishops, along with the representatives of other faiths, come to see that they can only defend the apparent anomaly of their peerages if they link their legitimacy to the cause of corporative representation. The same consideration applies to an imaginatively expanded role for the Crown.

Reforming the House of Commons

The most pressing problem with the House of Commons is its lack of representativeness. Yet electoral reform involving PR has not only been rejected by a decisive majority (as with the 2011 referendum on AV) but also contains numerous problems, chief of all some form of party list that breaks the link between elected parliamentarians and their constituents. At the same time, First-Past-The-Post effectively excludes millions of voters who live in safe seats. Therefore, two reforms might be suggested: First, creating constituencies that coincide with local identity as far as possible. These will be bigger than existing constituencies and, thereby, also contribute to the reduction of the size of the Commons. Second, introducing some system of transferable votes that reflects the more complex preferences of voters (other than voting for a single candidate of a single party) and link this to multi-member constituencies (which existed in the past), such that citizens in the newly created larger constituencies can be represented by more than one MP. Such a system would balance the need to maintain a connection between people and their representatives on the one hand, with the need to break the monopoly of the two big parties and open up politics to other candidates.

Other desirable reforms of the House of Commons include (1) much more parliamentary time to scrutinise government bills; (2) a new mechanism of reducing the sheer amount of legislation (e.g. for every new bill in one area, at least two or three existing ones should be scrapped or radically simplified); (3) considerably higher salaries for MPs, to augment their prestige, but no expenses system in order to avoid corruption.

8. RESTORING THE STATE AS ALSO THE CHURCH

Besides the monarchy and Parliament, the other integral part of Britain's mixed government that is under attack from liberalism is the established Church of England. Our considerations here also apply to the established Presbyterian Church of Scotland. If the mode of establishment of the latter is weaker, then its sense of independence from the Scottish state and the ultimate answerability of Crown to Presbytery has often been stronger (and therefore more 'Catholic') than the Anglican claim for the answerability of Crown to Convocation (or Bishops and Synod today).³¹ But in any case, Scotland accepts its monarch's Anglican coronation.³² In the case of Wales, there is no establishment, though with the collapse of old dissent and Calvinistic Methodism in the Principality, nineteenth-century disestablishment already looks premature (if unavoidable at the time), and, increasingly, the Anglican 'Church in Wales' effectively plays the same role there as it does in England. The situation in Ulster (where Gladstone, with reason, passed the 1869 Irish Church Act, which took effect on 1 January 1871 and disestablished Anglicanism in Ireland) is, of course, religiously divided and complex, though across the whole of Ireland Anglicanism is somewhat reviving in the face of Roman Catholic crisis and a rejection of Protestant distortions and extremities.

The Case for Establishment

For liberals, Anglican establishment is a relic of the past that is rendered obsolete by the great fall in church attendance and the pluralism of late modern society – not least the presence of growing religious minorities such as Muslims who might feel discriminated against by a Christian state religion. However, the established Church of England may have a vital role to play in renewing Britain's representational government. Anglican establishment sustains the idea that the Church is itself a polity and, indeed, the heart of the English polity, since sacramental coronation alone ultimately confers legitimacy upon a political system and a constitution that remains creatively unwritten.³³ Thus, at the very heart of the English (and Scottish) state, they are turned inside out and elsewhere. Their own most inward identity and authority is after all not themselves but, rather, something remotely as well as intimately 'other' to which they are answerable and which is represented by an inner psychic community (as discussed earlier in the book). Such communities exist, of course, in other countries in other modes, whether taking the form of a formal religious establishment or not. But in every case they should also strive to play this role of inverting their apparent secular containment, albeit in a manner that also (on an inescapably Christian paradigm) respects the integrity of the secular sphere.

Such a community serves to link the real to the ideal in a way that is fully correspondent to the inevitable circumstances of all human society and polity, which is always poised between the strange irreality of the real – its imperfections, confusions and contradictions – on the one hand, and the curious reality of the ideal on the other. The perfection of the latter can seem, as for Plato, oddly more solid, just as the world of a great novel can appear to the reader more vivid than her everyday, as if it was the latter that was illusorily ‘made-up’ (as, indeed, all culture is, in a certain sense) and not quite believed in or assented to by its participants. Without the imperfect real reflection of the ideal, there is no social real as something normative, for this reality is ‘there’ at all only as a straining towards something beyond itself. Conversely, ideality has not even a shadowy substance for us, without a certain participated reflection. The work of the psychic community is, therefore, always to try to close more tightly this gap, which must perforce remain open and, yet, cannot do so without tension and even an element of the nonsensical. And the work of the Church is the most acute and liturgically continuous of all³⁴ – in its attempted fusion of the ideal with the real, since it claims to reflect and sacramentally continue an actual *incarnation* of the divinely ideal in human and temporal reality.

Secular alternatives can, by comparison, propose a *tempering* of sovereignty from outside, but only a religious conception can propose a ritual or liturgical tempering at its very core, which amounts to a paradoxical (un-) foundation. Thereby, the authority of the English and Scottish polities, and, so, effectively the British state, is defined from the outset and source as self-qualified. It regards itself as a polity only because it stands within and defers to a polity inclusive of the nation but wider than the nation – a polity of not just global but also, finally, cosmic extent.

As part of another, both cosmic and worldly polity in excess of the national polity, which it founds through constitutive constraint under divine right, the Church of England is able to uphold *both* religious freedom *and* the secularity of politics. For by grounding the polity in an initial distance from itself, the importance of an assent of conscience beyond legality or constraint is seen not as something to be just tolerated, but as the most primary point of political reference. Even though the Church of England represents one particular religious option assented to by a national majority across time, the perceived basis of the collective assent in individual conscience logically requires respect for all consciences, including dissenting ones – as has come to be accepted in the course of time and was advocated by some from the early modern outset. Equally, the grounding situation of the English polity within a higher one ensures that the former polity will be regarded as merely man-made, provisional and always revisable. Just because the realm of England (and the realm of Scotland) *is* a church, its more secular apparatus is

radically secularised and cannot be sacralised in the manner that has accrued to the French and American constitutions. The political role of the established Church is, therefore, neither to sanctify the state nor to supplant the government as elected and representative, but, rather, to ‘inform’ public institutions in the direction of both individual virtue and public honour, without which democracy cannot function or thrive.³⁵

Church Establishment and British Democracy

There are two objections to the continuation of Anglican establishment. The religious argument against an established Church is that credal Christianity is incompatible with a state religion. And the secular argument is that it violates the imperative of state neutrality and, therefore, undermines the pluralism on which democracy and the impartial rule of law depend.

On the question of the theological principle, it is worth remembering that Christianity builds on the Jewish legacy of prophets holding kings – granted, in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament beyond the role of judges only by divine concession – to standards of justice, righteousness, reconciliation and peace. Similarly, from its inception, the Christian tradition has, in a unique way amongst religions, distinguished religious and politically coercive and punitively legal authority without divorcing faith from politics, or the answerability of secular to sacred standards, as the writings of St Paul already attest. Perhaps for the first time in human history, it was Christianity that refused to endow coercive power with a sacral aura. It began to imagine faith not just as a more interior and world-exceeding matter, but also as something linked to a new mode of ‘post-political’ social existence orientated around continuous liturgy, detailed pastoral concern, penance, forgiveness and processes of reconciliation as new modes of social order.

Of course, the boundaries between the political and the post-political have never proved clear: often, the Church has been part of state coercion, while, inversely, the new Christian modes of securing social order have re-shaped political practice, at once to the benefit of the latter and to the perversion of the former. Without the Christian irruption and its later distortion, we would have neither the politically economic state, nor the bureaucratic welfare state or the increasing surveillance state.³⁶ Nevertheless, this same irruption has left a surviving and beneficial legacy in terms of a general assumption that the scope of the political is limited and that the scope of the social or the civilly social creatively exceeds it.

Anglican establishment sustains the legacy of the Christian irruption in one possible, very imperfect but still surely authentic, mode. For the Church of England embodies a certain equilibrium between the distinction of political and religious authority, on the one hand, and the non-separation

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of politics from religion, on the other.³⁷ It sustains a sense that the secular arm is criticisable by and answerable to transcendent concerns, while also holding out the possibility that the political sphere can itself be informed by pastoral and reconciling aims that exceed the strictly political remit – as with the decisive Anglican influence on the post-1945 British political settlement, including the intimately linked establishment of the welfare state, universal secondary education and religious instruction in all state schools. In addition, it has the potential to be true to its own sources and legacy in guarding against the corruption of such information in the direction of a de-personalisation of the very Christian focus upon the interpersonal. For the latter, when routinised, can strangely result in the most insidiously de-personalised and intrusive processes of all – the subtle coercion exercised by classification and the statistically supervisory concern with our health, and sexual and psychological lives.³⁸

At the heart of this sustaining lies the role of the baptised monarch. After Henry VIII's break with Rome, the Church of England eventually sought to preserve the balance between priesthood and monarchy that reflects the patristic and medieval emphasis on Christ's priestly and kingly authority.³⁹ Richard Hooker, who by 'reforming the reform' in a somewhat neo-Catholic direction at the turn of the seventeenth century became the founding father of Anglican theology, went further in his seminal work *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. He argued that it is the monarchy in communion with the Church that represents the unity of the 'priestly kingdom' and the 'kingly priesthood' to the people, whose assent is necessary for a just order. Hooker developed this argument against the Puritanism of Thomas Cartwright who (in defiance of the New Testament evidence) reduced Christ's government of the Church to mere priesthood and thus to pure mission, excluding any social governance or political outlook.⁴⁰ By contrast, Hooker emphasised the interlinked unity of both ecclesial roles – in line with the notion that the Church is a polity in its own right and that together with the secular arm, it co-constitutes the public realm under the *aegis* of the secular monarch who is, nevertheless, anointed.

In addition to these religious (but secular) reasons, there are secular (but religious) reasons to defend the principle of Anglican establishment. The established Church of England does not so much undermine secular politics as help to defend the principle of secularity against either aggressive secularism or religious fundamentalism. Here it is crucial that it is the independent sovereignty of the Crown and not the Crown in Parliament that was made head of the Church from the outset – this being arguably the *main* point that Parliament wished to challenge against the constitutional prerogatives of Charles I, and with arguably oppressive implications. Together with the anointed monarchy, the Church qualifies from within the *imperium* the

authority of 'the state' as less than final and absolute, yet also upholds its regional secular legitimacy, including the space for religious diversity and toleration. Nor is this enabling of general religious freedom merely negative in character, because the higher space of Church polity is also one that offers a carapace for other denominations. Indeed, other faiths also can come to occupy the same space in a 'quasi-established' fashion, thereby being further enabled to exercise a positive social and political influence in the name of their own beliefs. In the United Kingdom, this has already become true for Catholic and Jewish spokespersons and is becoming truer also for Muslim ones.

At the same time, Church and Crown bind the universal ecclesial polity to the public realm – whether to the Crown in Parliament at the top or via the parochial system to local government at the bottom. Thus, in strictly contemporary and global terms, the Church of England embodies the Christian alternative to both secular extremism (as in post-revolutionary France or Kemalist Turkey) and absolutist theocracy (as in Saudi Arabia since Wahhabism). A careful examination of history, as Karen Armstrong rightly argues, suggests that both religious and secular extremism have been sources of extreme violence, and that there is nothing normative about a purely secular, religiously neutral state – this being, rather, the peculiar outcome of contingencies in European history.⁴¹ In the case of Britain, these contingencies have issued in a rather different direction, which is not necessarily eccentric and aberrant on account of its merely minority character. Instead, history could be read as suggesting that the relatively tolerant legacy of Britain has something to do with a constitutionally enshrined prevention of two extremes: the dominance of either an overly dogmatic and theocratic-tending mode of faith, or else of a militant mode of secularity, insisting on its own autonomous self-founding, without fearful reserve towards any sublime excess of the human. Europe's shared history from 1914 to 2014 strongly suggests that the notion of a stable liberal mediation of the void between these two substantive extremes is a complete illusion. At most it prevailed for the decade of the 1990s, between the collapse of the iron curtain and the tumbling of the twin towers.

These hundred years suggest that if the state does not acknowledge the need to be guided by higher principles than power or wealth, then one of two consequences will ensue: either the state invests politics and the economy with quasi-sacred significance, like Fascism, Communism and Neo-liberalism, or else the state ends up adopting a political religion with theocratic tendencies. Either way, politics ceases to be genuinely secular because the secular is alternatively usurped or absolutised in a quasi-religious fashion. So the conundrum for militant atheists always remains that the secular, which should be prized, evaporates if it loses its active pole of sacred contrast. There is no secular beyond the merely 'lay', as the French term *laïcité* records, with

an irony that subtly qualifies the seemingly absolute character of French secularisation. *Laïcité* remains in certain ways a lay *Catholic* triumph over and resistance to a clerical caste, rather than to the religious as such.

Fundamentally, the Church as the inserted national presence of a more universal community does not aim to be a rival government. This provides a basis not just for it to bear prophetic witness (which from disestablished or non-political religious bodies can become tiresomely priggish, moralistic and irrelevant) but also for it to begin to craft and assist in crafting superior human practices, more ambitious for the convivial beyond mere coexistence than is generally possible for the political arm. Establishment, therefore, allows the interplay of the state's coercive powers and the Church's persuasive powers in ways that are both mutually limiting and mutually reinforcing. Equally, it sustains some balance between critical distance and a fruitful insemination. For its established status gives the Church of England a constitutional role in the wider governance of societies and people – both their bodies and their souls, in terms of marriage, death, the care of families, welfare and educational provision. It is for these reasons that the established Church cannot simply be dismissed as a communal conspiracy against the nation, whose very existence is to do with its Christian past.

Not only does establishment sustain the secular aspect of the state, but it also serves to remind us that, as already argued, the only justification for democracy is ultimately theological. It is a genuine theological view that because the people are potentially the *ecclesia*, and since nature always anticipates grace, truth lies finally dispersed amongst all people, since the Holy Spirit speaks most infallibly through the voice of all. This may seem like a matter just for Christians, yet it is just this doctrine that seems to square the circle from an arising *aporia* concerning democracy and truth.

If coercion is abhorrent, then only the persuasion of the majority should prevail concerning questions that must be generally decided. But this seems to subordinate truth and the morally non-negotiable imperative to 'do the truth'. What if the majority happen to be wrong? On the other hand, the imposition of perceived truth upon people against their will is not only distastefully violent, but also ineluctably risks a twisting and dilution of truth, if it is in consequence not 'done freely'. The resolution of this conundrum must lie in a sense that, while new truth may first dawn upon the gaze of the lone visionary and be developed by her disciples, the ultimate clue to the certainty of the most important and fundamental truths is their general acceptability – not just to each and every one of us in dispersal but also to all of us taken together in community. For it is the communal realisability and illustration of truth that tends eventually to confirm it. It is not, as for pragmatism, that truth is 'what works', but that shared insight and practice are the most reliable organs for the perception of truth, not merely the insight of the isolated individual.

Nor is this *vox populi* an emergent but formally *a priori* and unalterable general will, distinct from the ‘special will’ of contingent circumstance, as for Rousseau’s secular translation of Malebranche’s distorted Baroque theology.⁴² Rather, just as divine providence is only universal in all its special details, so also the general and relatively stable views only emerge gradually and haltingly through the development of custom in all its historical specifics. For ‘virtue’ is not an isolated formal principle, but a realised and tested habit over time – and political truth consists in the exercise of the right set of virtues. The same insight demands that real democracy be considered a democracy of the ages and incorporate the wisdom of tradition. This does not belie the reality that radical new insights can arise, but if these do not eventually become embedded in common sense, they will prove to have been ephemeral shiny illusions. *Vox populi, vox Dei* alone, therefore, legitimates democracy, as the possible stable prevalence of truth in the long term, and not the view that the collective will, simply because it represents the highest common factor of arbitration, should always prevail.

It follows that, outside a religious foundation, it is hard to see that the democratic dimension of representation can be regarded as an absolute value. In secular terms, the absolutisation of democracy endorses its always imminent collapse into a view that the most aggregated force in the present should for now triumph and seek to pre-empt the future. This despite the fact that we know in advance that current norms will need to be overthrown when this future comes into its own presence. Therefore, liberalism always gleefully anticipates a further emancipation from its already achieved ones: no sooner, for example, have we recognised the naturalness of gay status as a subject of rights, than we must seek urgently to be rid of it, in the name of a total sexual fluidity (the bisexual, transgendered, etc.), freeing the individual from all generic identities, in a staggeringly self-deceptive denial of evident biological-historical reality, fully to escape which would be to abolish our humanity.⁴³

‘Holistic Mission’

So far we have argued that both Church and state represent distinct polities in their own right and that both co-constitute the public realm to which all citizens belong. If this is true, then it follows that establishment concerns both equally, albeit differently. For the Church, the key challenge is to make establishment work much better in terms of legislation and policies insofar as state decisions have contributed to the de-Christianisation of the nation. The decision to introduce same-sex marriage is a case in point. Despite the so-called ‘quadruple lock’ that allows churches and other religious organisations to opt out, it is by no means inconceivable that people will try to challenge this opt-out in the name of their individual, subjective human rights. Even if this

were to fail, the question that the same-sex marriage bill raises is whether it is legitimate for the state to modify the meaning of marriage and to effectively (and, of course, puritanically) deny any connection of a marriage contract with sex, since this component must now necessarily be left undefined.⁴⁴ If for millennia marriage has been understood as a conjugal relation between men and women linked to procreation, then there is something dubious about the state arrogating to itself the power by law to change the definition of a natural and cultural reality that has historically preceded the existence of the state (and, indeed, the Church) itself.

Coupled with contemporary Church opposition to welfare cuts hitting the poorest and a call for restrictions on usurious payday lenders, the Anglican position on same-sex marriage shows at once just how important ecclesial interventions are for public debate and the extent to which the liberal state is not at all neutral or impartial, but, instead, pushes an aggressively secular agenda. If anything, this reinforces the case for establishment and for an even more outspoken Church leadership working closely together with the laity, and people of other faiths and none who share similar concerns about secular aggression.

However, establishment is not merely a matter for the Church of England alone. From the perspective of Church and state alike, there is an overriding need *both* for genuine participatory democratic assent, *and* for a hierarchic transmission of learning and formation by the wisely formed, in every walk of life and at every level of society. These two seemingly contradictory dimensions belong together, and each is the precondition for the other.

The resurgence of faith as social involvement in Britain is linked with a stronger sense that people belong to society as long as they belong to some institutions in their communities, which tend to be either formal visible faith institutions or informal hidden social interactions often linked to faith groups.⁴⁵ London now seems notably more religious than the northern and western British fringes, as a result of immigration, more civil activity and a more educated, culturally and historically informed populace in a vibrant metropolis. (A parallel phenomenon is seen in Paris and northern France.) But throughout the country, Christianity is still lived out in diverse ways through the medium of the various churches, in terms of involvements that can be liturgically sporadic, or more social and practical than liturgical in character.⁴⁶

The Church of England remains central to this diversity through its sustaining of the ancient parochial system that allows it to offer more widely youth groups, dinners for the elderly, mums and toddlers groups and coffee mornings, or economic and welfare services such as food banks, homeless shelters, debt counselling, credit unions and health services.⁴⁷ In such arenas, people from many different backgrounds come together and the Church can reach a

greater variety of persons and groups than almost any other activity or form of human association.

For many communities, where in recent years places such as pubs, working clubs and community halls have been closed down, the Church and its connected buildings provide the only visible focal point in which people can come together. This is visibly apparent in the way that Victorian Churches still stand like gothic beacons amidst the atrocious city-scapes of places like Leeds, where coherent Victorian development has been partially wrecked by areas in which high-rise dwellings are cut off from each other and from all social amenities by a hideous and dysfunctional tangle of roads seemingly going from nowhere to nowhere through a an unwalkable limbo of urban dereliction. In this landscape, the signs of transcendence also offer the only resorts of a shared humanity. Here, as elsewhere, many events organised through churches involve persons of other faiths and of none, broadening, intensifying and unifying through concentration in this physical focal point.

So in very practical terms, it is the Anglican establishment that today uniquely sustains in Britain a parish system that helps to structure and coordinate local life in diverse ways.⁴⁸ This system provides a ready-made platform for a great extension of such involvement in the future by reaching further out into the spheres of education, welfare, health, business and finance. Such extension can potentially start to qualify the control of either the centralised bureaucratic state or the profit-seeking free market, both of which began to become dominant in part because of the Church's historical retreat from its civil role and social action.⁴⁹

To call for a revival of this role can sound simply nostalgic. But that is to ignore certain dialectical twists and turns of history. It now turns out that there is a financial, practical and existential limit to bureaucratic and impersonal care, while the mediations of the market always leave behind a social detritus in their wake that can prove politically dangerous to the existing system. Thus the secular appropriation of an originally ecclesial 'pastoral' and 'economic' rule that sought to govern through direct 'presence to detail' in every locality seems to come up against certain inherent limits. A de-personalised approach, unmotivated by immediate moral concern, has become organisationally overstretched, while the same approach has generally served to increase a sense of alienated passivity amongst the populace. Thus there are new exigencies already working to ensure a revival of religious social action – exigencies that tend to coincide with a new spontaneous populist drift towards revived self-organisation.

It is just this extension that can help to restore the Church's spiritual mission, by vividly demonstrating religious relevance in terms of a link between belief, practice and consequence. Inversely, it can be argued that in recent decades, mission has failed because of the mistaken and even craven retreat

of the Church from social, charitable, educational and cultural involvement. Frank Prochaska has written of this retreat that ‘the bishops blew out the candles to see better in the dark’.⁵⁰ In consequence, many people in Britain now see little or no connection between the Church’s mission and the main spheres of public and even private life in which they are involved. Because most people think in practical, concrete terms, Christianity is not comprehensible to them unless they see its effects in transformative practice and through vivid, concrete instantiations. This, of course, includes uplifting and transfiguring liturgy, but it is notable that traditional liturgical expressions and structures (which, of course, constantly require a different repetition) bear far more strongly and objectively upon our entire cosmic, social and existential situation than do etiolated modern substitutes. It is just for this reason that the ritual and the socially engaged have tended to go together, as witnessed by both the Catholic and Anglo-Catholic example, and the same truth applies in another way to charismatic churches – for genuine ritual by no means precludes the spontaneous and variegated.⁵¹

Greater Church of England involvement in society is, therefore, indispensable to the success of a post-liberal politics in the United Kingdom, besides its own survival and renewal, on which such involvement considerably depends.⁵² The crucial role of religion is not so much to complement existing processes as to indicate transcendent finalities that will sustain the ultimacy of social reciprocity or gift-exchange – in a word, of *charity* – as objectives beyond the realisation of freedom and justice.⁵³ For if the *point* of these latter things is mere peaceful coexistence in personal security, then they are finally grounded in the pre-ethical, and this grounding tends, in time, to erode their own ethical substance. By contrast, if the ultimate aim of social life is itself community, associating together in free and mutually beneficial relation, then liberty and the distribution of resources are not instrumentally subordinate to ultimately lonely, egotistic goals, indifferent to our reciprocal *recognition* by others. Instead, the pursuits of freedom and justice begin and continue as ethical pursuits because they are seen as pointing towards the yet more ethical goal of simply being together in free harmony as itself the ultimate aim of social existence.

9. DEFENDING DEMOCRACY NON-DEMOCRATICALLY

So in order to defend and deepen the democratic element of constitutional government, we need more than democracy. Western history suggests that if there is only one principle of political legitimacy, then there will remain only one self-answerable power. A strict, formal separation of powers elsewhere has neither prevented a concentration of power and wealth nor enfranchised

the excluded nor enhanced popular assent. Instead, liberalism has proved all too compatible with the tyranny of the majority and an aggressive destruction of group rights, faith groups, local powers and the role of regions, besides the right to protest of individual dissenters. Under the guise of representative democracy that sees no legitimacy in anything but itself, an unrepresentative and *non-virtuous* oligarchy tends to be enshrined in power, thereby destroying participatory and informal democracy. Instead, we need to recover the mediating role of the few, the dispersed sovereignty of plural corporations and the universal pursuit of goals of virtue. This chapter has sought to explain and exemplify their natural conjunction.

Ultimately, Western constitutionalism needs not just proper local government and regional representation, but, above all, the participation of individuals and groups in public political debate and decision making. Whereas liberal democracy too readily slides into ‘democratic despotism’ and the tyranny of general mass opinion, a post-liberal politics of virtue emphasises the need for a genuine pluralism in which different ideas can be set out and considered. The lifeblood of a representational system is a set of differing ideas and choices between real alternatives concerning our shared teleological pursuit of a shared substantive future – not the liberal attack on non-liberal positions while at the same time proscribing any scrutiny of liberalism’s foundational premises.

NOTES

1. Jean-Claude Michéa, *Les mystères de la gauche. De l’idéal des Lumières au triomphe du capitalisme absolu* (Paris: Ed. Climats, 2013).

2. The centrality of skilled and creative labour for socialism is the pseudo-socialist advocacy of mass labour by Robert Tressall in his novel *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Wordsworth, 2012).

3. G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism: A Plan for Economic Democracy* (London: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1921).

4. John Neville Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914).

5. This was seen by Walter Bagehot as a crucial informal aspect of the British constitution, though he reduced it to a utilitarian elitism in his *The English Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1867]); Martin Loughlin, *The British Constitution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 34–38.

6. John Milbank, ‘Shari’a and the True Basis of Group Rights: Islam, the West, and Liberalism’, in Rex Ahdar and Nicholas Aroney (eds.), *Shari’a in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 135–58; ‘Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition’, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 1:1 (2012): 203–34;

‘Dignity Rather Than Right’, in Christopher McCrudden (ed.), *Understanding Human Dignity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 189–207.

7. Often, post-Reformation Britain did not escape monarchic despotism, reinforcing oligarchy, just because it was only able to think of the Crown in nominalistic terms as only present in the literal person of the monarch, thought of, like the parson (with the weakening of the sense of the Church as the corporate body of Christ) as a ‘corporation sole’. This could only be counterbalanced by the survival to some degree, as in Hooker of the ultimately Christological idea of the king’s ‘two bodies’ – literal and mystical, with the latter always surviving the literal body’s demise. See F. W. Maitland, ‘The Corporation Sole’ and ‘The Crown as Corporation’ in *State, Trust and Corporation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9–51.

8. By dividing the sentimentally ‘dignified’ from the effective parts of the constitution, Bagehot encouraged just this drift. One should contrast this debasement with Burke’s sense that the symbolic and numinous must be interwoven with *actual* power, if human propensities to violence and greed are to be tempered.

9. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

10. We owe this insight to Oliver O’Donovan.

11. Carl Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba: the Intrusion of Time into the Play*, trans. David Pan and Jennifer Rust (New York: Telos, 2009), 63–65.

12. Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), 7–34.

13. King, *The British Constitution*, 177.

14. Phillip Blond and Mark Morrin, *Devo Max – Devo Manc: Place-based Public Services* (London: ResPublica, 2014), available online at http://respublica.org.uk/documents/csv_Devo%20Max%20Report.pdf.

15. Jessica Abers, ‘From Clientelism to Cooperation: Local Government, Participatory Policy, and Civic Organizing in Porto Alegre, Brazil’, *Politics & Society*, 26 (1998): 511–37; Andreas Novy and Bernard Leubolt, ‘Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Social Innovation and the Dialectical Relationship of State and Civil Society’, *Urban Studies*, 42:11 (2005): 2023–36.

16. Lord Hailsham, ‘Elective Dictatorship’, *The Listener* (October 1976), 496–500.

17. Phillip Blond, ‘The Monarchy’, BBC Radio 4, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wgqjb>.

18. John Milbank, ‘On Complex Space’, in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 268–92.

19. Philip Murphy, *Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

20. This way of thinking is an ecumenical compound of Augustinian, Neo-Platonic and Islamic scholastic thinking that helped to shape the thought of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and the later Rhineland Mystics, including Meister Eckhart. See Alain de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique: Albert le Grand* (Paris: Vrin, 2005).

21. Roger Trigg, ‘Religion in the Public Forum’, *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 13:3 (2011): 274–86. Here we would add that while Christianity has a critique of ‘mob

rule' and the 'tyranny of the majority', it does view the continuous assent of the people as a necessary condition for good government and a just polity.

22. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*; ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.5, The Eighth Book, 154.

23. Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party 1714–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

24. F. W. Maitland, 'The Unincorporate Body', 'Trust and Corporation', in *State, Trust and Corporation*, 52–61, 75–130. Whatever may be said in criticism of the National Trust, it has democratically preserved and opened vast tracts of the countryside and the monumental past to public enjoyment and education. Other countries would kill for its equivalent, and it is significantly extending its operations to the oldest British colony of Virginia and other parts of the current United States.

25. Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012).

26. Felix Liebermann, *The National Assembly in the Anglo-Saxon Period* (New York: B. Franklin, 1961).

27. J. Enoch Powell and Keith Wallis, *The House of Lords in the Middle Ages* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968).

28. Hirst, *From Statism to Pluralism*; Hirst and Bader (eds.), *Associative Democracy: The Real Third Way*.

29. Here one can note in passing that the inclusion of imams and other Muslim leaders in the Lords and in equivalent second chambers at the local level could start to link the properly and integrally political and civil dimension of Islam (the general commitment of the Qur'an to public benefit rather than private hoarding) to British politics in such a way as perhaps somewhat to reduce the demand for an exercise of shari'a law in a manner incompatible with the principles of British common law (an incompatibility that by no means always holds).

30. David Howell, *Old Links and New Ties: Power and Persuasion in an Age of Networks* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

31. Colin Kidd, 'Contours of British Political Thought', in *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47–66; Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

32. In the recent past, the Church of Scotland has held a National Service of Thanksgiving for the new British monarch during which the Honours of Scotland are presented.

33. It is true that, for a time in the later Middle Ages, with the rise of an anti-papal royal absolutism, coronation was deemed not indispensable. Yet – with dialectical implications – the establishment of a State Church all the more required the ecclesial conferring of legitimacy by anointing.

34. Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty [Officio]*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

35. John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, 'The Anglican Polity and the Politics of the Common Good', *Crucible: The Christian Journal of Social Ethics*, January–March 2014, 7–15.

36. John Milbank, 'Oikonomia Leaves Home', *Telos*, 178 (Spring 2017), *forthcoming*; Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism: The Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
37. Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004).
38. Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: Conversations with David Cayley* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005).
39. See Stephen Platten (ed.), *Anglicanism and the Western Catholic Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), especially the essays by Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'The Church of England, 1533–1603', 18–41; Eamon Duffy, 'The Shock of Change: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Elizabethan Church of England'; 42–64; Peter Lake, 'The "Anglican Moment": Richard Hooker and the Ideological Watershed of the 1590s', 90–121; Judith Maltby, 'Suffering and Survival: The Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Formation of "Anglicanism", 1642–1666', 122–43.
40. John Milbank, 'On Anglican Extremism: The Theopolitical Legacy of Hooker', *forthcoming*.
41. Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (London: Bodley Head, 2014); William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
42. Patrick Riley, *The General Will before Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
43. There is also an assumption here of a nature/culture divide and an illogical oscillation between a natural and a cultural pole of normativity.
44. Roger Scruton and Phillip Blond, *Marriage: Union for the Future or Contract for the Present* (London: ResPublica, 2013), available online at http://www.respublica.org.uk/documents/thr_Marriage-%20Union%20for%20the%20future%20or%20contract%20for%20the%20present%20pdf.pdf.
45. Stephen Timms MP, 'Faith at the Heart of the Nation', Jerusalem Chamber, 10 April 2013.
46. Church-going statistics indicating drastic decline fail to account fully for altered patterns of weekend behaviour; and for attendance that may not be weekly but is far from infrequent, and to explain the striking increase in the numbers worshipping in cathedrals and large civic churches, which offer more traditional liturgical patterns, creative connections to folk culture and opportunities for lay participation. Much, if not most, church-going decline since the 1960s is attributable to the half-hearted, and often downright lazy and defeatist approach of a clerical generation informed by a weak and uninspiring liberal theology, besides a liberal and evangelical lack of ecclesial, liturgical and aesthetic sense, and accordingly unable to respond creatively and positively to a new situation where most women (traditionally the main upholders of parish life) are in paid employment.
47. James Noyes and Phillip Blond, 'Holistic Mission: Social Action and the Church of England', ed. Caroline Julian, at <http://www.respublica.org.uk/documents/>

mfp_ResPublica%20-%20Holistic%20Mission%20-%20FULL%20REPORT%20 - %2010July2013.pdf.

48. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM, 2010).

49. Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); D.T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies, 1890–1967* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

50. Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, 152.

51. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

52. The argument that the example of the United States shows that a separation of religion and politics favours belief in God is being gradually falsified by strong evidence that it is now beginning to exhibit a 'European' pattern of decline in faith practice. In any case, this separation has been qualified by American civil religion and the way in which American churches compose so much of civil society, rendering baptism or its equivalent a kind of certificate of entry into citizenship. To the contrary, history suggests that where the state in no way acknowledges the truth of God, the private citizen will tend to follow. Thus the lasting legacy (contrary to some fond belief) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is not communism, but Russian atheism.

53. Adrian Pabst, 'The Big Society Needs Religion', *The Guardian* 21 July 2010, available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/jul/21/religion-bigsociety-mutualism-reciprocity>.

Part IV
CULTURE

Chapter 7

The Metacrisis of Culture

1. LIBERALISM TURNED LIBERTARIAN

Liberalism became fully normative only in the second half of the twentieth century when it finally achieved a hegemonic domination of mass culture. Prior to the 1950s, essentially pre-capitalist norms were still to the fore in cultural life, but after that decade, the whole of social reality, including the family, became gradually capitalised and commodified, through the construction of ‘the consumer’ rather than ‘the worker’ as the crucial economic and cultural actor.¹ But as with so many earlier dissolutions of ancient Europe, this first of all manifested itself as an anarchic, left-wing, emancipatory shift. Yet it quickly proved to be only a ground-clearing exercise for the increased control exercised by post-industrial capitalism as the main motor of liberal modernity – even if this dominance is ultimately determined by liberal ideology and culture, and not by any supposed techno-economic determinism.²

Thus, with antecedents going back to the ‘roaring twenties’, the 1950s and 1960s saw the rise to power of a vanguard that, for both good and ill, was eventually able to render its libertarian revolt normative, albeit in a curiously routinised form inevitably implied by massification.³ Its relationship to capitalism had, indeed, been ambiguous from the outset, with big business almost instantly grasping that money was to be made from a revolution that rapidly conceived itself, from the late 1960s onwards, so predominantly in terms of style and fashion. The contradictory notion of *de rigueur* conformity to a uniform resistance, to an individualism identified by the same outward badges, and to an expressivism guaranteed by stoned inarticulacy, was already tailor-made to suit the requirements of late modern industrial enterprise. It provided capitalism with the key to unlock familial and educational barriers to the spread of consumeristic control through the apparently voluntary, beyond its

hitherto wildest dreams. Those born in the 1950s will recall that every British rock festival of the 1960s, proclaiming that it already embodied an Aquarian Age bound to arrive by sheer force of contagion, was opened and closed by the appearance on stage of a cynical cockney entrepreneur still wearing the tell-tale sharp garb of pre-hippydom.

This collusion was compounded by the rapid swerving of any real political critique and transformative activism in the directions of liberal feminism, an uncritical cult of sexual gratification, rights-based identity politics and the general release of the narcissistic, as confirmed in the early 1970s. Such an increased appeal to freedom as liberation and equality as superficially individualised conformity ensured liberalism's victory over both non-capitalist conservatism and more ethically austere, responsible modes of socialism.⁴ Emancipation from traditional religion, cultural taboos, deference, patriotism and patriarchy provided a new cultural centre-ground on which left and right could eventually converge, at the level of basic received opinion and lifestyle.

Thus the shared liberalism of left and right can be described as 'libertarian' since it moves beyond a validly 'liberal' sense of generosity – the upholding of constitutional liberties to ensure the exercise of justice, the humanitarian treatment of the weak and defaulting and the free creative flourishing of every person – towards a false grounding of justice itself in the prerogative of self-selected 'release' in any direction whatsoever. Of course, these directions will always turn out to be but variations on the same spectacular idiom that the market reign of fashion then imposes. For, in reality, there is no possible social order without some form of mastery and direction, some sort of 'proposal'. These are composed both popularly through the gradual crafting of traditional symbolic identities and more hierarchically through the educative inculcation of higher culture, which still permits a popular feedback, and, indeed, requires this if it is to flourish as genuine critique. Into the void left by the evacuation of tradition and educated influence flows the rule of the mass persuaders who equally despise folk and high cultures with their proffered if flexible symbolic identities that aim to propose some objective 'good' for acceptance. Only such an acceptance can 'associate' people into a shared purpose, which is the *sine qua non* for any social or political grouping.⁵

Yet, for liberalism, which thereby promotes an anti-politics, such substantive questions belong exclusively to the sphere of private opinion and private debate. This notion is not *really* metaphysically neutral insofar as the reverse face of an affirmed subjectivity as to value is always objectivity as to fact and procedure. For this reason, the liberal procedural formalism that is supposed to safeguard the sanctity of private freedom tends to collapse in favour of the rule of the material (the closed, immanent and artificial realm of the economic and the bureaucratic), which is seen as objective and as a surrogate good. For one thing, in default of tacitly shared traditional sanctions, individual 'good

behaviour' of non-interference with others can only be guaranteed by an unremitting extension of formal controls and sanctions to ensure our 'health and safety' and protection from each other. For another, to compensate for the anarchy of private views, more and more public weight is necessarily given to the purported absolute truth of contemporary science, which is closely allied to inherently technological criteria of prediction and control. Thus, an extension of scientific-technological manipulation in every sphere goes unquestioned by liberalism. As we saw earlier, it is for this reason that liberalism has a logical and historical tendency to mutate into utilitarianism.

Yet today this unleashing of the manipulative already goes well beyond the merely utilitarian, since the Baconian 'elevation of man's estate' requires some minimum consensus as to what constitutes a good birth, life and death. Where the only remaining good is free choice and the choice to be happy can take many divergent forms, nothing prevents the evolution of society as such into a kind of anarchic laboratory. The interest of technologised science is in the repeated production of any sort of regularity, regardless of content. Thus experiment tends to outrun purpose, and technical possibility any merely charitable or beneficial usage. Alteration of human nature and novel hybridisation of the natural with the technical in a bypassing of their spiritual integration now becomes the main end to be pursued, even though this goal is now the purest of free-fleeting 'means'. And since capitalism always requires the novel for the sake of permanent profitability, it now finds in technologised science – and its increasingly shrill ontological claims to deliver final truth – the perfect partner in crime.

At a more mundane and, yet thereby, more insidious level, the unleashing of desire tends in our day to erode the very capacity for desire. As Bernard Stiegler argues, marketing increasingly seeks to evade any degree of considered choice that will involve some reference to a hierarchy of goods and the discipline of a superego in order to appeal directly to relatively unreflective emotional drives.⁶ In consequence, we have entered into what the American novelist William Burroughs first described as a 'society of control' where people are increasingly subject to manipulation at a subliminal level. The spiritual or psychic is avoided in such a way that people become saturated by their own multiple choices, which must eventually bore them, but from which they no longer have the capacity to escape. Many pathologies inevitably ensue as a result of over-consumption and debilitation of our capacities to reason and select: obesity, anorexia, bulimia, attention deficit disorder, drug-abuse, depression, self-harming, as well as increasingly devious, uncivil and sporadically violent behaviour. It is then no longer clear even that liberty has degenerated into the pursuit of happiness. Rather, degeneration goes further, such that people are sublimely manipulated 'beyond the pleasure principle', but in default of any capacity for personal sublimation.

In this way, as Stiegler further argues, the era of ‘deindustrialisation’ is, in reality, just the opposite. It is the era of the further industrialisation, rationalisation and routinisation even of the consumer, family and leisure existence insofar as all these aspects of our lives are now systematically subject to control, calculation and the extraction of profit. This occurs especially in the mode of the ‘service industries’ of the ‘tertiary sector’, which enclose evermore the once freely living ‘commons’ as packageable commodities, thereby depriving us of many of our inherited craft and social skills of *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre*. In this way also, apparent ‘bourgeoisification’ is, in reality, an extended ‘proletarianisation’ of both the working and private lives of almost everyone. By the same token, post-modernity turns out to be an exacerbated modernity, characterised by what Stiegler describes as ‘industrial populism’, whose typical condition is one of ‘symbolic misery’.

For these reasons, the supposed metaphysical neutrality of liberalism always collapses in the direction of a reductive materialism and a denial of the human spirit that is increasingly enacted in practice. Its duality of subjective value divorced from fact and objective fact without value eventually works in favour of the latter, such that an exaggeratedly libertarian favouring of the emptily free subject encourages its seeming opposite, a stonily closed objectivity. In this fashion, liberalism is bound in the end to efface its own apparent humanism.⁷ For genuine value requires the weight of objectivity and the glimpsed seriousness of the Good. In default of this recognition, technological norms will dominate as the quasi-good, with human beings reduced to cogs in machines or moments within processes. The post-Fordist ‘disorganisation’ of capitalism away from the machine, the tool, the factory and local concentration towards ethereal process, code, dispersed labour and outsourcing as well as remote, abstract, central control has not resulted (as it might have done) in a greater space for personal creative intervention for the many. To the contrary, it has led to a technicisation also of symbolic and linguistic procedures – rendering the middle classes more the component operators of prescribed digital systems than the working classes were ever mere tools of their own machines.

So, much of the shaping and usage of contemporary technology has a profoundly de-humanising effect. Paradoxically and perversely, the mantra of personalisation in the public and the private sector (whether in terms of work, benefits or consumption) has led to evermore impersonal, anonymous relations that breed distrust and are inimical to cooperation. One reason is that corporate business has reduced the workforce to a bare minimum and dumbed down customer service, with the client doubling up as worker as part of the trend towards ‘self-service’ check-out counters and computer-operated ‘self-help’. But a personal signature of random preference cannot increase one’s degree of social fortune.

2. LIBERALISM AS IMPERSONALISM

It is, nonetheless, perfectly true that online, digital culture contains genuine resources for spiritual renewal. As Stiegler also insists, in a radicalisation of the thought of the anthropologist and archaeologist André Leroi-Gourlan, any idea of specifically human existence without technology is an illusion.⁸ Intentional liberty mysteriously arose along with the tool and the word and not before them. It is never then a question of pretending to dis-invent, but, rather, of ensuring that the inherently positive and even curative properties of any given technology are not obscured by the equally ‘poisonous’ potential of the same ambivalent *pharmakon*. Such a poison is inherent in the flint tool that can double as weapon, speech that can serve sophistically to manipulate rather than Socratically to persuade, or writing that can substitute automatic formulae for intentional understanding and memory. It is present today in the laptop, mobile or internet, which may compound all these earlier dangers.

Yet, despite their poisonous potential, they also have a curative and improving one: open-source software and ‘Smart programmes’ can hugely enable new modes of symbolic association, cooperation and renewability, removing the distinction between controller and operator, producer and consumer (as with Wikipedia). Potentially, they can empower localities against the centre, since the internet expands in a micro as well as macro direction (think of Googlemaps), while equally allowing interpersonal links over long distances. Such links can be periodically supported by physical meetings that make curative and positive use of long-range transport also (despite the manifold poison and congestion of its false use or over-use).

Yet, in current reality, the apparently interactive gives more scope to hidden manipulators. It is not just technological development that has led from the radio and television to the virtual fusion of information, communicative and audio-visual capacities. For in theory, radio and television might have permitted more interaction from the outset. It is rather that commercial and political forces have grasped the immensely increased possibilities for power and profit when these things are exercised yet more indirectly (such indirectness having always been a feature of the politically economic regime) through the apparent elicitation of consumer response and even invention. That is because the core of what is offered here is predetermined, and the range of what is proposed likewise. The same consideration applies to processes of direct digital democracy in the political field: here an apparently incontrovertible and specific democratic verdict conceals the endorsement of an unfranchised prevailing proposal that may well be ultimately sourced by either a commercial interest or a militant minority faction.⁹

Above all, more and more human attention and brain-time is sucked into digital processes and spectacles, such that the time left over for the formation

of symbolic community with its own specific idiom, and the shaping of one's own truly singular character (including through the same digital means), is thereby severely restricted. In consequence, people become addicted, confused as to who they are, and frightened as to how they are regarded and who might be pursuing them, as so well divulged in Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle*.¹⁰ An increased sense of the right of all to know everything and of everyone belonging to everyone else engenders a uniformity of exposure and a shameless lack of secrecy and hesitancy that undermines integral identity while also paradoxically inducing a retreat into loneliness and isolation. Aldous Huxley projected the former aspect into a dystopian future in *Brave New World*. The French novelist Michel Houellebecq has more recently projected the latter into an ambivalent future.¹¹ A world where everyone is watching everyone else is really a world where centralised and monopolising powers are surveying us all. Similarly, a world where machines associate with other machines is a world in which intelligence reduced to information and quantitative calculation can increasingly dispense with the social that was the original incubus for all human reasoning.¹² Thereby, reason is depersonalised and reduced to rationalisation, while, inversely, human beings are de-socialised and consequently both 'stupefied' and 'stupified'.¹³

Of course, the growing impersonalisation of society and the consequent undermining of the human spirit is a problem that precedes the cultural triumph of liberalism. The maverick Catholic social theorist Ivan Illich, somewhat in keeping with the genealogies of Michel Foucault, warned about the dangers, already mentioned, of degeneration that always lurked within the personalising of the institutional, which lay at the heart of the Christian legacy.¹⁴ That danger was, almost from the outset, a reverse institutionalising of the personal that eventually allows essentially impersonal law, technology and money to pry into every detail of every home and heart, all the better to overwhelm them. Indeed, just as the 'society of the spectacle' (Guy Debord) emerged in succession to the Christian iconic (in contrast to the predominant aniconism of other monotheisms such as Judaism and Islam), so also the combination of bureaucracy with the market has emerged as a specifically post-Christian logic. For Christianity tended to further merge, beyond the existing tendencies of late antiquity, *polis* and *imperium* with *oikos* and to rule through an *oikonomia* that entered pastorally into all the details of life. But it is the very attempt of the Church to insert, as Peter Brown has put it, a 'rule by persons over persons' that has led in the end to the dominance of a machine more entirely impersonal than anything known to pagan antiquity: the market machine and the state-machine, now tending to merge as the market-state.¹⁵ Thus liberalism remains unintelligible without its theological and ecclesial roots and, more specifically, the gradual post-twelfth-century and early modern perversions of Christianity.¹⁶

As we have also seen, liberalism has exacerbated the ‘bio-political’ power of impersonal rule by endorsing the modern separation of nature from culture that rests upon the undoing of gift and symbol, which had rendered physical thing and implicit meaning inseparable. Separating the natural from the cultural implies not just a disconnection between physical reality and immaterial ideas, but also a denial of the psychic as the linking bond between them – the bond of self-moving and responsively aware life, risen to consciousness. As most supremely with Descartes, nature, including ‘animal’ nature, is deemed dead because it is not animated, but mind is equally removed from the living exterior shape and motor power of the body to stand at a mysterious, nonreflecting and ‘auto-affective’ (as Michel Henry’s revised Cartesianism has it) spiritual remove as a kind of conscious but lifeless mirror.¹⁷ Nature is now seen as a realm without inherent meaning, thought or even spontaneous and causative vitality – an anonymous mass of inert matter rather than a living *cosmos*. Equally, mind without soul is de-natured, disconnected from body, society and essential technological supplement. Eventually, it is reduced to the status of a purely physical brain, which is inexplicably conscious and willing.

This is to suggest that mind knows a world without value on the one hand, and posits for itself values with no grounding in reality on the other. It is to deny the metaphysical in favour of the manipulation of nature unconstrained by values that constitute essences, and it is to abolish politics in favour of technocracy and pop culture. For the only objective aspect of the political process will now be the manipulation of humans also as part of nature, while all else will be handed over to whim, giving licence to a kind of demonic sustaining of degenerate habits not just beyond their natural shelf-life, but seemingly in all perpetuity. One-dimensional science to the soundtrack of bad music is then one’s cultural lot.¹⁸

Liberalism, thereby, relegates the psychic to the realm of the purely subjective that has no role in politics or even educative formation. In consequence, the liberal tendency towards materialism must suggest that liberalism is not a humanism, because it denies the ontological space in which alone we can operate in a truly human fashion – integrating the mind with nature through the living, psychic medium of the body, and feeling and habit within spiritual communities committed to a symbolic sharing. Instead, liberalism views culture as arbitrarily constructed, and not as variously and partially disclosive of a natural order. Similarly, education is now seen in purely functionalist terms as something that serves utilitarian purposes of happiness or utility maximisation. Here the most seemingly trivial aspects of infotainment, prurient televisual intrusion and ritual humiliation of ordinary people has the direly serious purpose of further rendering people as bundles of controllable drives, increasingly persuaded to see leisure and work as a seamless whole, governed by a continuous hedonistic agonism embodying a virtual war of all against all

that may quickly and unpredictably mutate into real enacted violence, providing for us further diversion on the nightly news. Now, indeed, the loss of libido most recently produces a population less capable of formal crimes, but the instance of informal criminality and big-time criminality correspondingly increases, such that any crisis or rupture now threatens not so much legal infraction as the arrival of endemic disorder.

Thus, despair of one's sexual future in a world of increased infidelity and abandonment, fear of old age as a state of indignity rather than honour, a culture devoted to the cult of permanent youth, psychic overload and confusion, perpetual banal sunlight with no nocturnal pauses, all tend to engender a literally suicidal culture, now obscenely encouraged by legalised medicinal murder.¹⁹ This means that liberalism is on a path that will either undo itself or finally undo humanity. In this sense, liberal culture faces a 'metacrisis', in contrast to a mere crisis that would be to do with external threats to the valuation and practice of freedom, or the internal failure to secure a proper balance between the rights of liberty and the human requirement for comfort and material happiness. For, instead, it is the internal and central liberal exaltation of negative liberty that tends to its own undoing and the replacement of psychic freedom with the drugged pursuit of happiness and then subjection to systematic manipulation. This manipulation is at once highly abstract, in terms of virtual classifications and pathways, and yet evermore brutally concrete in terms of forced confinement to restricted spaces, physical recourses and competition over living space (the crises of housing and of refugees) for most of the population. The two are mediated by spectacular and endlessly substitutionary compelling images that keep people continuously in thrall. In short, without the psychic, liberalism cannot sustain the spirit even as mere observing, logical reason and will; instead, the capacities for the latter are subject to atrophy.

However, this is not, as Bernard Stiegler contends, a kind of final crisis of liberalism as ultra-industrialised, consumeristic capitalism. He suggests that, prior to an ultimate displacement of capitalism altogether, it first needs to revert from financialisation to an earlier industrial phase when liberty and desire were still in command of machines – machines now being overwhelmingly digitalised and automatised.²⁰ He deems this necessary, even for capitalist exigencies, because he supposes that capitalism requires a 'spirit' and must suffer hopelessly depleted energies without it.

But there are two objections to this relative optimism: first, the development of capitalism to financialisation is not simply a late and ultimately fatal phase, as Giovanni Arrighi would have it. Rather, as we have seen, financial speculation was there at the outset in eighteenth-century England.²¹ Thus financialisation is no temporary recent accident²² but is, rather, the result of an intensification of the founding capitalist logic.

Second, from the Calvinist (and Jansenist) commencement that Stiegler invokes, the further unleashing of elective will was for the elect few, with the degenerate masses constrained passively to undergo a discipline that was not for them a self-discipline. As *The Circle* suggests, digital capitalism can just involve a further exacerbation of this process. The will and desires of the many may not be required by a system increasingly controlled by a technocratically verbal and numerate elite who athletically combine intense ascetic discipline with hedonistic privilege.²³ Certainly, the resultant pathologies of the many would then present problems, and in certain circumstances could lead to a total breakdown. But this is not quite inevitable: a society basely driven by drives, total bodily and mental exposure and an equivalent spiritual isolation remains unfortunately possible and is beginning to prevail. Humanity could be undone by a liberalism that remains all-too-much itself, even in the course of a mutation beyond all self-recognition.

3. SOPHISTRY, DISCONNECTION AND DISSOLUTION

If liberalism is indifferent to the Good, in a way that unravels into human self-domination by its own productions, then it is also indifferent to truth – defined as any mode of disclosure of the eternally valid and, as such, the ‘real’ counterpart of the good as the ‘ideal’. In this respect, liberalism can be regarded as a mode of sophistry. Already for the ancient Greek sophists, as for the historian Thucydides, we must split reality between nature (*physis*) on the one hand, and law (*nomos*) on the other, eternal and objective truth being, thereby, squeezed out between the ever-arriving and given process of nature and a wilfully imposed valuation.²⁴ The same irreducible dualism between nature and culture is revived by neo-sophistic tendencies in modernity, supremely in the case of Hobbes.²⁵ It is much reinforced by the general breakdown of a ‘connected’ view of the world as a causally linked continuum, in which every effect shares some ‘likeness’ with its cause and so all things some likeness with each other and all some likeness with a final originating and plenitudinous source in which all finite realities partici-pate.²⁶ The collapse of this ‘analogical’ worldview had nothing to do with an objective progress in mathematics, scientific discovery and philosophical reflection (since most modes of Renaissance innovation – whose critical validity we still defend – retained this worldview and even augmented its ‘occult’ dimension).²⁷ It was, rather, and strangely, occasioned by modes of nominalist and then Protestant, pseudo-Augustinian Jansenist theology, which rejected such immanent ‘connectedness’ as too neo-pagan, since it disallowed the divinely freely chosen arbitrariness of reality and its abyssal contamination by the Fall.

In consequence, for this new mode of *piety*, finite effects no longer proclaim their transcendent cause; they are only connected in ‘universal’ patterns and likenesses by mental imposition, and a debased physical and human reality must be controlled by formal, technological and procedural regulation. Supremely, this dis-connecting of the world removes subjectivity from a causal chain of mere things that is inherently formless and meaningless, leaving subjectivity, as with Descartes, a surd mystery. Such a conception implies that the subject is linked to its ultimate cause not in terms of participating in truth or goodness, but in terms of its empty freedom and contentless self-reflexivity. Thus the new modern sophistic subject imposes its own disconnected values on a realm of sheerly external facts, either under the constant of revealed divine norms, or else in a sphere of ungraced, purely natural control where God has left man to his own self-preserving devices.

Like the sophists and the nominalists, but in contrast to almost the whole of the rest of humanity throughout history, liberals tend to assume that nature and culture have nothing to do with each other, because nature, for them, is inexorable and meaningless, inciting of blind passions, while culture, shaped by law, is entirely wilful, conventional and artificial.²⁸ This ensures that individual expressions of soul in artifice are just conscious manifestations of a blind will to power, vagaries of nature as it were, rather than revelations of an ordered cosmos.

The same Nietzschean conclusion ensues, whether one sees culture (language, art, technology) as the product of human intention, or whether alternatively, one sees it as an evolved fate – nature perversely pursuing herself by indirect, artificial means – to which human beings are subject. This is the *aporia* identified by Stiegler: no *techne* without human intention and anticipation, but no intention and anticipation (which constitute humanity as such) without tools and language. In order not to arbitrarily dissolve this *aporia*, one can argue that it is necessary to insist upon the paradoxical naturalness of culture: the latter is something contingently superadded to nature and not even in any straightforwardly ‘representational’ continuity with it. Yet, if it is not simply *unnatural*, accidental and, so, ultimately illusory – since nature is, for materialism, all of the real – then in some sense it must be, in various degrees, strangely ‘meant to be’.²⁹ Through the additional ‘making’ performed by humans, which makes their very humanity, a certain as it were supernatural *telos* is at once constructed and yet pursued.³⁰

This suggestion points to a ritual or liturgical understanding of Stiegler’s *aporia*. The intentional gesture of making a knapped flint only arrives with the flint itself and yet must also (impossibly) precede it. But this *impasse* is somewhat palliated if one thinks of the initiating gesture as being not as yet merely instrumental and purposive, but rather as a kind of probing, playful and celebratory response to reality, which renders the technical also artistic

AQ: Please suggest if the phrase ‘as it were’ can be set within parenthetical commas, for clarity.

and symbolic from the outset. The *utile* is also gratuitous, as the Anglo-Welsh poet David Jones famously put it.³¹ However, palliation falls short of resolution: one is still left with Stiegler's oscillation between the human 'who' causing the technical 'what', or the technical 'what' causing the human 'who'. The conundrum can only be resolved if, indeed, a humanity-founding liturgical offering simultaneously receives from, and participates in, a providential, transcendent source. Many religious perspectives implicitly propose this theoretical scenario. But perhaps it is Christianity (especially in the theological work of Nicholas of Cusa, reflecting on the technological revolution of the early Renaissance)³² that offers a peculiar degree of insight into the strange notion of an objective *telos* that beckons just to the degree that one has already started to construct it – as in the way that the artist only realises her imaginary projection to the degree that this realisation alone completes the initial shadowy anticipation.³³ Trinitarian theology is able to make sense of this aporetic paradox not through its dissolution, but through its ultimate sustaining: human work participates not just in an 'astral', unproductive contemplation, but also in a first divine paternal principle that is itself, both originally and exhaustively, the 'technical' generation of the Son or *Logos*.

Without such liturgical palliation and theological resolution (however conceived) one is left with having to arbitrarily choose one fork in the road – either 'the who' or 'the what'. But the first is today (after Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida) unsustainable, and the second would simply dissolve human culture into an illusory ruse of natural forces, in which case the naturalness of human culture is undone. However, Stiegler is bravely right here: common sense indicates that human culture is at once a work of human intention and anticipation (after Edmund Husserl), and yet the work of the 'originally supplementary' works themselves (after Derrida). But how is one to understand the latter as not obliterating the human, unless the works are somehow truly sacramental? It is a step that Stiegler does not take, yet, otherwise, the only way to save humanism is to appeal, as he does, to a Kantian sublimely transcendental *a priori* 'spirit' that precedes the technical, against Stiegler's own real insights. The secular alternative to this is a sophistic non-humanism, which he also wishes to reject, whereby words favour not truth but purely natural powers.

Yet it is, therefore, surely the sophists, and not (as Stiegler alleges) Plato, who divorce the technical from the contemplative or theoretical, since they simply disavow the latter. By contrast, Plato arrives at the theoretical by way of technical practice and the observation of the cosmos. The latter things are rightly dubbed by later Neo-platonists 'theurgic' because they appear liturgically and magically to 'recall' to us certain constant patterns and norms that we have not just 'made up'.³⁴ Even in the case of Plato, a technically active combining is attributed in some sense to the transcendent level in which

our practices participate – this notion being much extended on the Christian Trinitarian model just expounded.

All this, of course, sounds impossibly arcane. But it is just this subtle Western legacy that liberalism has rendered obscure by abandoning it in favour of something much cruder and apparently more universal. As a result, culture is problematically sundered from nature and ‘the what’ from ‘the who’, alternately reducing either to mere nature, such that culture and humanity itself vanish down a black hole. Today this theoretical upshot is being really performed.

The only alternative to the nihilistic drift of liberalism appears to be the perfectly traditional vitalistic assumption that the subjective and the symbolic have some sort of root in nature, which itself ‘rises’ to cultural expression, indicating a metaphysical participation in an overarching unity that binds both nature and culture together. In other words, a *cosmos* that shares in a transcendent principle that is the source of both. This is especially the case if such a view, although a ‘piety’, would appear to have been historically a more natural piety than the novel piety of nominalism-voluntarism, of which liberalism is but the secularised echo, yet with no genuine, immanent secular self-authentication. Only a God conceived in a certain voluntaristic fashion (remembering that antique naturalism usually involved the indifference of the gods to nature and not their non-existence)³⁵ ensured the ‘disconnection’ of reality. Without the invocation of this dubiously arbitrary God, sooner or later connectedness appears the more obvious presupposition. Thus, even people not returning to an earlier transcendent piety tend often to evolve more immanentist, vitalist, ecological, ‘new age’ and explicitly metaphysical theses concerning the continuity of matter, life, sensation and consciousness.³⁶

Modern liberals, in effect, deny the possibility of a cosmos, but, thereby, they effectively also deny the holistic reality of the human. But a disintegrated humanity, reduced to will and then to drives, can inherently know no bounds and must converge with the will to unleash the unbounded though unwilled potentials of nature as an experimental venture undertaken for its own sake. This is a circumstance that must eventually encourage the creation of a post-human superman, a bionic-robotic hybrid of which modern eugenics was perhaps but a pale precursor.³⁷ Such a development would, of course, take to yet further lengths the division between an elite of experimenting controllers and a mass of humanity stripped of their psychic and spiritual essence.

Its possibility also reveals that the height of non-teleological choice and construction must be a self-undoing and total reconstruction, as this would most prove our negative freedom, even if it brought about no substantive good or further flourishing. Similarly, but less spectacularly, if there is no assigned *telos* for freedom, no ‘true’ choice that renders us genuinely free, then the nobility of freedom for the sake of freedom can only be manifested in the trivial irrelevance of what is actually chosen. Claims to the intrinsically

higher value of ‘artistic’ creative choices that re-fashion matter, the self or society in a more ‘beautiful’ direction cannot survive the critique of the transcendent any more than claims to objective truth or objective ethical goodness. If it does not in some fashion ‘reveal’, then art in every sense becomes ingenious self-referentiality or the mere assertion of subjectivity variously through – ironically – the manufacture of a completely atomistic and anonymous, flattened, vauntedly de-hierarchised and contentless object (the sculptures of Donald Judd); the telegraphing of a public joke (the works of Marcel Broodthaers, which more or less consist in an anticipation of their own commodification, or Robert Barry’s ‘works’, which exist only insofar as he alludes to them and, more significantly, sells them); more or less harmless shock (the conceptual edifices of Damien Hurst) or not so harmless imaginary transgression of ethical bounds under the spurious claim that the imaginary is safely corralled against the real (the films of Ken Clark concerning degenerate provincial adolescents, sometimes depicted as abusing the elderly and infirm for recreation).³⁸

One can, therefore, argue that apparently ‘trivial’ consumerist freedom is simply a mass transcription of Enlightenment freedom. And it is far more than that the creative freedom of art, which, if it is taken to disclose truth, requires some sort of Platonic, participatory *rationale* in the lineage of early Romantic thinkers like Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Joseph Joubert and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The Death of Beauty

It is because of this populist, and yet retrospectively authentic, transcription of enlightened and idealist freedom that, as Malcolm Bull has suggested (and appears to celebrate), the idea of aesthetic value may now be subject to imminent demise, even though beauty is the last of the transcendental trio finally to lapse.³⁹ Indeed, as any city walk will now confirm, the obsession with perfect health and beauty of the few, alongside the careless despair as to dress and appearance of the many (in contrast to the sartorial dignity of most classes up till the 1960s), is giving way to a cult of expressive ugliness in both expensive and mass varieties.

In the sphere of the arts, as Bull argues, nothing is any longer deemed ‘decadent’ – marginal, uncoordinated, unintegrated, narcissistic and perverse – because these things are now the new post-modern norm and aesthetic value is reduced to market value. Thus, in an exacerbation of modernism, works may be purely conceptual and even privately esoteric and invisible, so long as they can be traded.⁴⁰ Furthermore, if, according to Nietzsche, aesthetic value proceeds only from a willed ‘valuation’, why should we value even valuation any longer, or that ‘ecology’ which favours the strong and their

prevailing? Would not a further perfected nihilism be ultra-Jacobin, as Bull suggests, in refusing all values and valuation in terms of an 'ecology of the weak'? Such an ecology would more fully realise anti-metaphysics in an hyperbolic utilitarianism as the greatest possible equality of the greatest possible numbers and, therefore, as the greatest possible dilution of value, given its inherent variation, concentration and hierarchy. But this advocacy of the lowest common denominator with the widest spread mistakes real democracy by ignoring the primacy of the temporal and educative dimension, besides the non-scarcity of the most valuable. The best, such as love, is the least rare and survives any spread, while excellence may be transmitted and grown into, just as it fades with age and death.

Beyond these points, it can be insisted that the various minority possessions of rare talents and capacities are seriously to the general benefit of the less talented, in contrast to the spurious supposed trickling down of value as mere wealth. The choice is between the one hierarchy or the other, and any spurious third alternative of debasement in hyper-egalitarian spread would merely celebrate a naturalistic misery that is ontologically impossible so long as we remain human. Yet, from Gracchus Babeuf onwards this has had the capacity to produce sufficiently miserable cultural approximations.⁴¹

4. FROM *PAIDEIA* TO EDUCATION

At the heart of the liberal destruction of the natural-cultural and humanotechnical hybrid lies the perversion of the formative or educational process, the *paideia* of the ancients. For the perspective of *paideia*, if education was for the purpose of producing philosophic and political virtue, then, inversely, politics was about producing virtuous citizens. Therefore, politics existed to further educative formation, at least as much as the other way around.

It is true that, to begin with, the Enlightenment approach to education did contain genuine echoes of the classical humanist balance and oscillation between the political and the educative, but eventually it subordinated the latter in favour of the former, rendering education an instrumental affair. One could say that the ancient balance, which was also one between (political) space and (formative) time, was predicated on some sense of extra-human transcendence, which qualified the insight that man is a 'social animal' with a sense that the destiny of the individual soul exceeds that of merely human society. But, in effect, in modern enlightened times, this transcendence has been entirely captured by the human in the form of the political. Thereby, the collapse of the transcendent into the immanently spatial, as already described, entails also the loss of the temporal. This 'spatialisation' reveals, perhaps surprisingly, that the loss of the eternal entails also the loss of historicity.⁴²

However, that is not the only option for the modern capture of education and the transcendent. One can describe political capture as the classical, enlightened option. But there is also an alternative, romantic (or quasi-romantic) option, as first expressed in the thought of Rousseau.

Because Rousseau, as we saw in the first chapter, made the inverse modern move of rendering the isolated individual purely innocent rather than purely amoral, he also made the inverse modern move of making education completely superior to the political, and time entirely superior to space – a theme that is later echoed by both Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger. Because, for Rousseau, civil society and sophisticated culture could only have a corrupting effect, this must also include education, and especially mass education. It can only be education into discontent, envy, *ressentiment* and loss of pure, natural good taste in favour of fashion and unnecessary complication and refinement, which loses the raw edge of genuine creativity. From this perspective, all cultural assertions of superiority, like all claims to justified power and inequality, can only be viewed *negatively*. At best, power, inequality and official culture are but necessary evils, to be endlessly resisted, in a spirit of tragic pathos.

It is easy to see what a tremendous effect this individualistic, quasi-romantic way of thinking has had upon the political left right up to the present day – and, indeed, especially in the present day, when it is more and more dominated by a pathetically tragic outlook. However, there is a crucial twist in the Rousseauian story. The great Genevan, of course, considered that we could regain our natural liberty at a higher level through the contractual concentration of all power at the political centre, which would then contrive to coordinate the negative liberty of each with the negative liberty of all – projected as the might of the state that coincides with the general will.⁴³

This political programme naturally had its educational precondition and ultimate purpose. The ideal education – as described in *Émile* – is natural and spontaneous, a matter of organic emergence, not of imbibing extraneous pre-digested knowledge. Nonetheless, it is still possible to systematically organise and encourage such a spontaneity through a romanticised Cartesianism that methodically returns to what is supposed to be sheerly given by nature and to permit this to merely unfold.⁴⁴ From this root derives the fact that purportedly ‘child-centred’ or else ‘skills-orientated’ approaches to education can be just as much linked to state-monopoly as the more ‘enlightened’ utilitarian-based programmes. By the most curious and yet crucial bio-political paradox, it is the state, within the individualist romantic paradigm, that claims to be the nursing-mother of natural wisdom and, once more, to exist and to educate.

So what can now be seen is that both the modern enlightened and quasi-romantic approaches to education are predicated upon the loss of transcendence, which disturbs the balance between space and time and so between

the political and the educational. An atheistic or agnostic refusal of transcendence appears to be rational, yet, in reality, it gives rise to twin insanities that everyone, whether religious or not, can partially recognise. Either, insanely, we grant to the state a complete *carte blanche* to force us to learn whatever it wants us to learn for the sake of its own power, or else, with equal lunacy, we imagine that there is some kind of innocent pre-cultural knowledge that we should permit to emerge spontaneously. By an ironic twist, the latter *also* can become what the state enforces. Of course, outside the exception of experimental schooling, what occurs in reality is an incoherent mix of the two: a utilitarian approach to what is deemed economically and socially useful, and a darkly romantic amoral and narcissistic approach to the arts and humanities. In this manner, liberalism fuses atomistic individualism with state collectivism, which is reflected in mass education.

5. CRITIQUE OF MASS EDUCATION

There is something dubious about the notion of the state as the prime educator and about its power to coerce us to learn what it thinks we ought to learn. But here one needs to go further and argue that it has been an unsuccessful educator so far, and that the effect of liberal mass education has been in many ways educationally deleterious. For one thing, liberal education has hardly promoted reflexive subtlety, and it has certainly been inimical to the complex connections between knowledge, popular belief and folk culture – just as official ‘care’ often works less well than traditional and unofficial mutuality. This can prompt a controversial reflection. The usual modern view is that gradually, with the spread of enlightened education, reason displaces superstition and this gradually extends down the social class ladder. But an alternative view might be that the crude spectacle entailed by mass exposure to ‘the truth’ is just as unfavourable to the complexity of truth as it is to the indirectness of myth. It is a matter of common observation – and, indeed, something insisted upon by enlightened thinkers themselves, like Hume – that what tends to prevail in the public light and amongst most people, especially under the influence of the contagion of opinion, is not necessarily truth but, much more certainly, *plausibility*.

A huge problem here is that the truth can often look – at least at first sight – implausible. One of the reasons for this is that a half-truth or even a falsity can sometimes tell a far simpler story that more readily appeals to people’s memories or imaginations, especially if that story can be told in terms of two clearly distinguished sides fighting a battle with each other. This is notably true of the popular perception of the history of science, and especially of the interaction of science with religion. But this perception is largely encouraged

by poor academics, often seeking a mass audience. Therefore, it can be suggested that the more one has mass education and mass culture, then the more half-baked ideas, obstinately middle-brow tastes and, eventually, sheer crude populist scepticism come to the fore. So much may this be the case that one can argue that folk-beliefs, including religious beliefs, tend to be rejected *for the same social reason* that complex and seemingly arcane metaphysical beliefs are rejected. On this theory, it is not the 'aristocracy of knowledge' that has triumphed in modern times, but, rather, a bourgeois marketing of knowledge, which also debases its currency. This bourgeois knowledge is in conflict with both subtle learning and folk-myth, which perhaps retain today a secret oppositional kinship and an extraordinary latent appeal – as the success of J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling's fictions suggests.

However, this kinship was, in the past, to a degree mediated at the folk-level itself. The English cottager who had imbibed his store of local understanding of herbs, weather, fairy-tales and natural magic, had also often read his Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Robinson Crusoe*. In Victorian times, readers laughed at the way in which Gabriel Betteredge, house-servant and first narrator of Wilkie Collins's novel *The Moonstone*, based all his life upon the wisdom of Defoe's most famous novel.⁴⁵ Yet today we can stand almost in awe of Betteredge's knowledge and elucidation. It is surely true that anyone who knew *Robinson Crusoe* thoroughly and had reflected on it deeply, never mind the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Bunyan, would be far more 'educated' as regards the human condition, ethics and the foundations of Western culture, than the average proletarianised middle-class product of most British universities today.

In fact, possessing only a thin spattering of information about this or that, plus a bundle of information-handling and presentational skills that anyone in urban modernity could swiftly pick up anywhere, such people are only prepared to become consumers or functionaries, not citizens in any genuine sense. Furthermore, the evidence is that mass literacy as improved after the Education Act of 1870 did not necessarily achieve higher levels than those achieved by home-schooling and ecclesial schools in the seventeenth century. In the following century, the British state, under whig influence that sought to limit the scope of Anglican catechesis, had resisted Church of England and tory attempts to extend the education of ordinary people in charity schools.⁴⁶ In the long run, since 1870, levels of literacy (by any serious standard) have eventually declined – even if the total number of literate people has gone up. And accompanying this has been a gradual erosion of interior working-class codes of honour, leaving little behind save a certain lassitude and tasteless hedonism, which the lower-end of the consumer market ceaselessly fosters.

How is one to escape the conclusion that actually, for most people, self-education – including cooperative education, given the crucial presence of a

learned clergy and the circulation of books – achieves far more than enforced learning?⁴⁷ The problem here is that liberalism enforces an equality of learning and, thereby, gradually undermines the very hierarchy of value on which true education or vocational formation, whether by brain or hand, depends – since, by definition, not everyone will attain its realisation equally. Thus, the more that the required standards of learning and conduct are seen as equally reachable by all, and the more this minimum is seen as the essential, then the more these realities are, in fact, thinned out and diluted – and to this degree Malcolm Bull is right.⁴⁸ Emancipation is, indeed, supposed to be from unequal power inhibiting freedom, yet the power to liberate still derives from knowledge, and so we need learning in order to free ourselves both from our natural condition and from unjust social impostures. But how can there be an ‘equal learning’, since learning by definition divides the learned from the less learned? Equal access of all, in principle, to that for which they may turn out to be suited is what is most certainly required here. But liberalism tends to undermine this just goal and so, paradoxically, the very possibility of a more authentic emancipation that can resist mere power or unjust power in the name of an insight into justice. It does so by increasingly educating all, in a Bebeuvian spirit as revived by the 1960s, without much respect for ability or inclination, into the same readily accessible minimum, which ensures that most people can be turned into state or market functionaries even at the level of the ‘professions’, whose work has become increasingly routinised.⁴⁹

And is it not the case that state education has been less successful at imparting skills than confessional education in the past, which paid more attention to goals of flourishing and, so, to aptitude and the possibility of open, unlimited development? Indeed, what are most secondary schools today if not conspiracies *against* learning? For how is any child supposed to learn if it has to spend much of every day travelling, rapidly switching from one topic to another and quarrelling with other children, while being deliberately prevented from any sustained focus upon any one book, task or problem? It would seem that we only ‘educate’ people in order that they may fill certain pre-inscribed roles and not in any consistent sense in order to fulfil them as individuals or to develop their innate talents.⁵⁰ Of course, we have to educate people to fulfil social positions. But if these latter are genuinely about building up society for its own sake, on behalf of human interaction, friendship and symbolic association, then we need to allow that different people will embrace these roles in different ways that will transform and renew the roles themselves, and constantly reveal their new potential for increasing social solidarity.

For this reason, the business of self-realisation is far from irrelevant to the social purpose of the pedagogic process. Much education goes wrong because it fails to recognise that people cannot ever improve themselves by becoming

someone else: all that is genuinely open to them is to become better versions of themselves, which is always something unique. Moreover, the increasing attempt to impose one template upon everybody ignores the prosthetic reality at the basis of all human society as well as at the basis of every economic market to which we have already alluded. This reality is the human compensation for its animal weakness by a 'technology' that includes the 'politically' organised reliance upon the cooperation achieved through the division of labour and its architectonic coordination. In the end, it is a person's focus upon what she *can* do well and with integrity that renders her at once fulfilled *and* socially useful.

Yet currently our educational system overvalues all-round minimal competence of a certain restricted kind, and fails to be alert to the fact that a chronic lack of talent in one field is sometimes a sign of a great hidden talent in another. That is one of the reasons why contemporary Britain, in particular, has such a shocking shortage of people with certain vocational skills – engineering, medicine, nursing and teaching itself. So if our schools and even universities are increasingly a conspiracy against learning, they are also a system for stifling talent and guaranteeing the politically requisite quota of failure. An over-emphasis upon a pseudo-academic curriculum for too many for whom this is not really suited is a crucial aspect of the picture that we are describing.

If much current education fails to be intellectually educative, then one can also argue, following the visionary Milanese priest, Luigi Giussani, that it is emotionally damaging.⁵¹ Left to herself or themselves, an individual or a community of people tends to build up a coherent symbolic worldview within which she or it can live happily and flourish. Obviously, one valid function of education is to question such worldviews and to encourage the appreciation and tolerance of alternative perspectives. However, the utilitarian/romantic oscillation encourages such a sharp and false pedagogic divide between facts and values that pupils today struggle to relate the sciences to the humanities, the humanities to each other or both to the religious or anti-religious dimension. Within this dislocated morass, they rarely develop any subtle capacities to discriminate between rival values or value-systems and may, instead, suffer severe emotional damage through a consequent inability to individuate themselves.

In the face of this situation, Giussani invigoratingly suggested that it is the task of the real teacher to 'risk' communicating her integral worldview, in the hope that the pupil will accept it, but with acceptance of her right not to. This proposal calls for an honest education, without masks or pretences, which accepts that the true stake of formation must be the chance of making some sort of integral sense of human life on earth. A more vocationally diversified education, therefore, needs to be combined not so much with a shared

minimum of low-level knowledge and skills, as with a shared maximum of concern, however approached and at whatever level, with overarching meta-physical frameworks and existential stances.

To be offered a version of such a framework and such a stance is to be given the chance of achieving it, whether by accepting this version or in terms of modifying it or rejecting it. Nor does this approach deny that one aspect of learning must come from the learner herself: for every vision will be appropriated differently, or refused differently. The good teacher is not only one who merely presents an integral vision, but also one who seeks to draw out what is latent in the pupil before her. However, her role is indispensable insofar as she offers to the pupil a certain guarantee that thinking ‘has somewhere to go’. Without this guarantee, the fear of never arriving somewhere would tend to inhibit the creativity of exploratory thought. This is the main reason why the figure of the teacher is indispensable: not to instil fear, but rather to banish it.

The fact that so many educated men and women in the West now fail to have children suggests strongly that Giussani was right – that the educative process induces such a state of psychological uncertainty that it becomes difficult to find a marriage partner or to know exactly why one should want to pass on one’s biological and cultural legacy. Thus one can after all agree with Rousseau that the usual upshot of modern mass education is a debasement of character. What most people are educated into is easier, lazier means to achieve a modicum of material comfort. In consequence, liberal education produces servile consumers rather than critical citizens in the interests of the capitalist market and the bureaucratic state. The contemporary focus on transferable skills reflects this, and has the further effect of undermining genuine excellence and ethos that would promote character formation. Perhaps most of all, liberalism is inherently general and middle-brow, and as such, it destroys the fusion of high with folk culture.

6. THE CO-DESTRUCTION OF HIGH AND FOLK CULTURE

As already indicated, liberalism is a moralism that replaces the substantive, indefinable and, yet, inherently attractive ethical Good with alien abstract rules about the right *versus* the wrong, which tend to be fussily insisted upon.⁵²

In illustration, one can note that the category of ‘minorities’ is frequently conceived as a genus that bizarrely lumps the needy and unfortunate – for example the disabled – together with natural groupings of race, sexuality and gender. This is done in such a way as to suggest a certain underhand exchange of idioms whereby the unfortunate are not helped by being seen as a natural grouping with rights, while natural groupings are symmetrically regarded as

necessarily permanent victims. Such sophistry undergirds a moralism that induces a false, always wrong-footing guilt, whereby one is deemed turn by turn to have failed to perceive an active, 'otherwise able', and so on, claimant of rights instead of a victim, or, alternatively, an active claimant where one should have seen a victim in need of 'positively discriminating' support. What is precluded here is the truly ethical discernment of the ways in which the other might flourish and be assisted to do so, including a questioning of any treatment of any altogether singular person under one particular species. In a similar fashion, liberal moralism, caught in a bio-political oscillation, is often unable to decide whether a gendered, sexual or even racial group possesses rights based in naturally given circumstances of birth, or rather in the claiming of an identity by a mere act of will. What is precluded here is the question of how any inextricably natural-cultural hybrid identity can be lived authentically in pursuit of an end that transcends either given nature or superadded culture.

And once one has what is, in reality, the merely moral rather than ethical in this mode, one has also the instability of trying to ground political 'mutual benefit' upon basically individualistic presuppositions about the supremacy of mere survival and expression of a particular variation (not true individuation) – so long as this is deemed healthy. This supremacy can always disturb such pseudo-reciprocal order through a resurgence of supposedly 'natural' egoistic violence, or else the slumbering anarchy of sovereign political power and formal economic capital. Zygmunt Bauman's work shows in detail how the rise of a mass democratic culture involved an extreme destruction of local modes of political participation and of folkways that had been previously impervious to control by either dispersed market or remote sovereign state. This was inevitable, since their solidarity involved notions of shared goodness that could only arise through processes of sharing, including a shared sense of socially arising symbolic value.⁵³

Without a popular inculcation of virtue and without virtuous elites that lead by example and command popular assent precisely because they uphold and hyperbolically fulfil ideals that are open to all, culture becomes debased and descends into the empty vacuity of bourgeois, middle-brow pietism. This has something to do with both a left liberal rejection of any hierarchy whatsoever, whether of values or exponents of values, and a right-liberal defence of pseudo-hierarchy based on accidental privilege or manipulative skill that secures the possession of purely economic value. For the liberal left, there are, increasingly, not supposed to be any people who 'know better' or 'perform better' than others concerning values as opposed to facts – a position that incidentally privileges technocracy over democratic rule. But do we not need, instead, a more modest notion of 'organic intellectuals' (in a non-Leninist sense) whose educative knowledge would be somewhat distanced

from immediate exercise of power and whose social experiments would be more subject to the test of populist feedback? Further, do we not need such intellectuals to be less contemptuous of the folk-wisdom of ages, which has stood the test of time? Is there not something highly ironic about the way elite experimenters tend to distrust the most long conducted experiments of all? The worst naivety is the naivety of the learned and the iconoclastic who nearly always over-estimate through caricature the naivety of the beliefs that they call into doubt.⁵⁴

And one can go further: metaphysical enquiries into the mystery of being are in harmony with the implicit questionings of folk-art and practice. By contrast, Enlightenment thought was suspicious of the latter because it either denied or circumvented the mysterious in favour of a self-produced and, so self-concerning, predictability. For this reason, from the outset, much Enlightenment thought was relentlessly middle-brow in character, such as that of Voltaire, and it possessed the more intractable naivety of the half-baked and excessively cynical.

If this is true, then it could be that typically modern, critical, secular thought poses the wrong sets of alternatives. In trying to get rid of the religious, it also threatens to get rid of demotic culture and of the kind of learned elite who are less likely to repress this culture, even though they are needed in order to criticise and guide it. This function is itself a *component* of the popular, from the beginning and for all times – just as folk tales so generally concern kings and queens. We construe our modern politics as high *versus* low, right *versus* left. But suppose, instead, the real political crux concerns the triumph of the mediocre middle (or ‘the false few’) and the possibility that only the natural organic alliance of high and low can question this triumph? After all, an aristocratic right without a popular left has engaged in either nostalgia or a kitsch gloss upon the mediocre middle. Meanwhile a popular left without an aristocratic right has usually, and in whatever complex disguise (including most Marxisms), merely removed symbolic barriers to the ever-greater victory of capitalism and bureaucracy; promoted a resentful aspiration of the masses towards the middling mode of economy and culture; and sustained a curiously inverted traditional dualistic assumption concerning the ‘more material’ inclinations of the masses, inherently linked to a metaphysical association of matter with the debased, confused and conflictual, rather than with a mysterious potential – as for the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition. Is it not by now obvious that, as John Ruskin suggested, any viable resistance to the capitalist-bureaucratic liberal centre would have to come from a continuously dynamic and paradoxical blue/red fusion of guiding excellence with populist spontaneity?

This is not at all to deny that sometimes religions themselves suppress their own more popular idioms. But if Charles Taylor is right, then they have been

in this respect the agents of their own destruction. Such suppression has been, in the European Latin West, the main cause of a unique secularisation that is neither necessary nor normative but, rather, historically contingent, largely arbitrary and, for that reason, in principle reversible.⁵⁵

The secular left and right are unable to properly criticise liberalism, including capitalism, and it is mainly for *this*, undiagnosed reason that they are today suffering an ever-accelerated entropy. In particular, they are incapable of making the key argument that various different faith traditions *are* able to make – that nature is neither external to humanity, nor should humans ever aspire simply to dominate their own or external nature. If culture itself includes and is constituted by the nature/culture tension, then there is, for a meta-critique (in the positive sense) no critical possibility of deciding that meanings or imaginings, spontaneities or purposes, are not just as natural as they are cultural. Inversely, one cannot necessarily conclude that cultural law is any exception to the habituations of nature. For the ritual dimension, which, as we have already argued, initially composes human culture, is a kind of experimental risk that can itself only be established through habit.⁵⁶ As risk, it is also the gift of instruction from an initiator, which sacrificially breaks the deadlock of potential human isolation. And as habit, it is something that has ‘worked’ with the populace, often through modification, and so has been received. Ritual is in this way indissociably aristocratic and democratic. The same applies to the authentically open-ended and genuinely purposive scientific or social experiment.

But a society like ours that has become excessively and anarchically ‘experimentalised’ is one in which a positivist aristocracy (as envisaged by Auguste Comte) totally dominates the mass of people in the name of science, such that the real ‘secret’ of the attempted control of nature by this elite is the control of society itself.⁵⁷ Here, ritual has ceased to be a gift of wisdom, but has become either an imposed law or a contract enforced by a wealthier party. And its reception is either punctiliar or identically repeated without variation. It is no longer received as an authentic habit, which imparts an artistic or craft skill.

Instead, in a liberal culture, ritual is increasingly about the identical repetition of a generic vacuity masquerading as an endless succession of diversity and difference. This is reflected in the tendency of capitalism towards re-branding essentially the same products and services and in the imperative to continuously change for the sake of attraction, profit and formal self-justification in terms of dynamism and increased speed alone. More broadly, it can be observed that capitalist culture, especially in the United States, is homogenous, despite the extraordinary diversity in origin of its population. It deals in abstract, generic and kitsch ideals: ‘it’s amazing to fall in love with a blue-eyed blonde, it’s sad to grow old and best to try to avoid it’. This kind of

low-grade US culture is accessible to all, but it is corrosive of both universal high and particular local folk cultures. For this reason, people outside the United States resent it even as they consume it, as the American commentator Christopher Caldwell has suggested.⁵⁸

Liberalism has been so successful precisely because it has inculcated the sense that mainstream culture should follow wealth and prestige, as evidenced by the increasing resemblance of ‘serious’ newspapers to populist tabloids. But this runs against a still-not-quite-eradicated memory of the time of cultural survival of pre-capitalist norms up till the 1950s, which tends to refuse the lure of an increasingly tawdry mode of glamour, especially as its economic reachability has receded. That is why the backlash against capitalism and liberalism tends to take a cultural form – France’s *l’exception culturelle*, Russia’s insistence on traditional conservative values and China’s appeal to its own Confucian roots. However much one may refuse its atavistic aspects, the mainstream left and right are deluded if they imagine that here the masses are gulled by a false consciousness into evading the priority of class and international solidarity. To the contrary, the people are implicitly wiser in realising that only loyalty to the ineffable realities of always singular and, so, sacred identification can possibly resist capitalist abstraction and simultaneously ‘enclosing’ materialisation.

7. LIBERAL CULTURE AS POST-HUMANISM

Liberalism does not just change the meaning of culture and education, it also redefines traditional social relations and the nature of life and its reproduction. In one sense, the freeing of sex from the law has always been ambivalently implied by Christianity, as realised by D.H. Lawrence in his advocacy of its sanctity and seriousness. At the same time, what one saw in the 1960s was a kind of democratisation and commercialisation of ‘bohemian’ morals, which had themselves earlier been newly legitimated and normalised for an elite. The problem here is that a released self-pleasuring can become either explicitly or tacitly a goal in itself, and that this twisting of freedom can become a new mode of political control through apparent submission only to one’s own contentment.

Indeed, the ever-increasing separation of sex from procreation (such that the palliative and accurate sense that one’s natural sexual drive is the drive of nature to sustain itself scarcely comes any longer to male consciousness) is regarded naïvely if we do not realise that this is what the state covertly wants – such being the central theme of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In terms of partially deliberate but mainly objective intentional drift, it desires a ‘Malthusian’ control over reproduction that is more easily attained

through self-release and permission for any sexual pleasure than through self-discipline. This allows the state to deal with the individual directly, rather than through the mediation of couples and families, which are too much like micro-states within states. Much of liberal feminism and LGBT rights activism too readily colludes with this underlying reality, as with the allied commodification of human reproduction, which becomes evermore a matter of the contractual exchange of necessary components – whether by personal encounter or impersonal third-partner mediation. It is also too rarely noticed that sexual permissiveness has today, as Huxley already noted in his later foreword to his dystopian novel, become a kind of opiate that covertly reconciles people to the loss of other freedoms – in relation to both the state and the workplace.⁵⁹

The Abolition of Gender Difference

Thus one has here, objectively regarded in terms of semantic implications and likely social outcomes, a further extension of bio-political tyranny as the state arrogates to itself the power to re-define anthropological rituals and social institutions whose origins and ‘ownership’ precede and transcend it. The same tyranny is also exhibited in the unisexuality of modern culture. As Ivan Illich argued in his book *Gender*, modern sexism, systematic subordination and increasing endangerment of women (exposure to chances of rape and violence), does not derive from the perpetuation of patriarchy – however productive of many abuses that undoubtedly was in the past.⁶⁰ Rather, it results from the *abolition* of gender difference. The latter was to a great extent (which Illich, nonetheless, exaggerates) constitutive of the sociality, economy and legality of all pre-modern human societies. Indeed, a sense of complementarity or of a kind of ‘social intercourse’ and ‘general marriage’ between the thoroughly different assigned matching tasks of the two halves of the human race produced a reciprocal circle that to some degree automatically produced symbolic meaning, legal norms, political order, social peace, charitable but non-institutionalised care and economic subsistence and stability. For Illich, this primordial model was, therefore, linked to a sustainable plenitude and not to economic scarcity – perhaps also because it construed culture and history as metaphorical procreation, which remains incessantly within a renewable human capacity.⁶¹

It follows that the dissolution of gender difference helps to give rise to a new liberal economic subject – at first, the isolated matrimonial household, sundered from kinship after the twelfth century and later, the isolated needy individual – ultimately defined by an infinity and so a scarcity of needs. The breaking of reciprocity included the circle of gender, even though this implies no crude version of ‘essentialism’. Rather, the human universal was the gendered division of labour, and not the precise mode of division, which

varied greatly and sometimes oppositely from culture to culture. Thus, in some societies women might be the traders or the outspoken debaters, men the domestic types or the oblique and enigmatic speakers.

Once gender in Illich's sense has been abolished, we are removed from the reality that gender difference is quasi-generic.⁶² There are no humans to whom gender difference is just tacked on by accident, as a bulge or its absence in the blue jeans (as Illich puts it), yet modernity wishes us to think that this is the case.⁶³ And naturally Illich insists that the exceptions – transsexuality, homosexuality, etc. – simply prove the rule by their manifestations in terms of parodic reproduction of gender difference, or else the substitution of difference in age and other quasi-essential varieties.

This modern inculcation of an asexual ontological delusion is another aspect of the sundering of nature from culture and 'the what' from 'the who', because gender is hitherto mysteriously universal (like archaic painting, one could suggest) as to form, and yet bewilderingly different as to content. Thus the persisting reality (despite everything) of gender difference tends to force us to acknowledge that there is something culturally beyond nature that is all the same somehow natural – supernatural in a certain sense.

When this is denied, as in modern times, much reinforced by that very economics of scarcity which the abolition of gender tends to permit, then inevitably the revenge of ineradicable gender takes the form of construing a supposedly basic, asexual humanity implicitly upon the model of the male sex. Just for this reason, contemporary sexism follows from the abolition of gender difference, since women will henceforth always be regarded as subordinate, imperfect men. It is for this reason, according to Illich, that, despite all best efforts, under a modern, liberal, unisexual regime they are doomed to remain subordinate – socially, politically and economically. In particular, he notes how women throughout the globe carry a hugely disproportionate burden of 'shadow work' – housework, childcare, maintaining of bureaucratic demands, care of consumer products. The developed capitalist system depends upon this, and it is totally unlike the traditional work of the *domus*, which was an integral or even the main part of older, largely or partially subsistence economies.

This seems to remain the case today, even though the position of women as regards income has improved considerably beyond Illich's expectations in the 1980s. It is still, nevertheless, true that women remain grossly under-represented at the summits, central and local, of every cultural and institutional tree. But here one can suggest a twist to Illich's case. In many ways, the typical 'unisexual' person is now more of a gender mix than he perhaps supposed: women appear to figure prominently in the middle ranks precisely because they are encouraged to combine an unnatural male professional sternness and detachment (which is always ethically dubious, however much

moralistically advocated) with a traditional, supposedly female characteristic of docility and compliance. It is just for this reason that quotas and positive discrimination are so unfavourable to any but a false, liberal feminism. For they are likely to favour precisely the over-promotion of just such a blandly careerist 'neutrality' in every sense. This serves to prevent the emergence of genuinely strong and unambiguously gendered women who may also tend to revolutionise the public sphere through an infusion of more 'domestic' nurturing qualities and a more passionately formed and, therefore, balanced and subtle intelligence.

This is not to say that any identification of gender difference is easy – but surely the fact that it is at once real and yet utterly elusive is suggested precisely by its formal preponderance and yet substantive variety in all ancient human cultures.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Illich fails to discuss the crucial point that any arbitrary division of gender labour, for all its traditional ubiquity, surely *obfuscates* as much as reveals the core of this elusiveness. Both Neoplatonism (which, in the wake of Plato's *Republic* accepted women as both philosophers and politicians) and Christianity gradually tended to question and remove this differentiation by task and role, just as the Christian removal of marriage from kinship (however ambivalent) did help to release women from the aristocratic threat of incest, concubinage and enforced capture by tribal formations (as Illich somewhat suppresses).⁶⁵

So neither the universal past nor the particular present provides us now with desirable paths for the social construal of gender. The more than difficult task before us is to imagine how men and women could share all roles in a way that admitted of an enigmatic complementarity, encouraging a fertile reciprocity beyond cultural and economic scarcity. This alone would allow any true possibility of gender equality in every area and at the cultural summit. For our culture would, thereby, have admitted that people only ever occupy a partial, gendered perspective, and therefore absolutely *require* 'the other point of view' if they are to see themselves and to become, as a collectivity, truly self-governed.

The Redefinition of Life

In the absence of any such realisation, state tyranny remains compounded maleness as it is often construed – the lone virility of the massed will. Such tyranny contradictorily elevates the free and absolute control (by living spirits) of life over psychic life as such, whose combination of external bodily fragility with inviolable interiority should command our absolute respect.⁶⁶ For the latter involves a double and combined gift whose origins we cannot trace and with which in a sense we coincide through a conscious awareness of existence. In this gift lies the assumed basis of value for valuing

everything else. But by liberalising access to abortion and euthanasia to such a degree that the power over life and death is handed over to private jurisdiction with its temptations to despair, liberalism surrenders the absoluteness of this vital foundation. In its place is positioned human freedom of choice and the pursuit of happiness now understood as including the right to terminate the lives of the immature, weaker, older or suffering, including one's own life so understood. What is legitimated here is not genuinely desirable democratic right, but incipiently the will to power of some over others and essentially the strong over the weak. For if it is not the created and creative uniqueness of each freely developing human personality that is absolutely valued, then nothing logically prevents a legitimate extension of this will to power to ending the lives also of children and adults deemed to be too miserable, or insufficiently free, or too inhibitory of the free scope of others. This is especially true if one remembers that there can be slow means of condemnation to death.

To reject the primacy of spiritual life is to abandon the entire basis of Western humanism, especially in its Christian form, over thousands of years, and to replace the noble ideal of humanity with the delusory yet dangerous norm of a spirit impossibly free of its own body manipulating all bodies and other spirits in its own interests. And a state that is itself run by such self-imagined creatures has no qualms about manipulating both life and death in the interests of its own augmentation of power and ease of operation. In fact, only this state control demonically and fraudulently resolves the *aporia* of an embodied spirit pretending to disembodied hegemony. For the purported distance of spirit from body can be both compounded and re-incarnated as the artificial body of the state Leviathan, whose collectively imagined reality is in practice at one with the policed unity of all human bodies amassed into methodical coordination.

In this way, liberalism about life, conception and death points inexorably towards a new form of biological totalitarianism. The logical conclusion of liberal post-humanism is Peter Singer's call to 'unsanctify' human life and to extend euthanasia to 'severely and irreparably retarded infants' and those forms of human and non-human life whose medical condition causes 'suffering to all concerned and benefits nobody'.⁶⁷ Recently, Belgium has introduced a law making assisted suicide available to minors, even against the express wishes of the parents. The notion of a 'culture of death' developed by Pope John Paul II is therefore demonstrably precise and rigorous, manifesting as it does a new 'ecologisation' of the nihilistic embrace of nullity as the final expression of a refusal of all value.⁶⁸

Liberalism's appeal to individual rights not only fails to save the human person from the worst forms of manipulative post-humanism, but in fact is entirely complicit with them. For the bio-political logic at the very heart

of the atomistic liberal tradition redefines life as something that belongs to individuals as their own subjective possession. But since even self-ownership requires protection by the constitutional-legal system, which is ultimately upheld by the state, liberalism effectively grants the state power over life itself. That is why liberals have not hesitated to ‘modernise’ marriage and liberalise both abortion and euthanasia. Thus, while, for liberalism, avoiding pain and maximising pleasure are seen as the best way of liberating the individual, in reality liberal utilitarianism hands over life to the forces of the state and the market, treating it as a commodity that can be traded or dispensed with without regard to its intrinsic worth.

Why Liberalism Denies the Reality of the Soul

What underpins this redefinition of life is a refusal to acknowledge the reality of the soul and the ontologically irreducible relation between the realm of the psychic and the realm of the political. That is because the embodied soul evolves in the city and is, therefore, political, just as politics is about the governance of both the body and the soul and, therefore, the city is psychic. For the atomistic liberal tradition, however, the realm of the soul is corroded from two opposite directions, echoing the sophistic division between original nature and artificial law. Between the ape and the robot, the human being as living thought and creative tool-user – crafting his tools as styles and possibilities of new art as much as means to further speed and proximity – threatens to be lost. For the mystery of the human ‘thing’ as lying precisely *between* the natural and the machinic is substituted an impossibly but deleteriously attempted rational fusion of the two, which is something altogether different.⁶⁹

Thus liberalism, as already mentioned, tends to make the human vanish in two directions: archaically, in the face of the tide of pre-human nature; and futuristically in favour of a ‘post-human’ project that can hopefully subordinate human egotism and the unpredictabilities of desire to a cybernetic era that will augment the liberal ‘peace of a sort’ into an absolute but absolutely eerie biotechnical tranquillity.⁷⁰ These two opposite directions by no means mystically coincide – except, perhaps, at the never-to-be-reached utopian point when experts would have willed away their own will in favour of a sheerly ‘natural’ cybernetic determinism. But before that point, liberalism always imposes upon us entirely contradictory imperatives, which negatively reveal the unreality of trying to deny, abolish or ignore the soul. Thus liberalism declares that all is natural and yet all is artificial, because it cannot admit that we are ‘supposed to be cultural’, that nature most fully reveals herself in the human experience of love for nature, for other humans and for the divine.

This duality further plays itself out in the contradictory demand that all sacrifice their liberty to the needs of growth, and, yet, that the 'rights' of all to assert their negative liberty and material comfort against this need are equally absolute. The same logic is expressed in the view that we must submit to inexorable economic necessities, and, yet, that economic processes are the ultimate expression of human freedom. Or in the demand that we work all the time, and, yet, equally relax and consume all the time. Or, again, in the view that all our significant actions impinge on the freedom of others and, so, must often be criminalised and exposed to public ridicule in the name of 'transparency', while equally we enjoy a right of absolute privacy to do what we like so long as it is (supposedly) done 'only to ourselves' and to others with their consent. This despite the fact that any damage we did truly to ourselves and to our own soul would render us the most dangerous of citizens. Whoever loses her own soul, cannot, in fact, gain even the world, because thereby she has helped to destroy the human world also.

These polarities tend further to coagulate in deeper ones of 'male *versus* female', 'human industry *versus* natural environment' and 'rational *ego versus* the unconscious'. In all three cases, we have to endure the social and psychological damage of a seemingly irreconcilable tension, which ruins our personal relationships, our integration of artifice with nature and our ability to relate dreams and imaginings to our everyday public lives. Yet in all three cases, we also fail to see that exaggeration in either direction (for example, the originally Viennese 'modernist' simultaneous adulation of both pure public functionalism and purely subjective artistic fantasy)⁷¹ is precluding the possibility of a harmonious balance of the sexes, powers and forces around an integration that must necessarily be psychic in character.

Of course, we need sometimes to work and sometimes to play: to discern what is more physically or more spiritually caused; to expose some things and keep others hidden; sometimes to put the community first and sometimes the individual; to criminalise some things and leave other wrongs to the force of shame and social disapproval. But the point is that, without the vision of the transcendently good, we have no 'prudential' way to make these discernments, and to proportionately distribute different 'rights'. In consequence, liberalism is involved in an increasingly hysterical shuttle between the various sets of poles, which are always variants on the arch-poles of nature and law. Above all, it tends to encourage the foolish view that anything not against the law is acceptable, while endlessly criminalising minor offences and utterances. Everything is to be negatively tolerated, but nothing is to be positively allowed. Substantive notions are no longer permitted to make any critical contribution, and the only 'validity' lies in voluntarist self-assertion.

8. THE CULTURE OF THE WEST AND THE CULTURE OF ISLAM

Will only the post-Christian West succumb to this debasement? Perhaps, in the end, as Houellebecq pessimistically anticipates, all human cultures, including that of Islam, will.⁷² But in the meantime, as he also suggests, the cruder and modernised modes of Islam offer a seductive alternative and a simplified conservatism of which Christianity is constitutionally incapable.⁷³ Gender precincts are unambiguously defined; male heroism is restored and possibly rewarded with multiple spouses; the dualities of sacred and secular ethics and legality are removed; education becomes an integral part of mechanical spiritual formation; death is not to be dreaded and even in military martyrdom sought. Against the culturally suicidal and birth-avoiding tendencies of the West, Islam provides every reason to live and to generate many offspring. And now Muslims, through no fault of their own, offer themselves to Europe as massed victimhood as well as beguiling alternative. It remains possible that liberalism will be insufficient to resist this but also that, as Houellebecq suggests, the more simplifying mode of Islamic critique could displace the more complex mode of the Christian, especially in a world of propagandistic travesty.

This is because the difficulty we face in trying to salvage the European cultural legacy, which is centrally a Christian one, is that liberalism is its bastard offspring and not totally in the wrong. It is identifiably post-Christian, because Catholic Christianity first partially de-sacralised the political, encouraged freedom of association, the primacy of the individual conscience, the flourishing of the creative arts in representing everything, both high and low,⁷⁴ and the freeing of gender difference from role constraints and of romantic love from patriarchal law. It is inherently difficult to re-instate the view that precisely true freedom is extra-legally constrained, precisely novel invention is the point of arrival and discovery of an objective *telos* – difficult, in other words, for Europe to overcome liberalism by being *otherwise modern* in a manner that will repeat, differently, its authentic antiquity.⁷⁵

But the difficulty *must* be faced, for the alternative is either the vanishing of Europe in the face of other civilisations, or the vanishing of humanity through the liberal subversion of the European legacy.

NOTES

1. Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit against Industrial Populism*, trans. Trevor Arthur (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

2. One can note that the Italian Marxist filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini foresaw that the culture of the sixties would have this eventual outcome.

3. The first stirrings of ‘revolt’ in 1950s Britain perhaps came from working-class gang culture (‘teddy boys’, ‘mods’ and ‘rockers’) and from working-class novelists no longer (as, variously, Robert Tressall and D.H. Lawrence) celebrating a Romantic, Ruskinian vision of corporate solidarity, but, instead, celebrating the nihilistic escapades and escapes from North to South of lone, male proletarian anti-heroes. One can mention John Braine, Stan Barstow, Alan Sillitoe and Keith Waterhouse. Perhaps the quickly statist drift of the welfare state had already eroded working-class collective identity and traditions of mutual assistance. But almost at the same time appeared the more middle class, socially existential literary works of ‘angry young men’ like John Osborne and Colin Wilson, and soon after that the rise of ‘satire’, which curiously attacked a parental generation and the remains of an empire that had been responsible for the most heroic stance against the worst tyranny in all of British history. The hippies arrived not so long after.

4. Eric Zemmour, *Le Suicide Français: Les quarante années qui ont défait la France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014), 9–16.

5. Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery: Volume I: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, trans. Barbaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 1–13.

6. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*.

7. Matthieu Baumier, *La démocratie totalitaire. Penser la modernité post-démocratique* (Paris: Editions de la Renaissance, 2007).

8. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, I: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

9. These comments apply to the catastrophic consequences and implications of internal, direct party democracy for the contemporary British Labour Party.

10 Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (London: Penguin, 2015).

11. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Michel Houellebecq, *The Impossibility of an Island*, trans. Gavin Bowd (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005).

12. Stiegler rightly suggests, like Giambattista Vico, that a sense of shame (*pudor*) is crucial to any genuine cultural formation.

13. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment*.

14. Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005).

15. Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber, 1982).

16. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

17. We are indebted here to the ongoing doctoral work of Leung King-Ho of the University of Nottingham.

18. But the failure of modern ‘classical’ music, at least until recently, to remain strongly rooted in the composition of song, the instigation of dance and the improvisation by performers is somewhat to blame here. And the best of modern ‘popular’ music, holding commercialisation at bay, has served to counteract this failure.

19. This is brutally and unflinchingly captured in Houellebecq’s *Impossibility of an Island*.

20. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*.
21. One could argue, against Arrighi and Fernand Braudel, that earlier focuses on finance in centres such as that of Genoa were not the decadence of an originally productive capitalist economy but, rather, pre-capitalist anticipations of capitalism that still awaited the beginnings of the extraction of surplus value from waged labour, beginning later in Dutch towns and, supremely, the English countryside. But the latter development only led to a ‘take-off’ when later combined, not just with colonialist primary accumulation overseas, but also with a state-sponsored speculation on the national debt.
22. Given globalised outsourcing to cheap and abundant labour, it can scarcely be blamed, for example, as by some, on demographic shortage of labour supply.
23. Eggers, *The Circle*, *passim*.
24. John Milbank, ‘The Politics of the Soul’, *Open Insight*, VI:9 (2015): 91–108.
25. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
26. Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A “Repetition” of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996).
27. A welter of recent research even shows that Renaissance Hermetic and vitalist currents revived in the Enlightenment period (for which mystical freemasonry was far from marginal) in a neo-humanist reaction against seventeenth-century theological rationalism and voluntarism. See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (Lafayette: Cornerstone, 2006).
28. Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2008).
29. This is the subtle ‘argument for God’ expounded by Rowan Williams in his *The Edge of Words* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
30. One can note here the influence on Leroi-Gourlan of the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin’s teleological evolutionism. Perhaps his idea of a biological-technical development of spirit, leading to a *noosphere*, which seems to be partially fulfilled in the information age, is not without echo in Stiegler’s reflections.
31. David Jones, ‘Art and Sacrament’, in *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber, 2009), 1–17. Leroi-Gourlan himself emphasised the gestural, in the wake of his teacher, Marcel Mauss.
32. Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).
33. It may be significant that Bernard Stiegler’s teacher, Jacques Derrida, was himself once taught by the Catholic Cusa scholar Maurice de Gandillac.
34. It seems that Stiegler needs to read Plato in this way if he is to resolve the apparent contradiction in his thought between wishing to refuse sophistry on the one hand, and, yet, to deny the pre-existent, ‘astral’ dimension in Plato on the other. Read theurgically, as by Proclus, Platonism is not incompatible with the fusion of *theoria* with *techné*, just as Plato’s ‘Platonism’ with regard to numbers is occasioned by the thought that if numbering is always a *technical* exercise, then, since numbers also number themselves, numbers must be higher ‘things’. Here, it is precisely *staying* with the technical that conducts one to the stars. See Jacob Klein (writing in the wake of Husserl’s reflections on the origins of geometry), *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origins of Algebra* (New York: Dover, 1968), 17–25.

35. Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).
36. One can see the vogue for ‘speculative realism’ in this context. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008); Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010).
37. Francis Fukuyama, *Our Post-Human Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Picador, 2003); Céline Lafontaine, *L’empire cybernétique. Des machines à penser à la pensée machine* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).
38. Here, once more, Houellebecq is crudely trenchant in exposing crudity masquerading as sophistication in *The Impossibility of an Island* and in *Submission*, trans. Lorin Stein (London: Henieman, 2015); Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lucan and Sternberg, 2002).
39. Malcolm Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche* (London: Verso, 2014).
40. Malcolm Bull, ‘The Decline of Decadence’ in *New Left Review*, 94 (July–August 2015): 83–102.
41. Babeuf’s hyper-equality of debasement advocated during the French Revolution was later criticised by the socialist Proudhon, as Bull mentions.
42. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
43. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
44. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allen Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
45. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
46. We are indebted here to the unpublished doctoral work of Fr. Rob Mackley of the University of Cambridge.
47. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (London/New York: Marion Boyars, 2004).
48. Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, 49–52.
49. One can note here that recent proposals to ‘comprehensivise’ even universities in the United Kingdom would inevitably lead to further destructive ‘stupifying’ and massification, and not at all to greater social and economic equality.
50. Illich, *Deschooling Society*.
51. Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna M. Frangia (New York: Crossroad, 2002).
52. We are indebted here to conversations with Alessandra Gerolin.
53. John Milbank, ‘Culture and Justice’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27:6 (2010): 107–24.
54. Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: An Essay on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
55. Taylor, *A Secular Age*; John Milbank, ‘A Closer Walk on the Wild Side’, in Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen and Craig Calhoun (eds.), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 54–82.

56. Felix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008).

57. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). Moreover, 'successful' scientific experiments today are rarely re-iterated – since there would be no grant money available for mere replication. And where they are, they prove not reproducible to an alarming extent. Thus, even the claim to control nature made by scientific experts (which grants them power to control people) may often not be as reliable as a scientific *imprimatur* would suggest. We are indebted here to discussions with Rupert Sheldrake.

58. Christopher Caldwell, 'Gangnam stylishly debunks US myth', *The Financial Times* 28 December 2012, available online at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8c831b72-4a16-11e2-a7b1-00144feab49a.html>.

59. Huxley, 'Foreword' [1946], *Brave New World*, 14. It should also be noted here that Huxley, in his famous novel, saw the total sexualisation of children as an inevitable consequence of the complete separation of sex from procreation, marriage and family life. For if sex is non-procreative, then why should children's sexuality be denied expression? Thus liberalism since the 1960s has aporetically switched from some advocacy of paedophilia to belatedly damning it as the one remaining unforgivable evil and sometimes – with supreme illiberality – seeking to suppress even normal proto-sexual expressions between children themselves.

60. Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon, 1982). It is arguably the most important book on this topic ever written. Illich recognises an affinity between his perspective and the feminism of Luce Irigaray.

61. Illich explicitly links his theses concerning scarcity to the economic ideas of Karl Polanyi, which significantly informed our thinking in chapters 3 and 4.

62. Although this is not decisive, it is significant that the most recent biology suggests that it is no more true that males are 'imperfect females' than (as for Aristotle) that females are 'imperfect males'.

63. The 'evidence' that there is no difference between the female and the male brain (there being, of course, no such entities, taken in bodily abstraction) ignores the increasing academic recognition that we think not just with our brains but with our whole bodies and tools and the surrounding environment.

64. One needs to supplement Illich here with Irigaray's considerations that, if we *are* our bodies, then the different phenomenologies of male and female physical insertion into the world always colours the cultural coding of gender difference, even though it does not fully determine it. But it does allow us to perceive more analogies across different modes of differing than Illich allowed.

65. Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Penguin, 1983).

66. Michel Henry, *Barbarism*, trans. Scott Davidson (London: Continuum, 2012).

67. Peter Singer, *Unsanctifying Human Life: Essays on Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 225.

68. Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, *passim*.

69. Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, trans. Mark Allen Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 221–41.

70. Lafontaine, *L'empire cybernétique*.

71. Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 32–119.

72. Houellebecq, *Submission*; *idem.*, *The Possibility of an Island*.

73. This is particularly well conveyed in *Submission*, through its ironic and, yet, often nostalgic invocations of French Catholic literary conservatism, against the prevalent Nietzscheanism that Houellebecq so clearly despises, while tending to regard it, in Manichean fashion, as inevitable.

74. Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

75. On the original 'post-modernism' of the great American poet Charles Olson, the first real coiner of the term (after Arnold Toynbee's different and fairly insignificant usage), see George F. Butterick, 'Charles Olson and the Postmodern Advance', *The Iowa Review*, 11:4 (Fall 1980): 3–26.

Chapter 8

Culture as Formation

1. POLITICS AS FORMATION

Liberal education, as we saw in the previous chapter, characteristically oscillates between esoteric concerns that bear no relation to politics on the one hand, and a form of utility maximisation that hands bio-political control over society to the forces of the market-state on the other. It is, therefore, a formation that ends up being profoundly de-humanising because it does not integrate the spiritual with the material, considering the former to be a purely private matter, while making the accumulation and alteration of the latter the default point of reference for public affairs.

The same division can also be construed as an impossible division between the co-determination of ‘the who’ and ‘the what’ – a cult of ungrounded will on the one side and a cult of technical fatality on the other. From Descartes onwards, this implies that politics, like the supposedly best civic design, is no longer a mingling of souls but a Spartan mental manipulation, directed ideally or paradigmatically by one man, of material and corporeal forces that alone now constitute the acceptably and respectably ‘public’.¹ Otherwise, the mental concerns a realm of privately reserved and seemingly ‘dead and buried’ interiority, which is precisely *not* the ‘psychic’ as debased linguistic usage might lead us to imagine.² For traditionally, ‘the psychic’ was the very essence of public and political concern, as Plato argued against the sophists who viewed the soul purely in terms of private power engaged in manipulating the masses.³

Plato’s argument is that sophistry removes the psychic from the political sphere in line with the dualism between nature and law, as we saw in the previous chapter. His refusal of this dualism is in harmony with the archaic wisdom of most human societies. In Platonic terms, this means that

the realm of the *psyche*, though higher than the material, is still fully a part of nature – an integral element of the cosmos. And this includes Stiegler's *prostheses*, since the arch paradigm for the eternal forms in *The Republic* is the crafted table, and though writing may be warded off, it is also invoked as the paradigm for the memory of the soul.

A politics that integrates the psychic with the non-psychic suggests that the liberal emphasis on law, consent and individual conscience is insufficient to direct the often brutal processes of politics towards something higher than themselves. Liberal resistance, based on private right, is also not enough, because the main reality of all human association, including political association, *is itself psychic*: it is to do with friendship (as both Plato and Aristotle taught), with benevolent generosity (as they also taught in common with Confucius and Buddha) and with a reciprocal sharing of the common good. Only secondarily is it about distributing material goods and designing specific law codes that are always somewhat arbitrary, yet should reflect as far as possible non-arbitrary justice.

In other words, as we have already seen, politics requires a psychic community to which it is finally answerable, a community whose seeking of harmonious relationship with society and the natural world is in excess of either material need or coercive law. Today, we need a revival of this function in its mode of Christian *ecclesia*, which most of all discovered and enacted the pre-eminence of the person and of relationality within a fluid sense of the organic whole,⁴ beyond the twin atomisms of occidental egotistic individualism and Oriental static, rigid, hierarchical organism.

Our politics requires this, rather than the fearful combination of modern Western libertarianism with an Eastern technologism of the spirit, collectivist autocracy and temptation to spiritual nihilism that could be arising in parts of Asia and of Europe. And it needs this, rather than the lamentably disenchanting and voluntarist transcendence increasingly advocated by some modes of Protestant Christianity and more extremely by Sunni Islam to the relegation of its more mystical, Sufi legacy. But, above all, it needs it rather than our modern liberal political legacy since the seventeenth century, as we have argued in the preceding chapters.

Yet, far from being Western-centric, such a re-invocation of the West's archaic legacy reconnects Western cultures with other civilisations that also emerged during the Axial Age. As Karl Jaspers first argued, the great philosophies of East and West are of a single contemporary birth with the world religions.⁵ The Axial Age marked (in very different ways) the becoming reflexive – so both 'theological' and 'philosophical' – of religious traditions in the period from around the sixth to the second century BC.⁶ This centred on a theoretical and practical critique of predominant norms of absolutist power underwritten by gods who were not believed to be on the side of ordinary

humans. The advent of critical thought and political resistance was from the outset inextricably intertwined with an appeal to religious transcendence – whether in Plato, Buddha or Confucius.

Connecting all these traditions is the idea that the rightful exercise of reason involves a pre-rational trust (*pistis* or faith) in the reasonableness of reality – that the universe and all rational beings therein are not subject either to a deterministic fatalism or to the indeterminacy of random flux, but that they can be ordered harmoniously. Based on a new synthesis of personal liberty with universal *telos*, agency in the immanent order of being was, thereby, for the first time in human history seen as compatible with a transcendent outlook. For the key difference of pre- and post-axial thought is the notion that personal flourishing requires some form of salvation by a benign deity that refuses sacrificial practices to appease divine wrath and, instead, represents the ultimate guarantee for the dignity of the person.⁷ In this manner, divinity is re-configured as the supernatural foundation and finality of the good that all human beings desire naturally – a good that exceeds complete comprehension, but is amenable to rational and imaginative reflection.⁸

Moreover, ancient philosophy, East and West, and most Medieval thought, was neither detachedly rationalist (as with much of modern liberalism),⁹ nor resigned to the random flux of sensory experience and the short-term pleasures of hedonism. Rather, the philosopher had both to see aright and to live well, and he could not do one without the other. It was because philosophy involved ethos as well as vision that it was to some degree esoteric and incommunicable: you had to join in and join with a whole culture if you were really to ‘get it’. This meant that politics was viewed ontologically and the cosmos politically. If one rejects that interchange, then, like the sophists in Antiquity or liberals nowadays, one espouses a duality of meaningless nature versus imposed culture – the artificial social contract and state-imposed education that tries to regulate the anarchic violence in the ‘state of nature’. In this manner, the universalism of the axial vision, to which Enlightenment is but a recent, belated footnote, is prised apart from its accompanying integrating perspective, which one might say is just as ‘technological’ and ‘ecological’ as it is respectful of the interior life.

AU: the term “Antiquity” starts with a lowercase in CMS 16 (when referring to a period). Please confirm style to be followed.

2. EUDAIMONIA AND PAIDEIA¹⁰

To reiterate: education is today usually considered from one of two perspectives: either it is thought of apolitically, in terms of the transmission of human knowledge and the benefit of the learner, or else it is thought of politically, in terms of the supposed benefits that education can bring to the strength of the state and the welfare of its citizens as citizens. But both these perspectives

are inadequate, as they tend to ignore the basically problematic ‘Platonic’ relationship that pertains between education and politics. Each refers to the other, yet each can claim to be included within the sphere of the other. Today, liberals naturally think of education as contained within politics to such an extent that it becomes a mere instrument of political forces, directed towards goals of national power, pride, social engineering and profit maximisation.

By contrast, the more classical version of this containment thought of education as forming virtuous citizens, able to participate in the political and economic process. Yet for antiquity this containment was also reversible: if education (*paideia*) was a rehearsal for political debate and action, it was equally true that the life of the city was itself the most advanced school of humanity. The classical perspective, therefore, saw politics and education as equally important, and each as equally liable to subsume the other.

This classical balance between the political and the educative, was, as we saw earlier, to some extent echoed within the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Both the tyranny of monarchical absolutism and the anti-humanism of materialist philosophy were, for several Scottish and Italian thinkers, especially, to be resisted by an education into experimental science and humane letters. Such an education would produce as many citizens as possible who were both free from superstition and able to sympathise with the nobler sentiments of others. The aim to expand the range of ‘civil society’ outside either dispersed market interest or direct state control involved both the idea that the right educative influence would have political benefits and the idea that a restrained political practice would produce better citizens.¹¹ In Scotland, thanks to the Calvinist legacy, this education has still much to do with schools and universities. In France, on the other hand, these institutions were often regarded by *philosophes* as too tainted by piety, and so they looked, rather, to a new conversational network of the enlightened – a ‘republic of letters’ that would be seamlessly fused with political reconstruction.¹² Catholic Italy, which sometimes nurtured a Catholic Enlightenment in its universities, as in the case of Antonio Genovesi, fell somewhat in between.

But at the same time, the complete integrity of the classical ideal, which had been both sustained and transformed by the Christian Middle Ages, was impaired by the Enlightenment. This integrity, which involved the equal balance between the political and the educational, depended upon a teleological understanding of virtue that understood the goal of politics to be human happiness in an ethical sense – individual fulfilment and mutual flourishing. The Enlightenment, however, was on the whole gloomier about constructing large-scale economic and political frameworks on the basis of virtue. In consequence, it ultimately tended to derive not only economic but also political order from the benign blending of rival self-interest. Nonetheless, it retained at least some sense that state and market exist for the sake of the nobler

non-economic and politically free associative process of civil society. In this respect, we can recognise an explicitly Christian legacy that Enlightenment thinkers developed in a post-Christian direction: civil society now occupies that transpolitical space of free association and constitution making, which uniquely appeared in Europe as the space of the Church. That space was concerned, beyond politics, not just with the destiny of men's souls, but also with social processes of mutual charity and reconciliation in excess of legal coercion and punishment.¹³

However, from a post-liberal perspective – which seeks to retrieve, revise and extend the classical legacy – the Enlightenment would appear somewhat parodic. First, its relative banishing of virtue from state and market formation is *far more pessimistic* than either Platonist-Aristotelian Antiquity, or the Christian Middle Ages, or, indeed, the Renaissance renewal of the fusion of Greco-Roman philosophy and law with biblical revelation (developed further by the early Romantics like Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Joseph Joubert and Samuel Taylor Coleridge). Second, even in the case of civil society, it is not clear that any genuine notion of ethical *telos* remains. The Enlightenment emphasis is less an Aristotelian one upon the goals of moral aspiration than it is a Stoic one upon the bonds of human sympathy. The latter horizon tends to lose its links to a reciprocal pursuit of teleological harmony (as still with Shaftesbury) and comes to denote a more complacent mutual regard for socially acceptable pleasures and disappointments.¹⁴ Here, sympathy is either spontaneous animal emotion or imaginative projection of one's own feelings onto the human other. So in its modern, liberal guise, sympathy has come to mean little more than empathy, and empathy for the feelings of other is the basis for not just compassion, but also for cruelty. What is therefore primary to sympathy-become-empathy is, rather, individual human freedom and happiness (in the sense of utility, not *eudaimonia*), which as something pre-given tends to reduce to mere material contentment.

So what can now be seen is that both the modern enlightened and debasedly romantic approaches to education are predicated upon the loss of transcendence, which disturbs the balance between the political and the educational. However, we cannot seriously desire to return to the sheerly classical balance. For even if that balance directed all politics towards education, it equally made the *polis* the one road to *paideia*, and even to communion with the eternal gods. This over-estimation of the political was forever interrupted by the *ecclesia*. The latter went beyond the classical balance in the direction of a kind of fusion of education with politics, since it admitted as citizens of the heavenly kingdom in its earthly sojourn children (besides women, slaves and metics). Inversely, it tended to stress that even adults remain children in the sight of God – children who must continuously learn. Both liturgical patterns and monastic communities tended, thereby, to combine governing structures

and pedagogic processes in one. In that sense, only a Christian legacy could possibly have given rise to the fictional reality of Hogwarts and its intimate continuity with the Ministry of Magic.

3. EDUCATION INTO VIRTUE

Enlightenment thinkers, including Rousseau himself, suggested that only a few should pursue learning and that its link to virtue would only be guaranteed by their responsibility to share in power.¹⁵ By contrast, a post-liberal politics seeks the education of the many, where that means, indeed, to encourage *the virtue of the many*. But in partial vindication of Rousseau, this is only possible if one makes space for that dispersed political participation at every level from local to international, which Rousseau's own theory of city-state sovereignty denied. In addition, mere advocacy of democracy does not solve the problem of how to inculcate virtue at large, nor of how to sustain virtue at the top of the political hierarchy, even if political representatives have been elected.

In both respects, the link of education to time exposes the inherent limits of democracy if one is not prepared to espouse the 'spatial' tyranny of the state over the group or the individual. For wisdom is necessarily communicated from initiator to initiated; even though the aim of this hierarchy is in time to reverse hierarchy and ensure that the initiated can in turn initiate others, initiation is still not something that can be elected, even chosen; since one never really knows what it is that one has agreed to learn, there is in a sense here no real 'consent'.

In the second respect, as we indicated in chapters 1 and 5, one sees the naivety of the typical liberal attempt to substitute a democratic balance of power for the operation of virtue. Superficially, it would seem that liberals are right to mock those who wish to depend merely upon the goodwill of those in power or the goodwill of those who wish to organise welfare within civil society, etc. Yet this restricted view yields to the second-order naivety of imagining that, just because it distrusts mere trust, it can finally dispense with trust altogether. Too often now, history has had its revenge here: elected leaders have turned into dictators, state bureaucrats substituting rules for charity have ensured that welfare becomes the very reverse of charitable – an impersonal control over the individual and family who now find themselves trapped in penurious dependency.

So alongside the democratic checks upon power, we still require an education into virtue of potential leaders – however properly meritocratically recruited – and even the sense that they have been inducted into a 'class' or Coleridgean clerisy, whose entire 'interest' lies in an honourable connecting

of its own personal and family fortunes to that of the polity. We now know that the successors to the 'old establishment' are a 'new class' that tends to milk positions of power for personal gain, knowing that their occupation of them is merely temporary and not a matter of lifetime or inter-generational vocation. An entire branch of neo-liberal economics deliberately deployed by the liberal left and right tells us that *all* public servants have only ever, or will ever, act like this.¹⁶ But a better reading of history can beg to differ with such ontologised cynicism.

Both educators and governors need then to be primarily seekers after virtue, in a way that restores the classical circulation between the political and the educative. The way to prevent this circle from becoming tyrannical is, first of all, the constraint of democratic election. But for this to operate properly, the educative and temporal 'aristocratic' factor must be so constitutionally secured as to disallow any populist demoting of high culture, which would leave the populace itself prey to the democracy-subverting sway of either propaganda or technocracy.

The second way for the public authorities to prevent tyranny is for the state itself to defer to the organisation of education freely within the realm of civil society, such that one sustains a certain open field of politico-pedagogic experimentation, which is at the same time searching for objective truth. One should, in this respect, not accept the liberal point that the purpose of the state is merely to 'broker different interests', rather than to make people either happier or wiser. It is, instead, the goal of the state to help human beings to flourish, as the ancients and the medievals taught, else politics is obviously in league with iniquity. However, beyond the antique, the pagan absolutisation of the state's vision of virtue is guarded against by the pedagogic role of civil society.

But how can people be educated into virtue? We have already seen that modern liberal assumptions render this impossible. On the one hand, enlightened utilitarianism reduces everything to egotistic pleasure, machinic or informational efficiency and the strength of the market-state. On the other hand, individualist romanticism reduces all to wilful self-seeking and, again, the strength of the state and market combined. The blend of Enlightenment and debased Romanticism results in a mixture of mere repetition of facts and their experimental manipulation, alongside an encouragement of 'authentic' self-expression. Students, in effect, are at once programmed as robots and unleashed as creatures of the wild. But in either case one is faced with the monstrous and not the human – though precisely a hybrid of the two is what much of the liberal left and right, utterly duped by capitalism and bureaucracy, now appears to want.

This double-faced monstrosity manifests itself both as 'conservative' and as 'progressivist' pedagogy, a hybridity that Western education systems

under different governments have abundantly displayed. On the one hand, we have had the suppression of all personal character and creativity in favour of government-prescribed information, government proscription of any study of the dangerous past, check-lists, criteria comprehensible only to functionaries, sacrifice of the individual child to targets, and so forth. Alongside this we have also the perpetuation of rigid timetabling, endless exams and transferable skills testing. On the other hand, we have had an equal perpetuation of the supposedly 'child-centred' neglect of grammar, spelling, other languages, mathematical and scientific difficulty, with no real gain in terms of a sophisticated teaching of natural science, which would above all deal with the process of its historical emergence and, so, the human reasons for the posing of its peculiar questions in the first place.¹⁷ Alongside this, there still persists from the 1960s a cult of free expression and mere 'respect' for any and every 'other' in the ethical and artistic realms, without any sense of the need to be inducted into the literary and artistic traditions of the West, which are no longer taught.

Any adequate rage in the face of all this would have to be both radical and conservative, which is why it is so rare and why we lack any real critique of what is going on. For the hybrid monstrosity we are describing has deep roots in the enlightened/romantic pedagogic divide and its developed complicity. Authentic education, by contrast, would *both* pass on a tradition *and* encourage individual expressivity from the outset. It would not merely teach skills, but also initiate into the traditions of Europe and the particular nation or region in question, and equally foster all sorts of excitingly creative individual responses to this legacy, beginning at the youngest possible age with pictures, fairy-tales and myths. We desperately need a genuine 'third way' in education also.

However, what impedes the emergence of a 'third way' is a debatable, secular philosophy and politics. This philosophy is caught within the modern oscillation between the natural and the cultural, itself split between the intentionally voluntary and the mechanically artificial. As a result, individual creativity and spontaneous development are associated strictly with nature, while objective learning is associated with the accumulation of supposedly objective observation and the development of useful invented techniques. This divide leaves us with no educational option between a Rousseauist abandonment of real teaching on the one hand, and various modes of rote learning on the other. We lack, in consequence, any impartation of the sense that genuine knowledge is open to debate and can be creatively modified. Equally, and inversely, we lack any sense that aesthetic and ethical performances are properly subject to objective public judgement. This is precisely that 'difficult combination' of the Western legacy, which we spoke of at the end of the last chapter as most awkward and yet most imperative to get across and to restore.

The philosophical root of the problem here is that what is spontaneous and arises from within the individual is seen as having nothing to do with what is imparted to her from without. In terms of the logic of secular immanence, this is inevitable: for all that is 'given' is nature, while everything cultural is but arbitrarily 'added' – either willed or fated by an inorganic evolution of the technical.

How would one overcome this problem? This is only possible if in some way one re-admits participation in transcendence as embracing both nature and culture, both spiritual will and *prosthesis* in excess of anticipation, and thereby mediating between either duality. The crucial example here must be the thought of Plato, the first thinker about education in the Western tradition, who in the *Republic* made its theorisation fundamental for both philosophy and politics. Rousseau's educational thought can be regarded as a modern parody of Plato, insofar as, like Plato, he opposes the knowledge that is innate within the child to knowledge that merely comes to her from without, via a teacher. However, Plato did not really see this knowledge as innate – rather, he saw it as being a dim recollection (*anamnesis*) of something once known – an awakening to the presence of universal forms in particular things.¹⁸ In this way, he did mythical justice to the conundrum that dictates that we cannot try to know about anything unknown without first knowing *something* about it.

Plato's dialogue *Meno* makes it clear that *part* of the answer to that conundrum is that we must first be taught by a teacher who can assuage our fear that there is a something that answers to what we seek.¹⁹ But this does not explain our seeking out of a teacher in the first place, even when she has not been imposed upon us by the modern state. Nor does it explain the same problematic if we transfer it to the collective and protological level where it becomes precisely (as we saw in our discussion of Stiegler in chapter 7) the issue of how humanity manages to invent itself as tool and language user before it has these things and, therefore, before it possesses human will and reason. How does humanity seek either to know or to deploy what it does not yet either use or know, yet must in some manner anticipate if it is to begin itself at all?

So another part of the answer is that we do, indeed, both individually and collectively, obscurely anticipate the knowledge that we seek through the force of our searching desire, expressed in reaching, proto-ritual gesture. This anticipation is *not* a given *a priori* structure of the mind (as for Descartes, Kant and the modern tradition of rationalism that shaped liberal politics, as we indicated in chapter 1). Rather, it has to be triggered by something exterior, in particular the words of a teacher. On the other hand, the sense that 'we are going somewhere' is akin to a kind of memory of something yet to come. Plato spoke here of 'recollection' in the sense of being awakened or alerted to the presence of something that is unfolding.

In either case, unlike the modern pedagogic theories, spontaneity and teaching work together rather than in opposition. This is because the truth they together seek transcends both nature and culture and concerns something 'true' in a radical sense, combining nature and culture in one 'trans-ecology', as it were, since this truth is eternal and lies beyond space and time. Just for this reason, nature is relativised, while the apparently greater contingency of culture is inversely authenticated. Nature, like culture, may also be, in one sense, just the way things happen to be ordered for a time, within time. Yet, inversely, culture, like nature, may also be a varied, stuttering and stumbling, technically expressive and conjectural intimation of abiding truths of goodness, beauty and truth.

If there is no such genuine objectivity confirmed by transcendence, then education into virtue is not really possible. That is because individual spontaneity and external knowledge will remain estranged from each other, and there will be no way to induct an individual, as authentically *that* individual, into a living tradition that trusts its own faltering quest for the truth.

Ideas versus Ideals

But surely, what we are saying here could not possibly seem more irrelevant, mystical and obscurantist. Is one really to suppose that the possibility of education into virtue requires assent to something like belief in the Platonic forms? Of what use as criteria are 'ideas' whose full reality escapes us and in which we but dimly participate? But once again, insanity turns out, rather, to reside with the refusal of all such notions and not with their embrace. And 'Platonism', genuinely understood, is not a quirk, but the very basis of any possible philosophical refusal of sophistry. Without it, one has 'pre-Socratic' physicalism and liberalism (today drifting to outright nihilism) and not philosophy. In the issues raised by dialogues such as the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, the highest stakes of Western civilisation are raised and they are, perforce, still being played out.

For what has happened after we have abandoned any sense of archetypes, or ideas in the mind of God with which, in his purely unified 'simplicity', he is co-terminous? Instead of these ideas, we have mere 'ideals'. Unlike the unfathomable concretion of divine ideas, ideals are supposed to be fully comprehensible in their very abstraction. But, as such, they are often utopian and, therefore, irrelevant. For if one can locate *no* practical, mediating approximation to an idea, then, in reality, one has no understanding of that idea whatsoever, and one is doomed to a life of self-congratulating marginality. Sometimes, by contrast, as with French Jacobinism or the Chinese Cultural Revolution, attempts have been made directly to impose the abstractness of ideals in their very abstraction. Since, as Hegel realised, this is contradictory,

the result of the imposition of ideals is always terror: for the only way to incarnate an abstraction as an abstraction is by way of ceaseless subtraction of the determinate – a process also embarked upon at times for this false reason by modernist abstract and distortive art.²⁰ But subtraction in practice is violence and death.

It follows that an ideal is either pointless in its very knowability and, therefore, really *unknown*, or else it is so well known that it is really an ideal of destruction – as we earlier diagnosed to be the real driver of capitalism. The only ‘third way’ here would be the notion of an unknown concrete ideal in which we dimly participate by putting it into effect to a certain degree. But this is just the *rationale* for embracing Plato’s forms (or ‘ideas in the mind of God’ in later monotheist permutation) *rather than* modern ideals, as inculcated by our educational process. The entire argument is clinched once one recognises that without any ideas/ideals *whatsoever*, there could be no specifically human motivation, and, therefore, no existence of human culture.

Once more it should be emphasised here that such an assertion is not a retreat to the stars away from *techne*, but that it, rather, accounts for the ineradicable surplus of spiritual anticipation to its realisation in an artefact, even though the beginnings of artefaction are required for, and run in tandem with, such anticipation. The latter necessitates some recognition of a luring transcendent norm, in order to avoid the lapse of anticipation to mere will, which would deny its evident phenomenology. And if this anticipation manifests as our partial dissatisfaction with our own product, then this very dissatisfaction is suggested by the ‘incompletion’ of the product itself. Thus the product or *prosthesis* with which alone we think, act, calculate, remember a past we have not lived and much of our own past that we have forgotten, *itself also* anticipates and so, in Platonic terms, itself also recollects. As Nicholas of Cusa finally sees, if the eternal ‘form’ is a perfect idea or model, it must equally be the perfectly realised work of art.

One can therefore conclude that our natural desire to know the transcendent Good ensures that we can in some degree realise it, while guarding against any totalitarian notion that we have the precise formula for its implementation. Modern education, however, nihilistically teaches children either that there is no Good, or that only liberalism can ensure that the social contract will guard against the ‘tyranny of the Good’ and instil, instead, the ‘legitimacy of right’. In that case, liberal thinking claims that each and every child is a self-legislating god, or else liberal thinking terroristically suggests that it possesses the formula for its entirely perfect self-implementation here and now. Either way, it not only fails to educate into virtue, but also abundantly succeeds in the training of highly talented criminals, mostly skilled in the evasive exploitation of every human law and substitution for law by manipulable

economic contract. Increasingly, it is just these modern educational products that are now in charge.

4. BEYOND LIBERAL BOREDOM

By sundering education and politics from the quest for the transcendent Good, liberalism renders its serious side the inculcation of a spiritually leached technology (the processing of signs and experimental manipulation of matter). And it renders its more relaxed side of self-expression a prelude to the production of culture as mass entertainment, whose only serious validation lies in the making of money. Such reduction of culture to entertainment, in abandonment of any authentic 'cultivation' that must be rooted in history, requires the claim that the past was not at all entertaining, but rather boring (except sporadically for the elites) and that only modern, liberal progress has brightened up the lives of the many. In fact, it is one of the most basic tenets of liberal belief that most people were bored out of their minds for most of human history. Before there were cinemas, art exhibitions, concerts, cocktail bars, public gyms, internet sites and a variety of ethnic restaurants, there was basically nothing to do – except, of course, suffer pain, which was more or less continuous. Yet, obviously, boredom is relative: what you miss, you do not know, and if you have never seen a film, then you look forward to feast days and perhaps even sermons.

And much more decisively, variety and boredom stand in an ambiguous relationship. At first, variety reduces boredom, but in the long term, it can induce it, because it reduces the effort of response you have to make in the face of any experience. In fact, sustained attention to detail and creative use of what you are given is a far greater salve against boredom than the mere passive sampling of a large menu of consumer delights. Thus Charles Baudelaire already realised back in nineteenth-century Paris that rural melancholy was giving way to urban spleen,²¹ and today we know that lassitude and depression all too often strike precisely those who are offered a plenitude of possibilities.

For where less is offered, the more the power to be fascinated by small differences and unfolding depths is cultivated. The Count of Monte Cristo evaded boredom in his bare cell by gradually exploring all its hidden possibilities for communication, subterfuge and, ultimately, escape. For just this reason we have to ask whether pre-Enlightenment, pre-liberal peoples might even have been less bored than us, because greater monotony and confinement to one place incited more active attention – for example, to the changing seasons and the annual variations upon their changes. A paucity of resources led to greater imaginative involvement with the use of words, music, human

movement and ability to shape natural materials. Do Brueghel's peasants look more anomically languid than people in a snapshot of a contemporary cityscape?

Similar considerations apply to the supposed unending dirt and suffering of the 'horrible' past in which children are now so basely indoctrinated. For one thing, the low average life-spans of past times are misleading, since large numbers who survived a likely infant death often enjoyed a reasonable longevity. And not only were expected pains perhaps less acutely suffered than in our current culture, where all pain is regarded as an outrage, but they were also not, as yet, the things most feared, as Michel Foucault, Talal Asad and Ivan Illich have shown.²² Rather, a different social construction of value both ritualised physical suffering and feared far more the loss of honour, of human relationship, of landed connectedness and of one's immortal soul. Nowadays, even the 1950s is regarded by liberals as basically the tail end of this gothic epoch of tedium relieved only by torture. And some of those who are old enough claim actually to remember the escape they made from the evil citadel of the primordial past. However, they are currently challenged in books and in the blogosphere by the memories of others who look back upon this epoch with fond nostalgia as one of childhood liberty and robust embrace of risk and adventure, and of an adult life sometimes suffused with a kind of mellow rapture.²³

Of course, both sides are right, and it seems amazing that we are not able to recognise that history is inevitably a process of simultaneous loss and gain. On the one side, we can say that the comfort and variety of life has gradually improved (in large part quite simply to the eradication, at least for now, of epidemics) along with greater opportunities for women and a greater social tolerance in certain respects. It is possible to celebrate all that and yet to mourn the loss of less tangible realities, especially since the 1950s – indeed, the childhood freedom to roam and fantasise,²⁴ or the higher levels of civic engagement in religion and politics, as well as the much greater cultivation of hobbies and allotments.

Yet the materialism of social liberals in relation to this debate is surely disturbing, as it is in league with the materialism of financiers, which they might elsewhere denounce. For the increase in cushioned comfort has not accidentally coincided with an increase in economic inequality and social isolation. One may seek to unmask the hardships and tedium of the past, with its lack of showers, inside toilets and coal fires.²⁵ But how could these be absences if they were not felt as such at the time, and were in any case at least partially compensated for by family security, neighbourliness and a still surviving oral and folk creativity? Moreover, it is only a smugly metropolitan bourgeois perspective that can imagine that 'unending domestic drudgery' has vanished (for single-parent families, for instance?), along with bullying,

snobbery, poor education and bigotry – which generally mutate. And this is not to mention an increasing mass crisis of both physical and mental health, brought on in large part by dubious food, chemical pollutants and the loosening of social bonds of mutual nurture.

These debates about the past matter, because they slant the current perspectives of the liberal left and right. A revived scientism tricks the left into imagining that increased hygiene and anaesthetics (though for how long?) is a sign of ‘progress’ in general. The same goes for the variety of entertainment, largely a by-product of technological advance. But while these things should not be derogated, there is a real sense in which they are trivial, and either neutral or actually detrimental to participatory freedom, if they subordinate human action and interaction to automatic processes. As to the advent of freedom of choice and social mobility as championed by the right, we should be able to celebrate such things in principle, while also counting their unacceptable cost in the mode in which they have arrived (and to the extent that they really have) in terms of the loss of interpersonal solidarity along with sufficient economic reward and compensation for the performance of menial and sometimes dangerous, but necessary, tasks.

The debates about the past, thereby, tend to slant our sense of possibility in the present, because too often they present a supposedly necessary either/or, which precludes us from considering a possible both/and, often in the name of a freedom-denying superstition of ‘progress’ which announces that one cannot ever ‘step back in time’, as if history were not replete with examples of bending backwards and newly tuned repetitions of ancient themes. Examples include the gradual medieval recovery of a pre-pagan-imperial greater distribution of property and balanced ecology, or the Italian city-state reworking of the pagan *polis*, or today’s revival of global cities (as we will discuss in chapters 9 and 10).

If the respective costs have been counted, then in principle people may now more *freely choose and shape* the advantages of rootedness, tradition, conservation, faithful commitment and fascinated attention to the common and repeated as more likely to hold their long-term interest. In the United Kingdom, one can see this happening, for example in the case of ‘extreme cities’ in the West Country where aspects of economy retained within a specific area ensure greater re-circulation, and, so, reciprocity (for example, the introduction of the Bristol Pound), and anticipation of possible global disaster encourages greater community independence and participation in the present.

In the more specifically cultural dimension, one can note in Britain the strikingly increased attendance at cathedral and Oxbridge university college chapel worship, or in Italy and northern France a revival of educated youth involvement in Catholic thought and practice, besides globally, the number of young people who are members of charismatic movements and/or participate

in the annual World Youth Day. This by no means as yet clearly betokens a big religious revival, but there is much evidence that in Europe the mass decline of religion is somewhat balanced by its relative survival and even increase amongst the thoughtful and active middle classes.²⁶ This does suggest that many people are rediscovering that ritual is actually less monotonous than constant surprise and novelty. The same new mood is shown in the revived interest in nature writing and landscape painting, as manifest by the radiated faces emerging from the 2012 London Royal Academy exhibition of the work of David Hockney. For his revived qualities of craft and attention to hidden beauty have succeeded in making the ordinary (the Yorkshire Wolds) sublime and the sublime (the Yosemite) familiar, the small and intimate complete in itself, and yet only a part of an evermore awesome non-identical variation and irregular symmetry.

This makes up his 'bigger picture', which conjoins locality to the whole planet. And it is in both ritual and contemplative art that security and surprise can be integrated – a fact that perhaps provides a clue as to how we might try to shape loyally committed, and yet not tightly constraining, human communities in the future. Liberals ultimately sustain a dialectical movement between a diversity that is really more of the same on the one hand, and boredom with the ordinary, which is, in reality, full of depth and complexity, on the other. By contrast, post-liberals favour a culture that fosters creativity and the always novel search for perennial forms of beauty by combining traditioned high art with the equally traditioned popular. Since post-liberals reject the dualism between theory and practice, which ultimately arises from that between education and politics, they should seek to promote a culture that is at once subtly intellectual and practical, a fusing of art with craft and linked to every sort of daily, weekly, seasonal and religious ritual.

5. ETHOS AND EQUITY

As we have argued in chapter 6, the dimension of 'nurture, education and creative production through time', directed towards the discernment of the objectively good, is the precondition of democratic practice. However, as we have also seen, this cannot itself be democratically governed, given that we are all first born and are immature before we become adults through the directive (and sometimes necessarily coercive) nurturing of those who are already adults themselves. This 'educative' dimension of human 'natality' (as Hannah Arendt called it) remains inescapably hierarchic, though not statically, irreversibly or oppressively so.²⁷ And the same applies to any necessary dimension of guidance or governance where we must defer to greater wisdom or expertise – as in the case of medical doctors.

Ignoring this dimension has led to a catastrophic confusion of social equality with a levelling of talent and non-recognition of intellectual and moral excellence. To make this observation is to be the reverse of elitist. For just as mixed government really does favour *more* democracy, so, by virtue of a parallel paradox, recognising tangled hierarchy and a greater scope and power of influence for those who combine talent with virtue really does favour *greater* fulfilment of talent by the many.

It is the promotion of justifiable hierarchy that can ensure that an egalitarian politics, against the legacy of Babeuf, pursues an overall levelling up rather than a dumbing down. For justifiable hierarchy always requires the lead of examples to be followed – whether this be the learned physicist or the master-craftsman – if it is ever to become possible. Indeed, British socialism began as the aspiration to fulfil to the maximum the creative abilities of all, as with John Ruskin and William Morris.²⁸ But it has sunk to a resentful attempt to ensure that all will equally endure the same awfulness to the end of time. Robert Tressall, who regarded workers content to surrender their skills in return for ease as the greatest enemies of socialism, must surely be turning in his hand-crafted coffin.²⁹

The emphasis on dynamic hierarchy and ethos is closely connected with the idea of personal representation that implies a strong fluidity between the political and the educative, since both are embedded in the social. Rather than imposing centralised control, a more ‘personalised’ government would grant under licence the performance of public functions to bodies of persons or to collective persons, which are corporations. Examples are the universities (now, alas, often but in theory!) or the BBC, both of whose independence and yet public-spiritedness should today be strenuously upheld and extended elsewhere (via more regional and local outlets). Conversely, it is possible from this perspective to understand how ‘self-appointed’ educators and others are, nevertheless, carrying out ‘political’ functions to the benefit of the entire polity and even the state itself.³⁰

AQ: Please check the change in title to ‘Reforming Formation’

6. REFORMING FORMATION

In the wake of liberalism’s ascendancy and triumph, instrumental and utilitarian justifications have come to dominate all others in defining the purpose of education in the West. Now the worth of education is largely seen in terms of the economic value of qualifications – the lifetime income as the main measure of why schools and universities matter. Even as the presence of specifically craft-based vocational training has disappeared in so many parts of Europe and the United States, all schooling has subtly been assimilated to this paradigmatically capitalist model of producing able actors in the economy, not virtuous citizens – never mind virtuous leaders.³¹

In consequence, schools are now set up to create marketable skills dictated by the desires of employers, in contrast to those traits that are good to possess not simply as an employee, but as a human being and a member of a family, community and nation. And, of course, it is all too plausible that capitalism is evermore able to operate without even the minimum of virtue. But the more it does so, the more it tends to mutate into a mode of semi-criminal oligarchic politico-economic control of a de-spiritualised populace. The question is whether we are ready to accept such a dire transformation.

The more education is defined in merely functional and skill-set terms, to the neglect of excellence, the more it produces students who are unmotivated, unambitious and cognitively disorientated. Such people are unlikely to make any dynamic economic impact and, therefore, the whole approach would seem, at least on the face of it, to be self-defeating even in its own terms. Indeed, a number of Western economies suffer from a chronic lack of productivity growth precisely because there is such a shortage of innovation and a total under-use of the creativity that certainly does exist (as evinced, for example, in Britain's arts, design and other innovatory sectors). To this degree, Bernard Stiegler is right: a capitalism without spirit is less productive,³² but as we have contended, it may be that capitalism is less a system of production than of destruction and control through the suspended threat of further dissolution.

Thus, viewed more cynically, it could be that many of our current masters are quite happy for most people in the United Kingdom (as elsewhere) to be reduced to the status of an amenable and proletarianised middle and lower-to-middle-grade professional class. For this serves the purposes of an increasingly finance-dominated capitalised elite, who think of the role of the United Kingdom, in subservience to that of the United States, as largely the provision of financial services. That is combined with the random performance of some of the more subordinate business and manufacturing processes of international corporate conglomerates (increasingly based in the United States and in China) by the rest of the population. The question, once more, is this: do we really want to acquiesce in this evolution of Western (especially Anglo-Saxon) capitalism?

This same approach has achieved, as earlier stated, an extraordinary combination of the worst aspects of traditional education with the worst aspects of a progressive approach. Thus, whereas many continental European children still wear locally produced clothes and learn Latin and Greek, Anglo-Saxon children are dressed up in sometimes comic uniforms and yet learn little of their own cultural legacy. Increasingly, little knowledge or culture is imparted and, yet, creativity is not encouraged either, and tedious routines of periods, homework, examinations, note-taking and rote learning are still adhered to. Neither the right nor the left is able to make the proper diagnosis here, as they

AQ: Interrogative sentences following a colon are to be capitalised. Please confirm if such instances are to be lowercased throughout.

are only concerned with instrumental value or various forms of equality (of opportunity or outcome). Meanwhile, in a desperate search for the improvement of standards, we have also landed up with a combination of continued state control with a kind of multi-track anarchy. Thus, even private schools are constrained by a dubious national curriculum and, arguably, only a very few highly elite schools achieve genuine independence. On the other hand, the current British mix of local authority schools, independent academies and fee-paying institutions is highly confusing, dysfunctional and incoherent. Increasingly this incoherence is only resolved, as is likely intended, by the control of schools by business interests who will subordinate education to profit and ensure that all that is taught is the ability to make money, in terms of technical expertise and habits of conformism.

To restore and extend, by contrast, the dimension of guidance in virtue, one can suggest the following transformative ideas in the realm of education, with the United Kingdom in mind, but an obvious relevance everywhere:

- A. Encouraging apprenticeships in every field and strengthening vocational training in primary, secondary and tertiary education; this includes substituting apprenticeships for part-time jobbing as an alternative to unemployment (with a guaranteed tax break for business if apprentices are hired for a certain substantial period of time).
- B. Restoring the older technical colleges, but enhancing their prestige as vocational higher-education institutions (in Britain, this includes a number of polytechnics for engineers that reflect local traditions, for example marine conservation in Newcastle and Hanseatic trading in King's Lynn).
- C. Reducing the number of universities to those that can viably offer an inclusive curriculum in the sciences or the humanities or both, accordingly ending the respectively inhibiting confusion between training in skills in the case of polytechnics, and training in theoretical reflection in the case of universities. This is by no means intended to deny a crucial communication between these two, but only to deny a disallowing of their distinction that prevents either good practice or discerning theory to emerge at all.
- D. Bringing together re-distinguished universities and technical colleges in regional associations – with links to the extended work of guildhalls (see chapters 4 and 6); such an arrangement would also help to ensure that polytechnics can take over all training in medicine and law and that no 'class-divide' is intended here between them and universities.
- E. Restoring the self-government of universities and abolishing all centrally imposed external assessment exercises, including time- and resource-wasting practices such as external examination in favour of peer-assessment as part of an academic guild. They are once more to be treated like

independent public corporations, funded by a combination of charitable endowment and state grant. The restoration of student grants (perhaps by a combination of government, educational and charitable agencies) may have much to recommend it, as currently loans are contributing significantly to the economy of debt.

- F. Re-instating block grants to the humanities as well as to the social sciences, in order to protect education into truth and curricular diversity, which are otherwise at the mercy of student take-up, upon which the central provision and funding of the humanities and social sciences now depends.
- G. Positioning collaborating universities and technical colleges in ultimate guiding charge of all schools for children of all ages according to region. This principle alone ensures that the ancient circle between education and politics is not broken by the ultimate dominating role of the political, as is inevitable if, as now, in most countries, a rupture is imposed on the flow from lower to higher education – a rupture mediated by government, which then becomes the single source of the now divided lower and higher educational streams. If the integrity of the flow is restored, then education can again become an autonomous circle – located from one perspective within the wider circle of political autonomy, which from another is itself located within the wider circle of the educative. This arrangement can also help to facilitate the temporary use of university students as school teachers.
- H. Learning for once good rather than bad things from North America by postponing specialisation, retaining some study of both science and humanities for all undergraduates; making all undergraduate degrees four years in duration (or perhaps, more realistically, making the BA and MA degrees one longer programme at the point of entry); encouraging more all-round humanities programmes that mainly involve the reading of important historical texts in their wider historical context. Nevertheless, the British doctorate by dissertation only should be retained and North America should, inversely, be encouraged to adopt the British PhD system, as their current one (involving years of mind-numbingly conformist ‘course-work’ that is unnecessary after an excellently diverse and rigorous system of high school – in the best instances – and undergraduate training) disastrously kills the creativity of young people and encourages the production of theses, books and even taught courses that are mere critical collages, often designed to appease several ideological factions at once. In short, we urgently need a new Anglo-Saxon pedagogic synthesis across the Atlantic.
- I. Placing all schools under the quadripartite control of teachers, parents, the local community and governors, mediated by cooperatively conceived local educational associations.

- J. Turning all schools, if possible, into ‘village colleges’ on the Cambridgeshire model inaugurated in the 1930s, offering all-age education, training and through-life learning. Ways should be found to make access to this and endless ‘second chances’ always possible for everyone linked to a reciprocal duty of return. There could, indeed, be a ‘national educational service’, though the providers of this and the modes of provision might be highly diverse.
- K. Abolishing all national curricula except for the very broadest national guidelines, while enhancing the pay and professional status of teachers in order to attract people of much higher calibre than at present.
- L. Further encouraging faith-based and military-linked educational institutions at every level, since they tend to promote the formation of character and resilience.³³
- M. Promoting cross-fertilisation between the private and the public sector and, following the best examples of the former, re-infusing into the latter a sense of integration of learning (often around a religious vision that is offered to children for consideration), social responsibility and personal discipline. It should be demanded that private schools revert to the intentions of their charitable foundations, or else such intentions should now be required. This means, perhaps, that they should take half their pupils on the basis of merit alone – given free places funded either by school bursarships or by local authority (building on the model of the old British ‘direct grant schools’).
- N. Breaking with the current hotchpotch in Britain of state, free and academy schools (the latter two’s successes being much exaggerated) and, instead, trying mainly to ensure that there is one good school in every area, at every age-level and of every type, funded in various mixtures by the local authority and charitable sources. Neighbouring schools should be cooperatively linked together and the role of Local Education Authorities should be in some fashion restored, though in a more participatory and cooperative guise and under the ultimate guidance of Higher Education Institutions. These links are crucial in part to ensure the pooling of different specialisations in different institutions. The direct control of isolated schools by central government and the gradual selling of all educational bodies to the profit-based sector should be discontinued.
- O. Beginning educational divergence not at age 11 but at around age 15, and not as yet between arts and sciences but between the academic and the technical. Despite the considerable success of grammar schools in the past in the United Kingdom with respect to social mobility and ensuring experience of ordinary life in the higher echelons, selection at age 11 is too early, too socially discriminating, too damaging of individuals and too prone to dismissal of potential talent. Instead, not so much selection but,

rather, preferential option should begin around age 14–16 with alternative divergence into technical and academic streams. This could sometimes be reflected into transference into different types of school.

- P. Ending the current misuse of digital technology, especially in universities, to destroy the autonomy of teachers and the creativity of students. Currently, we are subject to a top-heavy model in which a preponderance of technical provision and of administrators tends ‘poisonously’ to reduce teachers and researchers to proletarianised sub-administrators and routinised functionaries of machinic processes. The reverse path, which should be taken, is to deploy other ‘curative’ potentials of information and audio-visual technologies to encourage, instead, a ‘light’ model in which digitalised *prostheses* enable more academics (who need to be freed from the bureaucratic diktat by administrators and senior managers) to greatly extend their teaching reach across distances and through time, in a more interactive process with students, which would enable them to learn faster and imbibe from the outset a specific creative idiom. Book and library use would be much more encouraged than it is today (since the physical traces of pre-digital writing tell us rather more than a digital reduction, besides lending to significant writings a certain symbolic weight). But it has become easier today to use dispersed libraries while retaining interpersonal pedagogic connections. In this way, the subordination of many people to single machinic complexes would be reversed as the subordination of many machines (by simple virtue of the always astonishingly available internet) to a few people. Thereby, depersonalisation by computer would also be reversed as re-personalisation of the educational process through the computer. In a parallel fashion (as Stiegler recommends), television and video should cease to be a means by which instruction is contaminated by entertainment and, instead, become a means by which, from multiple servers and sources, entertainment becomes more infused by formation and interactive instruction.
- Q. Inverting the invasion of the university, college and school by the internet as the colonisation of the internet by educational processes. Currently, as we saw in the previous chapter, apparently free and spontaneous internet interaction is really spun into both formal and substantive conformity by subtle manipulators. As against this, one needs, indeed, genuinely free and democratic interaction. Yet things are really not so simple and are actually far more dialectical. For it is just this anarchy of interaction that invites both dominance and also private stalking and bullying, besides the pervasive presence of unsupported and arbitrary reports and views, which tend evermore to unsupported accusations of scandal at every level of society. Thus free interaction cannot really dispense with the factor of guarantee and authorisation as provided by universities and publishing

houses – whose possible corruption is balanced by multiplicity and competition. It is certainly striking that Wikipedia works without any such authorisation – yet Wikipedia is confined, as an encyclopaedia, to a certain thin and nude ‘objectivity’, which is very useful, but precisely because it is limited. Any more detailed and controversial presentation of fact, cause, argument or opinion, rather requires one to know, first, from what source, and with what inevitable bias this derives, and, second, whether this source has a reputation for reliability, for initially (in a sort of social version of the *Meno*) we are all reliant upon repute. Thus both universities and publishers need to establish a greater ‘authorising’ internet presence, as also do religious organisations. Inversely, authorising sites that have sprung up on the internet themselves need ideally to extend their activity into print publishing and the holding of non-virtual encounters. For already we are discovering that the speed and reach of the internet in connecting persons at a distance needs to be balanced and fulfilled by actual individual and group encounters. Hence the rising popularity of the festival, live debate, concert and theatre.

- R. Encouraging the appropriate use of older and simpler technologies. For the curative and creative use of the latest technologies can only be sustained if the older ones are not abandoned. This truth also applies to the domain of economic practice. This is, first, because the non-debilitating deployment of computers requires that, as far as possible, users imbibe some genetic sense of the automatic as having been gradually arrived at by a series of intentional and hands-on actions. They will be better used and understood if, for example, children have been introduced to the histories and concrete models of the abacus, Napier’s Bones, slide-rules and so on from primary school onwards, besides the beginnings of geometry in Egyptian land-surveying and so forth. In this way, as Edmund Husserl implied, authentic usage of any *mathesis* should repeat the process of its generation.³⁴ Second, simpler technologies are not simply cruder than later ones, but, instead, usually have a greater scope and indeterminate capacity by virtue of their simplicity – like the cup, ring, pencil, stick, knife, wheel and bicycle. For this reason, and by virtue of their relative lack of automation and coded memory (although they were originally co-generative, along with the operation of the human mind of the most *basic and widespread* recollections), they remain the crucial allies of human reason and creativity. This is true even in terms of the manufacture and improvement of complex machines (and especially the best ones) from cars to televisions to software programmes. It is also the case that more advanced technology is not always the most appropriate or the most sophisticated, economic and sustainable in certain circumstances – as, for example, often in the case of agriculture where excessively extreme

interventions tend to have uncontrollable and ecologically deleterious effects. The stick and wheel still guide us sometimes, rationally and not nostalgically, to select them as opposed to the machine or engine. Therefore, it is crucial that students of all ages still be taught variously to draw, to hand-write, to paint, to knit, to sew, to weave, to make pots, to dance, to ride horses, to row and sail boats and to climb mountains.

7. ENHANCING THE ROLE OF FAITH SCHOOLS

Within this multiple scenario, an important role would exist for faith schools. However, it is not simply a matter of defending this role, but, rather, of considering ways in which they might transform our entire approach to schooling. This could be done in the following ways:

- I. Faith schools should enter into cooperative partnerships with each other and with other schools, both private and state. This is in order to maintain school independence and, yet, to compensate, for reasons given in N above, for the defects of isolation.
- II. Like all schools, they should be free of any but the very broadest national curricular requirements and government micro-management.
- III. Instead, they should aim to appoint teachers of higher calibre. This might be achieved through (a) working with faith-based teacher training institutions; (b) paying higher salaries and (c) providing better working conditions, including reduced teaching hours and time for research, as in Germany, Scandinavia and France.
- IV. Faith schools should be cooperatives run by teachers, parents, the local community, and a governing board that remains largely under independent control (not at the mercy of central government politicians, bureaucrats and regulators).
- V. Faith schools need to set an example by aiming to provide a combination of conservative and progressive child-centred learning. Hence, they should aim to increase the standards in science and mathematics and languages, as well as impart real historical (local, national, European, global), geographical and political knowledge. On the other hand, they should consider dispensing with the 'period' model and teach in longer time blocks with more time for private study. The volume of homework should be reduced in order to provide more time for private reading and out-of-school or extra-curricular activity, as seen to lead to much higher levels of academic success in Scandinavia and, especially, Finland. Time must be used more productively, as it is often at the best private schools. Most assessment should be continuous and done by the single teacher,

as done very successfully in the United States and with little consequent corruption. Public examinations should have a more limited, checking role. The current procedures manifestly do not favour many intelligent young people, especially boys. In general, we need to appoint and then trust the right people at all levels of education, instead of appointing mediocrities and then subjecting them to all sorts of formalistic checks, which they deserve, but genuinely able and dedicated teachers do not.

- VI. A good ethos should be in part instilled through the central place of philosophy and religious studies in the curriculum – aiming to bring all the different disciplines together and allowing children to start to develop a coherent worldview and avoid the psychic confusion and damage that may well result from the current system of unrelated courses. In every subject area, ethical questions should be raised. The school life should be related to the liturgical calendar of different faiths and there should be regular acts of worship. Sports and cadet corps should once again be deployed in order to build character and team spirit, while ensuring much more than in the past that the diverse and different levels of physical capacity of all children is developed without humiliation – which may well mean little or no involvement in team sports for some. At the same time, efforts should be made to develop to the most the physical abilities and well-being of all. Art, music and drama need to be seen as much more than marginal. Creative writing should continue to be part of the English curriculum at secondary school and beyond and not just at the primary level. Once more, note the combination here of ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’ notes – the example of the better public schools suggests that this combination is both what works and what is inherently valid.
- VII. Faith schools/adult education centres should seek strong links with local universities. As already stated in G, this could lead to a greater use of graduates as temporary teachers and also encourage a move towards normative attendance at local universities rather than going away from home. The assumption of the latter is highly detrimental to local loyalty and the local economy, as a continental comparison might suggest. It is also perhaps much more psychologically damaging for many young people than we realise: in the current economic climate, they are effectively cast adrift at 19 from family, friends and community, just when they most need their support.

8. AGAINST SECULAR BARBARISM

Today, what the West’s politics and education need in cultural terms is a revival of the archaically Western vision in a new form. As T.S. Eliot wrote

in *Little Gidding* (1942), 'It is not to ring the bell backward. Nor is it an incantation. To summon the spectre of a Rose. We cannot revive old policies. Or follow an antique drum'. So to call for a revival does not mean restoring unjustifiable hierarchies and inequalities that the Enlightenment and liberalism rightly swept away. After all, Christianity had already democratised Platonism with its God who reached down to be born in a manger and its more open yet more extreme, ever-to-be repeated mysteries of water, bread and wine as the now more accessible and yet more necessary modes of triggering recollection of the eternally good. The higher wisdom had, thereby, become entirely united with just that ordinary and yet unfathomable love or reciprocity known to all human cultures. Equally, Christianity had democratised virtue by making it consist primarily in 'supernatural' faith, hope and charity, which involve less 'moral luck' than what Augustine called the 'glittering vices' of the pagans, able to be exercised fully only by the high-born and economically fortunate. In the course of the nineteenth century, various socialisms, cooperative movements and, finally, Catholic and much Anglican social teaching started to realise these more egalitarian implications of Christianity, not in the name of the liberal left, but precisely in criticism of its egoistic pessimism.

It is hard to see how we can sustain the genuine Western legacy unless we revive, more democratically, its archaic idiom. This is required to uphold the absolutely incomparable value of both the person and of relational reciprocity in free association. We need both the mysticism of the individual soul and the spiritual and liturgical community of souls, in whatever sense. For our true human equality resides in the upper register of the shared psychic and not in the lower register of matter, which is the realm only of the unconscious and occultly striving or desiring, and so not of the communal. Whenever equality has tried to speak in the name of our lowest shared attribute, a fantasised and grim purpose has been ideologically attributed to the innocent simplicity of matter – whether of racial preference, class preference or economic growth for the sake of it. The option of 'disenchanted immanence' has failed us dismally.

Instead, a more democratised version of 'enchanted transcendence' sees all worldly realities, including cultural ones, as symbolising something higher and hidden. For this perspective respects nature as mysteriously outside the human, as well as the higher place of many degrees of flora and fauna, with humanity at the top, within that nature itself. Allowing that our psychic culture belongs to nature allows us, therefore, to develop a humanistic ecology that still avoids a triumphalism about the human ability to control the natural world, as the early Anglican ecologist and political distributist H.J. Massingham and, more recently, Pope Francis have argued.³⁵ This perspective is, therefore, preferable to certain Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment notions of man as the

measure of all things and of human beings encouraged (like their omnipotent maker) to dominate nature, even though they cannot be trusted to relate to each other but must, rather, submit to a mechanised version of divine providence (whose workings reflect Newtonian physics, like Adam Smith's 'hidden hand'). Such 'disenchanted transcendence' is to be rejected. Yet an enchanted transcendence is also to be preferred to notions of 'enchanted immanence' or pantheistic conceptions of the universe. While they rightly preserve the mysteriousness of nature and favour poetic contemplation of its workings over attempts to deduce causal mechanisms, they deny the discernment of personal forces behind nature and, so, the sanctity of our own interpersonal life.

Yet it is, rather, the 'disenchanted immanence' of an eventually secularised liberalism that has now captured our culture. In consequence, sheerly impersonal and devitalised social forces have started to undermine the interpersonal relationships and mutual flourishing on which vibrant cultures depend. Behind the functionalist formation that serves utilitarian purposes of utility maximisation lurks a nihilism that believes in nothing except the power of an impersonal natural flux that somehow (it is never really explained) combines randomness with efficient mechanism. We, accordingly, require a new and dynamic re-induction into virtue in order to save humanity from the post-humanist nightmare of bio-robotic rule and help to restore the cultural primacy of the living, yet always technically supplemented and, thereby, rational human person.

NOTES

1. René Descartes, 'Discourse on the Method', in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), II:12, 116–17.

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4. A relational personalism without this sense – a philosophy of 'I and Thou' without a balancing sense of corporate personality, as in the case of 'the body of Christ' – degenerates into an inverted 'egoism of the other', as with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, that remains within a liberal paradigm. It also envisages an impossible earthly community of spirits alone, without the mediation of connecting material objects and organically surrounding (if modifiable) environment. The Russian 'sophiological' tradition held this balance best of all.

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15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'First Discourse', in *The First and Second Discourses*, 58–64.

16. Phillip Blond, *Red Tory: How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 127–38, 185–200.

17. These human reasons alone render natural science initially approachable for the seriously inquiring student, or allow a real philosophical assessment of both its legitimacy and its limitations.

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19. Pickstock, *After Writing*, 3–46.

20. Paul Virilio, *Art and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2006).

21. Charles Baudelaire *Le spleen de Paris* (Paris: Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1945).

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Part V
WORLD

Chapter 9

The Metacrisis of the Nations

1. THE BATTLE AGAINST BARBARISM

We live in more than troubling times. Barely twenty-five years ago, the triumph of capitalism betokened for some the convergence towards Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, while others predicted a clash of civilisations pitting the West *versus* the rest. In reality, neither scenario has come to pass. Instead, we are witnessing a sustained attack on civilisation by a variety of barbarian forces within and across different countries and cultures: religious fundamentalism and the ‘global war against terror’; the rise of old empires and new elites who combine bureaucratic capitalism with authoritarian plutocracy in a neo-liberal-communistic hybrid, as in China; the resurgence of virulent nationalism in parts of Russia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere; the power of a global financial oligarchy; the criminalisation of government worldwide and everywhere the bending of the rule of law to serve corporate interests.

Barbarism is most strikingly apparent in the case of the Islamic State and similar forces of mainly Sunni (but also sometimes Shi’ite) Islamic extremism that torture, rape and slaughter men, women and children with impunity across Iraq and Syria, while perpetrating mass terrorist attacks against civilians elsewhere. Stopping ISIS and their like is a battle against barbarism and for civilisation: for ancient ways of life, ancestral homeland, millennia-old traditions and different faith communities, including Shi’ite minorities, Oriental Christians and the Yazidi, as well as for the basic freedoms of societies across the West and beyond.

This exigency does not gainsay the truth that Western foreign policy since the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement has contributed to the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, notably the legacy of artificially dividing ancient

civilisations, overthrowing established regimes and establishing client states, and valuing oil more than security and peace.¹ What is even worse is the West and now apparently Israel's continued support for Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Turkey that fund and supply weapons not just to so-called 'moderate' rebels in Syria but also to the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat-al-Nusra and Salafist groups, which morphed into ISIS.²

However, ISIS is not simply a creature of the West's failed foreign policy or of the clash of civilisations that Huntington prophesied. Instead, it is largely the product of the long-standing sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni powers that is now escalating and spreading all the way from North Africa via the Middle East and the Hindu Kush to Central and East Asia. This arc of instability is spilling over in the forms of massive population displacement and of terrorism that are driven by a poisonous creed of jihadist Islamism, which – as the Muslim scholar Ziauddin Sardar remarked following the 7/7 attacks in London – 'can be traced right back to the formative phase of Islam'.³ Like Al-Qaeda, ISIS is inspired by the example of the Kharijites (or 'Assassins'), a seventh-century sect that emerged shortly after the death of Mohammed to wage total war not just on infidels but also on all those they considered to be Muslim apostates.⁴ More generally, it has drawn on the study of mainline Muslim tactics, which in part permitted their astonishing original and rapid territorial expansion of engendering a scorched earth and popular fear and impoverishment that can serve to legitimate Islam as the one source of order.⁵ Abul Ala Maududi, Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, the fathers of modern Islamism, drew on the writings of Ibn-Taymyyah and Muhammad Ibn'Abd al-Wahhab (the founder of the Wahhabi movement) to reclaim both the narrower and the wider legacy to develop a new theology of jihad that has influenced the current generation of Islamic leaders – including Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.⁶

Linking them all together is a puritanical and apocalyptic vision of a revolutionary vanguard Islam that invokes the military prowess of Mohammed and his companions (somewhat fused with a Western-derived fascist understanding of will to power) in its quest to annihilate apostates and unbelievers.⁷ An extreme theological voluntarism,⁸ refusing sacramental and traditional mediation, prevents any allowance that human reason, custom and example – alongside more pluralised and repeated sacral events (the testimony of Muslim saints, besides that of Mohammed) – can help conduct believers to unity with the divine. Confined, instead, to literal Qur'anic injunctions, Islamists aim to weaken the will of infidels and insist on the collective responsibility (*fard al-kifayah*) of true Muslims to conduct wars of conquest and subjugate all non-Muslim monotheists to absolute dominance while annihilating all polytheists and idolaters. Secular non-believers are subsumed into the latter category and only in non-military circumstances are they even to be granted

AQ: Please note that 'will to power' has been made consistent.

the chance to convert. One sign of ISIS's temporal syncretism here is the way in which it evidently assumes (beyond any Qur'anic injunction, if not necessarily all ancient precedent) the modern notion of total war in treating all non-Muslim citizens as combatants and, therefore, legitimate targets. Meanwhile, lovers of the pleasures that the extremists do not favour (such as rock music and dance) are necessarily apostates to their own monotheistic faiths, in the individual cases where these are still embraced.

For this extremist outlook, all modern states are illegitimate and need to be absorbed into a global *Ummah*⁹ – ruled by a religiously sanctioned leader (*amir*) such as the self-declared caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In his first public pronouncement in 2014, he promised to conquer Rome, raise the flag of the Islamic State over the Vatican and defeat 'crusaders' across the globe. Today, the fall-out from capitalist globalisation and the collapse of state structures in Syria, Iraq and Libya are creating the conditions for the expansion of the new caliphate originally planned by Al-Qaeda and now executed by ISIS.¹⁰

Even a few years ago, this project looked to most people in the West simply insane – albeit very dangerously so, for many and for some time to come. But now one can start to wonder whether it does chime all too well with globalisation and the current weakening of the power of the nation-state, besides the natural unease of the Islamic sense of *Ummah* with this concept, together with that of popular sovereignty and individual liberty.¹¹ Moreover, the Caliphate project has been variously mulled over in the Near East ever since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and is construed (in keeping with Islamic history) as one for the very long term, in such a fashion as to strategically allow long pauses in the struggle when immediate gains seem unrealistic.¹² Despite the symbolic boast about Rome, it may be focused in the first place upon reclaiming Saudi Arabia and Jordan, gradually re-taking Andalusia and the Balkans, destabilising France and Belgium (which has the most volatile Muslim enclaves), and, eventually, defeating Israel and capturing Jerusalem.¹³ Even if ISIS is currently in retreat in the Near East (though not elsewhere), it is quite possible that it can regroup there and likely that successor extremist projects will arise in the future.

2. LIBERAL HEGEMONY

Thus the rise of ISIS can be seen as a new culmination of a profound transformation in international affairs that belies the 'democratic peace' theory beloved of liberals – the claim that the spread of sovereign states and democracy entails a civilising process and that 'the better angels of our nature' will prevail over the worst human instincts of selfishness, greed, mutual distrust

and violence.¹⁴ Instead, the post-Cold War era has seen the revival of old ideological forces of ethno-nationalism, far-right and far-left populism as well as the resurgence of holy war, which could ultimately prove to be as threatening to liberal hegemony as fascism and communism once were.¹⁵

Nor is liberal hegemony simply threatened by external forces. It is unravelling because the logic of liberalism tends to its own undoing, as we have argued in earlier chapters. In the case of international relations, the paradox is that the liberal order, which began as an anti-colonial project designed to replace the old imperial order after 1919, morphed into a new imperialism led by the United States. From Wilsonian idealism to the neo-conservative vision for a New American Century, the United States has always denied that it is in the business of building an empire – arguing, instead, that independent America came into existence precisely to throw off the shackles of British colonial rule and to fight imperialism everywhere. But since Wilson, the United States has sought to make the world ‘safe for democracy’ and to make national self-determination

the prime test of state legitimacy, rather than dynastic inheritance or imperial rule. Here indeed was a ‘seismic shift’ in European history. Yet the principle of nationalism was an artificial construct, almost an anthropomorphic fantasy. Consider some of its cognate terms – national *consciousness*, national *will*, *self-determination*: in each case the nation is treated as analogous to an individual human being. ... In short, [the aim of the US is] to recast the world in America’s self-image.¹⁶

Thus US hegemony views national states as liberal egos writ large. This conception rests on liberal norms of individualism and voluntarism that are deeply rooted in American political life and have been exported by successive administrations, which promote national ends by imperial means. Historian Niall Ferguson observes that ‘the United States is the empire that dare not speak its name. It is an empire in denial, and US denial of this poses a real danger to the world. An empire that doesn’t recognise its own power is a dangerous one’.¹⁷ With around 750 military bases in three-quarters of the countries of the world and 30 per cent of total global wealth, US power now exceeds that of the British Empire at any point in time. If one adds to this America’s allies (especially the European Union and Japan), Western hegemony looks unassailable.

Moreover, the liberal order appears to endure even at a time when US leadership is weakening and Western authority is in crisis. Although we are seeing the rise of both old and new ‘great powers’, and the return to a multipolar system as well as multiple pathways to modernity, no grand alternative to hegemonic liberalism seems to exist: the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India,

China and South Africa) have all adopted capitalist models that depend on access to world markets for growth and development. Neither they nor any other countries have created blocs, exclusive spheres of influence or closed geopolitical systems that could rival – never mind replace – the open, rules-based system organised around national state sovereignty and transnational institutional cooperation.¹⁸ While some power and authority might shift from the liberal West to the authoritarian East, liberal hegemony looks set to last for three reasons: first, the United States is one of the most powerful countries with a young population and a growing power to innovate, especially in robotics; second, the Transatlantic alliance remains the only global military structure; third, so far China is neither able nor willing to take over the world, and the ‘rising rest’ want to integrate rather than overthrow the Western liberal order.¹⁹ This order rests on the 1941 Atlantic Charter and the US-dominated institutions of the post-1945 system (NATO, Bretton Woods, GATT/WTO), which gave the United States special rights and privileges in exchange for providing a security umbrella for its allies in Europe and Asia. It created an ‘international society’ of sovereign states that is more than an unstable balance of power (*contra* realism) but less than a unified ‘world order’ (*contra* cosmopolitanism), to use Hedley Bull’s terminology.²⁰

3. THE METACRISIS OF THE LIBERAL

ORDER Subverting Western Civilisation

Yet one can equally suggest that the West’s hegemonic power is weakening precisely because its underlying liberalism has progressively eroded the very foundations of Western civilisation. Part of the liberal appeal was the promise of progress, but liberalism unleashed the forces of science and technology while divorcing modernisation from the pursuit of substantive shared ends. In this manner, liberal ideology became increasingly associated with subjugating both nature and society to individual volition and with releasing the collective ‘will to power’. A few prophetic voices warned against such voluntarism and the subversion of virtues. Fyodor Dostoevsky in *The Devils* and Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent* anatomised the secular extremists who embraced nineteenth-century positivism and nihilism in pursuit of a revolutionary vanguard whose origins go back to the Jacobins, the first exemplary inflictors of modern ‘terror’.²¹ And they also saw that this apparently shocking minority is, in reality, symptomatic of a wider terroristic tendency. Dostoevsky’s dictum that ‘without God, everything is permitted’ rightly indicated that ethics would be increasingly subordinated to politics, and politics to the iron law of power – the sheer strength of individual self-assertion and

collective mobilisation, exemplified by mass conscription and total war since the French Revolution, Bonaparte and Bismarck.²²

As the Catholic meta-historian Christopher Dawson argued in 1942, it is surely no coincidence that in the run-up to the two world wars, Western civilisation ‘suffered such a total subversion of its own standards and values while its material power and wealth remained almost intact, and in many respects greater than ever’.²³ Unlike ancient despotism that had deployed brutal physical coercion, the positivist and nihilist ideas that many nineteenth-century liberals celebrated used the resources of modern psychology and mass propaganda to enlist both body and soul. The new liberal creed of progress, equality and emancipation displaced Greco-Roman and Christian values of the dignity of the person and the freedom of association around shared substantive objectives, which – as Nietzsche himself remarked – ‘prevented man from despising himself as man, from turning against life, and from being driven to despair by knowledge’.²⁴ Thus the ambivalence of liberalism lies in the tendency to release human energy and foster individual freedoms while at the same time failing to guide the forces it unleashes on an international as well as national scale.

Instead of the culturally amalgamated organic society of nations, which once composed ‘Christendom’, liberalism has supported an artificial state system wherein membership is defined exclusively in terms of central sovereign power without any reference to the national character of the societies in question. When in 1918 Woodrow Wilson elevated the ‘self-determination of people’ into an absolute principle (which still governs the inter-state system to this day), he did not so much defend popular sovereignty or the consent of the governed for all the nations. Rather, he encouraged the process of empire-breaking and state-building that inaugurated liberal hegemony and led to new wars. Wilson also called for the creation of an international organisation – the League of Nations – based on the equal rights of each participant member. This, as Dawson noticed, amounted to the recognition of every *de facto* state as a *de iure* nation (or identifiable ‘people’) and treated a multiplicity of incommensurable political systems all alike – as though they were individuals writ large who are endowed with equal rights and a common nature.

Over time, according to Dawson, the liberal destruction of the medieval society of nations in favour of an inter-state system left peoples and societies exposed to two competing, yet mutually empowering, forces:

The modern world is being driven along at the same time in two opposite directions. On the one hand the nations are being brought into closer contact by the advance of scientific and technical achievement; the limits of space and time that held them asunder are being contracted or abolished, and the world

has become physically one as never before. On the other hand, the nations are being separated from one another by a process of intensive organization which weakens the spiritual links that bound men together irrespective of political frontiers and concentrates the whole energy of society on the attainment of a collective purpose, so as inevitably to cause a collision with the collective will of other societies. ... What makes the danger of war so great today is ... the death-grapple of huge impersonal mass Powers [*sic*] which have ground out the whole life of the whole population in the wheels of their social mechanism.²⁵

The International Metacrisis

The simultaneous interdependence of national societies and the sundering of social, cultural and religious ties that bind together people within and across state borders suggest that liberal hegemony faces a metacrisis. This is in contrast to a mere systemic crisis, which would be to do with external threats to the inter-state system (say from a rogue, revisionist state), or the internal failure to secure a proper balance of power between sovereign states with rival interests. For, instead, as we have seen, it is the founding liberal assumptions for international order that are eventually being shaken through their own operation. Alongside the revival of political Islam, this is the real reason for the growing anarchy in international affairs.

This profound cultural malaise has affected the West's ability to shape the contemporary world. US military might and European economic expansion can scarcely hide the absence of any substantive accord among Western powers. As America shifts its geostrategic focus away from the Euro-Atlantic region, the West seems increasingly split between European and Pacific powers – with Russia stuck in a Eurasian grey zone. Without an overarching narrative, the various parts of the wider West are drifting apart. There is a growing gap between an exceptionalist United States, a provincially cosmopolitan European Union and a reactionary Russia. Whereas America offers its post-Puritan salvific promise as a 'beacon of democracy' to all the nations, the European Union seeks to pursue the Rousseauian and Kantian Enlightenment project of a post-national federation of states. Meanwhile, Russia and, increasingly, other European states seem to follow the counter-Enlightenment of Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald: strengthening the national community against both foreign influence and minority demands.

As the US and European response to the 'Arab Spring', events in Ukraine and now ISIS shows, there is a strategic void. The twilight of the West in the sense of the unquestioned hegemony of the Atlantic community could now be upon us.²⁶ Compared with the era since the discovery of the New World or even the recent Cold War past, the West today looks bereft of ideas, deeply divided and incapable of acting as a force for good.

Amid ever-greater global interdependence and volatility, Western countries now oscillate between market anarchy and coercive state control. They eschew global leadership and lasting involvement abroad in favour of managing risks from afar.²⁷ Across the West, there is a growing populist backlash against the dominant forms of globalisation and calls to retreat to narrow national self-interest led by insurgent parties such as UKIP and the SNP in the United Kingdom, kindred movements (usually ‘right’ but sometimes ‘left’) on the European continent and the Tea Party and Donald Trump in America.

The Anglophone liberal empire is still the globe’s most potent coalition, but its hegemony is unravelling because it lacks a coherent intellectual vision and the necessary cultural-social cohesion. This is manifest in the protracted crisis of the liberal values-based foreign policy that was so dominant under Bill Clinton and Tony Blair’s ‘humanitarian’ interventionism and the neo-conservative crusade in Afghanistan and Iraq, but whose roots stretch back to the liberal imperialism of Woodrow Wilson and the nineteenth-century British liberals like Palmerston. For today we have, instead, a distinct shift back to a more nakedly interest-based foreign policy and, above all, to ‘great power games’ and spheres of influence – a dynamic that accounts in large part for the beginning of a deep freeze in Europe in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis and continual conflict in the Near East.²⁸ Thus we are witnessing the return of a post-Westphalian geo-politics, albeit in a mutated form, that revives and accentuates its inter-imperial dimension (as diagnosed by Benno Teschke)²⁹ in terms of geo-economics and a global ‘culture war’ between Western liberalism and its adversaries.

For as long as the United States is in denial about its imperial project, the key role in contemplating an alternative falls to Europe. But if Europe cannot even make the European Union work when so much unites its member-states – history, culture and shared sacrifice – then these are dark times indeed. And if the European Union (which needs a profound internal transformation if it is to survive) does not get more fully and creatively engaged in the world, then the portents for the rest of the twenty-first century are even darker.

4. MODERN SOVEREIGNTY IN QUESTION

The Birth of International Relations

The origins of the liberal order that is now suffering a metacrisis go back to the foundations of modern international relations. The standard liberal narrative goes something like this: since the 1555 Peace of Augsburg and the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, the modern international order has been coterminous with sovereign national states that claim exclusive authority over

populations and territories. Over the last century, and especially following the 1918 'Wilsonian moment', this model of national state sovereignty has been extended both geographically and culturally by the forces of international law, multinational corporations, supranational organisations and the global economy.

However, a more critical reading of international affairs and political economy suggests that the tension between the national and the transnational is internal to modernity itself. For the capitalist system, which like the national state is modern and not medieval, has from the outset favoured international open markets and the free movement of capital across borders. At the same time, the modern state could assert itself against rival forms of political organisation only by promoting financial expansion and new models of economic accumulation (including the use of mercantilism by France, England and, more recently, Japan and Germany). From its inception in the city-states of Northern Italy in the fourteenth century, transnational finance was essential to the destruction of old medieval regimes and the institution of modern models of government.³⁰ So, rather than being always diametrically opposed to the power of the state, the transnational can also reinforce the national subordination of the local. Just as territorial states and de-territorial finance absorb relatively autonomous regional economies, so too national governments and multinational corporations promote a worldwide economy that increasingly abstracts from locality by uprooting markets from the cooperative fabric of human relationships and associations.

In fact, the Hobbesian *realpolitik*, which modern nation-states are thought to pursue in order to sustain their own interests (and have done in part, in reality), is only a political version of the law of market coordination through the operation of self-interest. Either – according to American IR Thucydidean 'realism' – a hidden hand coordinates the blind and unlimited ambitions of states. Or – according to English School Grotian 'rationalism' – state leaders anticipate providence by more prudently and even ethically constraining their own sovereign aims. In both cases, the anarchy of modern international order is mitigated by an 'economy' of forces, which is entirely mixed up with the actual economy of money. But this can also plausibly be inverted: the monetary economy is driven by politics to the degree that mercantilism is never fully abandoned, and the need for permanent 'primary accumulation' to overcome market contradictions is equally driven by imperial ambitions for the extension of power.³¹

Globalisation and Central State Sovereignty

This is not to say that these equations have remained unchanged in the face of the current phase of globalisation. On the contrary, the fusion of

economics with politics, apparent throughout the modern age, now extends beyond geographical boundaries more than ever before, as national states are increasingly integrated into a transnational network.³² This dual aspect system rests on the convergence and even collusion of ‘big government’ and ‘big business’, notably national governments, multinational corporations and supranational institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. Yet, *precisely* for this reason, the state remains central to the exercise of sovereignty. Through the executive branch of government, states retain the prerogative to enforce international agreements, laws and regulations within their respective jurisdictions.³³ Even if international legal bodies now increasingly have the capacity to overturn the decisions of sovereign democratic governments (as with Brazil’s recent attempt to freeze energy prices), they still require national political power as the real ‘police’ enforcer of these decisions. To this degree, globalisation does not so much undermine state sovereignty as further extend the subsumption of the local, which the single sovereignty of national states crucially mediates.

The most basic contrast of models of sovereignty lies not between the Westphalian modern and the ‘post-modern’ blurring of borders, but between the modern and the premodern. In late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the exercise of political power was regarded as an attempted representation of eternal order and sometimes as a divine gift of grace, which is properly received through man’s transformative and architectonic perfecting of nature in which God’s goodness is intimated. The *telos* of politics was to reactualise as far as humanly possible the just and harmonious ordering of God’s original creation within the civic or imperial polity. Yet, as we have already seen, this very sense of trusteeship under God tended both to require a constitutional answerability to the people and to nurture some measure of distribution of the power to rule and the gift of ruling, and to encourage the growth of overlapping jurisdictions and a complex web of intermediary associations.³⁴ And in the end this ensured the ultimate transnational authority of the new supernatural polity that was the Church, of the first real system of universal international jurisdiction that was Canon law, and to some extent the international reach of a coercive power of last resort that was the Holy Roman Empire.

5. THE MODERN ORIGINS OF ‘INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY’

A Conflict of Civilisations?

It is, nevertheless, true that in the era of globalisation, national states have somewhat ceased to be the primary frameworks of *cultural* reference and

that this has political consequences. 'Civilisations' assume more importance for people's identity as well as their security – symbolic and real.³⁵ And clearly, 'the religious' stands at the heart of the civilisational. Here though, we would part company with Samuel Huntington: none of the diverse civilisations he lists – Eastern Orthodox, Chinese, Islamic, South American (this last a truly absurd example of North American condescension and misapprehension) and so forth – genuinely remain in existence. This is because most of the world has been so thoroughly permeated by liberalism and capitalism, which, as a general ideology and economy, is not just a political and an economic system, but an entire system of values, a quasi-religious way of life and system of representation. To read, for example, Haruki Marukami's novel *Dance Dance Dance* is to realise how almost the entirety of Japan's past has been obliterated by global capital, with a break arguably more absolute than is the case in Europe, precisely because in adopting capitalism the Japanese have perforce come to adopt a wholly alien culture.³⁶ Very significantly, the only thing that is Japanese in the novel is a religious sense of the porosity of the bounds between this world and a spirit world beyond death, and the continuum between the latter and the world of dreaming. The genius of the novel is to blend this traditional sense with a late modern sense of hyper-reality, so that what one gets is a kind of eclectic mix of ancient religion with capitalist 'quasi-religion' (Walter Benjamin). Viewed through the former, the latter is strangely shown to have secret elevating and redemptive potentialities. Nevertheless, one is left with the sense that the ancient can only narrowly break through and that it then requires one to handle consumer society stringently and sparingly, against its fundamental inclination. (Stick to your reliable Subaru, forswear the gleaming Maserati, is the novel's oddly transcendental message.)

This suggests that only the religious defines a civilisation that might today be considered as distinct against the Western one, and that even here old religions struggle against new and often debased religiosities. That appears especially true for those countries that do not have a tradition of organised monotheism, like Japan, China and most of India. They lack the presence of a counter-globalising force with a reach such as is provided by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, even if both Hinduism and Buddhism have now developed their own more local forms of often intolerant politicisation. This is why Huntington would appear to be correct only for the case of Islam. Here, indeed, one has a civilisation driven by a salvation religion that has a tendency to expand imperialistically and that still aims to inform all aspects of life. It is not surprising that with some decline in the effective sovereignty of the individual nation-state, Islam should enjoy an increase in power and influence.

Ius Gentium and Iustus Hostis

Like the nation-state, of which it is an element, the modern system of international relations is very recent indeed, and is certainly not grounded in any ‘realist’ natural law, nor even in any autonomously geo-political ‘constructivism’ occurring between sovereign nations. For the standard IR theory of a geo-political ‘anarchy’ pertaining on the high seas, in the air and in territorial ‘marches’ only reflects a certain modern reality (in parts of Europe and North America), and is universally but a fiction. For most of ‘civilised’ history, peoples have acknowledged an authority that extended over most of their known world – ancient China, for example, or the Roman Empire and Medieval Europe.³⁷ And even between alien peoples, an unwritten ‘law of hospitality’ was exercised, diverse, of course, in different places, but, nonetheless, often found to coincide. The absolute stranger, precisely because she was beyond all ken, was not seen as primarily a potential enemy but, rather, as a temporary sojourner: she was first a stranger to be ‘hosted’ before she became an enemy to be taken ‘hostage’.

The ‘temporariness’ of this welcome was not, as Derrida had it, a sign of *aporia* – only the enemy need be welcomed; were he a friend he would be at home. For the natural home of the other was intrinsically valued (something like, but also very unlike, your own home) and, therefore, his eventual return to that home was also valued and not viewed as a kind of expulsion and return of a captive.³⁸ Respect for the stranger’s character was bound up with respect for his mysterious origin: to receive him *was* to receive that origin and not to suspend it; eventually, to speed him on his way was (at least for the present) to refrain from conquering that domain. So, in hospitality, there was a balanced exchange, timed and spaced in due measure, not a played-out contradiction between an absolute one-way receptivity on the one hand and an abrupt termination of this gesture on the other.

As to what went on *within* people’s known worlds, this was nothing like a balance of power between states. The European *ius gentium* was a law of peoples, not states, and, thus, a full part of the natural law up until the time of Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), when natural law came to be inversely based upon the law of nations, now itself more formalistically construed.³⁹ Thus Suárez now saw the privileges and prohibitions of the *ius gentium* as positive laws set up by contracting sovereign state partners: ‘The law of nations does not forbid things because they are evil, but makes things evil by forbidding them’.⁴⁰ In the European Middle Ages, there had existed no ‘sovereign states’, only patrimonial rulers who in some eminent sense ‘owned’ their kingdoms, while, inversely, the local lords acted as petty rulers within their feudal territories.⁴¹ Nothing usually guaranteed that the vassal of a vassal was also the vassal of his final overlord, and just for this reason, the lords

of the various 'marches' were semi-independent of the political centre. Thus there were generally no wars in this period 'between states'. Many wars were between nobles and were bound up with what was seen as the restitution of justice or the remedying of crimes. Wars between kings had usually a dynastic aspect and generally concerned the extension of terrain rather than the defence of boundaries.

In the same period there existed some distinction between the lawless criminal and the enemy warrior. Thus, for example, Western report and fiction notably admired Saladin as the very exemplar of chivalry. (This has interesting inter-religious implications, given the sacral character of the chivalric cult.) While it was not supposed at this stage that there could be a 'just cause' of war on either side, nevertheless, Church and chivalric codes together sustained a sense of the *iustus hostis* as distinguished from the criminal or the infidel.⁴² Against the latter there could, indeed, be a wholly just struggle without quarter since he had no *ius* on his side whatsoever, on account of his failure to render any justice towards the true good. But within the bounds of Christendom, the fellow Christian could become a 'just enemy', since both the warring parties ultimately owed allegiance to higher powers: the Pope and, sometimes, the Holy Roman Emperor. The latter's power was as much deliberately latent as, of necessity, weak: it was often re-exercised in the case of emergency threats of extreme internal disorder or threats to Christendom from without.

Thus, within this era, war generally fell within the sphere of both a kind of irregular policing and violent criminality, the issue being mediated through a sort of informal trial by combat. It was not as yet a purely 'political', nor, strictly speaking, an 'international' matter. The international dimension was only invoked when need arose to appeal to the imperial or else the papal guarantor of the order and unity of Christendom as such, either against inner disruption or against a rival civilisation.

The Birth of International Anarchy

Political and international warfare in the modern sense emerged only with the rise of sovereign and absolute Christian states, the contested struggle by sea and land for new-world territories, the lapse of the role of the emperor as ultimate guarantor and, finally, with the Peace of Westphalia, the lapse of the role of the Pope as international arbitrator.⁴³

In this way, 'international anarchy' was born and the role of the *iustus hostis* was either augmented, as for Hobbesian 'realism' (whose tradition would pass down to E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr), or completely abolished, as for Kantian 'liberalism' (whose legacy has been developed by John Rawls and Michael Doyle). Already, with Grotius, there

is some hesitation between the idea that war can have an *iustus causis* only on one side and the notion that both sides can wage war justly, if they possess real sovereign authority and have declared hostilities following the proper procedures. After Grotius, 'just cause' became more and more formally reduced in this fashion.⁴⁴ But with Kant, on the other hand, one has, following the Scots political economists, the notion that trading nations will tend to balance out each other's powers and arrive at a convenient peace, just like trading parties inside a state. As within the state, so internationally, Kant envisages a body of international laws that will pronounce upon property violations at the inter-state level. Yet, unlike Suárez, he envisages no world government, because he believes that the many nations constitute a sort of international equivalent of the division of powers at the state level and a bulwark against tyranny.

Since, nonetheless, war can for Kant be adjudicated by a moral law beyond that of sovereign states, there can no longer be any 'just enemy' at all: if your enemy is legitimately your enemy (in anticipation of the category of 'terrorist'), then he is an international criminal. This notion of a law not just prior to, but even independent of, any exercise of sovereignty ignores the fact that a law is an impotent fiction if it remains without authorisation and interpretation in the case of its application.⁴⁵

Either the realist over-dominance of the notion of the just enemy *or* its liberal abolition removes the medieval sense that war, while wholly regrettable, is a kind of honourable recognition of the limits of human reason in arriving at a just consensus. Thus the enemy may be in the wrong, may even be a violator, but it is not quite so in the case of the person seen by all as a common criminal. By contrast, Baroque realism trivialises warfare and separates honour from virtue, because the combatants are now involved in a mere game of rivalry that is but an exceptional bloody extension of the marketplace, which has newly made *agon* normative. Inversely, Enlightenment liberalism ironically threatens to turn war into an unlimited action against a particularly heinous kind of criminal who is an enemy of civilisation as such: the global war against terror is, therefore, already here in sight and it turns out that both liberal interventionists and neo-conservative crusaders are Kantians not Hobbesians, after all...

Yet, even in the case of the early modern and the Enlightenment periods, one can exaggerate the preponderance of strife between nations.⁴⁶ In the first era, the really dominating factor is not the displacement of Christendom by competing nation-states, but, rather, the warfare without quarter (since it could not just be between enemies) between the two factions of Christianity, Catholic or Protestant – or if one prefers, the war against Catholic order, which was the continued but threatened unity of Europe itself.⁴⁷ The religious *civil* wars were also wars about securing the unity of the emerging

nation-state (which could not as yet imagine religious plurality), these wars also had an international dimension (the operations of a threatened 'Protestant International' stretching from Bohemia to Scotland, for example, cannot be ignored in accounting for the unfolding of national events in the first half of the seventeenth century).⁴⁸ And these wars surely *were* primarily religious, if also suffused with dynastic and national power-politics. For the Catholics fought in part under the Pope and Emperor in order to preserve a united Christendom, while the Protestants often envisaged (as with Comenius and, later, Leibniz) a new sort of Erasmian peaceful international Christian community, if the office of the Papacy could be overthrown or else modified.

Dynastic Honour without Virtue

In the later era, Teschke has effectively shown that, while the Peace of Westphalia (which he does not, however, explicitly point out) 'secularised' the international sphere by establishing a treaty without the blessing of the Pope, it, nevertheless, did *not* really usher in (as nearly all IR textbooks say) an era of balance of powers between states. The treatise itself involved nothing of the kind, but only an old-fashioned dynastic carve-up of the body of the ancient imperial heartlands between Sweden and France against Austria.⁴⁹ Later, the wars of the eighteenth century continued to be in large measure inter-dynastic (and sometimes still inter-religious) feuds, rather than out-and-out quarrels between nations for the wealth of the earth. Even after the Vienna Congress, the balance of power was, in reality, an agreement among the various dynasties. And military campaigns throughout the nineteenth century were often the result of the shifting alliances of royal and noble families contesting, across national boundaries, for shares in Montesquieu's honour without virtue.

Only after the First World War were dynastic empires (Germany, Russia, Habsburg and the Ottomans) decisively replaced by sovereign states, but instead of this inaugurating an era of egalitarian managed order, control over international relations lay with the old empires of Britain and France, as well as rising powers such as the United States and the nascent Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. After the Second World War and de-colonisation (especially in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis), the two superpowers steadily expanded their sphere of influence and extended their domination over newly independent states. In short, the international society of sovereign states was only ever a partial reality, heavily qualified by the enduring presence of imperial 'great powers' and social-cultural ties across borders. Bruno Latour's claim that 'we have never been modern' also applies to international relations.

6. THE NEO-MEDIEVAL SHAPE OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Globalisation and Impersonal Rule

The dominant model of globalisation has additionally established the primacy of the economic and the political over the social and the ethical. The subject of rights and contracts is no longer by definition a person, but a mere subject of a system or state, which means that subjectivity here dialectically inverts into objectification. The human subject as paradigmatically an owner, and owner of herself, now owns even her own body merely in part, while another aspect effectively belongs to the market or state. And this aspect is always homogeneously compounded with other bodies to make one single manipulable mass. This process of objectification has been taken much further in recent times and has been much assisted by the dominant model of globalisation, which permits a further degree of remote control of both isolated mental decisions and human flesh.

However, there is another possibility. This is that transport and communications could truly provide the pre-conditions for the emergence of a 'global village', in which social bonds and cultural ties really do embed economic transactions and political cooperation. The current mode of globalisation mostly destroys locality and interpersonal relationships by regarding local taste and custom as irrelevant. But globalisation also renders it more and more possible for one community, locality and even region to communicate directly with another in a totally distant part of the world without the direct control of bureaucracy and capital. In this way, it just could once more come to seem 'common sense' that the entire economy should be subordinate to social reciprocity and that multiply interlocking polities should reflect the relational nature of humankind – including the complex ties of family, community, profession and faith.

The Resurgence of Cities and Faiths

This is not a mere possibility on the theoretical horizon, either. Globalisation has already transformed the secular settlement of national states and transnational markets bequeathed to us by the Westphalian system. In a sense, we now live in a neo-medieval era insofar as we have outlived the dominant sway of national states and to some extent of undifferentiated markets. Viewed from a long historical perspective (say 5,000 years), the era of sovereign nation-states is very short (less than 500 years) and exceptional, compared with the relative norm of imperially organised systems with gradated polities, which rest on a different kind of suzerainty, that is, formal or semi-formal

relationships of supremacy and subordination that are situated somewhere between the absolute equality of independent sovereign states and the direct rule of repressive colonial powers.

Even if the dominant modern institutional legacy will endure for some time to come, the exceptional era of the Westphalian settlement (which we have seen was itself not as exceptional as all that) appears to be drawing to an end.⁵⁰ We seem to have entered an interregnum in which the shape of things to come is best described as *neo-medieval*. Far from indicating a return to, or repetition of, the Middle Ages, this notion suggests a reversion to long-standing patterns that reflect the socio-cultural realities in which forms of political and economic organisation are grounded. Yet here most critics of the notion of neo-medievalism in IR have adopted a curiously literalist interpretation that posits some kind of identity or equivalence between the Middle Ages and our present situation, which would be guilty of the same ahistorical logic as that of liberal and Marxist theorists who treat the modern as necessary, normative and superceding the medieval.⁵¹

To say that the contemporary world is not the same as the Middle Ages does not mean that the notion of ‘neo-medieval’ is redundant. On the contrary, it can be used as a metaphor that helps IR thinking break out of conventional conceptual frames, and opens up new possibilities of recognising alternatives to the sovereign power of both national states and global markets. Such alternatives include hybrid institutions, overlapping jurisdictions, polycentric authority and forms of multi-level governance, which are all characterised by dispersed power structures and degrees of suzerainty that are not captured by modern paradigms of equal sovereignty and balance of power.

In fact, signs that contemporary international affairs exhibit a neo-medieval shape abound. The three ‘political forms’ that successively characterise the West from Antiquity to the late Middle Ages – the City, the City-Empire (Rome) and the Church⁵² – are all resurgent in new ways. Big cities are often trading more with other global cities across the globe than with towns or regions within their national borders. This is true not only for old and new city-states such as Singapore, Hong Kong or Dubai and, indeed, long-established metropolises such as London, New York or Tokyo, but also for new mega-cities – including Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico-City, Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta – not to mention the booming metropolitan areas in China and India.⁵³

As Benjamin Barber suggests, ‘The nation-state is failing us on the global scale. It is utterly unsuited to interdependence. The city, always the human habitat of first resort, has in today’s globalizing world once again become democracy’s best hope’.⁵⁴ Barber writes off the state too hastily and fails to think properly about cities in relation to their regions and natural environment, but his point about the rise of autonomous cities as powerhouses

of political transformation is surely right. The resurgence of global cities certainly witnesses to the rural exodus, which reinforces the divide between urban and rural areas, but it also offers new opportunities to build more horizontal relationships between individuals, groups and communities that are not subject to central state control.

Similarly, the global resurgence of religion is much remarked upon but little understood. There is no return to faith, as if it had ever gone away. Rather, the intellectual and moral collapse of secularism provides new opportunities to re-think religion in international affairs in non-secularist ways.⁵⁵ Amid the global flow of ideas and practices, it is often religious ties that bind together persons and communities both within and across national borders. Unlike the impersonalism of rights and contracts, the bonds of faith can nurture the kind of trust and cooperation on which vibrant societies and stable relations with other societies ultimately depend. Globalisation has re-inforced formal connections of bureaucratic control and capitalist commodification, but it has also opened up new spaces for new religious networks. Scott Thomas puts this well:

The global and the local are becoming more closely linked together in a kind of 'global particularity'. One key example is ... 'globalized Islam', in which types of radical Islam around the world blur the connection between Islam, a specific society and a specific territory. Another example is the transnational links between churches and denominations that make up global evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity. ... These global links or networks do not just happen; they are not free-floating, but are social networks, embedded in religious diaspora communities that are a key aspect of religious transnationalism ... such social and information networks have been part of much of human history, and a part of the main world religions for centuries, and existed long before the modern international system.⁵⁶

The Resurgence of Old Empires

At least as fundamentally, the Westphalian idea of equality between sovereign states has turned out to be a bit of a myth. Amid the shift in power from the West and the North to the East and the South, global geo-politics is marked by the crisis of the nation-state and the resurgence of pre-modern empire, besides, and sometimes along with, a new permutation of the modern, colonising empire.

One can approach this matter by first noting that the core UN principle of national self-determination and territorial integrity, alongside non-interference in internal affairs, is not really compatible with the recently adopted UN doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). So, on the one hand, under R2P, ever-smaller territorial entities can break away from their larger parent

country in the name of the right to self-rule (South Sudan, Kosovo, South Ossetia, to name but the most recent cases) and populations have been protected from the brutal force of tyrannical rulers (such as Gaddafi's imminent onslaught on the people of Benghazi in 2011). But on the other hand, and more dubiously, R2P has also served as a justification for regime change encouraged (and sometimes brought about) by greater powers who enjoy an effectively quasi-imperial sway. The 2011 intervention in Libya encapsulates this ambivalence. Here the modern state is in tension both with imperial traditions that have long modern and pre-modern roots and with contemporary realities such as tribal loyalties and Islamism that cannot be navigated with a merely Westphalian compass.

The spread of globalised capitalism has led to a simultaneous national fragmentation and imperial consolidation that complicates any post-colonial and post-Soviet idea of an 'end of history' or a worldwide convergence towards liberal 'market democracy'. In the category 'economically imperial' belong global capital movements and supranational institutions such as the IMF and the WTO, which represent a pooling of economic and political sovereignty that constrains the power of states. Meanwhile, a new 'political imperialism' is exemplified by powers as diverse as Turkey, Iran, Russia and China. Their leaders look back to pre-modern imperial traditions in order to define national roles in a multipolar world and to forge links independently of Western countries and institutions. This is why Moscow speaks of its post-Soviet 'sphere of privileged interests', and Beijing considers Taiwan (as well as various islands in the South and East China Sea) as a renegade region that must be reintegrated into the Middle Kingdom.⁵⁷ Equally, Tehran's power projection across the Near East is raising fears of revived Persian imperial ambitions. There is a contest for supremacy in the wider region, and it pits the Shia crescent against the Sunni arc – the former is led by Persia and stretches from the Lebanon via Syria, Iraq and Iran all the way to Bahrain, while the latter is dominated by the Saudi Kingdom and encompasses Turkey, Saudi Arabia itself, Kuwait and the remaining Gulf States.

In fact, Ankara's assertive foreign policy has transformed Turkey's role from that of being a bridge between Europe and Asia to exercising hegemonic influence in the lands that formerly constituted the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸ Indeed, the governing AKP party's foreign policy strategy assumes a 'double-gravity state' that seeks to balance its shared values as a member of the Euro-Atlantic community with its interest in the Greater Middle Eastern neighbourhood.⁵⁹ Taken in combination, these attitudes compose a neo-imperial outlook – the revival of Ottoman traditions novelly borne by newly self-assertive 'Great Power' Turkey that seeks to act as an imperial force rather than a modern nation-state. Erdogan's election as President underscores the gradual 'sultanisation' and creeping Islamisation of the formally secular Turkish

Republic – especially considering his refusal to intervene decisively in the fight against ISIS on the Turkish-Syrian border, swayed by its overarching concern to subdue Kurdish separatism.

The resurgence of old imperial powers is not limited to Europe, the Near East and China but can also be observed elsewhere. Across the globe we are seeing the resuscitation of ancient empires or transnational political configurations that had never entirely died. In Latin America, Brazil is exercising a continental leadership role. In Africa, countries such as Nigeria and South Africa deploy cross-tribal and cross-cultural linkages that project their power well beyond their national borders. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines are engaged in struggles to secure their respective zones of influence.

None of these developments can be captured either by the realist focus on sovereign states, nor by the liberal emphasis on inter-state relations, nor yet by the cosmopolitan accentuation of post-national identity. For all three approaches view the modern state as given, and underplay the social, cultural and religious ties that precede modern statehood and endure in international affairs with a revived force after the collapse of the conditions that ensured the unchallenged sway of the Westphalian system.

AQ: Please note that the original text reads fine with 'or'; Or could the word 'either' be deleted from the text 'captured either by the realist...?'

7. IMPERIAL POWER AND GUARDIANSHIP

Power as Imperial

Ultimately, all political power tends to become imperial for at least three reasons: either to stabilise volatile 'backyards' (e.g. the United States in Central and Latin America; China in the South Chinese Sea; Turkey and Russia in the wider Caucasus and Eurasia), or to secure natural resources and market outlets (e.g. the United States worldwide; the European Union's trade agreements; China's expansion in Africa) or else, again, to pursue a 'civilising mission' (e.g. the US export of democracy by 'hard' and 'soft' power, or the European Union's promotion of human rights, or China's neo-Confucian project of global harmony). Indeed, even the geo-politically inept European Union is best described as a 'neo-medieval' empire that has both pacified relations within its own borders and tries to project normative power by syndicating its values worldwide.⁶⁰

Thus contemporary 'great powers' operate a tributarian system with smaller neighbours and other states across the world. They provide military security in exchange for market outlets and inexpensive imports. For example, the United States sells military equipment to its allies worldwide – notably smaller imperial powers such as India or Saudi Arabia, but also client states such as Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It also buys cheap

consumer goods from abroad in order to fuel a consumption binge that papers over growing income and asset inequalities at home, while at the same time importing cheap (often unskilled and illegal) labour to maintain a young population and keep wages low. For its part, China needs primary commodities to sustain its buoyant economic growth, which it extracts in the resource-rich regions of Africa and Latin America. Beijing has also established a system of client states, which provide either underpaying sweat-shops (e.g. Vietnam and Cambodia) or market access for its cheap consumer goods. In the new Great Game, the geo-economics of energy and financial security matters just as much as the geo-politics of territorial control. Instead of national states and liberal market democracy, we are seeing the rise of old empires and new elites who combine oligarchy with authoritarianism in novel ways.

This continual revolution in modern sovereignty also involves some modulations. If power is ultimately imperial, then the question is what this means for relationships between empires – old or new – and other countries. Arguably, there is a choice between various forms of direct colonialism and indirect exploitation and more virtuous forms of protection and cooperation. In the first case, we can see a parallel to the fate of the supposedly ‘free’ labourer and ‘free’ citizen, as Justin Rosenberg (who synthesised English school perspectives in IR with Marxist ones) pointed out. Just as agricultural wage labourers could be more enslaved in practice than the theoretically more ‘tied’ peasants of the past, so also colonies are ‘liberated’, but, in reality, into a more absolute mode of contractual slavery at the hands of new internationally oligarchic masters (both states and corporations) who are more indifferent to their true well-being than even the more avowed masters of the colonial past.⁶¹ Rosenberg’s analysis (and his Marxism) is here more rigorous than that of most ‘post-colonial’ writing.

In the face of the mutations of the Westphalian system, there is an urgent need for a much more equitable and more cooperative approach to international affairs, which can replace ‘liberal interventionism’ and neo-conservative crusades with an ‘associationist’ action upholding genuine transnational trusteeship and partnership in a fashion that respects local peculiarities and traditions. This is preferable to either an isolationism or a supposedly principled ‘non-interventionism’ of a pure Grotian stamp, which is now either dangerous or outright impossible.

The Associationist Alternative in IR

In international relations, the notion of trusteeship or guardianship describes a relationship in which one state, country or nation assumes responsibility for the security and flourishing of another state, country or nation, which is thought to be unable to manage its own affairs without doing damage either

to itself or to others.⁶² In the contemporary world, there are many cases where this might apply – including transition economies, post-conflict countries or ‘failed states’. In the absence of trusteeship, there is always the strong risk that purely self-interested powers will fill the vacuum, thereby ensuring that a priggish absolutism with regard to national boundaries produces not the best but the worst – and not even compromise, which ‘associationist intervention’ (committed to a cooperative approach, but not to all and every tolerance of the behaviour of the other) is more likely to achieve.

Associationist approaches would assume that the international system is not so much a society of sovereign states but, rather (as in the early work of English School, especially the writings of Martin Wight, Herbert Butterfield and Donald Mackinnon), a society of nations and peoples who are bound together by social ties and cultural bonds that are more primary than state-guaranteed rights and market contracts. Up to a point, this is true of the countries that compose the British Commonwealth, members of the *Francophonie*, or the association of Ibero-American states, or certain parts of the post-Soviet space.

Such advocacy is by no means unalert to the danger that the virtue of cooperative assistance can flip over into the vice of oppressive tutelage. This is true for all relationships that include forms of hierarchical dependency – from the family via communities and states to the international society of nations and peoples. However, the risk of exploitative domination is counterbalanced by the pursuit of mutual flourishing, which can only be sustained by an equally shared vision of a substantive common good. Without this common pursuit, one is left with the formalist vacuum of a purely legal and contractual equality, which inexorably engenders its own substantive opposite – namely the domination of the powerful and the wealthy. With ‘associationist’ intervention, the latter is an admitted risk, but with the apparently greater radicalism of a non-paternalist liberalism, the risk is, rather, an inevitability. For liberalism, different degrees of development are in the end but the outcome of chances in a game played according to fair rules, and therefore they are ultimately a matter of indifference. But for a ‘post-liberal associationism’, shared virtue permits a common horizon of human concern between the richer and the economically poorer who may well be richer in depth of life, while the open advocacy of virtuous guardianship ensures that no relative failure consigns one to bio-political unconcern.

But to realise this requisite, even in any degree, would require some progress towards the genuine practice of international government, international policing and the international rule of law. And this cannot be done merely in the name of acting for humanity or the cause of human rights. For the problem with a lot of Western interventions in the Near East or North Africa – as in the case of Libya in 2011 – is that if one is only intervening on that basis,

one will not possess a more concrete plan of medium-term trusteeship, which, though it might involve something more paternalist, could also prove to be of far more sympathetic use.

For it is no good just saying we are acting in the name of humanitarian goals or human rights unless we have actually got a real plan for how we are going to help a desperate populace and how we are going to produce a more just constitutional government adapted to their valid cultural habits. In effect, recent interventions in the Near East can all be construed as either too much or too little. If we insist on always and despairingly saying 'this is too much' in the name of a Grotian purism, then surely we must inevitably be putting an arbitrary block on our ethical sympathies and imperatives in the name of that debatable absolute which is the 'nation-state', besides arguably putting at risk our own ultimate security. But any intervention is likely to remain an irresponsible 'too little' – or 'too little and thereby also too much' – if more powerful nations are not prepared to engage in long-term strategic assistance. An unashamedly more 'parentalist', substantive assistance could take more seriously than any locally autonomous modernising regime, local customs and habits and not override them in the name of 'democracy', 'rights' and 'development', whose status can never have the absolute and eternal ring of 'justice' or 'the human good'.

8. LIBERAL EMPIRE AND THE UN

SYSTEM The UN's Double Deficit

But this sort of 'thick' international engagement cannot be delivered (as Dawson already realised in relation to the former League of Nations) by a formal alliance of nations sharing only abstract liberal principles in common. Such an organisation, like that of the UN, suffers a double deficit, doubly linked. The merely formal principles prevent it from communicating any substantive vision of a desirable political and cultural way of life, while the merely formal alliance of powers ensures that it lacks any power of real enforcement. This mutual linkage arises because principles of themselves engender no concrete unity or power, while contract divorced from a power of enforcement (which always proceeds from a more substantive, ineffable unity) is generative of no concrete agreement.

For these reasons, the power of the UN has been in reality the power of the United States. That power is not bad in itself, and might in theory have been exercised in terms of its own often hidden and perhaps deeper associational genius. But unfortunately, the United States has largely sought to impose

on other countries merely formalistic and economic principles that derive from its own dominantly liberal theory of itself, more perhaps than from the truth of the way it has reliably worked in practice. It has offered this thin gruel rather than the solid sustenance of a deep-rooted Western culture with which other cultures might enter into conversation. And since culture abhors a vacuum, the formalism is, in reality, the offer of a continuous commercial soundtrack and a permanent lust for the ephemeral.

Liberal Imperialism Revisited

Ever since the Wilsonian and Weimar era of the 1920s, it is this mode of liberal imperialism that has taken the global initiative. But in that era, such a commitment to the empty freedom of culture taken as ‘human choice as such’ helped generate its dialectical counterpart of totalitarian advocacy of merely material or ‘animal’ values of biological flourishing – whether ‘materialist’ or ‘racial’. This alternative was deliberately refused by the British under Baldwin, Ramsey MacDonald and George V, who avoided continental political violence by some shift of ownership and wealth away from the upper classes, an involvement of the representatives of labour in government and a populist re-invention of the role of the monarch – a re-invention of the British ‘mixture’, which suggests that a parallel re-invention is possible today, if the political will for it were to exist.⁶³

By contrast, the Wilsonian ‘democratic republican’ option (partially taken up by several continental countries) sustained mainly the cultural commitment to ‘human choice as such’. Such a commitment tended (especially on the continent where it met less resistance from an American spirit of anarchic libertarianism) to compound aggregated individual ‘Lockean’ wills as a ‘Rousseauian’ ‘general will’, legitimating an ever-increased biological control of their own populations by the state taken as this will’s legitimate legislative embodiment.

Today it may be that just the same dialectic is at work, as liberalism once more automatically produces various totalitarian reactions (in new mutations), while on the other hand, the contrast of liberal and totalitarian modes of the bio-political is somewhat less apparent today. For, in either case, neo-liberal market and bureaucratic oligarchy impose an economic mediation between a massive spectacular authority and a mere appearance of individual choice, while policing any aberrantly real choices with an ever-increased police surveillance.

Not accidentally, this double idiom can be parodied by large criminal consortia, as in northern Mexico or large parts of China. So if the contrast between liberal and totalitarian is being qualified in a globalised era (partly for globalising reasons of increased abstraction and dialectical merging of far

and near), then so too is the contrast between licit and illicit, in the same context and for the same reasons. It is possible to read the phenomenon of political terror, which, again, is equally perpetrated by both states and outlaws, as, in one respect, an intensification of this situation. And in the case of both organised crime and organised terror, one has a terrible fusion of archaic, but now dispossessed, tribal and other archaic factions with all-too-modern aims, procedures and discourses.

Putting Culture and Religion Back into IR

The new triple threat of official anarchy, crime and terror may be one reason why certain modes of culture and religion are now once more to the fore. For we cannot quite allow either individual anarchy or collective power to be the ultimate principle, without admitting that we are now under the sway of a post-modern and post-theological 'animalistic' anarchy – even though this is increasingly the case. Therefore, to avoid this admission or surrender, unmediated and unmystical, voluntaristic modes of belief coming 'right out of the blue' – whether Sunni Islamic or Christian fundamentalist evangelical – claim that legitimacy derives, rather, from some sort of hidden providential (rather than also transcendently ethical) mediation between the individual or locally communal self-interested actor on the one hand, and political collectivities on the other. In this way essentialist racist, bio-political identities such as the Arab or the Anglo-Saxon worlds get re-construed as providential totalities bearing the secret of private salvation.

At the same time, rigid revealed codes of mainly private personal conduct serve to ensure at least some boundary against incipient anarchy, and some residual sphere in which people will be restrained by that degree of discipline which remains necessary to market performance – however fused this may now be (beyond anything foreseen by Weber) with the operation of the pleasure principle. Indeed, if work is now also pleasure (both mainly involve texting...), then, significantly, charismatic Christianity endorses this equivalence at a more elevated level with its blending of piety and ecstasy. Perhaps the Islamic equivalent is one-sidedly to do with insistence at once upon the duties and the pleasurable rewards of the Muslim male.

The post-modern era (tentatively beginning as far back as the aftermath of the First World War in the IR field), beyond the sway of the nation-state and its extension into national empires, is, therefore, the era of liberal empire often collusive with totalitarianism and the renewal of *ersatz*, voluntaristic monotheism. Prior to that, one had the age of Christian empire and prior to that, again, the age of pagan empires. Every human age has been an age of empires, in a way that the term 'post-colonial' may all too easily ignore, just as one tends to overlook the fact that a nation-state is every bit as much

a product of original and often unjustifiable violence as is every imperial formation. For all these reasons, the widely accepted assumption that we live in a post-imperial era of sovereign national states whose equality is best ensured by promoting liberal democracy and individual human rights (or, alternatively, a pristine national genius) must be questioned – and along with it, British and Western foreign policy that have sought to implement this misguided conception of international relations.

9. THE FAILURES OF WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY

One may note that if British foreign policy since 1945 has been subject to indirection even more than indecision, then Western foreign policy in general may have been subject to a grand illusion. This illusion consists in blaming the occurrence of two world wars and Nazism on the phenomenon of empire rather than upon an excessive nationalism. For, after all, it is within the latter soil that both Nazi territorial ambitions and Nazi racism were nurtured, for all the talk of *Reich*, while an empire based upon race is, in a sense, but the nation-state writ large.⁶⁴ Disaffected commentators like Lewis Namier and Elie Kedourie have noted that the British obsession in the Near East with both the naturalness of nation-states and the naturalness of ethnic and cultural over religious groupings had the effect of promoting Sunnism at the expense of religious minorities in the region. In local and traditional terms, pan-Sunnism was all that either ‘popular national identity’ or ‘pan-Arabism’ could really mean – especially after the demise of the monarchies (which Britain should have supported far more and helped to become properly constitutional in character).⁶⁵

In consequence, Kedourie concluded that the British failure in this region, which we can now see is a direct factor in the growth of political Islamism, was not (as so many think) the consequence of imperialism as such. Nor was it the effect of an arbitrary tendency to divide colonial subjects into religious groups (not so arbitrary, and not so mistaken, in India where the policy only went wrong when combined with nationalism in the post-colonial era). Rather the opposite – in other words, the over-hasty, if often unavoidable, abandonment of imperial trusteeship combined with a liberal (and actually *Christian* liberal, under the influence of Arnold Toynbee) imposition onto another culture of categories of nation, ethnicity and economic class.⁶⁶ By contrast, Oriental cultures, near and far, tend to function more according to a notion and practice of being in or outside the state apparatus on the part of individuals (which from a Western perspective can seem quite random), giving rise to characteristically factional, not social or economic, conflicts, in such a way that they cannot be resolved or even placated by mass representative democracy.⁶⁷

The failures of British foreign policy since 1945 are, of course, not confined to the Near East. After Churchill sealed the special relationship with the United States by co-writing the Atlantic Charter in 1941 together with Roosevelt, Britain has, in effect, relinquished not just, and inevitably, its hitherto preeminent status but also, and by no means inevitably, its still considerable scope for autonomous power and even wider capacity for cultural influence. The 1956 Suez crisis finally put paid to Britain's Great Power status. After that debacle, it was generally assumed that the United Kingdom must now act as a mere scion of its former North American colonies. But the reason for this assumption appears to have been more to do with habitually entrenched patterns of thought than with clear-sighted analysis. An older generation thought in Churchillian terms of 'the English speaking peoples', and so Atlanticism and Commonwealth-consciousness went together in their minds. On the other hand, a younger generation, imbued already with a strong rejection of the colonial epoch, tended to consider that the future lay entirely with Europe. The alternative combination – which would subordinate the American link within the 'three circles' – of United States plus Europe plus the Commonwealth – seems rarely to have been entertained, and possibly in part because the 'white' Commonwealth countries themselves saw this as an either-or and sometimes with reason – for example in terms of New Zealand's agricultural interests. Linked to this largely self-inflicted decline was the retreat from power of British intellectuals who no longer sought to influence the United Kingdom's vision of world politics and thus left the fate of foreign policy in the hands of party politicians and career civil servants.⁶⁸

In recent times, the two main exceptions to the neglect of foreign policy were Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. However, their shared preference for a rigid morality of 'ideals' over 'Christian realism' restricted at once the nobility and long-term viability of their achievements. Instead of trying to impose moral ideals regarded as fully moral in the abstract, Christian realism, in accordance with traditional Western thinking, seeks participatively to incarnate transcendent 'ideas' in some possible degree, on the assumption that otherwise, without any exemplification, they are not really known and, therefore, proffer no true ethical guidance.

But an at once moralistic and cynical 'idealist' adherence to liberal capitalism blinded Thatcher and Blair to just how often since 1945 the United States had sought to undermine Britain as an independent global power, especially over the Suez crisis. The 'special relationship' was less a force multiplier for UK influence and more an instrument for US unilateral power, which the British have compounded by offering their island up as a gate of entry for dubious and, often, failed American policies in the economic and social area.⁶⁹ The same applies to Blair and David Cameron recently – only qualified by Cameron and George Osborne's depressing and probably

miscalculated kowtowing to China, as if this country were inevitably destined to eventually displace the United States as the dominant global power.

In different ways, they have all perpetuated Churchill's failure to link Britain and its commonwealth partners to all the European powers and their former colonies, thereby providing a springboard for a potential global European-based commonwealth whose base could in time have included the sovereign countries of Central and Eastern Europe and a newly independent Russia. But is it possible still to revisit the neglected third alternative where Europe (led by the United Kingdom, France, Germany and, much further down the line, Russia) could act as the key shaper of such a world order? The final chapter will argue that this possibility, indeed, remains, even if the public and political morale to pursue it appears at present to be fatally absent.

NOTES

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33. Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–32; John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta, 1998), 22–77.

34. Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, trans. F. W. Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 1–100; *Associations and the Law: The Classical and Early Christian Stages*, trans. George Heinrich (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1977), 143–60; Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 42–86, 193–313; Susan Reynolds, *Country, Kingdom and Community in Western Europe: 900-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1–11.

35. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Free Press, 2002).

36. Haruki Murakami, *Dance Dance Dance*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (London: Vintage, 1993).

37. Walter Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World* (London: Abacus, 2012).

38. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, tr. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005); J. Derrida with Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

39. Michel Villey, *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2003), 340–44; Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes's Theory of International Relations', in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 432–56. As Malcolm writes, in 'the Hobbesian international state of nature ... moral rights do exist ... but they are not fixed by nature in any pattern of mutual harmony or reciprocity. Outside the commonwealth rights and duties may be in direct conflict; only inside the commonwealth can they be presumed to be in harmony' (256).

40. Francisco Suárez, *Laws and God the Lawgiver*, Book 2.19 translated by O. and J. L. O'Donovan (eds.), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 728.

41. Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

42. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos, 2003), 50–67.

43. Thus at the cusp of this early modern transition, the Spanish neo-scholastic theologian Francisco de Vitoria drew up *both* new norms for the 'just' seizure of alien lands outside Christendom (violations of the still, for him, non-statist natural law of the *ius gentium* requiring free legitimate trade and mission) *and* new *ius in bello* norms for limiting the new terror of more unconstrained warfare between nations, whose more anarchic logic he was already inclined to accept. Michel Villey, *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2003), 340–44.

44. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 159–62.

45. Immanuel Kant, 'On Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93–131; Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 168–72. It should be noted here that Schmitt's decisionism always oscillated between a Hobbesian formalist insistence on the need for order whatever its content, and a much more genuinely Catholic personalist stress – attributed to friends like Erich Przywara and Eric Peterson – that all actual exercise of law happens between specific persons in specific circumstances, which demands a Pauline primacy for imprescribable equity over the written prescription. For Schmitt, only the individual conscience can really decide equitably on the exception and hence it was to a degree his *humanism* that made him hesitant about the always general and fixed rule of representative majority opinion.
46. Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*.
47. Dawson, *The Judgement of the Nations*, 23–38.
48. In qualification of William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
49. Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 215–49.
50. Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992); Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Atlantic Press, 2003).
51. Adrian Pabst, 'Commonwealth and Covenant: The West in a Neo-medieval Era of International Affairs', *Telos* 168 (2014): 107–31.
52. Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic*, trans. Marc LePain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).
53. Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (London: Sage, 2011).
54. Benjamin R. Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 4.
55. Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (London: Palgrave, 2003); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Adrian Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-secularity: Religion, Realism and the Revival of Grand Theory in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 38:5 (2012): 995–1017, esp. 1003–17.
56. Scott M. Thomas, 'Religions and Global Security', *Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, 12:2 (2010): 10, 12.
57. China is also involved in a 'great power' game against India, with Pakistan and Afghanistan serving as proxies in a fight over geo-political control and geo-economic resources (the China–Pakistan economic corridor running through Balochistan on the Afghan–Pakistani border down to the deep-sea port of Gwadar).
58. Ahmed Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)*; 'The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order', *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 2:4 (1997–1998): 1–17.

59. Philip Robins, 'A Double-Gravity State: Turkish Foreign Policy Reconsidered', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 33 (2006): 199–211.

60. Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); 'Europe as a Global Actor: Empire by Example?' *International Affairs*, 84:3 (2008): 471–84.

61. Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*, 172.

62. William Bain, *Between Anarchy and Society: Trusteeship and the Obligations of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

63. Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, 41–83.

64. This is said somewhat in criticism of Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (London: The Bodley Herad, 2015). Snyder also exaggerates the degree to which the major cause of Hitler's overrunning of other states and search for *Lebensraum* was food shortage and denial of available scientific solutions to this problem.

65. Sometimes, as with Iran in the mid-twentieth century, they were betrayed for the sake of resources or other narrowly self-serving purposes.

66. Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1984), 317–94; John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013), 342–85. There was a failure – both racist and, admittedly to a degree, culturally realist – of the British (despite considerable advocacy of this by some within the United Kingdom) to much earlier inaugurate the development of the 'non-white' colonies towards the independent dominion status of the 'white' nations. That would have involved cultivating the habit of representative government, as desired by the Indian National Congress itself from the late nineteenth century onwards and by other indigenous groups elsewhere. Failure to do this led to the forced handing over, by war-exhausted powers, of colonies, based to a large degree on economic extraction and exploitation, to new, indigenous rulers who could then prove equally or still more tyrannous and capitalistic than the colonial powers they replaced. This was in part because of the absence of the restraining hand of London or Paris in defence of beleaguered minorities and London's equal need sometimes to qualify purely capitalist considerations with political ones and so to somewhat rein in (for all the more fundamental and undeniable fact of British encouragement, promotion and collusion) the most naked economic predation. In part, it was also because, in their understandable rejection of European liberalism as hypocrisy, but in general ignorance or deliberate shunning of an older European Christian legacy, Third World leaders tended often to embrace more openly cynical Western political philosophies, such as Communism and various modes of Fascism, nakedly centred on power as the only human reality. Unlike many post-colonialist accounts, we reject the reading of the two world wars as the desperate last act of the already threatened European colonial powers and rather consider that the huge losses entailed in global mass warfare scuppered any chances for an evolution of European empires into substantive collaborative maritime commonwealths. Nor can the European struggles be seen as but a resistance by global imperial powers to Germany's reactive internal imperialism. Rather, it was a resistance by a residual Christianity and a liberal tempering of nihilism to a more nakedly militaristic and power-based creed, to which emergent

Third World powers were often all too attracted in both their right-wing and left-wing versions. Thus widespread Asian ruling-class support for Japan, as with Turkish support for Germany, cannot be seen as simply rejection of the white man (or the nearest white man to hand) but, rather, as something more sinister. These latter comments are offered both with and against Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013).

67. Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version*.

68. Ian Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline: British Intellectuals and World Politics, 1945–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

69. It is tragically the case that the language barrier, an unwillingness to learn about under-reported polities, and ‘West Wing’ fantasies of airbrushed liberal glamour ensures that British MPs make far more fact-finding trips to the United States than to the countries of the European Union.

Chapter 10

Commonwealth, Culture and Covenant

1. EUROPE: DEATH AND RESURRECTION

We live also in more than peculiar times. The emerging neo-medieval shape of international affairs objectively favours a greater European role in global leadership, however remote a prospect that may currently seem. However, for the present, the foreign policy of the European Union, of its key member-states Germany, France and – for the moment – the United Kingdom, as well as of greater Europe (adding Ukraine and Russia), has not caught up with this widely unexpected development. Western Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, has, in effect, abandoned any serious ambition to lead by example and failed to engage in a culture-based re-think of its own inherited imperial role. Britain, in consequence, has neglected *both* Europe (even after joining the EEC) *and* the countries of the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, France sought to remake Europe in its own Gaullist image, but never communicated any internal vision, or linked the external Francophone territories to a new European future.

In this manner, Europe's decline as a global power has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. With the United Kingdom and France stuck in a post-colonial impasse, Europe's fate today seems to lie with a re-unified Germany that is reluctant to lead (except by diktat within the Eurozone) and a re-assertive Russia whose aggressive defence of her sphere of influence undermines Europe just as much as the United States meddling in EU affairs. As the migration crisis and the barbarism of ISIS show, a divided Europe not only weakens Europeans at home but also exacerbates instability along its eastern and southern borders. Once a crucible of civilisations, the Mediterranean is now a symbol of drowning and destruction, for which Europe's deep divisions are partly to blame, besides the long-term sundering

of the Roman, and then Christian, encirclement of the great inland sea through the extraordinary irruption of Islam.

Europe is also absent from geo-politics at a time when old empires and new powers clash around the world. The Sino-Indian great power game is intensifying the standoff between India and Pakistan and could yet draw proxy forces in neighbouring Afghanistan into a potentially nuclear conflict. The reason why New Delhi has sought close military ties with the United States to contain Chinese leverage over Islamabad is that neither the United Kingdom nor the rest of Europe offered anything beyond a vague promise to extend trade.

Beyond even the more imminent danger of a war on the Indian subcontinent (or between Western powers and Russia), there is an as yet small yet distinct future possibility that the United States and China are heading for a major conflict that may be fought in cyberspace and outer space as much (or more) as on land or sea. Both countries view themselves as exceptionalist civilisations and hegemon, with China perhaps becoming a revisionist power that seeks to challenge the Western-dominated order and ultimately replace it with a Sino-centric one. As Christopher Coker has argued, the ‘Thucydidean Trap’ – when a conservative *status quo* power confronts a rising new one – could precipitate hostilities in a context where both lack a proper cultural understanding of each other, and neither has a coherent strategy to avert war.¹ To do so and to bring about a genuine transformation of international affairs, Europe needs to recover her global leadership position alongside her main partners and aspire to a certain needed role of umpireship – helping to ensure that universal, constitutional provisions and rules are put in place and observed.

But Europe is currently nowhere near to playing such a role. For the moment, it lacks the economic provision and military capacity to participate effectively in global leadership. The United Kingdom has largely recovered from the Great Recession of 2008–2009, but the long-term frailty of its economic model is closely connected with post-war Atlanticist obsessions – especially since 1979. An oligarchic cabal whose loyalties are more to an international moneyed elite has abandoned all semblance of an industrial strategy intimately linked to the United Kingdom’s security at home and its ability to project power abroad. It has done so under the cover of a neo-liberal dogmatism to which even the United States (whose government substantially intervened in 2009 to save its motor industry) does not fully adhere to in practice, thereby revealing how in the end mercantilist imperialism trumps its economic ideology. This truth ensures that while, in one sense, the loyalty of the international rich is only to themselves, even this loyalty continues to be co-opted by Anglo-Saxon corporate power. And allied to this reality is the point that abstract neo-liberalism as a genus does not simply include cultural

‘Americanism’ as a species. To some degree, it is the other way round: a specific and debased ‘spectacle’ that defines Americanism helps to ensure that what is, after all, a merely economic logic goes unchallenged.

The 2013 announcement of the closure of the historic Portsmouth military shipbuilding yards and the 2015–2016 collapse of steelmaking – in considerable part caused by an undervalued pound (in deference to financial priorities) and UK opposition to EU tariffs on cheap Chinese steel – amply symbolise this obeisance not just to an economic but also to a transatlantic logic. They thereby exhibit a double alienation of British responsibilities, both to their own people and to the peoples of Europe and the world.

Yet this alienation and continued twofold obeisance is not an inevitable destiny, especially because the United Kingdom has so far escaped the general European demographic crisis and is on course to be the most populous Western European country by mid-century. A more creative foreign policy would regard London’s geo-political and geo-economic situation as a vortex of meeting and competing economic, political and cultural forces that provides a springboard for much greater positive world influence, in an era where cultural power is becoming evermore important. After all, up till the present, the United Kingdom remains the second net cultural exporter after the United States, while enjoying more prestige in this area in certain respects. Therefore, the prospect of some relative decrease in US power and a relative increase in UK power does not seem at all unlikely and has, arguably, already commenced, for all that Britain’s political leaders across the political spectrum are now squandering this opportunity and rapidly losing diplomatic influence – in part through their failure to ward off the threats to the survival of the British Union and the United Kingdom’s EU membership.

Moreover, with the EU and with the Commonwealth and the former French (and perhaps also Spanish) dominions *together*, the United Kingdom could try to craft an alternative international network of expanded fair trade and legal guarantee whose success in producing more sustainable economic growth, because it is linked to greater economic justice, could eventually in the very long term bring even the United States and other countries into its orbit of more successful and more virtuous international practice. The historical and cultural connections that the combined European and Commonwealth linkages offer are perhaps Britain’s single greatest asset, rather than its confusing twin shackle, as the advocates of a greater UK involvement in the Anglo-sphere would have it.

To say this is to re-invoke Oliver Frank’s Reith lectures of the early 1950s, which unusually conceived of Britain as the centre of ‘the three interlocking circles’ of the United States, Europe and the Commonwealth. It is worth asking why this vision was deemed so completely impossible in the wake of Suez. Since then, British foreign policy has oscillated between a largely

uncritical alliance with the United States on the one hand, and a half-hearted approach to Europe on the other – with the Commonwealth dropping off the political agenda altogether, save for the striking and visionary role played by Queen Elizabeth II and her advisors.² These mental assumptions, rather than any iron force of circumstance, have most of all sustained the abandonment of Frank's vision. The radical alternative most of all in line with Britain's tradition of constitutionalism and mixed government remains that of re-thinking the United Kingdom's global role at the heart of those three circles.

This becomes truer if one considers the possibility of the United Kingdom as a very strong or even the strongest power in Europe. Here an even longer-term diplomatic habit of mind has been, arguably, inimical to clear future-thinking. This is the 'rationalist' assumption, still central unfortunately for the 'English School' of IR, that the threefold requirements of British security, British morality and British Protestantism all point towards a European policy mainly concerned with preventing the dominance of any one continental power. Quite apart from a frequent failure to realise that even *this* policy required to be pursued from within the European Union, which otherwise risked falling apart altogether, the traditional outlook failed to take account of the new international exigency for the pursuit of substantial pan-European unity rather than merely a balance of forces. Geo-politically, this exigency also bears upon the United Kingdom. But in addition, it failed to grasp the new possibility that inclusion within European structures, given the factors of demography and London-dominance already mentioned, could open the altogether novel possibility of Britain *herself* being the most commanding continental power because she would then have pursued the ancient Constantinian vision of a pan-European polity ideally to be extended eastwards. This vision differs markedly from the restoration of the ancient Carolingian unity of France and Germany in the West, which at present faces its most serious intellectual and political challenge since 1939 – the migration crisis, the Eurozone crisis, the influx of ISIS fighters, a global economic slowdown, Russia's provocations against Scandinavia and Eastern Europe and the corporate scandals of banks and car companies. Even after the Brexit vote, all this remains true.

Thus in the new circumstances after the end of the post-Cold War era of US unipolar hegemony and the beginning of a decline in American power, the idea of the three interlocking circles can be revisited in a new guise that is less Atlanticist and less ambivalent about Europe. Moreover, it becomes both more realistic and more ethical, since it is less threatening to other European nations, if combined with the idea that they also might mediate between Europe and their own diasporas. But to realise this long-neglected and now far more viable potential requires that the British governing elites both abandon the liberal vision of international affairs with its neo-conservative radicalisation, and also reject the post-colonial narrative that has been equally

influential since the end of the Second World War. Despite its contaminating whiggery, the early work of the English School of IR indicates to a degree an alternative to both liberal imperialism and pseudo-Marxist post-colonialism by rescuing IR 'realism' in more culturist and religious terms.³

Accordingly, the real alternative to either chauvinist nationalism or abstract cosmopolitanism is to re-envision international affairs in terms of covenant and commonwealth. Peoples, sometimes under religious inspiration, might covenant with each other in the interests of mutual benefit and genuine wealth construed as improved and shared material and spiritual well-being for all. Such covenants of reciprocal sharing could apply within the United Kingdom, and across the European Union and the British Commonwealth as well as in other parts of the world. They might take the form of voluntary agreements among participatory nations to meet minimum standards of the sharing of rewards, risks and resources in both the economic and the social realms, and also to meet certain shared standards of 'subsidiarity', or of decentralised control and responsibility. Another aspect of such covenanting might be a pooled promise of financial solidarity under inspected control, if any nation found it hard to meet such standards. Equally, the validly recognised social problems arising from an otherwise desirable free flow of labour within the single EU market but across national borders might be dealt with by mutual agreements between nations and regions for some temporary limitations on immigration, coupled with much greater efforts to bring about genuine integration.

Such a novel approach to globalisation would be a way to revive and re-think the United Kingdom, Europe and the wider Anglo-Saxondom as something like multinational associations where social and cultural ties shape our identity more than individual entitlements and contracts. Thus the potential task for Britain and her allies is to build true commonwealths of nations and peoples who are no longer enslaved to the liberal empire of market-states in the West, or the reactionary revisionism of state-markets in the East.

2. A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF EMPIRE

Amid the resurgence of old imperial powers and the rise of new forces of global terrorism or financial oligarchy, Europe needs to abandon both the shared liberal/neo-conservative interventionist doctrine based upon supposedly universal (but, in reality, narrowly formalistic) values and the post-colonial narrative that too often denigrates the entire Western legacy, which it wrongly equates with colonial barbarity. This approach obfuscates our current global reality, wherein 'the worst of the West', which is completely dominant everywhere, can only be counteracted by the revival of 'the best

of the West'. For example, the false cult of the ego by the true cult of the human person, and the rival cults of subjective freedom and ossified organic hierarchy by the equally true cult of primordial but fluid relationality. In the light of these considerations, we need to think afresh concerning the legacy of empire.

The history of modern Western empires is commonly associated with one of two competing narratives: either the progressive unfolding of universal civilisation that invented and instituted freedom, democracy, market economy and the rule of law, or else a history of dreadful colonialism that led to violence, oppression and capitalist domination across the globe.⁴ Both these narratives seem to be diametrically opposed, but share more in common than might be at first apparent. First of all, they imply that European empires are an entirely modern invention, which exported modern ideas and institutions to the rest of the world – for good or ill. Second, and concomitantly, they assume that, in general, modern history superseded and ultimately replaced all preceding traditions. In this supercessionist light, the Glorious Revolution of 1688/1689 in England and the French Revolution of 1789 are seen as a series of absolute ruptures with the past, of which Britain and France (as much as the United States) have been the vehicle.

Third, the same supercessionism ensures that European domination is seen as displacing the older project of Christendom, either in continuity with the Reformation, or solely with the Enlightenment. In this way, the post-Westphalian system is seen as but the international arm of unquestionable 'whig' progress, famously rebutted by Herbert Butterfield.⁵

Yet one can question this prevailing story. It uncritically accepts the conventional periodisations of Antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity, which ignore deep continuities over time – including the long-lasting impact of Greco-Roman law and participation in the *polis/civitas*, Christian constitutionalism, the emergence of charitable institutions and the stuttering development ever since Constantine of religious freedom, free association and the dignity of the person.⁶ If one takes these continuities into account, then one can tell a more balanced story that reveals how change and stasis are always complexly interwoven.

From this perspective, the initial emergence of the British Empire belonged to an era spanning the early fourteenth to the late seventeenth century during which both ideas and practices already nascent during late medieval times achieved fuller maturity. If it was an early modern phenomenon, then it was also a late gothic one, which sustained a medieval crusading zeal. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 6, England herself already ruled an island empire, while every European kingdom understood itself as more like a mini-empire than as a modern European 'state' enjoying an absolute monopoly of legislation, policing and control of the money supply. Recent historiography confirms

that the extension of every medieval realm to its margins involved processes of attempted inculturation very like those later undertaken in extra-European colonies, while beginning with Rome itself, the margins also shaped the centre by a process of ‘blowback’, which again anticipates modern global phenomena.⁷

If late medieval beginnings can sometimes look unexpectedly like early modern ones, then, inversely, some medieval features of the international system endured until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and even intensified in scope. Both Spain and Britain continued to be medieval monarchic empires extended overseas, with an accompanying sense of religious and cultural mission and a measure of continued commitment to the common good and substantive justice. It was in this context that the rights of the South American Indians could be defended by late scholastic theologians like Francisco de Vitoria, whereas the later and more modern treatment of the North American Indians by Anglo-Saxon Protestants was more simply genocidal (even though they began their colonisation with an exhortation of Spanish brutality and inter-ethnic humanitarian intent.)⁸ Notably, however, central British control tended to restrain in many (though not all) cases the very worst excesses of genocide and enslavement – these tending to be exacerbated by local control, as in the case of the appalling Australian treatment of Aborigines.

Finally, the two dominant narratives of the British and the other European empires as vehicles of the modern share in a wider myopia that fails to see ‘Enlightenment’ as but one phase in a long-term Western rooting in its own version of the Axial Age. Europe’s specific axial legacy meant that the Christian synthesis most of all shaped its ‘long post-antiquity’ (approximately c500–1300). As a particular homiletic gloss on the Hebrew scriptures that was later interpreted by Greek philosophy and Roman ritual and law, Christianity not only lacked any absolute self-foundation, but also for that reason constantly evolved by integrating and transforming other Middle Eastern and European traditions in late Antiquity. This constitution of a particular universalism through an ‘eccentric’ mediation of the prior and other ensures that Europe is uniquely and almost contradictorily characterised at once by a modesty of transmission and a pride in a duty to further convey.⁹

After the fall of imperial Rome in the late fifth century, three different forces vied for the Roman legacy and shaped the West’s emerging civilisation: first, pagan tribes from Germanic, Turkic and Slavonic territories; second, Christendom and its ecclesial ‘body’ of local parishes and transnational monasteries; third, Islam’s creation of a caliphate from Arabia to the Iberian peninsula. Of these, as Rowan Williams writes, ‘the Christian Church is quite simply the most extensive and enduring, whether in the form of the Western Papacy or of the ‘Byzantine Commonwealth’, the network of cultural and spiritual connections in Eastern Europe linked to the new Roman Empire centred on

Constantinople'.¹⁰ Arguably, the British Empire more than any other power later developed this inheritance in the direction of a universal global polity – a project that was hijacked by the Whigs who simply promoted capitalism and colonialism, and then by the contingent and linked accidents of the American and French revolutions, which finally prevented the sporadically grasped possibility of a global monarchic-constitutional Anglican project.¹¹ Given this revisionist history of empire, we now need to re-think Britain's and continental Europe's imperial past and the post-colonial situation.

3. EUROPE'S IMPERIAL LEGACY

We saw in chapter 5 that, just because the British constitution bears strong traces of medieval mixed government, it really falls short of fully modern continental statehood (though so, in other ways, as we also saw, did *ancien régime* France, because of its greater sustaining of medieval regionalism and corporatism). Although British constitutional exceptionalism is yet another 'relic', which the liberal left has recently suggested that we try to dispose of, no suggestion could now appear more belated. For globalisation has effectively destroyed the autonomy of the 'Continental state', alongside the apparent 'anarchy' of the international realm lying between such states, which rendered warfare in theory but a formalist game between rivals, immune to ethical norms.¹² Instead, 'the commercial sea' has now invaded everywhere, imposing its problematic anarchic rule, now untempered by formal regulation, quickly followed by militarised airspace, which can invade without invasion.

We have witnessed the lethal impact of this with the often dubious deployment of drones, especially following the event of 9/11 and its final avenging through the troubling disposal of Osama bin Laden and other terrorists.¹³ It is to be hoped that the West can break with such lamentable barbarism (including Guantanamo and the worldwide system of extraordinary rendition) and abide by its own best principles of liberality, including the need for fair trial in all possible circumstances, about which Western leaders love to lecture the rest of the world.

From this perspective one can suggest that the antiquity of the British political settlement now gives it a benign late modern advantage. What has eventually triumphed on the sea and now by air is a narrow Anglo-Saxon economised empire that constantly seeks to export its own marketised politics and to culturally embrace all within the bounds of its own peculiar commercial republic. To a considerable degree, of course, the British Empire paved the way for this. And yet, it would be false simply to say that this empire lined up with the modern piratical market rather than the British mode of ancient government.

For while, indeed, the British Empire upheld and increased much capitalistic exploitation, it also at times tempered this politically and juridically in the name of Classical 'good order' and 'mixed government' (imbibed from family, school and university). It inherited the Spanish and Portuguese claims to legitimate imperial in terms of securing the passage throughout the world of free (not initially capitalistic) trade, rights of passage and communication rights to preach the gospel. It is for this reason that Niall Ferguson's pro-enlightenment and neo-liberal defence of the imperial past is the wrong one.

One could argue here, instead, that the American and to a degree the French empires were the political-economic outreaches of fully modern states, which therefore have sought to incorporate 'the other' entirely within their own Republican logics (completely economised in the American case, and so rendered far more oppressive than the French instance). By contrast, Britain to some degree remained the extension abroad of a pre-modern political venture. This meant an empire that, like the Holy Roman Empire itself, sought to unite and pacify under shared evaluative norms and central protective guarantees of last resort, terrains that were, nevertheless, allowed to some degree (however appallingly inadequate) to retain a measure of cultural diversity and local autonomy.¹⁴ It was with a proper grasp of this nature of the United Kingdom that the Malta Labour Party led by Dom Mintoff sought full political incorporation into Britain in the 1950s and that this possibility was even considered for a time by a faction in France.

In the current situation of horrendous globalised economic empire, it is important to remind ourselves of the fact that the United Kingdom is still formally speaking an island empire defined not by geographical bounds but by a claimed service (through constitutional monarchy and Church establishment) of the common good. But its Germanic-Celtic version of medieval polity needs now to be supplemented with a more Roman-antique element of subsidiary federalism.

Here Britain can obviously learn from her European partners. The recent moves towards a Scandinavian Union suggests a perceived need for intermediate links between the level of the 'regional state' and Brussels – a circumstance that further suggests the possibility that, in the very long term, Southern Ireland might even choose to re-join a federated or confederated British Isles. And it is certainly to be hoped that it will very soon re-join the Commonwealth. From long ago, a Celtic-Scandinavian insular culture has been a reality (as the mixed styles of the *Book of Kells* attest). Therefore, an isolated English nation-state would be a wholly artificial reality, denying the reality of its own Celtic fringes (Cornwall, Cumbria, the Welsh Marches and the Scottish Borders). Similarly, an independent Scottish nation – through adherence to a contrived, post-Calvinist and sometimes pseudo-Gaelic 'Scottishness' – would tend to deny its variously Anglo-Saxon, Norse,

Brithonic and religiously Catholic and Episcopalian components, while not doing justice to the real Gaelic legacy of the Highlands and Islands either. The implications for Commonwealth and other immigrants to the British Isles would also be negative: in fact, the British, ‘imperial’ identity is for them the most civic, non-racial and non-nationalist one.

This legacy is one of Britain’s most significant assets. For the inherited internationalisation of this empire as ‘commonwealth’ can permit her to entertain the future project of infusing globalised structures with more constitutionalism and respect for civil society. This can occur through an exercise of cultural influence and, where necessary, juridical linkages or guarantees (as are already in place for some business operations in Eastern Europe and elsewhere) and, as a final recourse, Western military intervention.

From the above remarks one can start to see that in the international arena also, the social is really primary – the flow of religions, customs, fashions and influences across borders is what most of all binds the globe together. A successful future international politics needs to go with this flow and the United Kingdom is, by inheritance and inclination, in a good position to seize the initiative in this respect. The emphasis on cultural and social ties was the most interesting stress of the ‘English School’ of IR gathered round Herbert Butterfield at Peterhouse, Cambridge. It exposes a glaring gap in the thinking of both Carl Schmitt and the American ‘realists’, as the following section shows.

4. EMPIRE AS COMMONWEALTH: THE PRIMACY OF ASSOCIATION

Liberalism inherited the notion of commonwealth from late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, notably the idea of *respublica christiana*, and redefined it in secular terms. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes distinguishes commonwealth by free, contractual institution from commonwealth by forceful, violent acquisition. But in either case, creating a commonwealth for him marks the imposition of an artificial, political order on the violent ‘state of nature’. Thus the polity is governed by will and artifice, not the intellect and any real inherent universal nature of things (which Hobbes denies).¹⁵

In an albeit different mode, Kant naturalises violence within the order of being and considers inter-state warfare as a natural mechanism to regulate global anarchy. Thus internationally as well as nationally, liberal politics rests on the idea of asocial sociability: human beings are naturally self-interested and jealous vis-à-vis other human beings, but this eventually engenders some kind of competitive order. War is the process through which antagonism is transformed into stability, with human conflict somehow mirroring natural violence:

Nature has therefore once again used the incompatibility of human beings, even of great societies and state bodies ... as a means to seek out in their unavoidable antagonism a condition of tranquillity and safety, i.e. through wars, through the overstrained and never ceasing process of armament for them ... nature drives them to what reason could have told them even without so much sad experience: namely to go beyond a lawless condition of savages and enter into a federation of nations.¹⁶

So Kant views warfare as an evil necessary to regulate the original violence that is supposedly our fundamental human condition. Only war will lead to the formation, destruction, and reconstitution of states until such time that national and international arrangements permit the creation of 'cosmopolitan commonwealths'.¹⁷ Hobbes's and Kant's ultimately converging, though apparently very different, conceptions of international order show the complicit collusion of realism and cosmopolitanism in IR theory.

Therefore, a truly alternative account would reject the claim that international society is fundamentally anarchic – a global 'war of all against all' that mirrors the violent 'state of nature' at the national level. It is not so anarchic because the most primary ties, bonds, and connections between human beings are not confined to national borders. They are transnational inflections of universal human attributes: language, cultural customs, music, art, literary modes, fashions in manners and dress as well as religion. Therefore, as Catherine Pickstock says, 'One reason why different countries do not wage war all the time is the widely-diffused sense of shared culture and common sensibility which can stretch even across vast geographical distances'.¹⁸ Long ago, but in the same spirit and against the New Whigs, Edmund Burke – perhaps the ultimate progenitor of the British 'cultural' theory of IR – emphasised 'traditioned' association as the most universal mode of human interaction:

In the intercourse between nations, we are apt to rely too much on the instrumental part. We lay too much weight upon the formality of treaties and compacts. We do not act much more wisely when we trust to the interests of men as guarantees of their engagements. ... Men are not tied to one another by papers and seals. They are led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies. It is with nations as with individuals. Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nation and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners, and habits of life. They have more than the force of treaties in themselves. They are obligations written in the heart. They approximate men to men, without their knowledge, and sometimes against their intentions. The secret, unseen, but irrefragable bond of habitual intercourse holds them together even when their perverse and litigious nature sets them to equivocate, scuffle, and fight, about the terms of their written obligations. ... There have been periods

of time in which communities, apparently in peace with each other, have been more perfectly separated than, in later times, many nations in Europe have been in the course of long and bloody wars. The cause must be sought in the similitude throughout of religion, laws, and manners. At bottom, these are all the same. The writers on public law have often called this aggregate of nations a *Commonwealth*. They had reason.¹⁹

By contrast with the liberal conception of nations as individual egos writ large that are driven by will not intellect (as for Wilsonian idealism), Burke accentuates the primacy of association over the sovereign power of the individual and of the collective under the aegis of an artificial social contract. In other words, Burke inverts the modern priority of rights and contracts by arguing that the mutual moral obligations of interpersonal relations are more primary than abstract, formal and procedural standards imposed for either state-administrative or market-commercial purposes. Crucially, this extends to ties across nations and sovereign states, which suggests that a ‘family of nations and peoples’ really can embed the society of states and markets – even if this is not reflected in the currently dominant arrangements of international affairs. One might in this light say that, ever since early humans walked right round the globe, *both* the global and the minutely local are more primary and more primarily linked than all the more restricted modes of political maximisation lying between them.

In accord with this secondariness of the political middles, Burke therefore argues that ‘common-wealths are not physical but moral essences. They are artificial combinations, and, in their proximate efficient cause, the arbitrary productions of the human mind’.²⁰ By ‘artificial combinations’ he means effects of human habit and creativity that blends nature with culture – the order of being with the order of knowing and ‘making’. In this manner, ‘customs, manners, and habits of life’ provide the bonds and ties that infuse the immanent political order with a transcendent, cosmic outlook. Such a Burkean perspective shifts the focus from an artificial commonwealth that coercively regulates natural violence to a natural-cultural commonwealth that can uphold peace beyond conflict based on the principle of association.

5. RE-INJECTING CHRISTIAN REALISM INTO IR

It follows that a renewal and extension of this Burkean vision requires a break with the secularist assumptions of IR theory. Just as general IR theory took a secular turn in the 1950s–1960s, so too the specifically Christian terminology of early English School writings was gradually replaced by a discourse that focused on the institutions of international society, ‘leaving many Christians

trading in secular currency, where formerly agnostics had quite comfortably used religious coinage'.²¹ With the growing influence of Hedley Bull's work, the dominant strand of the English School privileged the formal-procedural dimension of international society over substantive questions such as natural law, community, association and the common good.

Bull and his English School contemporaries certainly offered an alternative to the scientific dystopia of realism and the idealistic utopia of revolution-ism. But the price they paid for making Grotius's rationalist tradition now completely normative was to eschew a metaphysical worldview connected with Christianity in favour of a secular discourse centred on increasingly abstract, vacuous categories such as 'common interests, common values ... a common set of rules ... and common institutions'.²² (By contrast, Martin Wight had somewhat tempered Grotian rationalism with a Burkean sense of substantive culture and distributive justice). As with IR thinking in general, the English School's secular, post-metaphysical turn coincided with the decline of grand theory and the rise of secular positivism.²³

It is surely right to view the legacy of Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight and Donald Mackinnon as a better starting point to develop a more realist position in IR that is both metaphysical and political, and can conceptualise international affairs beyond the secular categories of the Westphalian settlement. Their embrace of the international primacy of cultural forces and their critique of secularism provides a basis for re-integrating religion into politics. Both Butterfield and Wight viewed the Cold War as the final destruction of Christendom. In 1951, Butterfield warned of a 'serious collapse of civilisation' across Europe and suggested that the violent clash of secular totalitarianisms marked a point in history at which 'the Dark Ages have actually returned'.²⁴ Three years earlier, Martin Wight had made the point that the modern secularist settlement culminates in post-1945 bipolarity, which licenses absolute power without ethical limits:

It is in the international sphere that the demonic concentrations of power of the modern neo-pagan world have their clearest expression. Russia and America are the last two Great Powers within the Westernized system of sovereign states. And the characteristic of that system, after centuries in which the Church has had no influence upon its development, is the emancipation of power from moral restraints. Leviathan is a simple beast; his law is self-preservation, his appetite is for power. The process of international politics that has followed from this is equally simple: the effective Powers in the world have decreased in number and increased in size, and the method has been war.²⁵

Indeed, Butterfield and Wight believed that the modern separation of the sacred from the secular does not reflect the true nature of the world we all

inhabit. On the contrary, heavenly and earthly powers are inextricably intertwined and interact with one another according to certain patterns – in line with the ‘Platonic’ notion that immanent reality bears the trace of its transcendent source and in part reflects the divine warrant.

So in qualification (albeit too muted) of the Hobbesian fear of a violent ‘state of nature’ and the ‘war of all against all’, these thinkers shifted the focus back onto the social nature of mankind and the idea that human cooperation precedes the contractual arrangements both within and across nations. Precisely in the absence of a single sovereign who wields coercive power, the glue that therefore most of all holds together societies both nationally and internationally is ‘an antecedent common culture’, which is more primary than the rights of individual citizens or sovereign states.²⁶ Culture so configured rests on a shared ‘cosmic, moral constitution’ that is metaphysical in nature because it links immanent values to their transcendent origin and outlook.²⁷ Thus if the self-admitted residual ‘whiggism’ of the English School too often took the form of a state rationalist anticipation of the mediations of private interest by the ‘hidden hand’ – whether of the market or of international power-relations – this was qualified by the legacy of the more gothicising constitutional whiggery of Bolingbroke and Burke. Within this legacy, something of an older medieval sense of *ius* as just distribution rather than merely private possession had been to a degree sustained.²⁸

Moreover, beyond even natural law, Butterfield and Wight appeal to the principle and practice of love or charity, which complements both power politics and natural law, and which relates the dignity of all persons to their shared transcendent origin and finality – even if Butterfield aligns charitable understanding too much with an excessive retrospective denial that the right ever really lies on one side rather than the other.

This metaphysical vision of perfectible unity differs profoundly from the dualism between the violent ethic of coercion and the peaceful ethic of love that characterises the thinking of the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr who influenced mainstream realism in the United States and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom.²⁹ The American theologian limited charity to personal piety and justified warfare as the fulfilment of a divine providential volition in excess of the ethical.³⁰ As ‘tutors of mankind in its pilgrimage to perfection’,³¹ Christians (according to Niebuhr) have a duty to join America’s divinely sanctioned mission of spreading democracy and freedom across the globe. This license to kill in the name of liberal freedom coincided, for him, precisely with a pure pursuit of self-interest, understood in terms of Stoic ‘natural’ limits to the reach of sympathy and justice that appeared to neglect any real theology of creation.³² In contrast, Butterfield and Wight posit in effect the ontological primacy of peace over violence and emphasise the ethical constraints on state action within and across national borders.

The adoption of such an ‘associationist’ model of IR would promote a plural search for the shared common good and substantive ends that can mediate between the individual and the collective will and thus help bind together members of diverse bodies and polities. Thereby, one can refuse the liberal view that the incommensurability of rival values either necessarily requires (an internationally unforthcoming) central sovereign power to arbitrate conflict or else leads to a fragile and uncomfortable international *modus vivendi*.

Taken together, a commitment to the common good and constitutional corporatism by global powers such as Britain and her partners could in theory transform the dominant model of neo-liberal globalisation. The focus on shared substantive ends can correct the fixation either with instrumental and transactional relationships (merely national or international corporate interests) or with procedural ties (commitment to common rules and regulative bodies)³³ towards the reality of shared cultural and social bonds that matter more in an increasingly globalised world. Similarly, the emphasis on ‘mixed government’ can, globally applied, redirect the debate away from either national-republican or global-cosmopolitan arrangements to more mutualist models of subsidiary federalism and multinational associations based on constitutional rule,³⁴ embedded institutions, uncorrupted law and the re-balancing of power.

6. EUROPE’S POLITY OF CULTURE

Faced with the absolutism of the French Revolution that sought to replace the Christian identity with a secular creed, Burke argued thus:

It [Europe] is virtually one great state having the same basis of general law; with some diversity of provincial customs and local establishments. The nations of Europe have had the very same christian [*sic*] religion, agreeing in the fundamental parts, varying a little in the ceremonies and in the subordinate doctrines. The whole of the polity and œconomy [*sic*] of every country in Europe has been derived from the same sources. It was drawn from the old Germanic or Gothic customary; from the feudal institutions which must be considered as an emanation from that customary; and the whole has been improved and digested into system and discipline by the Roman law. ... From this resemblance in the modes of intercourse, and in the whole form and fashion of life, no citizen in Europe could be altogether an exile in any part of it. There was nothing more than a pleasing variety to recreate and instruct the mind; to enrich the imagination; and to meliorate the heart. When a man travelled or resided for health, pleasure, business or necessity, from his own country, he never felt himself quite abroad.³⁵

Burke's vision of Europe's religiously based 'polity of culture' (our term) provides an alternative to the liberal view that sovereign states or else sovereign individuals are more primary than the overlapping forms of associations that constitute countries and 'international societies'.

In a remarkable report on 'The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe' published in 2004, a reflection group composed of European statesmen and intellectuals debunked the myth that economic integration will lead to political union and that market forces can produce politically resilient solidarity: 'The original expectation, that the political unity of the EU would be a consequence of the European common market has proven to be illusory. ... To function as a viable and vital polity, the European Union needs a firmer foundation'.³⁶ Rejecting any arbitrary list of abstract values, the group argued that the role of Europe's common culture, which is a variety of traditions that are both intertwined and in tension with one another, grows in significance as the old, secular logic of modernity is unravelling.

The shared cultural bonds that link Europeans can draw on the Christian fusion of biblical revelation with Greco-Roman antiquity in order to promote solidarity, subsidiarity, the dignity of the person, the virtue of free association and the distinction of religious from political authority that avoids both aggressive secularism (masquerading as secular neutrality) and fanatical theocracy.³⁷ In the absence of such principles, the professing of values associated with democracy and liberalism will sound increasingly hollow. Universal values of freedom, equality, solidarity and the will of the majority require transcendent finalities projecting notions of the genuinely good life, otherwise they are drained of their meaning by procedural process, or else they oscillate between the sovereign individual and the sovereign collective. Equally, they oscillate between obsession with imagined micro-differences of identity in the name of negative freedom, and the univocal rendering of all identities in the name of a formalistic equality as essentially the same. These oscillations then fall victim to state and market power, which will decide, arbitrarily or automatically, just where the verdict should fall and to what degree.

To ward off this danger, Europe therefore needs to eschew merely abstract standards and formal values, allied to the priority of process over policy, in favour of a mutual recognition of particular practices, and a prudentially just distribution of their variously proper roles. Here Christian legacy is key: up to a point, Europe remains a vestigially Christian polity that is characterised by hybrid institutions, overlapping jurisdictions, polycentric authority and multi-level governance.

The aforementioned report by the Reflection Group on the spiritual and cultural dimension of Europe puts this well:

Europe itself is far more than a political construct. It is a complex – a ‘culture’ – of institutions, ideas, expectations, habits and feelings, moods, memories and prospects that form a ‘glue’ binding Europeans together – and all these are a foundation on which a political construct must rest. This complex – we can speak of it as European civil society – is at the heart of political identity. It defines the conditions of successful European politics and the limits of state and political intervention.³⁸

Contrary to common misconceptions, the European Union is neither a federal super-state nor an intergovernmental structure. Instead, European nations pool their sovereignty and are more like regions within a pan-national polity that combines a *sui generis* political system with elements of a neo-medieval empire.³⁹ The German constitutional court, in a landmark ruling on the Lisbon Treaty in June 2009, emphasised that the Union in its original outlook is not so much an international organisation or single state as a voluntary association of states. But now that the European Union has been captured by the logic of the market-state, its members need to strengthen the associational model that combines vertical, hierarchical elements with horizontal, egalitarian aspects. Based on overlapping jurisdictions and a complex web of intermediary institutions wherein sovereignty is dispersed and diffused, such a model can help re-embed both politics and economics within the civic and social bonds of civil society. Amid the current crisis of legitimacy, this suggests that the European Union should pursue a truly subsidiary *polis* that connects supranational institutions much more closely to regions, localities, communities and neighbourhoods. Most of all, the Union requires a much greater sense of a common *demos* with a mutual *ethos* and *telos*.

Specifically, one of the clearest weaknesses of the European Union’s political system is the established modality of direct elections to the European Parliament (EP), which has broken the link between national political classes and the European project, giving national politicians and national parliaments a pretext to get involved less than they should do and might otherwise have done. Bound up with this is another structural weakness, namely the radical transition of the Commission from being a pan-European civil service in support of cooperation among national governments towards becoming a supranational institution that concentrates both legislative and executive powers in its own hand. Both EP elections and the design of the Commission drive a wedge between EU and national politics and deepen the growing gap between the Union and its citizens – a gap now manifest in the Brexit vote.

For these reasons, the European Union should create a parliamentary system of bicameralism – with a lower house representing the people and an upper house representing cities, regions, nations, professions and faith communities. For its part, the Commission must revert to being a high-level

European civil service that supports the work of the European Union's bicameral legislature and the European Union's executive – the Council of Ministers and the European Council (and possibly nationally elected politicians on secondment to the European Union to ensure the day-to-day running of the Union's executive). In this manner, a bicameral system and an executive rooted in national polities can once again bind national political classes to the European project. The objection that the European Union already has a certain kind of second chamber in the form of the Council of Ministers ignores its current role, which is to relate the European project to national governments but not to national parliaments and national polities in the manner that is needed.

A bicameral parliament and the participation of nationally elected politicians in the EU executive would go some way towards building a mixed government that is in line with the best traditions of European constitutionalism – the rule of law, limits on sovereign power, the interplay of the 'one', the 'few' and the 'many', as well as the distinction of powers without, however, an absolute separation, which ends either in paralysis or in the primacy of the executive over the other branches of government. What a proper European polity requires is a much stronger measure of popular assent, coupled with civic participation (through local, regional and professional assemblies such as town-halls or guildhalls) and the guidance of 'the wise' (based on the representation of professions and faiths). Only a commonwealth of nations and peoples with shared social imaginaries will be able to foster social ties and civic bonds that are key to re-embedding markets and states in the interpersonal relationships of trust and cooperation.

Externally, a commonwealth that reflects the mediating universalism of the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions would contrast with the exceptionalism of old empires and new colonial powers such as the United States and China. However imperfectly, the European Union remains so far the only serious attempt to inaugurate a transnational polity whose members come together to form a voluntary association of nations that pool their sovereign power for the common good of their people and others across the globe. Europe has a dark colonial history, but it has also given rise to a set of institutions and practices that have transformed tribalism and nationalism at home and abroad. Moreover, Europe has shaped global history not through sheer size or military might alone, but, rather, through its inventiveness and the creation of 'force multipliers'.⁴⁰ European creativity today is mirrored in the international order that reflects Europe's Christian heritage. For example, European Protestant theologians and Catholic figures played a decisive role in creating the League of Nations after 1919 and the United Nations in 1946, while Christian Democrats from Italy, Germany, the Benelux countries and

France led the way in setting up the project for European integration and enlargement in the late 1940s and 1950s.⁴¹

In contemporary parlance, the Christian origin and outlook of the post-1919 world order is based on the idea of ‘networking’ and ‘mainstreaming’ Christian ideas and thus multiplying the power of Europe’s vestigially Christian polity. The invention of international organisations and supranational bodies reflects the Christian commitment to create a Philonian *megalopolis* – a cosmic city that upholds universal, global principles embodied in particular, national or regional practices. Arguably, Christianity – whose global spread outstrips that of Islam and other world religions⁴² – is Europe’s single most significant force multiplier.

7. WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY IN A WORLD OF RESURGENT EMPIRES

Renewing Britain’s Global Outlook

Nowadays, city-states, empires and transnational religious institutions are, as we have seen, once again resurgent and capable of displacing the Westphalian system of national states and global markets. European influence will further diminish unless it changes tack, in comprehension of this new context, and adopts a truly bold and imaginative foreign policy in which genuine ambition and genuine generosity would coincide. This is particularly true for Britain, which remains Europe’s most globally orientated power.⁴³

Had the Scots voted for independence in September 2014, it would have been hard to overstate the implications for Scotland and the rest of Britain. The former would have faced protracted economic uncertainty, an uncertain relationship to the EU and a shortage of national defence capabilities. For Britain, the loss of Scotland (a threat that has returned after Brexit) would have been devastating both symbolically and in real terms – the end of a 300-year-long union during which time Britain became the globe’s largest empire of all times. After years of sacrificing its armed forces on the altar of austerity, the rest of the United Kingdom would have lost access to the strategically significant naval bases at Faslane and Coulport in the Firth of Clyde on the Scottish west coast. Leaving aside the exposure to financial meltdown, London’s role in Europe would have been much diminished. Without Scotland’s positive influence, the United Kingdom’s retreat to ‘splendid isolation’ in the wake of the Brexit vote would loom even larger in the eyes of Europe and the rest of the world. Yet Britain (or a residually lone England) still faces the prospect – despite its being very far from inevitable

– of becoming a glorified Singapore: a city-state with some rural hinterland in a world of old and new imperial powers.

The potential consequences of Scottish secession for Europe are similarly hard to overstate. Scotland's independence could have triggered a wave of further secessions – from Catalonia and the Basque country in Spain, via Wallonia and Flanders in Belgium, to the Balkans and beyond. This, coupled with the current wave of populism and nationalism, might have led to the unravelling of the European integration process, starting with the much-maligned Eurozone. Of course, all this remains a distinct possibility, especially in the wake of the influx of millions of refugees and Britain's wavering commitment to the continent. Without a more positive, never mind non-existing, involvement on the part of Britain, the European Union will continue to lack a clear geo-political vision and the prospect of regional secessions, of course, remains. Anti-establishment movements everywhere are blaming the nearest easy target rather than the globalisation process itself, and so they can only be met by a shared European alternative approach to the global.

Yet, alongside Russia (and as her game-changing intervention in Syria serves to show), Britain is the only power in the wider Europe with a truly global outlook, and as long as both remain on the margins of the European Union, Europe's role in the world will be increasingly marginal compared with that of the United States and China.⁴⁴ Right now Britain and the European Union increasingly look like an economically constrained annex to the United States, which oscillates between isolationism and interventionism. Meanwhile, Russia risks becoming a vassal state that supplies cheap resources to China. After more than 500 years of continental prestige, the whole of Europe is deeply divided and diminished in international affairs.⁴⁵

But with Scotland remaining in the Union, Britain has a unique and perhaps final chance of crafting a more imaginative foreign policy and playing a transformative part in international affairs, especially across the wider Europe. Such a vision refuses either a British version of the American dream or the post-imperial destiny of 'Little England', on the model of either a 'larger Sweden' (inside the European Union) or a 'little Norway' (if Brexit were really to happen). To view Britain either as an appendix to the United States or as a small post-imperial sovereign state would be to misunderstand who she is and how she came to be – which is not out of a big revolutionary explosion. Rather – to agree with both gothicising whigs and High Tories, besides the more romantic aspect of the English Labour legacy – its slow-burning genius, as both English and Celtic, since before the Norman conquest (and always of a part-Christian inspiration) is political – is to know how to govern, based on a flexible rule of law and on constitutional free association at many different levels. It is this long legacy of interweaving consent with leadership and freedom

with community that has most of all given to the world European representative government. By comparison, the revolutionary legacies are rather inadequate parodies, on which what is best in France and the United States does not really depend.

Therefore it is important for the understanding of the Western destiny and its future to tell a better story about the British one – not simply a whiggish and capitalist recent story that is superficial and misleading.⁴⁶ Part of this story is the truth, already invoked, that Britain has always been an internal empire where a group of diverse local territories, ethnicities and cultures was already held together by a common set of symbolic loyalties, values and acceptance of a certain jurisprudential horizon that was already committed to a counter-centralisation and balancing protection of the substantive rights of different social groups, as argued in the Middle Ages by Sir John Fortescue.⁴⁷ There is, therefore, a historic sense in which empire can be more benign, plural and inclusive of a reality than that of the nation state. Of course, the British Empire was overwhelmingly to do with capitalist expropriation, and it eventually tried to impose precisely modern ‘statist’ features on a global scale. However, it also from the outset mitigated through politics, diplomacy and cultural negotiation a more naked exploitation on the part of freebooting entrepreneurs, besides tempering through missionary interests the demand for white settlement and a merely economic engagement with native territory. Equally, given the limits of its military and personnel resources, it perforce had to encourage the emergence of more plural and indigenous modes of political control, while also fostering a certain cross-cultural and international modulation of an originally merely British ethos – such that, for example, Indians and not British people often managed the empire and quasi-empire in India itself, Africa and China, while indigenous Africans often proved more successful missionaries than the British originals.⁴⁸

For this reason, it is shallow to think that the legacy of empire bequeathed no positive and equitable potential, or that it could not be turned towards mutual and cooperative notions of international commonwealth – even though such a mutation was sadly held back by (if anything, latterly growing) racist prejudices. In fact, there are historical links between the emergence of the British Commonwealth,⁴⁹ of Francophonía and of the European Community (originally envisaged in some ways as a substitute for the recently lost Habsburg control in the East and an attempt to restore the ancient Carolingian unity of France and Germany in the West).⁵⁰ And although it is still largely assumed that British and French influence must necessarily wane, we forget that those who assumed this in the 1960s would be staggered by the fact that they are still in the early twenty-first century militarily involved in major conflicts in the Near East and in Sub-Saharan Africa.

European Commonwealth

Empire is always about, finally, to end yet never quite does so, and in certain modes – such as the underwriting of foreign business by British law or the creation of charter cities (a measure of guardianship to uphold the rule of law) – re-invents itself in some positive new ways in contrast to the post-imperial corporate and oligarchic ravages that we have disgracefully supported. Indeed, it can be argued that part of the British loss of influence (itself exaggerated) was due to loss of nerve and absence of vision on the part of a decadent establishment and not wholly to historical inevitability.⁵¹ Equally, it is questionable to suppose that the cultural and political break-up of the United Kingdom follows automatically upon the end of empire, as opposed to a more plausible Celtic discontent with metropolitan neo-liberalism, a mood almost equally shared by the North of England, East Anglia and the West Country. For a British, and even a British Isles, dimension in both culture and politics stretches right back to the early Middle Ages – as historians rather than Hollywood-made movies so clearly attest.

If British identity has tended to lapse in favour of Celtic and now English ones with the success of the SNP and the rise of UKIP (and whatever successor party might emerge), then this is not inevitable, but rather the result of a southern English failure to offer a vision of British identity. Such a vision has to include a new version of looking outwards in order to seek to help others and the British themselves towards political and economic equity in suitably diverse terms – because without this maritime destiny (which one might regard as a European identity intensified) the British identity must itself be lost. That this destiny has often been pursued with brutality and was abandoned so recklessly and irresponsibly – with dire consequences in the Near East – only precludes Britain, like France, from trying to pursue it in future more charitably and cooperatively if these nations act out of guilt, which is always to act in bad faith. Outside Western Europe (which is itself not immune) the world now exhibits a general descent into demagoguery, oligarchy, anarchy and tyranny – whether the liberal tyranny of democratic despotism (as in the West) or the reactionary tyranny of authoritarian state capitalism (as in China or Russia). To retreat to an insular powerlessness in the face of these threats would be for Britain and Europe to betray their own legacy and identity and to jeopardise their long-term security.

Based on their historical and cultural connections the European Union with the Commonwealth and both Francophone and Ibero-american territories could potentially offer a genuine alternative to (federal or unitary) super-states on the one hand, and globalised free-trade zones on the other.

Indeed, the current crisis of Brexit, the Schengen area and the Eurozone, with their potential threat to the very existence of the European Union, ironically gives

Britain, despite all her past and present anti-continental irresponsibility, the chance to take the lead in crafting a 'European Commonwealth' with an internationalist extension.⁵² Such a commonwealth would be a loose federal association defined by a shared religious and intellectual legacy, besides a shared ethical, social and political culture. Taking this lead has become urgent in the face of Germany's current desire to impose 'Asiatic' disciplines of an undemocratic capitalism upon the southern European countries, while progressively weakening its own internal social market within which it still, nevertheless, exceptionally basks. As an alternative to this process, Britain and France need to adopt once again a more global outlook and Germany to export its own in many ways exemplary economic model (though it needs radicalisation and a removal from an all too statist mode of corporatism) in adaptively different ways to other European countries. This might involve some blending with the rather *more* mutualist structures of welfare provision in the Latin polities. Any such moves would require a greater internal balancing, whereby Germany learned to consume more and other European countries to produce and export more.⁵³

Thus, while one must deplore the (albeit often circumstantially enforced) selectivity and mixed motivation of recent Western intervention in the Arabic uprisings, it is still to be hoped that a new, more European-led approach to international affairs can replace 'liberal interventionism' for rights and markets with an 'associationist interventionism' upholding genuine transnational trusteeship and partnership in a fashion that respects local peculiarities and traditions.

Given the international associationist programme set forth above, the reasons for sustaining the United Kingdom are the same reasons for still seeking to remain in the European Union, and yet again for not abandoning British links to international Anglophonia, for in every case an imaginative foreign policy would call for the abandonment of false and dysfunctional either-or's in favour of strangely possible paradoxes. This would mean not to focus on state or market, religion or the secular, Anglophonia or Europe, or nation versus the global but, instead, to shift the emphasis to intimate reciprocities in ever-widening circles from the local street to the planet, fusing economic, political and ecological purpose in the name of the flourishing of each and every person and their combination as workers to build a shared and beautiful *megalopolis*.

8. COVENANT AND COMMONWEALTH

If this seems utterly fanciful at present, since, although objectively possible, it lacks every precondition of subjective willingness, then it could become

less so in the face of increasing emergency – which, as in the case of Nazi Germany, can change public thinking very rapidly. Currently, Europe is challenged by militant Islam both at its frontiers and within its borders, and by an influx of refugees, which is turning into something more like a nomadic incursion, inciting an understandable mass fear about a further loss of identity and traditional ways of life. The overwhelming majority of refugees are themselves fleeing from terror, tyranny and chaos, and are frequently Muslims escaping from an Islamic extremism, which they utterly reject, yet a few will have malign intents and more of the children of refugees may well in time grow drastically discontented with their new home.

In the face of these threats, it is all too possible that European nations, already now moving apart, will simply close their individual borders, withdraw from external European engagements and try to reduce and constrain their Muslim populations. But, besides destroying the European ethos in a quasi-fascistic mode, this would still leave Europe vulnerable to a radical Islam that is, by definition and its perverse sense of duty, hostile to an ‘idolatrous’ neighbour and bound to attack it in future in various ways. Perhaps, indeed, a caliphate or rival caliphates could take hold, Israel would be existentially threatened in a way that the West could scarcely ignore and elements of the growing Muslim minorities within Europe would be yet more inclined than they are already today to provide a potential fifth column of support.

The only way, therefore, for Europe to secure its future is twofold. First, whatever the fate of the EU in its current configuration it must truly draw into an ‘ever closer union’ within a subsidiary, federal polity, else its individual parts will themselves be continuously threatened. The failure of European security integration, which allowed the Paris attacks of November 2015 and the Brussels attacks of March 2016 to take place, gave the lie to any notion that the Islamist emergency will lead to a return to the supremacy of the Hobbesian state, designed only for protection, as though that were an ahistorical default position.⁵⁴ In reality, a new globalised enemy who is everywhere, inside as well as out, can only be contested by equally transnational forces. Equally, an ideological, civilisational enemy cannot be fought only in terms of supposed Hobbesian realism, but only through a recrudescence of self-belief and rediscovery of just what it is that we believe in and what holds us together. So as we have argued, political and military solidarity, besides a reversing of demographic decline, requires a renewal of Europe’s cultural legacy, including its Christian aspect.

Second, security within can only be achieved by securing for others, including overwhelmingly Muslim ‘others’, security without. Radical Islam, other religious sectarianisms, climate change, capitalist exploitation, corrupt government and the collapse of the rule of law are rendering the Near East and Sub-Saharan Africa scarcely habitable for many. The same processes are

more mutedly at work in India and Burma and further East. Thus, at the very least, Europe, North America and Australasia need to intervene in the Near East and Sub-Saharan Africa in order to assist local populations in rendering these places viable as human habitations and to mitigate the need for mass migration.

Currently, as said, the popular will to do this is lacking and, yet, as also already indicated, a growing threat of drastic cultural and political transformation could shift peoples' minds. But drastic intervention is in any case required, because it seems likely that a merely half-hearted engagement with ISIS could in the short term backfire and in the long term eventually engender a yet more fearful and widespread Islamism. Even if ISIS is decisively defeated on the ground in Syria and Iraq, they could still regroup in reaction later in that area, or elsewhere within the Middle East and within wider Islamic territories, especially in Africa and Europe – as is already happening in Libya.⁵⁵ Therefore, serious military action (realistically also involving the United States) would also have to include a long-term commitment to stay (even for as long as half a century). The task is to craft – together with the peoples of the Near East, including an Israel pressurised to give the Palestinians justice in exchange for security – a new stable order based on associationist political structures respectful of local religious, ethnic and tribal legacies but compatible with the rule of law and the plural tolerance of different faiths and cultural allegiances.

In the short term, this implies the adoption of a distinct military and political strategy that has so far been lacking. In order to defeat ISIS and fully to overcome radical Islam, the basic options are to ally either with the Sunni arc or with the Shi'ite crescent. The latter course should be adopted, in cooperation with Russia, because neither Turkey nor the Gulf States are unambiguous opponents of ISIS, which unfortunately has become the spearhead for the expression of wider Sunni discontents.⁵⁶ The long-term and modern tendencies of some strands of Sunnism towards intolerance and extreme jihad must be openly recognised, and equivalently, the more sacramentally mediated tradition-respecting and 'Catholic' variants of Islam must be supported against the militant 'Calvinism' of the Wahhabist legacy.⁵⁷ More broadly, the West should lend aid to those Muslims who openly recognise that they must learn from Christianity in shaping an unprecedented mode of Islam that would break with both the advocacy of jihad and the non-separation of a secular political and legal sphere. Neither of these things is, in a long historical perspective, simplistically contemptible, but neither of them is compatible with the Christian and modern norms upon which Western civilisation is built. And unfortunately both these things are clearly supported by the Qur'an itself – a sacred text whose authority is more literally regarded than most Christians have regarded the Bible,⁵⁸ despite the subtle, beautiful and

life-enhancing exegetical complexities that have often been erected on top of this non-negotiable foundation. We have either collectively continue to believe that we have made an 'advance' that the Qur'an misapprehends and distrusts, or deny this and deny ourselves and our own future.

Such an approach would nonetheless be respectful of the degree of truth in the Islamist critique of the West. For the many merely social explanations for the rise of Islamism are insufficient, if by no means totally wrong. Certainly, Muslim minorities in the West suffer poverty and discrimination and, if not that, then sometimes a disdain that can breed disaffection. Certainly, there is a long-standing grievance against the West that includes anger at the treatment of marginalised Muslim tribes and failures to intervene to protect Muslims (for example in Bosnia) as well as anger at grossly misjudged interventions (as with Iraq and, arguably, Afghanistan), besides geo-politically and economically convenient support for secular tyrants. The list should also include the disgraceful pandering to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States – but this has involved an effective encouragement of Islamic extremism that is more of concern to Islamic moderates.

One can validly ask here just how *really* concerned the West was with Islamism before the displacement of Al-Qaeda by ISIS. Its irruption, after all, allowed Western states to gleefully assume exceptional powers and new measures of control over *all* its own citizens, rather than imposing on Muslims specifically a justifiable exceptional demand that they put their own house in order, while the 9/11 wars were oddly off-centre in terms of their supposed extremist targets. The West has, thereby, failed to better protect not only its own citizens, but also Muslims who have themselves been more often than anyone else the victims of terrorism. And one can note in this respect the highly curious way in which a certain modern Protestant (and sometimes fundamentalist) theological voluntarism and an equally modern Islamic voluntarism have, in effect, reinforced each other's standing as militant advocates, in the course of their ostensible mutual standoff. Indeed, *both* for a long while in the wake of 9/11 regarded the main enemy as being the secular Ba'athist states of the Near East. No wonder Shi'ite Iranians, however absurdly, have tended to detect a conspiracy.

In effect, both sides would seem implicitly to have realised that, with the decline of the nation-state, Grotian-Hobbesian liberal or Schmittian justification of the political through the need for security and requirement of a threatening external foe (a vision ultimately grounded in theological voluntarism and pessimism, as we have seen) can only be revamped through the discovery of a new 'pervasive' enemy within as well as without, such as to create a permanent condition of emergency.⁵⁹ In the face of this dire development, the only pacifying course can now be rediscovery of the political as the positive mutual quest for virtue, which can open up a realistic

prospect of a global order sustained by striving vision and not constitutive antagonism.

But having said all that, and having also noted how Western deficits in relation to Islam also apply, in parallel ways, more globally, then one can still ask just why resistance should have taken the form of recrudescence of a pure but brutally simplified Islam. Part of the answer here is certainly a collapse of secular ideologies of resistance, partly as a result of Muslim and other religious disillusion with secular regimes. However, one needs here to move beyond simple liberal regret and sense that history has gone perversely and for the moment away from its 'normal' progressive direction. To the contrary, the discernment of many in the global East and South, including Muslims, that the secular critique of capitalism and liberalism is inadequate should be seen as valid, and as coinciding in some respects with the critique made in this book – though as too often taking cruder forms and as not informed by the necessarily more complex and muted relationship that Christianity has to the liberal legacy, as its own bastard offspring. The theorists of the Muslim Brotherhood and of the Iranian Revolution were not wrong to see that the denial of the sacred tends of necessity to commodify everything and to encourage an anarchic selfishness. They were equally right to refuse a sub-Soviet-style statism that negates group and individual liberties. Unfortunately, their response has been to adopt a version of authentic Qur'anic religion that is, nevertheless, disastrously unqualified by the complex subtleties of Islamic tradition, fused with elements of Western fascistic ideology.

Moreover, the liberal alternative of a global embrace of liberal capitalism is all too likely to leave most of the Global East and South in permanent subordination and penury, given that economic and regional inequity is built into the logical workings of capitalism. Therefore, we cannot, as the West, simply and arrogantly return to an exacerbated version of liberal progressivist illusion – though the 'Hegelian' possibility must remain that the entire globe, including Islam, could succumb to this illusion in the end and, so, to the permanent economic depression of some and to the materialist illusion of most. This would be a dismal and, in reality, a regressive prospect. History has truly moved on and disclosed something unexpected, but true, to our gaze. If we are prepared to recognise this, then we can begin to try to craft a post-liberal global approach that would seek to ensure that integral and substantive social loyalties can live alongside each other in peace, which means also in terms of those substantive – and often pan-religious – loyalties that they can discover they share in common.

Otherwise, and for the moment, the new historical truth confronts us as terror. And it includes a moment of truth for lost Christendom – as to the consequences of this internal loss as well as the continued implications of its

earlier external loss of the southern and eastern Mediterranean to Islam.⁶⁰ The long term has returned to haunt Europe and the world. And now this ghost demands of Europe the seemingly impossible – to recover its own interior identity and to engage externally in a commonwealth-creating global project. But only the impossible may be remotely realistic.

NOTES

1. Christopher Coker, *The Improbable War: China, the United States and the Logic of Great Power Conflict* (London: Hurst, 2014).

2. Philip Murphy, *Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

3. Jodok Troy, *Christian Approaches to International Relations* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013).

4. On Britain, see Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, new ed. (London: Penguin, 2004); Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012).

5. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: George Bell, 1949).

6. Julia M.H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151–216, 253–92; Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 87–109.

7. R.I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Peter S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

8. John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013), 1–33.

9. Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. Samuel Lester (New York: St. Augustine's Press, 2009).

10. Rowan Williams, 'Religion, culture diversity and tolerance – shaping the new Europe', 7 November 2005, at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1179/religion-culture-diversity-and-tolerance-shaping-the-new-europe-address-at-the-european-policy-centr>; Dmitry Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (London: Sphere Books, 1974).

11. J.C.D. Clark, 'Challenging the American Public Myth', in *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism and History* (London: Atlantic, 2003), 146–88.

12. This was the era whose passing Carl Schmitt wrongly and in a non-Catholic fashion lamented. See his *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos, 2003).

13. It is hard to rid oneself of the suspicion that for the US authorities Osama Bin Laden was *neither* a criminal *nor* a combatant but an enemy of humanity who was, therefore, not really human at all. And an enemy of humanity not simply because he

was a terrorist, but because he denied the validity of the American norms of liberal democracy. If there was a chance to arrest and put him on trial, then the United States had an obligation to do so.

14. This contrast is to some extent grasped by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

15. Adrian Pabst, 'Modern Sovereignty in Question: Theology, Democracy and Capitalism', *Modern Theology*, 26:4 (2010): 570–602.

16. Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History (1784)', in *Anthropology, History, Education*, trans. R. Loudon and G. Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 114.

17. *Ibid.*, 114–15.

18. Catherine Pickstock, 'Numbers of Power, Lines of Transition: Metaphysics and the Problem of International Order', *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 2:1 (2013): 72–97.

19. Edmund Burke, 'The First *Letter on a Regicide Peace*', in *Burke: Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 316–17.

20. *Ibid.*, 293.

21. Charles A. Jones, 'Christian Realism and the Foundations of the English School', *International Relations*, 17:3 (2003): 372.

22. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 13. This more procedural vision is developed in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

23. Adrian Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-secularity: Religion, Realism and the Revival of Grand Theory in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 38:5 (2012): 995–1017, esp. 993–1003.

24. Herbert Butterfield, 'Christianity and Human Relationships', in *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), 39.

25. Martin Wight, 'The Church, Russia and the West', *The Ecumenical Review*, 1:1 (1948): 30.

26. Herbert Butterfield, 'The Historic States System', quoted in Adam Watson, 'Foreword', in James Der Derian (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations* (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1995), x.

27. Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, eds. B. Porter and G. Wight (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 13–14.

28. One can say that this is a slight qualification of Ian Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline: British Intellectuals and World Politics, 1945–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 83–106.

29. Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Vassilios Paipais, 'Overcoming "Gnosticism"? Realism as Political Theology', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29:1 (forthcoming).

30. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1955); *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defenders* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1945).

31. Niebuhr, *Irony*, 71.
32. John Milbank, 'The Poverty of Niebuhrianism', in *The Word Made Strange*, 233–54.
33. Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
34. Martin Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', British Committee paper (October 1961), published in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), 89–131.
35. Burke, 'The First Letter on a Regicide Peace', 317.
36. Kurt Biedenkopf, Bronislaw Geremek and Krzysztof Michalski, *The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe: Concluding Remarks*. Vienna: Institute for Human Sciences, 2004, http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/michalski_281004_final_report_en.pdf.
37. For a longer exposition of this argument, see Adrian Pabst, 'Commonwealth or Market-State? Europe's Christian Heritage and the Future of the European Polity', in Gary Wilton and Jonathan Chaplin (eds.), *God and the EU* (London: Routledge, 2016), 109–28, on which this section draws.
38. Biedenkopf et al. *The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe*, 9.
39. Simon Hix, *The Political System of the European Union*, rev. ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); 'Europe as a Global Actor: Empire by Example?', *International Affairs*, 84:3 (2008): 471–84.
40. 'Force multipliers' are factors that dramatically increase the effectiveness of individual or group action, such as ethics, religion or technology, which translate ideas into institutions and can overcome the 'collective action' problem – people have common interests in acting but fail to do so because of vested interests.
41. Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 2015).
42. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
43. David Goodhart, *The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-War Immigration* (London: Atlantic, 2013).
44. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954).
45. Brendan Simms, *Europe: the Struggle for Supremacy, 1453 to the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).
46. For all his critique of a whig account of history (see note 10, above), Butterfield still felt that whig illusion was an important motivation for the future. But as a motivation, it is inadequate and a more genuine pursuit of international virtue can be linked to a truer, non-whig historical account.
47. Sir John Fortescue, *On the Laws and Governance of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104.
48. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, 189–222, 265–303.

49. A transition from empire to commonwealth was long meditated and advocated by some British visionaries: see Lionel Curtis, *Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God* (London: Macmillan, 1938); John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (London: Nelson, 1916) 244: [‘Lord Launceston’ speaking] ‘I can foresee an empire where each part shall live to the full its own life and develop an autochthonous culture. But behind it all there will be the great catholic tradition in thought and feeling, in art and conduct, of which no one part, but the empire itself, is the appointed guardian. In that confraternity of peoples the new lands will redress the balance of the old, and will gain in return an inheritance of transmitted wisdom ... our English race will vindicate to mankind that doctrine which is the noblest of its traditions – that liberty is possible only under the law, and that unity is not incompatible with the amplest freedom. We of the old countries shall give and receive. Our Trojan manhood, our *lares* and *penates* will be there, but so too will Latium and the ancient Ausonian rites’ [Virgil, *Aeneid*, XII, 826–840]. The anticipated cultural exchange could sometimes be viewed in truly profound terms. In Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, the implicit message is that the British Empire can allow a Masonic, but, in the last analysis, a Christian mystical synthesis to arise between an Indian transcendence of this-worldly attachment and the practical securing of this worldly safety and aesthetic enjoyment. Thus the novel in its aspect as *Bildungsroman* is complete when the Buddhist initiation of the Irish orphan Kim at the hands of a *bhoddistava* figure whom he has physically safeguarded attains a grace that the guru’s un-Buddhist ‘attached’ love (which he deplures), but not his religious outlook, anticipates, when it coincides with Kim’s coming of age as a British spy. The unity of the two are sealed when Kim, having finally been mothered by a woman, at last realises his self-identity in terms of the ‘masonic’ work he must do upon a now fully real and in no sense illusory and yet still sacred earth. The entire literary cunning of the book views empire and its trappings through Indian eyes as but another cult, but then implies that, when this cult is fused with an Indian mystical sense now lost to the West, and so recovers its Christian mystical (for Kipling masonic) character, then it can be a genuine and higher cult after all. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), esp. 267–89.

50. Zielonka, *Europe as Empire; Kaiser, Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*.

51. Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Faber, 2011); for a critique of ‘declinism’, see Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (London: Penguin, 2015), 801-891.

52. Pabst, ‘Commonwealth or Market-State?’, 109–28.

53. Adrian Pabst, ‘Political Economy of Constitution: Pathways for the Eurozone beyond Ordo-liberal and Neo-functional Models’, in Ivano Cardinale, D’Maris Coffman and Roberto Scazzieri (eds.), *The Political Economy of the Eurozone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 7 (*forthcoming*). It is clear that there are many alternatives to the ordo-liberal status quo of austerity and internal devaluation on the one hand, and the break-up of the whole Eurozone or the exit of periphery countries on the other. Among the many more mutualist options are sovereign debt write-offs and restructuring, bailing out under-capitalised banks, the temporary introduction of parallel currencies with capital controls, Eurobonds and a

concerted industrial policy to boost productivity. See Wolfgang Streeck, 'Why the Euro Divides Europe', *New Left Review*, 95 (September–October 2015): 5–26 and Sandbu, *Europe's Orphan*, 165–240.

54. On this we disagree with John Gray, 'Islamist terrorism, Security and the Hobbesian Question of Order', *The New Statesman*, 3 December 2015.

55. See the article by Rosemary Hollis in *The Observer*, 22 November 2015. See also the pieces by Kenan Mail and Bat-El Ohuyon in the same issue.

56. Of course, Church leaders are right to say that any strategy must be in keeping with the criteria for 'just war'. But one should realise that these criteria do not constitute a kind of algorithmic formula that might be applied to a set of non-disputable facts to issue in a clear moral injunction, but, instead, indicate the kind of *questions* that must be posed in a conflictual situation: would a war have a just aim? Is it being waged by legitimate authorities? Could it be 'proportionately' fought? Is it reasonably winnable? Is the damage likely to be inflicted on citizens justifiably minimal and genuinely collateral? And so on. Having posed these questions, *the more basic* philosophical or theological task is to interpret the actual complex given situation in their light. It is more the reading of the facts than the imposition of principles that then delivers an ethical verdict.

57. James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

58. The very reading of the Old Testament through the New ensures this, and it is notable that Calvinism qualified such a superseding subordination.

59. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

60. On the initially defensive character of the Crusades, see Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

Conclusion

Summary and Prospect

In this book we have argued that liberalism is the dominant modern ideology but it now faces a metacrisis, which tends to the undoing of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions on which it rests but which it distorts and hollows out. Characteristic of this metacrisis is an exacerbation of the arbitrary and tautologous implications of liberalism, whose unwarranted anthropological pessimism and superficial techno-scientific optimism are all disconnected from reality. In consequence, what we see today is an extremity of liberalism that necessarily tends to slide into an outright authoritarianism always lurking in the liberal logic.

By the same token, liberalism threatens to collapse back into the materialism that is one-half of its dualist worldview, evacuating the ungrounded idealism that is its other half. Starting in the late nineteenth century, liberal procedural formalism and emptiness were challenged by the materialist philosophies of Fascism, Nazism and Communism, all arguably modes of Comtian positivism that sought to re-construe positive liberty on a non-religious, supposedly scientific basis. And following their eventual collapse in the twentieth century, liberalism has increasingly insisted on its own latent materialism, which today takes the form of naturalism and scientism (of which militant atheism is one expression).¹ For this perspective, the human mind is but a series of chemical processes governed by instrumental rationality and the body but a collection of atomic cells that belong to a Lockean proprietor, now reconceived as a material brain.² Not only has the soul disappeared, but also the subject, such that private biological ownership must inevitably prove more and more a cipher for the operation of a centralised technological control. The persisting and, indeed, augmented subjectivity or demonic psychic character of the oligarchic controllers then becomes the esoteric secret of our times that cannot be resolved or at least publicly admitted.

At last, indeed, a positivist priesthood rules, and it must inconsistently also compose an invisible masonic psychic brotherhood.

Yet this new totalitarian liberalism, or psychic elitism, is also threatened by a new recrudescence of fascism and the politics of positivistically grounded mass identity. In default of the emergence of a non-positivist post-liberal movement based on a *democracy of the psyche*, it is all too possible that quasi-fascist tendencies will increase their appeal and eventually seize power across Europe, and even, in the United States, as we can already see. For one might describe such insurgents as the crude, parodied versions of post-liberalism that, nonetheless, answer to some of the same exigencies – notably a popular revulsion against liberal excesses: the success culture that operates at the expense of most people, the amoral and narrow criteria that define this success, and a cosmopolitan contempt for embedded identity and the need for belonging.

Currently, this demand is so strong that governments across the West are trying to bring about a measure of regional and local autonomy – as with Northern Powerhouses in the United Kingdom or decentralisation to the regions of France.³ However, the danger remains that local leaders (rather like post-colonial rulers) will be corralled by national party and bureaucratic cadres, unless a more powerful local self-government is linked to genuine citizen participation and to non-political economic and social associations, alongside a keen sustaining of local inherited identity. Where the new fascists pander to a politics of fear and exclusion of the alien (the immigrant, the refugee), mainstream politics needs to develop a politics of hope, which addresses popular concerns about loss and cultural insecurity, and offers a positive vision of patriotism and international solidarity.⁴

If neo-fascism is travestied post-liberalism, it does not at all follow that the latter is soft fascism, for, to the contrary, neo-fascism tends merely to exaggerate in populist terms the very tendencies that it inchoately discerns and purportedly resists. Thus it characteristically combines the de-regulated neo-liberal approach to business and taxation with central state *dirigisme* and welfarism. Far from resisting the modern cult of the sovereign state, the amorality of modern public life and corporate rootlessness, it, rather, seeks – in frightening repetition of the 1930s – to dishonestly enlist popular support behind these things, in the name of an ethnocentric atavism. Such gross populism becomes the unwitting vehicle for the further growth of the nihilistic power of a dishonourable few.

Nothing could be more opposite to the post-liberal proposition of a ‘politics of virtue’. The latter seeks to promote individual fulfilment and mutual flourishing in an objectively valid sense, observant of natural equity, though always mediated, as it must be, by local inheritances and specificities. Nor could nationalism and ethnocentrism stand in a greater contrast to the

post-liberal drive to deconstruct monistic sovereignty and to share 'ruling' in every sense both within and across national frontiers. By comparison, not only is neo-fascism chauvinistic and amoral, but it is also nostalgic in a bad sense, since it seeks only a retrieved and exaggerated version of recent modernity. But the post-liberalism we advocate seeks to renew long-standing and variously embodied traditions of 'conservative socialism' that have been side-lined and eroded and yet have never completely disappeared.⁵ This tradition is one of a paradox whose ideas are in tune with the temporal and spatial complexities of reality: thus it sees that an increase in popular participation and an increase in 'aristocratic' educative guidance and the guardianship over equity finally exercised by the 'single' symbolically sovereign power belong together. They are only opposed for a simplistic liberal political ontology.

However, critics of post-liberalism contend that a post-liberal politics rests on an 'an incoherent body of ideas, which invokes a historically parochial view of liberalism and denies or rejects some fundamental facts of contemporary ... life', namely that a majority is reasonably content with contemporary life precisely because most people hold liberal values, which alone can hold highly diverse societies together.⁶ Of course, a growing number of people in Western countries and elsewhere are socially liberal and rightly so in certain respects. They prefer a fair and open-minded mentality to an insular and bigoted attitude (in terms, for example, of minority rights, ethnic diversity and reasonable levels of immigration). However, a sizeable majority is also much more small 'c' conservative and associationist than mainstream parties recognise: most people (including many ethnic minorities) choose a fairly traditional family life, want to live in safe, stable places and are generally sceptical about change.⁷ Even university graduates and professionals who are liberal-cosmopolitan tend to become culturally more conservative and communitarian as they settle down and get married. They worry far less about high mobility and more about buying their own house, finding their children a place in a good school, having access to decent healthcare and living in relatively stable communities with low levels of crime and a moderate degree of trust and neighbourliness.

Beyond this more complacent aspect, they tend also to long for a more intense and romantic sense of belonging to community and nature, and a life and landscape that would more symbolically mediate a sense of ultimate mystery and purpose. Witness here the rise in popularity of pilgrimage and cathedral worship and other more acute modes of liturgy, despite the decline in churchgoing, whose usual liturgical modes may now seem just too bland. There is also an upsurge of popular interest in concert, theatre, live debate and secular festivals, including musical, literary and philosophical events – besides the new cultural concern with the specificity and numinosity of landscape⁸ and the revival of local craft traditions often in relation to ecological

concerns.⁹ Perhaps the majority of people can be considered to be properly liberal on some issues, over-influenced by a cosmopolitan elite on others, but all within a more overwhelmingly conservative-associationist outlook.

The question for post-liberalism, therefore, is how best to mobilise this unexpressed consensus, which rejects both mainstream liberalism and neo-fascism, and which runs against the concerns of dominant party factions – revealing the limitations of our current mode of representative government, as we have outlined. Today, by contrast, the most cogent resistance to both these tends to come from locally based citizens movements that are able to link up all the different sites of struggle – ecological, domestic, pecuniary and political – in a movement counter to capitalist commodification exactly in the sense that they implicitly question its founding Sunderings of the symbolic and the reciprocal as the prime site of the ethical. Not accidentally, these movements – as in the case of ‘community-organising’ – tend to have a pan-religious dimension and in this respect to transcend the modern instrumentalisation of the religious as the typical bourgeois American vehicle.¹⁰ For it is religions that tend to propose some overall account of the human essence as teleologically directed by nature in an ethical direction, without which the ethical must sink to the level of sentimental and epiphenomenal illusion.

Given the recent relative failure of post-liberal groups in Britain to gain traction with the mainstream political parties,¹¹ there is a continued need to try to link this local level with a wider national and international attempt to re-define the tacitly agreed ideological ground of politics in general and to make post-liberalism the new consensus against the fusion of economic with cultural and political liberalism. Above all, there remains a clear need for a broad popular movement in shaping a politics of the common good – a movement that can overcome the binaries that divide Western countries and, increasingly, the whole world: young *versus* old, owners *versus* workers, natives *versus* immigrants, city *versus* countryside, faithful *versus* secular.

New vehicles are needed that can bring together individuals and groups with seemingly opposite values and interests, including trade unions, business associations and faith communities. If they can together build movements with new members and activists beyond single-issue protest and section interest, then they can help renew or transfigure political parties. Thus post-liberalism needs to become a broader cross-class and cross-cultural movement promoted by the churches, other faith traditions and civic groups such as CitizensUK or Occupy.

We can therefore conclude this book by saying that not only is a politics of virtue the alternative to liberalism, which is either moralistic or amoral, but that it is also only an ethical alliance of forces, which is likely to be able to put this alternative into place. Given the general drift of most of the population towards further voluntary servitude, greater inequality and cultural insecurity,

it is important to stress that a potential for resistance, not by any one particular group or class, but by 'everyone' already exists. But just because it concerns everyone, it can only be authentically articulated and organised in more ideal terms, which is to say, in the name of human flourishing as such, and in a way that links together all the dimensions of political, economic and social life. This will require a new irruption of a communicable ethical and probably religious vision, genuinely able to move people.

Such an irruption would include a renewed pursuit of Christian ecumenism under a new sense of practical exigency and public responsibility and not just inward-looking idealism. Allied to this should be a new sense, already present in the Catholic Church and lay movements in Italy, that Christian churches need now to organise and act directly in the economic, cultural, education and political fields, not mainly through the surrogate of political parties. One can see the relevance of such an ecumenism to intra-ethnic conflicts and to clashes between nations, above all between Western Europe and Russia, where a shared Christian faith should now allow a primacy of culture to translate into more political terms in an era tending beyond the supremacy of the nation-state. The joint declaration by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill at their meeting on 12 February 2016 that sets out a broad agenda of cooperation could be the long-overdue beginning of a much-needed rapprochement.¹²

And allied to the ecumenical exigency, in turn, should be a new recognition that, for all the inevitably enormous area of acceptable disagreement, uncertainty and debatability, there is a much greater political consensus implied by orthodox Christian belief than has recently been taken to be the case. This is somewhat witnessed by the new tendency of Christians in the British Parliament to cohere in roughly post-liberal views across the party divides. It is just this consensus that this book has sought to articulate more thickly, though in the belief that it is a consensus that can be shared for the most part by people of other faiths and by non-religious people of metaphysical sensitivity. It is clear that there are many non-religious people who, nevertheless, fully recognise the existence, mystery and irreducibility of the human spirit and respect the wider mystery and value of nature and Being itself.

A powerful implication here is that naturalism *versus* anti-naturalism, or psychic politics *versus* anti-psychic anti-politics, is a secretly more crucial modern political struggle than the more apparent and often illusory intra-liberal one of left *versus* right. The sudden re-emergence of a crude scientism and anti-religiosity in the 1990s was the first rising to the surface of this truth. With the defeat of the anti-liberal positivist ideologies, liberalism itself as the dominant modern ideology revealed its own shadow-side or secret heart of positivism. Likewise, after the defeat of the positive secular creeds (Marxism, scientific racism, sociology, Freudianism), a negative, anti-religious creed of secularity itself took their place, impossibly posing

its supposedly default refusal of faith as itself a religion of the ‘humanism’ that its post-psychism most clearly no longer believes in. But this insight cannot quite explain its degree of anti-religious virulence (emerging before the recrudescence of militant Islam), or its inconsistent double claim that Christianity is both in terminal decline and yet remains a dangerous threat to liberal values. Rather, one may suggest, another reason for the rise of the ‘new atheism’ is a secret fear that actually, in the face of the collapse of the positive secular ideologies, a religious revival – this time refusing cultural and political marginality – might be just around the corner. And that fear may not be wholly unfounded, especially if we have regard for the growth of religion outside the West,¹³ and do not dismiss the potential impact of a highly educated religious minority in the West itself, given the impact of small secular vanguards in the past.

But even if the emergence of a religious and metaphysically inspired post-liberal movement seems unlikely, it is far less unlikely than any other scenario of non-fascistic resistance to liberalism. For the mainstream is today hampered not just by the success of oligarchy in ‘disorganising’ all elements of potential resistance, but also by the inadequacy of its own inherited analysis that accepts too much of its enemies’ terms of reference. Above all, these are the primacy of the isolated individual and of ‘negative liberty’. In the face of this, as we have shown, it is not possible to recover a ‘more humanly credible type of liberal thinking’ (as John Gray claims) since none such is, or could possibly be, theoretically available. Instead, resistance must be based on the primacy of positive liberty and a substantive vision of true human flourishing. At the heart of this primacy lies the sense that human beings – as integral, if bizarre, rational and political animals, uneasily poised between *bios* and *techne* – are all heroic cultural labourers, who work because they are guided by a vision of the further realisation of the Good. After all, ‘man’ is, as Thomas Carlyle put it, ‘the missionary of Order’.¹⁴

NOTES

1. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

2. J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

3. On decentralisation in the United Kingdom, see Simon Parker, *Taking Power Back: Putting People in Charge of Politics* (London: Policy Press, 2015).

4. Nick Lowles and Anthony Painter, ‘Fear and Hope – The New Politics of Identity’ (London: Searchlight Trust, 2011), at <http://www.fearandhope.org.uk/project-report/>; Laurent Bouvet, *L’insécurité culturelle. Sortir du malaise identitaire français* (Paris: Fayard, 2015).

5. On the patriotic, small 'c' conservative and radical nature of early English socialism (William Morris, Thomas Spence and Robert Blatchford), see Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (London: Continuum, 2010).
6. John Gray, 'Why Post-liberalism is a Dead End in British Politics', in *Twenty Years of Ideas*, ed. Ralph Scott and David Goodhart (London: Demos, 2014), 61–5.
7. David Goodhart, 'Labour has lost its cultural connection with the people it claims to represent', *The Guardian* 29 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/29/labour-party-equality>.
8. See, for example, W.G. Sebald, *The Rings Of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: New Directions Books, 1998); Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Penguin, 2013).
9. For example, the willow holts at Farndon on the river Trent in Nottinghamshire that combine restoration of riverside foliage and preservation of varied tree species with the revival of a traditional craft that supplies material for baskets, fencing and cricket bats, thereby contributing to the current local economy.
10. Austen Ivereigh, *Faithful Citizens. A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).
11. Notably the 'Red Tory' and 'Blue Labour' groupings.
12. For the full text of the joint declaration by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, see https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html
13. Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2010); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
14. Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2005), 95.

