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Liberalism and Democracy: Frères Ennemis?[1]

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Both liberalism and democracy have been sponge terms. Each has been given multiple, often contradictory, definitions. Furthermore, the two terms have had an ambiguous relationship to each other ever since the first half of the nineteenth century, when they first began to be used in modern political discourse. In some usages they have seemed identical, or at least have seemed to overlap heavily. In other usages they have been considered virtually polar opposites. I shall argue that they have in fact been *frères ennemis*. They have been members, in some sense, of the same family, but they have represented pushes in very different directions. And the sibling rivalry, so to speak, has been very intense. I will go further. I would say that working out today a reasonable relationship between the two thrusts, or concepts, or values is an essential political task, the prerequisite for resolving positively what I anticipate will be the very strong social conflicts of the twenty-first century. This is not a question of definitions, but first and foremost one of social choices.

Both concepts represent responses, rather different responses, to the modern world system. The modern world system is a capitalist world economy. It is based on the priority of the ceaseless accumulation of capital. Such a system is necessarily inegalitarian, indeed polarizing, both economically and socially. At the same time, the very emphasis on accumulation has one profoundly equalizing effect. It puts into question any status obtained or sustained on the basis of any other criteria, including all criteria that are acquired through filiation. This ideological contradiction between hierarchy and equality that is built into the very rationale for capitalism has created dilemmas, from the beginning, for all those who have privileges within this system.

Let us look at this dilemma from the point of view of the quintessential actor of the capitalist world economy, the entrepreneur, sometimes called the bourgeois. The entrepreneur seeks to accumulate capital. To do this, he acts *through* the world market, but seldom exclusively *by means of* the market. Successful entrepreneurs necessarily depend on the aid of the state machineries to help them create and retain relative sectorial monopolies which are the only source of truly substantial profits in the market.[2]

Once the entrepreneur has accumulated substantial amounts of capital, he must worry about retaining it – not only against the vagaries of the market,

but also against the attempts of others to steal it, confiscate it, or tax it away. But his problems do not end there. He must also worry about passing it on to heirs. This is not an economic necessity, but rather a socio-psychological necessity; one however that has serious economic consequences. The need to ensure that capital is bequeathed to heirs is not primarily an issue of taxation (which can be treated as an issue of defending the market against the state) but of the competency of heirs as entrepreneurs (which means that the market becomes the enemy of inheritance). In the long run, the only way to ensure that incompetent heirs can inherit and retain capital is to transform the source of renewal of capital from profits to rents.[3] But while this solves the socio-psychological need, it undermines the social legitimacy of entrepreneurial accumulation, which is competency in the market. And this in turn creates a continuing political dilemma.

Let us look at the same problem from the point of view of the working classes; those who are not in a position to accumulate capital in any serious way. The development of the productive forces under capitalism leads, as we know, to vastly increased industrialization, urbanization, and geographical concentration of wealth and higher-wage employment. We are not concerned here with why this is so or how it occurs, but merely with its political consequences. Over time, and especially in the core or "more developed" countries, this process leads to a reconfiguration of the state-level stratification pattern, with increasing percentages of middle strata and higher-waged employees, and therefore to the increasing political strength of such persons. The primary geocultural consequence of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath was to legitimate the political demands of such persons via the argument that national sovereignty resided in the "people". While popular sovereignty was possibly compatible with the hypothetical egalitarianism of market accumulation, it was absolutely at odds with any and all attempts to create rentier sources of income.

Reconciling the ideology of market legitimacy with the socio-psychological need to create rentier income has always been a matter of fast talk for the entrepreneurs. The contradictory language of liberals is one of the results. It is this attempt to juggle the language that set the stage for the ambiguous relationship during the last two centuries of "liberalism" and "democracy". At the time that liberalism and democracy first began to be political terms in common usage, in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was the case that the basic political cleavage was between conservatives and liberals, the Party of Order and the Party of Movement. Conservatives were those fundamentally opposed to the French Revolution in all its guises – Girondin, Jacobin, Napoleonic. Liberals were those who saw the French Revolution as something positive, at the minimum in its Girondin version, which was believed to represent something akin to the English evolution of parliamentary government. This positive view of the French Revolution, cautious at first in 1815 in the wake of the Napoleonic defeat, became bolder as the years went by.

In the years between 1815 and 1848, in addition to the conservatives and the liberals, there were persons sometimes called democrats, quite often republicans, sometimes radicals, even occasionally socialists. These persons represented, however, not much more than a small left appendage of the liberals, sometimes playing the role of its ginger element, more often seen as an embarrassment by the mainline contingent of liberals. It is only later that this left appendage emerged as a full-fledged independent ideological thrust, at this later point usually under the label of socialists. After 1848, the ideological horizon became stabilized. We had arrived at the trinity of ideologies that have framed the political life of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism/radicalism – otherwise known as right, centre, and left. I shall not repeat here my argument about how and why liberalism after 1848 gained the upper hand over its rivals as an ideological construct, creating a consensus around it that became consecrated as the geoculture of the modern world system, and transforming both conservatism and socialism in the process into avatars of liberalism. Nor shall I repeat the argument that this consensus held firm until 1968, when it was once again called into question, allowing both conservatism and radicalism to reemerge as distinctive ideologies.[4]

What is crucial, I think, for the purpose of this discussion is to understand that, after 1848, the central concern of liberals ceased being to argue against the *Ancien Régime*. Rather, their central concern came to be at the other end of the political spectrum: how to counter the growing demand for democracy. The revolutions of 1848 showed, for the first time, the potential strength of a militant left force, the beginnings of a real social movement in the core zones and of national liberation movements in the more peripheral zones. The strength of this upsurge was frightening to the centrist liberals, and even though the revolutions of 1848 all petered out or were suppressed, liberals were determined to reduce the volubility of what they saw as the too radical, anti-systemic demands of the dangerous classes.

Their counter-efforts came in three forms. First, they put forward over the next half-century a programme of "concessions" that they thought would satisfy these demands sufficiently to calm the situation, but in such a way that the concessions would not threaten the basic structure of the system. Secondly, they quite openly replaced the de facto political coalition with the left, (which they had pursued in the 1815-1848 period, when the left seemed tiny and they thought their primary opponent was the conservatives), with a priority to political coalition on the right, whenever and wherever the left seemed threatening. Thirdly, they developed a discourse that subtly distinguished liberalism from democracy.

The programme of concessions – the suffrage, the beginnings of a welfare state, an integrative racist nationalism – was magnificently successful in the European/North American world and laid the basis for the ability of the capitalist system to surmount all its storms, at least until the last 20 years or so. The second measure, the political coalition with the right, turned out to be all the easier to achieve in that the right had drawn a similar conclusion as a consequence of 1848. "Enlightened conservatism" became the dominant version of right politics and, since it was essentially an avatar of liberalism, there was no longer a real obstacle to a form of parliamentary life that involved the regular shift of formal power between parties whose real politics revolved around a centrist consensus, never swinging too far in either direction.

It is the third tactic, the discourse, that created some problems. This was because liberals wanted to have it both ways. They wanted to distinguish liberalism from democracy, but they wished at the same time to appropriate the theme of democracy, indeed the very term of democracy, as an integrative force. It is on the discourse and its problems that I wish to concentrate this discussion.

Liberalism, as is often noted, starts its analysis from the individual, whom it takes to be the primary subject of social action. The liberal metaphor is that the world consists of a multitude of independent individuals who have somehow, at some time, entered into an accord (social contract) to establish common ties for the common good. They have also pictured this accord as a quite limited accord. The source of this emphasis is obvious. Liberalism had its origins in the attempt to remove those persons whom liberals defined as "competent" from the arbitrary control of institutions (the church, the monarchies, and the aristocracy, and therefore the state), which they saw as being essentially in the hands of less competent persons. The concept of a limited social contract provided exactly the rationale for such a putative liberation of the competent.

This explains, of course, such traditional slogans identified with the French Revolution as "la carrière ouverte aux talents". The combination of the word "open" and the word "talent" gave the essential message. This quite precise language, however, soon slid into the vaguer, more fluid language of the "sovereignty of the people". The problem with this latter phrase, which was widely legitimated in the wake of the French Revolution, is that the "people" are a group far more difficult to bound than the "talented people". Talented people constitute a measurable group with logical boundaries. All we need to do is decide on some indicators of talent, no matter whether they are plausible or spurious, and we can identify who these persons are. But who constitute the "people" is not really a matter of measurement at all, but a matter of public, collective definition; that is, it is a political decision, and acknowledged as such.

Of course, if we were ready simply to define the "people" as truly everyone, there would be no problem. But the "people" as a political concept is primarily

used to refer to rights within a state, and thereupon it becomes contentious. What is obvious is that virtually no one was, or is, prepared to say that the "people" is everyone, that is, that truly everyone should have full political rights. There are some widely agreed-upon exclusions: not children, not the insane, not criminals, not foreign visitors – all these exceptions being considered more or less obvious to almost everyone. But then to add to this list other categories of exceptions – not migrants, not the propertyless, not the poor, not the ignorant, not women – seemed to many just as obvious, especially to those who were not themselves migrants, propertyless, poor, ignorant, or women. Who the "people" are constitutes to this day a continuing and major source of political controversy, everywhere.

For the last two hundred years, throughout the world, those who have no rights, or less rights than others, have been constantly knocking at the door, pushing and shoving the door open, always asking for more. Let some in, and others have been coming right behind them requesting entry as well. Faced with this political reality, which is evident to everyone, the responses have been varied. In particular, the tonalities of the responses associated with liberalism and with democracy have been quite different, almost opposite.

Liberals have tended to seek to constrain the flow. Democrats have tended to applaud it and to push it. Liberals were primarily concerned with process; bad process leads to bad outcome. Democrats were primarily concerned with outcome; bad outcome indicates bad process. Liberals pointed to the past, and stressed how much had been achieved. Democrats looked to the future and talked of how much was yet to be fulfilled. Cup half full? Cup half empty? Perhaps, but perhaps also a difference in objective.

The mantra of liberals is rationality. Liberals are the most loyal scions of the Enlightenment. They believe in the *potential* rationality of all persons, a rationality that is achieved, not ascribed, and achieved through education, *Bildung*. What education can create is not, however, merely intelligent citizens endowed with civic virtue. Liberals in the modern world have been well aware that the town meeting model of democracy, derived from the Greek city-state, is unmanageable in the physically large entities that are modern states, which are furthermore required to decide upon a wide range of complex matters. Liberals share the metaphor of Newtonian science: that complexity is best handled by reducing it to smaller parts, by differentiation and specialization. It follows that, in order to perform their role as intelligent citizens endowed with civic virtue, individuals have need of expert counsel to guide them, to delimit the alternatives, and to suggest criteria by which to judge political alternatives.

If rationality, to be exercised, requires expertise, it also then requires the civic culture of giving the specialists pride of place. The modern educational system, whether in its humanistic or scientific form, has been intended to

socialize citizens into accepting the edicts of experts. This is the nexus around which all the debates about suffrage and other forms of political participation have revolved: who has the necessary expertise, who has the cultural frame of mind to allow themselves to be informed by these experts? In short, although all persons are potentially rational, not all persons are actually rational. Liberalism is the call to accord rights to the rational in order that the irrational are not able to make crucial social decisions. And if, under pressure, one is obliged politically to accord formal rights to the many who are not yet rational, it then becomes essential that the formal rights be circumscribed in such a way that no hasty foolishness occurs. This is the source of the concern with process. What is meant by process is slowing down decisions long enough and in such a way that experts have an excellent chance of prevailing.

Exclusions of the irrational are always effectuated in the present. It is, however, always promised that the excluded will be included in the future, once they have learned, once they have passed the tests, once they have become rational *in the same way as those presently included.* While unfounded discrimination is anathema to the liberal, the liberal sees a world of difference between unfounded and founded discrimination.

The discourse of the liberal hence tends to be fearful of the majority, fearful of the unwashed and unknowing, of the mass. The discourse of the liberal no doubt is always full of praise for the potential integration of the excluded, but it is always a controlled integration of which the liberal is speaking, an integration into the values and structures of those who are already included. Against the majority, the liberal is constantly defending the minority. But is not the group minority that liberals defend, but the symbolic minority, the heroic rational individual against the crowd; that is, himself.

This heroic individual is both competent and civilized. The concept of the competent is not in fact very different from the concept of the civilized. Those who are civilized are those who have learned how to adjust themselves to the social needs of the *civis*, how to be both civil and civic, how to enter into a social contract and be responsible for the obligations that thereupon are incumbent upon them. It is always we who are civilized and they who are not. The concept is almost necessarily a universalist one, in the sense that the values involved are asserted to hold universally, but it is also a developmentalist one. One learns to be civilized; one is not born civilized. And individuals, groups, nations can *become* civilized. Competence is a more instrumentalist notion. It refers to the ability to function socially, especially in work. It is linked to the idea of a *métier*, a profession. It is the result of education, but of more formal education than is the case for civilization, which is first and foremost a matter of childhood socialization within the family. Still, it is always assumed that there is a high correlation between the two, that those who are competent are also civilized and vice versa. A disjunction is surprising and anomalous and

most of all disturbing. Liberalism is as much as anything a code of manners. That such definitions, however formally abstract, are always class-based or class-biased seems to me obvious.

The minute, however, we invoke civilization and competence, it is clear in any case that we are not speaking of everyone – not of all individuals, of all groups, of all nations. Civilization and competence are inherently comparative concepts, which describe a hierarchy of persons: some are more so than others. At the same time, they are universal concepts: everyone can become so in theory, eventually. Indeed, the universalism is closely related to the other inherent connotation of liberalism: paternalism towards the weak, the uncivilized, the incompetent. Liberalism implies a social duty to improve the others, to an extent by individual efforts, but most of all by collective efforts of society and the state. It is therefore perpetually the call for more education, more *Bildung*, more social reform.

The very term "liberal" has built into it not only the political meaning but the usage of largesse, of *noblesse oblige*. Powerful individuals can be liberal in their distribution of material and social values. And here we see quite openly the link with the concept of aristocracy, to which liberalism purports to be opposed. In reality, what liberals have opposed is not the concept of aristocracy *per se*, but the idea that aristocrats are persons defined by certain external signs of status, derived from past achievements of an ancestor, of titles which accord privileges. In his theorizing, the liberal is in that sense extremely present-oriented. It is the achievement of the current individual with which the liberal is concerned, at least theoretically. The aristocrats, the best, are really, can only really be, those who have proved in the present that they are the most competent. This is expressed in the twentieth-century usage of "meritocracy" as the defining legitimation of social hierarchy.

Meritocracy, unlike nobility, is presented as an egalitarian concept because formally it can be possibe for everyone to take the tests that accord or define merit. One presumably does not inherit merit. But of course one inherits the advantages that improve considerably the possibility for a child to acquire the skills that are tested. And this being the fact, the results are never really egalitarian, which is the recurrent complaint of those who do poorly in the formal testing, and the allocation of position and status that are its consequence. These then are the complaints both of the democrats and of the "minorities", "minority" meaning here any group (whatever its size) which has been persistently and historically treated as a socially inferior group and which is presently at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

The competent defend their advantage on the basis of formal rules that are universalist. They therefore defend the importance of formal rules in political controversy. They are by nature fearful of anything that can be called or considered "extreme". But what is "extreme" in modern politics? It is anything

and everything that can be labelled "populist". Populism is the appeal to the people in terms of the outcome: the outcome in legislation; the outcome in social distribution of roles; the outcome in wealth. The liberal centre has been for the most part viscerally anti-populist, although on rare occasions, when the threat of fascism was on the horizon, it has accepted for brief periods the legitimacy of popular demonstrations.

Populism has normally been a game of the left. At one level, the political left has been traditionally populist, or at the very least has traditionally pretended to be populist. It is the left that has spoken in the name of the people, of the majority, of the weaker and the excluded. It is the political left that has sought repeatedly to mobilize popular sentiment, and to utilize this mobilization as a form of political pressure. And when this popular pressure emerged spontaneously, the leadership of the political left has usually run to catch up with it. Democrats have given priority to including the excluded, in specific opposition to the liberal notion that the good society is one in which the competent prevail.

There has also been right-wing populism. However, populism as played by the left and by the right are not quite the same game. Right-wing populism has never been truly populist, since it is right-wing, and what characterizes the right conceptually is that it puts no faith in the people except as followers. Right-wing populism has in practice combined hostility to experts with some social welfare concerns but always on the basis of great exclusionism, that is, limiting these benefits to an ethnically delimited group and often defining the experts as members of the out-group. Right-wing populism is therefore not democratic at all in the sense that we are using the term, as a concept that gives priority to including the excluded.

What we have meant by democracy is in fact quite opposed to right-wing populism, but it is also quite opposed to what we have meant by liberalism. Democracy precisely implies suspicion of the experts, of the competent – of their objectivity, of their disinterestedness, of their civic virtue. The democrats have seen in liberal discourse the mask for a new aristocracy, all the more pernicious in that it has claimed a universalist basis that somehow tended always to result in maintaining largely the existing patterns of hierarchy. Liberalism and democracy have thus been very much at odds with each other, standing for deeply diverging tendencies.

This is sometimes openly admitted. We find it in the discourse concerning the famous slogan of the French Revolution, about which it is often said that liberals give priority to liberty, meaning individual liberty, and that democrats (or socialists) give priority to equality. This, it seems to me, is a deeply misleading way to explain the difference. Liberals do not merely give priority to liberty; they are opposed to equality, because they are strongly opposed to any concept measured by outcome, which is the only way the concept equality is

meaningful. In so far as liberalism is the defense of rational government, based on the informed judgment of the most competent, equality appears as a levelling, anti-intellectual, and inevitably extremist concept.

However, it is not true that democrats are in a parallel manner opposed to liberty. Far from it! What democrats have refused is the distinction between the two. Democrats have traditionally argued that there can be no liberty, except within a system, based on equality, since unequal persons cannot have equal ability to participate in collective decisions. They have also argued that unfree persons cannot be equal, since this implies a political hierarchy which thereby translates itself into social inequality. This has recently been given the conceptual label of egaliberty (or equaliberty) as a singular process.[5] On the other hand, it is true today that few on the self-proclaimed left have been ready to make egaliberty their theme of popular mobilization, out of the very same fear that has made liberals insist on process and competence: fear that the people, given full rein, will act irrationally, meaning in a fascist or racist fashion. What we can say is that the popular demand for democracy has been constant, whatever the formal position of left parties. Indeed, in the long run, left parties that have refused to embrace egaliberty have found that their popular base of support has eroded, and found that their former base came to classify them for this reason as "liberals" rather than as "democrats".

The tension between liberalism and democracy is not an abstract issue. It returns to us constantly as a set of political dilemmas and political choices. The world system was engulfed by this tension and these dilemmas between the two World Wars, with the rise of fascist movements in a large number of countries. We can remember the hesitations and indecision that was the mark of both centrist and left politics in this era. These hesitations have become visible and acute once again in the 1990's with the rise of multiple destructive racisms masking as nationalisms and the attempts, within the Western world, to build new exclusionary politics on the basis of anti-immigrant, anti-outsider rhetoric.

At the same time, there is a second, quite different issue that emerged in the post-1968 era with the great upsurge of movements of the excluded, who were framing their demands for political rights in terms of group rights. This has taken the form of calls for "multiculturalism". Originally an issue primarily in the United States, it has now come to be discussed in most of the other countries with long-standing pretensions to being liberal states. This issue is often confounded with the issue of opposition to what the French call the *lepénisation* of society, but it is not the identical issue.

The relationship of the *frères ennemis* is thus once again today very much at the centre of debates about political tactics. I don't think we are going to make any significant progress on this issue, unless we can cut through the rhetoric.

Let us start with some contemporary realities. I think there are four elements in the post-1989 situation that are basic, in the sense that they form the parameters within which political decisions are necessarily being made. The first is the profound disillusionment, worldwide, with the historic Old Left, in which I group not only the Communist parties, but the Social-Democratic parties and the national liberation movements as well. The second is the massive offensive to deregulate constraints on the movement of capital and commodities, and to dismantle simultaneously the welfare state. This offensive is sometimes called "neo-liberalism". The third is the constantly increasing economic, social, and demographic polarization of the world system, which the neo-liberal offensive promises to fuel further. The fourth is the fact that, despite all of this or perhaps because of all of this, the demand for democracy – for democracy, not liberalism – is stronger than it has been at any time in the history of the modern world system.

The first reality, the disillusionment with the Old Left, is primarily, in my view, the result of the fact that, over time, the Old Left abandoned the struggle for democracy and advanced in fact a liberal programme, in the very simple sense that they built their programmes around the crucial role of the competent people. To be sure, they defined who was competent somewhat differently from centrist political parties, at least theoretically. However, in practice, it is not sure that they recruited their competent people from very different social backgrounds from those privileged in liberal discourse. In any case, the reality turned out to be insufficiently different for their mass base, and this base has been abandoning them as a result.[6]

The neo-liberal offensive has been made possible by this widespread popular disillusionment with the Old Left. It has garbed itself with an essentially false rhetoric about globalization. The rhetoric is false in that the economic reality is not at all new (certainly the pressure on capitalist firms to be competitive in the world market is not new), but this alleged newness has been used as the justification of abandoning the historic liberal concession of the welfare state. It is precisely for this reason that neo-liberalism cannot be considered in fact a new version of liberalism. It has adopted the name, but it is in fact a version of conservatism, and conservatism is, after all, different from liberalism. Historic liberalism has not been able to survive the collapse of the Old Left which, far from being its mortal enemy, was its most important social underpinning, in that the Old Left had for a long time been playing the crucial role of containing the democratic pressures of the dangerous classes by purveying the hope (and the illusion) of inevitable progress. To be sure, the Old Left argued that this would be in large part via its own efforts, but this argument in effect endorsed policies and practices that were merely a variant on the incrementalist liberal theme.

What brought the Old Left down was the demonstration that it had not been able in reality to stanch the polarization of the world system, especially

at the world level. The neo-liberal offensive has taken advantage of this to argue that its programme would be able to do this. This is an incredible claim because, in point of fact, its programme has been accentuating, with striking rapidity, the economic, social, and demographic polarization of the world system. Furthermore, this recent offensive has actually renewed the process of polarization internal to the wealthier states, a process that the welfare state had been able to hold at bay for a relatively long time, and most notably in the period 1945-1970. The correlate of increased polarization has been the increased immigration from South (including the old so-called East) to North, despite the ever-strengthened legislative and administrative barriers to legal migration.

Perhaps most importantly, the strength of democratic sentiment is greater than ever, probably more because of all of this than despite all of this. This strength can be observed in three specific demands, which can be seen operating across the globe: more education facilities, more health facilities, and a higher income base. Furthermore, what is considered the minimum acceptable threshold has been constantly increasing, never receding. This is of course deeply at odds with the programme of dismantling the welfare state, and it therefore raises the potential for acute social conflict – on the one hand, in the form of relatively spontaneous worker mobilization (as has occurred in France, for example) or, more violently, as civil uprising (as has occurred in Albania, following the acute loss of income base in the wake of the Ponzi scheme scandal).

Whereas from 1848-1968 we lived in a geoculture that was based on the liberal consensus, and the liberals were therefore able to appropriate the term democracy and vitiate the efficacy of its proponents, we have now entered the world of Yeats – "the center cannot hold." The issue before us is more polarized: either egaliberty or neither liberty nor equality; either a true effort to be inclusive of everyone or a retreat into a deeply partitioned world, a kind of global apartheid system. The strength of liberalism from 1848-1968 had forced the democrats to choose between accepting largely liberal premises or being condemned to political irrelevance. They opted for the former, which describes the historical trajectory of the Old Left. Today, however, it is for the surviving liberals to choose: either accepting largely democratic premises or being condemned to political irrelevance. We can see this by examining more closely the two great debates today between liberals and democrats: multiculturalism, and *lepénisation*.

What are the issues in the multiculturalism debate? Groups that have been significantly excluded, both at national and at world levels, from political participation, economic reward, social recognition, and cultural legitimacy – most notably women, and persons of colour, but of course many other groups as well – have put forward demands in three different fashions. (1) They have quantified historic outcomes, and said that the figures are disgraceful. (2) They have looked at the objects of study and of esteem, and the

presumed "subjects of history", and said that the choices up to now have been deeply biased. (3) They have wondered whether the standards of objectivity which have been used to justify these realities are not themselves a false barometer and a leading generator of the realities.

The liberal response to these demands has been that demands for outcomes are demands for quotas, which in turn can only lead to pervasive mediocrity and new hierarchies. They have asserted that esteem and historic relevance are not decreed but deduced from objective criteria. They have said that tampering with the standards of objectivity is the slippery slope to total subjectivity and thereby total social irrationality. These are weak arguments, but they are not arguments that do not point to real problems with multiculturalism in its vaguer, less self-aware formulations.

The problem with all multicultural claims is that they are not self-limiting. First of all, the number of groups is not self-limiting, and indeed they are infinitely expansible. Secondly, they lead to unresolvable disputes about hierarchies of historic injustice. Thirdly, even if adjustments are made in one generation, there is no assurance that they will last into the next. Should readjustments then be made every x-number of years? Fourthly, they give no clue as to how to allocate scarce resources, especially non-divisible resources. Fifthly, there is no guarantee that multicultural allocation will in the end be egalitarian, since it can in fact simply result in designating new criteria for membership in the group of competent persons who will receive privilege.

This being said, it is hard not to see how self-serving such anti-multiculturalist arguments are in the deeply inegalitarian world in which we presently live. Despite the hype and the howls of anti-PC publicists, we are far from living in a world already dominated by multicultural realities. We are barely beginning to make a small dent in historic unfairnesses. Blacks, women, and many others are still getting the short end of the stick, by and large, whatever the marginal improvements here and there. It is certainly far too soon to call for a swing back of the pendulum.

What is really more to the point is to begin a serious investigation of how we can build structures and processes that will constantly move us in the right direction, without us ending up in the cul-de-sac that the liberals correctly fear might result from doing this. It is clearly the moment for liberals, as a dying breed with however strong intellectual traditions, to use their cleverness as part of the team, instead of carping, or denouncing from the sidelines. To take a simple example, would it not really have been more useful for someone like Alan Sokal to enter into cooperative discussion with those who have been raising real questions about the structures of knowledge, instead of deflating foolish excesses, and thereby making the discussion of the underlying issues more, rather than less, difficult.

The thing to bear in mind is the problem: the problem is exclusion, and the fact that this problem has not at all been resolved by the so-called advance of the modern world system. If anything, it is worse today than ever. And democrats are those who put priority on fighting exclusion. If inclusion is difficult, exclusion is immoral. And liberals who seek the good society, who seek the realization of a rational world, must bear in mind Max Weber's distinction between formal and substantive rationality. Formal rationality is problem-solving but lacks a soul, and is therefore ultimately self-destructive. Substantive rationality is extraordinarily difficult to define, lends itself to much arbitrary distortion, but is ultimately what the good society is all about.

Multiculturalism is an issue that will not go away, as long as we are in an inegalitarian world, which is as long as we are in a capitalist world economy. I think that this will be far less long than many others do, but, even in my view, it will take another 50 years or so before our present historical system has entirely collapsed.[7] The issue during these 50 years is precisely what kind of a historical system we shall build to replace the present one. And here is where the issue of *lepénisation* comes in, for a world in which racist, exclusionary movements gain an increasing role and are able to set the agenda for public political debate is a world that is likely to end up with an even worse structure than our present one, from the point of view of maximizing egaliberty.

Let us take the concrete case of the Front Nationale in France. This is a movement which is against both competence and inclusion. It therefore violates the principles and objectives of both liberals and democrats. The question is what to do about it. Its strength derives from a diffuse anxiety among persons of relatively little power, but across different class positions, about their personal security, both physical and material. These persons have a realistic basis for their fears. What the Front Nationale offers, as do all such movements, is three things: a promise of more physical security via a repressive state; a promise of more material security through a vague programme combining neo-liberalism and the welfare state; and, above all, a visible scapegoat explanation for the difficulties people are experiencing. In the case of the Front Nationale, the scapegoat is first of all "migrants", a term used to mean all non-Western Europeans (who are all defined as non-whites), adding to the potion an argument about the proper role of women. The second scapegoat, carefully intruded from time to time, but less overtly to evade French anti-racist laws, is clever and wealthy Jews, cosmopolitan intellectuals, and the existing political elites. In short, the scapegoats are the excluded and the competent.

For a long time, the response to the FN has been evasive. Conservatives have sought to recoup FN voters by adopting a watered-down version of the exclusionary theme. Centrist liberals, whether in the RPR, UDF, or the Socialist Party initially tried to ignore the FN, in the hope that it would somehow go away, if ignored. Anti-exclusionist mobilization was left to a handful of movements

(like SOS-Racisme) and some intellectuals, as well of course as members of the communities under attack. When, in 1997, the FN for the first time won an outright majority in a local election at Vitrolles, the panic button went off, and a national mobilization occurred. The government, split between its true conservatives and its centrist liberals, retreated on one egregious clause in proposed anti-migrant legislation and maintained the rest. In short, the policy of seeking to recoup FN voters largely prevailed.

What has been the programme of the democrats? Basically, it has been to argue that all persons already in France should one way or another be "integrated" into French society by according them rights, and to oppose all repressive legislation. But the crucial subtext is that this applies only to all persons already in France, as well as perhaps to bonafide refugees. No one has dared to suggest that *all* limitation of individual movement across frontiers be eliminated, as it already is in practice among the countries of the North, and as it was historically in most of the world until the twentieth century. The reason, of course, is that even the French democrats fear that taking such a position would strengthen the hold of the FN on members of the working class.

If I pose, however, this "extreme" possibility, it is precisely because it illuminates the issue. If the issue is exclusion, why should the struggle against exclusion only be within state frontiers and not throughout the world? If the issue is competence, why should competence be defined within state frontiers and not throughout the world. And if we take the conservative, so-called neo-liberal perspective, of the virtues of deregulation, then why shouldn't the movements of people also be subject to deregulation? Neither in France, nor elsewhere, is it likely that racist, exclusionary movements will be checked, if the issues are not posed clearly and up front.

Let us return to the relationship of liberals and democrats. The one, I have said, has put forward the defense of competence. The other, I have said, has put forward the urgent priority of combating exclusion. It would be easy to say, why not do both? But it is not easy to give equal emphasis to both. Competence, almost by definition, involves exclusion. If there is competence, then there is incompetence. Inclusion involves equal weight to everyone's participation. At the level of government and all political decision-making, the two themes come, almost inevitably, into conflict. The *frères* become *ennemis*.

The liberals have had their day in the sun. Today, we are threatened by the return of those who want neither competence nor inclusion, in short the worst of all worlds. If we are to build a barrier to their rise, and to construct a new historical system, it can only be on the basis of inclusion. It is time for the liberals to defer to the democrats. If they do this, they can still play a salutary role. The liberals can continue to remind democrats of the risks of foolish and hasty majorities, but they can only do so within the context of the

recognition of the fundamental priority of the majority in collective decisions. The liberals can of course, in addition, constantly call for elimination from the realm of collective decisions all those matters which should be best left to individual choice and variation, and they are legion. This kind of libertarianism would be very salutary in a democratic world. And of course, in placing inclusion before competence, we are talking primarily of the political arena. We are not suggesting that competence is irrelevant in the work place or in the world of knowledge.

There is an old joke about the relationship of the wealthy person to the intellectual. It goes this way. The wealthy person says to the intellectual: if you're so smart, why aren't you rich? Answer: if you're so rich, why aren't you smart? Let us vary this joke slightly. The liberal says to the democrat: If you represent the majority, why don't you govern competently? Answer: if you're so competent, why can't you get the majority to agree with your proposals?

Notes

1. Text of the Fourth Daalder Lecture delivered for the Department of Political Science at the University of Leiden on 15 March 1997.

2. I have outlined ways in which entrepreneurs have always depended on the states in "States? Sovereignty? The Dilemmas of Capitalists in an Age of Transition", keynote address at the conference on "State and Sovereignty in the World Economy", University of California, Irvine, 21-23 February 1997. Cf., *passim*, Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capatilisme*, XVe-XVIIIe *siècles*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1979.

3. I have outlined how and why this has been done over the centuries in "The Bourgeois(ie) as Reality and Concept", in: Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London: Verso, 1991, pp. 135-152.

4. I do this in "The French Revolution as a World-Historical Event", in my *Unthinking Social Science*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, pp. 7-22, and also in Part II of my *After Liberalism*, New York: New Press, 1995.

5. See the theorization of égaliberté in: Etienne Balibar, "Trois concepts de la politique: Émancipation, transformation, civilité", in his *La crainte des masses*, Paris: Galilée, 1997, pp. 17-53.

6. This is a theme that I have pursued in detail in *After Liberalism*, New York: New Press, 1995, particularly, but not only in Part IV. See also "Marx, Marxism-Leninism, and Socialist Experiences in the Modern World-System", in my *Geopolitics and Geoculture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.84-97, and "Social Science and the Communist Interlude, or Interpretations of Contemporary History", paper delivered at ISA Regional Colloquium, "Building Open Society and Perspectives of Sociology in East-Central Europe", Krakow, Poland, 15-17 September 1996.

7. For the detailed arguments, see chapters 7 and 8 in: T.K. Hopkins and I. Wallerstein (coord.), *The Age of Transition: Trajectory of the World-System*, 1945-2025, London: Zed Press, 1996.