THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

SOCIAL AUDITING AS SOCIAL LEARNING:

A theoretical reconstruction

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Hull

by

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CHAPTER 1:

THE RESEARCH PROCESS, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter describes the origins of the thesis, the research process and methods, and sets out the overall aim and objectives.

1. 1. ORIGINS

The motives behind this research arose from my work as an independent training and organization development consultant. By the late 1990s I had been working in that capacity for about fifteen years, and was increasingly sure that one of the causes of widespread dysfunction in organizations is the model of organization that views them as if they are disconnected from their social context, and as if the people who work in organizations are detached from their alter egos who act out their 'personal' lives as private individuals, members of society and citizens. The problem affects public service organizations as much as commercial ones. Among other things, I came to see this as confining the idea of organizational learning to a kind of artificial half-life, promising release from intractable problems but seldom achieving the depth and dynamism that the idea implies. Meanwhile, the blurring or systematic dismantling of the boundaries between the public and private sectors was gathering pace, and it was beginning to appear that corporations were set to rule the world (Korten, 1995) – with little or no accountability to society, their own members, or even to governments. All told, it seemed that straightforwardly political approaches to tackling social problems would increasingly run up against the problem of corporate

disconnection from society, which would also confound any prospect of working from 'inside the organization out', as it were.

Casting around for a different approach to all this, I came across the emerging field of social and ethical accounting, and was drawn to it because the words 'social auditing' seemed to encapsulate a radical change in the relationship between organizations and 'stakeholders' – meaning those whose interests *ought* to be taken into account as well as those who are involved or affected by organizational activities (Midgley, 2000).

Terminology relating to social auditing will be clarified in chapter 2. Suffice for now to say that social auditing (or social and ethical accounting) is concerned with evaluating the social impact of an organization's activities. Environmental auditing is a related field. The term 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) covers both fields, as does the notion of corporate citizenship.

1. 2. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

1. 2. 1. Initial plan and re-direction

As initially envisaged, the research was intended to develop a theoretical and empirical understanding of social auditing as a new form of organizational learning. It was to be done in three phases. First, a review of how social auditing issues are being constructed by advocates and opponents of it, coupled with interviews with some leading people in the field. The second phase would use action research with 2-3 organizations coming new to

social auditing to explore the processes of getting to grips with the main concepts, the expectations and assumptions involved, and the processes of learning to deal with the challenges of putting the ideas into practice. The third phase envisaged the development of models of social auditing as a form of organizational learning. The need to adapt the strategy to emergent issues was recognized from the outset.

In regard to my own work, I had no interest in practising as a social auditor, but was more interested in 'coming alongside' developments in some way – partly because social auditing offered a way of thinking about organizational learning and ethics from 'outside' that literature but from a perspective related to it. So, right from the start, the research was oriented towards holding an independent stance, and I had no preconception of how it would influence my work.

The first phase of research was under way when unexpected developments led to a change of strategy. The first inklings of this were that, instead of thinking about social auditing as a form of organizational learning, I began to connect it to a wider concept of social learning. This was beginning to emerge from my early efforts to formulate a notion of social learning grounded in a combination of ideas about evolutionary adaptation, concrete agency, and discourse politics – ideas that continued to develop as the research progressed. Around this time I was also forming the idea that critical systems thinking (CST) could provide a framework for reconceptualizing social auditing, mainly for two reasons. First, CST's roots in operations research and systems practice, combined with its orientation towards critical theory, would have a kind of 'face validility' vis-à-vis social auditing. Secondly, the approaches to CST that interested me most – particularly those of Gerald Midgley and

Werner Ulrich – seemed to support the ideas of agency and social engagement that I wanted to develop.

It was with this barely-formed set of ideas, and the conclusions I was drawing from the literature on social auditing, that I arranged to meet three leading figures in social and environmental accounting, for what I envisaged as introductory discussions to test whether I would be regarded as a credible researcher, and to open doors for the second phase of the plan. These people were: (a) Claudia Gonella, then Head of Social Auditing at the New Economics Foundation (NEF), which had helped to pioneer social auditing; (b) Mike Pierce of the Institute of Social and Ethical Accounting (soon to become known as AccountAbility), who was then shepherding the drafting of its foundation standard (AA1000); and (c) Stephen Martin, Director of Education and Training at The Natural Step (TNS) UK, an offspring of Forum for the Future which promotes a model of sustainability aimed primarily at the corporate sector and local authorities.

Claudia Gonella was much more enthusiastic about my 'take' on social auditing as social learning than I had anticipated, seeing it as offering a new perspective that might help to overcome problems about the perceived effectiveness of social auditing that were then beginning to surface. Mike Pierce of AccountAbility reckoned that I was driving at something that had been quite overlooked in discussions about standards for social auditing: a *social* learning perspective that went beyond organizational learning. Stephen Martin was also very enthusiastic, seeing potential for a social learning perspective to resolve a weakness in the TNS model vis-à-vis social factors, and he encouraged me to concentrate on developing the concept I had in mind.

These discussions were intended only as part of the first cycle of research, but while absorbing and reflecting on them I became convinced that I needed to re-focus the research on making the *theoretical* argument for the kind of double-reconstruction I had in mind – reconceptualizing social learning and reconstructing the concept of social auditing on that basis. I was also concerned that, as the plan stood, it would be impossible to develop the ideas in sufficient depth within an empirical framework. There was a danger of producing a superficial synthesis of social auditing, CST and social learning, without the intermediate groundings needed to make the double reconstruction stand up – particularly in regard to the nature of agency, and in regard to citizenship and related issues. These considerations led to a change of strategy.

1. 2. 2. Revised strategy and process implications

The new strategy was to focus the research on developing the theoretical argument for re-conceptualizing social auditing as a form of social learning, based on a prospective synthesis of CST (as revisioned primarily by Midgley) and the idea of social learning.

The decision to concentrate on the conceptual argument also reflected my perception that, while sophisticated methods for social auditing were being developed, understanding of the learning dimension was lagging behind. As the research progressed, further confirmation that I was 'on to something' came from participating in two AccountAbility conferences that featured leading practitioners from various countries, and taking part in a small residential conference on alternative economics with some leading figures in that field,

including James Robertson, one of the founders of NEF. Meanwhile, I was also taking part in networks of organization development practitioners who were probing ways of making organizational learning more socially-engaged. Even though the research has taken several years, the enduring relevance of its main thrust is borne out by an article in September 2005 by Simon Zadek of AccountAbility which concludes that the creation of a new generation of accountability mechanisms for the 21st century "demands new ways of organising, mobilising and, most of all, of learning" (Zadek, 2005: 4). In other words, there is a pressing need for new perspectives on social learning and accountability.

The fact that the research took several years impacted on its development in a number of ways. First, I was of course concerned that my ideas would be overtaken by a new theory of social auditing or of organizational and social learning. On the other hand, the way that various aspects of the thesis gradually dovetailed into each other – the linkages between social auditing, corporate citizenship and systems thinking, and those between an adaptive view of agency, social engagement and social learning – made me determined not to foreshorten the process of building up the prospective synthesis. Secondly, because I needed to make a living while doing the research, the writing had to be done in concentrated periods. Nevertheless, the enforced breaks proved to be beneficial. There was the benefit of mulling things over and letting ideas sink in. Thus, for instance, I came up with the notion of consciousness as an emergent effect of active being in the world (as described in chapter 8) a few months before I came across similar concepts elsewhere, and the sense of it having been my own idea gave me the confidence to develop it.

Having to work while doing the research also meant that synergies began to develop, not necessarily in straightforward ways. For instance, I have been doing empirical research on race relations issues since the early 1990s (e.g. Walker & Ahmad, 1994). In 2002 myself and my partner initiated and conducted a study of black and ethnic minority nurses in leading positions in the NHS (Elliott, Walker et al, 2002), a study which led directly to specific policy developments. Its relevance here is that (albeit in different terms) the research highlighted the importance of exercising the kind of 'agency amidst complexity' which is described in chapter 8.

In that case, empirical work contributed to the development of the thesis. In another case, it was the other way round. Reflecting on the difficulty of exercising agency in corporate contexts, I came to the conclusion that fear of challenging and of being challenged, coupled with misunderstandings about conflict in organizations, seriously inhibits the exercise of agency and of everyday accountability. So my partner and I have been piloting an approach called Developing Capacity for Challenge, which tackles received wisdom about challenge and conflict and helps people to learn how to challenge more actively on a principled basis. Taking this further is one of the ways I foresee putting the thesis into practice. In retrospect, therefore, having to do the research in concentrated bursts over an extended period has been more of a benefit than a hindrance.

Another effect of the theoretical focus was that the approach had to span a number of different fields and literatures, and competing perspectives within fields. Hence the use of frame analysis as a research method, as described below. Yet it was also necessary to ground the research in *one* of the literatures, and (of the fields involved) CST was the obvious

candidate for doing that. Among other things, this resulted in a much more detailed analysis of CST than could be accommodated in the final thesis. On the other hand, the need for compression led me to focus my account of CST, and its relation to philosophical pragmatism, on the issues most relevant for development of the thesis, while framing the relevant concepts and theories in relation to their overall field. This brings us to the use of frame analysis.

1. 3. THE FRAME ANALYSIS APPROACH

Once the decision was made to concentrate on building a theoretical argument, the issue of research methods resolved into a series of literature reviews combined with an approach to interactively developing the range of concepts reflected in the research aims. The approach adopted is a form of frame analysis, applied at the level of cultural and political discourse.

1. 3. 1. The concept of framing

The concept of framing has been used in psychiatry, psychology, linguistics, sociology and media studies. Whereas the phrase 'term of reference' denotes a set of standards or principles governing behaviour or thinking, the concept of framing refers to processes by which people use interpretative schemes – variously labelled as frames, schema, scripts, scenarios, patterns or packages – to make sense of the world and to construct discourses. That is more of a scoping statement than a definition, because the frame analytic literature lacks consensus even on the basic questions of what frames are and how individuals or cultures make use of them (Fisher, 1997).

Bateson ([1954] 1973: 150-166) introduced the concept of a frame as a meta-communicative

device for focusing perception by setting parameters for interpreting 'what is going on'

(Oliver and Johnston, 2000) – as in distinguishing 'this is play' from non-play. Kelly (1955)

introduced personal construct theory, which refers to the psychology of constructing

meaning in anticipation of events on the basis of past experience. Goffman (1974) coined

the term 'frame analysis', referring in his conception to culturally-generated cognitive

frameworks that unconsciously guide the perception and representation of reality, rendering

what otherwise would be meaningless into something meaningful. However, Goffman's

formulation was criticised for being ill-defined (Gamson, 1975; Swanson, 1975), and the

frame analytic work that has developed in recent years has little in common with his

approach, while itself being so disparate that the various notions of framing have been

described as "disjointed and incompatible" (Fisher, 1997). Nonetheless, the concept is

useful for understanding the role as well as the content of discourses, and it represents

something intermediate between personal constructs and impersonal ideology. Hence the

relevance for this research of certain approaches to frame analysis.

While frame analysis overlaps with discourse analysis, the field of discourse analysis tends to

focus on the use of language in talk and text (Garfinkel, 1967; van Dijk, 1985; Billig, 1987;

Billig et al, 1988), whereas frame analysis also includes approaches that are pitched more at

the level of cultural and political discourse. Fisher's (1997) review of the frame analytic

literature is particularly useful because it covers both types of frame analytic approach:

(a) those that focus mainly on everyday communication and negotiation, and tend to

separate framing and ideology (e.g. van Dijk, 1977, 1985; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980;

Moscovici, 1984); and (b) those that focus on the study of framing in relation to social movements, the concept of cultural frames, and the *relation between* framing and ideology. What follows concentrates on the second category. It is not a review of this type of frame analysis; the intention is, rather, to identify certain issues regarding framing and ideology, and then outline how they relate to the thesis.

1. 3. 2. Framing and social movements

The application of framing to social movements is closely associated with the work of Snow and Benford, who contend that the way a social movement frames a problem or grievance plays a significant part in the movement's capacity to mobilise supporters and to shape public policy (Snow et al, 1986; Snow & Benford, 1992). They define framing as the process by which ordinary people make sense of public issues, using "domain-specific interpretative frames" for organizing behaviours and individual lifestyles, and using "global interpretative frames" or "master frames" to amalgamate domain-specific frames and form more broadly socio-political meanings (Snow et al, 1986: 474-5). For social movements, frames function as "conceptual scaffolding" (Snow & Benford, 1988: 213) for the "ideological work" (Snow et al, 1986: 478) of constructing or modifying ideology. Once in place, frames enable activists to assign meaning to events and to signify those meanings to the public. Successful framing enables a movement to "mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to [de-mobilise] antagonists" (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198). While Snow and Benford emphasise the capacity of activists to manage framing processes, it is not clear how they relate framing to the patterns of discourse into which people are culturally

socialized, nor is it clear how their conception of framing differs from ideology (Fisher, 1997: 6-7) – a point to which I will return.

Gamson (1988: 220) identifies two levels of framing: "issue cultures" referring to a particular issue/event, and "cultural themes" which "transcend specific issues and suggest larger world views" – such themes being related to ideology, values, and belief systems. For Gamson (ibid: 221), frames "develop dialectically, with established, conventionalised frames attracting adversarial counter-frames". Like Snow and Benford (1988), Gamson (1992, 1995) describes various framing strategies that movements can employ, but how framing relates to ideology remains unclear (Fisher, 1997). One solution is Swidler's (1986) argument that levels of discourse lie along a continuum, with ideology at one end, tradition in the centre, and common sense at the other end. Swidler (ibid: 279) defines these terms as follows: an ideology consists of "a highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system, aspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action"; tradition means "articulated cultural beliefs and practices, but ones taken for granted so that they seem inevitable parts of life"; and common sense is "the set of assumptions so unselfconscious as to seem a natural, transparent, undeniable part of the structure of the world".

For Triandafyllidou (1995: 3) frames form part of the "discursive universe" of social interaction, functioning at two levels: a surface structure of signification and coding, and a deep structure that includes narrative structures and ideologies that are associated with language and culture. Triandafyllidou and Fitiou (1998) use frame analysis to describe how competing narratives of capitalism and modernity can play out in policy-making processes

relating to sustainability. The discourse of sustainability will be discussed in chapter 3, and the concept of social learning in policy-making debates will be discussed in chapter 9.

1. 3. 3. Cultural framing and ideological perspectives

Fisher's (1997: 24) own conception is that of cultural framing, defined as "socio-culturally and cognitively generated patterns which help people to understand their world by shaping other forms of deep cultural discourse". She adds two important riders. First, that the "array of cultural frames in any given culture need not be consistent with each other" (ibid). Secondly, while cultural frames provide people with tools for constructing meaning to make sense of their world, such frames are not "finished constructions" (Donati, 1992: 139). Moreover, like Swidler and Donati, Fisher defines cultural frames as being distinct from ideologies, although she recognizes that some frames work better with some ideologies than with others. For her, because they are independent, cultural frames can cut across ideological boundaries. For example, "Ardent socialists, radical animal rights activists, conservative business people, and religious fundamentalists can all make use of such frames as ... 'no gain without cost' " (Fisher, 1997: 25).

The advantage of distinguishing frames from ideologies, Fisher suggests, is that it challenges monolithic notions of ideology and allows social actors to reconstruct ideological arguments by 'swapping' cultural frames. This ties in with her belief that cultural frames can work in more than one socio-linguistic environment, and that one group can adopt a frame developed by another; equally, within any cultural context some cultural frames will provide more widely-accepted ways of making sense than others, and "cultural frames acceptable

within one social context may not prove acceptable in another" (ibid: 26). Swapping frames may not formally restructure ideological positions but may influence how people come to regard them and thereby open the way to changing minds – an idea that chimes with Schön and Rein's (1994) concept of frame reflection. At the same time, Fisher (1997: 26) also accepts that use of a cultural frame "does not necessarily reflect the desire or unconstrained choice of people within a given culture". In capitalist societies, some cultural frames will find more ready acceptance than others, but that does not mean that support for them can be taken for granted, and even deeply-embedded cultural frames can still be contested. Indeed, Fisher rejects the idea that cultural framing is merely about erecting conventions, and casts it more as a form of conscious or unconscious intervention:

> "By selecting a cultural frame to understand an issue or event, individuals maintain the saliency of that particular frame, whether or not they consciously acknowledge the consequences of their choice ... [and] people can also remember – or be reminded – that they have the power to select, deselect, or change a cultural frame during a framing dispute (even if that power is partially checked by cultural and systemic constraints)". (Fisher, 1997: 27-8)

This agentive dimension is also brought to the fore by stressing the verb 'framing' rather than the noun 'frame'. The noun refers to a "constructed product" whereas the verb refers to "dynamic, negotiated, and often contested processes" (Snow and Benford, 2000: 3). In much the same terms, Oliver and Johnston (2000) refer to framing processes as emergent and contested. Another agentive aspect is that (re)framing can function as "remedial ideological work" (Snow and Benford, 2000: 10) by providing "a conceptual handle" for thinking about disjunctions between cultural framing and actual experiences or events – to

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resolve cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Aronson, 1976). Snow and Benford (2000: 11) also make the point that framing is more empirical than ideological and therefore more accessible to first-hand observation and intervention.

These observations by Snow and Benton feature in a rejoinder to a critique by Oliver and Johnston (2000) of the tendency in frame analytic work, including Snow and Benton's, to blur the lines between framing and ideology. Most of the rejoinder is taken up with rebutting criticisms that are of no concern here, and the two sets of authors agree that frames and ideologies are not synonymous, that both concepts are useful, and that frame theory can contribute to better understanding of the workings of ideology (Oliver and Johnston, 2000; Snow and Benton, 2000). However, Oliver and Johnston also draw some other conclusions that deserve attention.

Their main concern is that the concept of ideology needs to be used in its own right and not re-cast as a frame.

> "Frame theory is rooted in linguistic studies of interaction, and points to the way shared assumptions and meanings shape the interpretation of any particular event. Ideology is rooted in politics and the study of politics, and points to coherent systems of ideas which provide theories of society coupled with value commitments and normative implications for promoting or resisting social change." (Oliver and Johnston, 2000: 37)

Fisher's concept of cultural framing spans both conceptions, but the point Oliver and Johnston are making is valid for the frame analytic literature in general. Putting it in framing

terms (as they do), to frame an ideology as a frame is to treat linguistic and social

psychological issues as paramount, whereas to frame an ideology as an ideology is to focus

on a structure of ideas about society and its ethical, moral and political content. In other

words, framing an ideology as such is making political issues paramount. At the same time,

just as a social psychology perspective can be latently political or de-politicizing, social-

psychological assumptions can be latent in an ideological perspective (as in the differing

views of social relations reflected in liberal-individualistic or communitarian conceptions of

citizenship and of rights, discussed later in the thesis). So, a linguistic/interactive

perspective on framing is latently ideological, and an ideological perspective is latently

social-psychological. The point is to acknowledge this sufficiently to avoid the dangers of

depicting human capacities in terms that are completely de-politicized, on the one hand, or

stultifyingly over-socialized (Wrong, 1961), on the other.

In his analysis of the thickets of ideology, Eagleton (1991) offers six definitions, ranging

from the neutral but "unworkably broad" notion of the social production of thought and

belief to the pejorative and "suspiciously narrow" notion of the deployment of false or

deceptive beliefs in the direct interests of a ruling class (ibid: 28-30, 221). Oliver and

Johnston's definition would stand mid-way in that range. Support for their view of the

relation between ideology and framing is provided in Eagleton's conclusion regarding the

relation between ideology and language.

> "Ideology is a matter of 'discourse' rather than of 'language' – of certain concrete
>
> discursive effects, rather than of signification as such. It represents the points where
>
> power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them. But it
>
> is not therefore to be equated with just any form of discursive partisanship,

'interested' speech or rhetorical bias; rather, the concept of ideology aims to disclose something of the relation between an utterance and its material conditions of possibility, when those conditions of possibility are viewed in the light of certain power-struggles central to the reproduction (or also, for some theories, contestation) of a whole form of social life." (ibid: 223)

This brings us directly to my use of framing, which comes down to the points stated below.

1. 3. 4. Framing and ideology in the thesis

First, in regard to thesis structure, after the review of corporate social responsibility and social auditing in chapter 2, the rest of the thesis is developed as a series of framings and reframings of ideas that underpin the synthesis that grounds the concept of social learning set out in chapter 10, and the reconstruction of social auditing on that basis. This is represented schematically in Figure 1.1 overleaf, which constitutes a meta-frame for the development of the thesis, and will be referred back to at various stages.

Secondly, this method of framing and reframing ideas also runs through most of the individual chapters, with the style of discussion reflecting the contestable and 'unfinished' nature of framing.

Thirdly, while this approach is focused mainly at the level of cultural and political discourse, social psychological perspectives are also taken into account where relevant – in relation to the nature of agency, for instance.

Fourth, this framing and interweaving of discourses is intertwined with competing

ideological perspectives, particularly in regard to the role of organizations in society, the

purposes of systemic inquiry and intervention, the nature of citizenship and of rights, and

concepts of agency and of social learning.

Figure 1. 1: Schematic meta-frame of thesis
(four-way symbol represents synthesis)
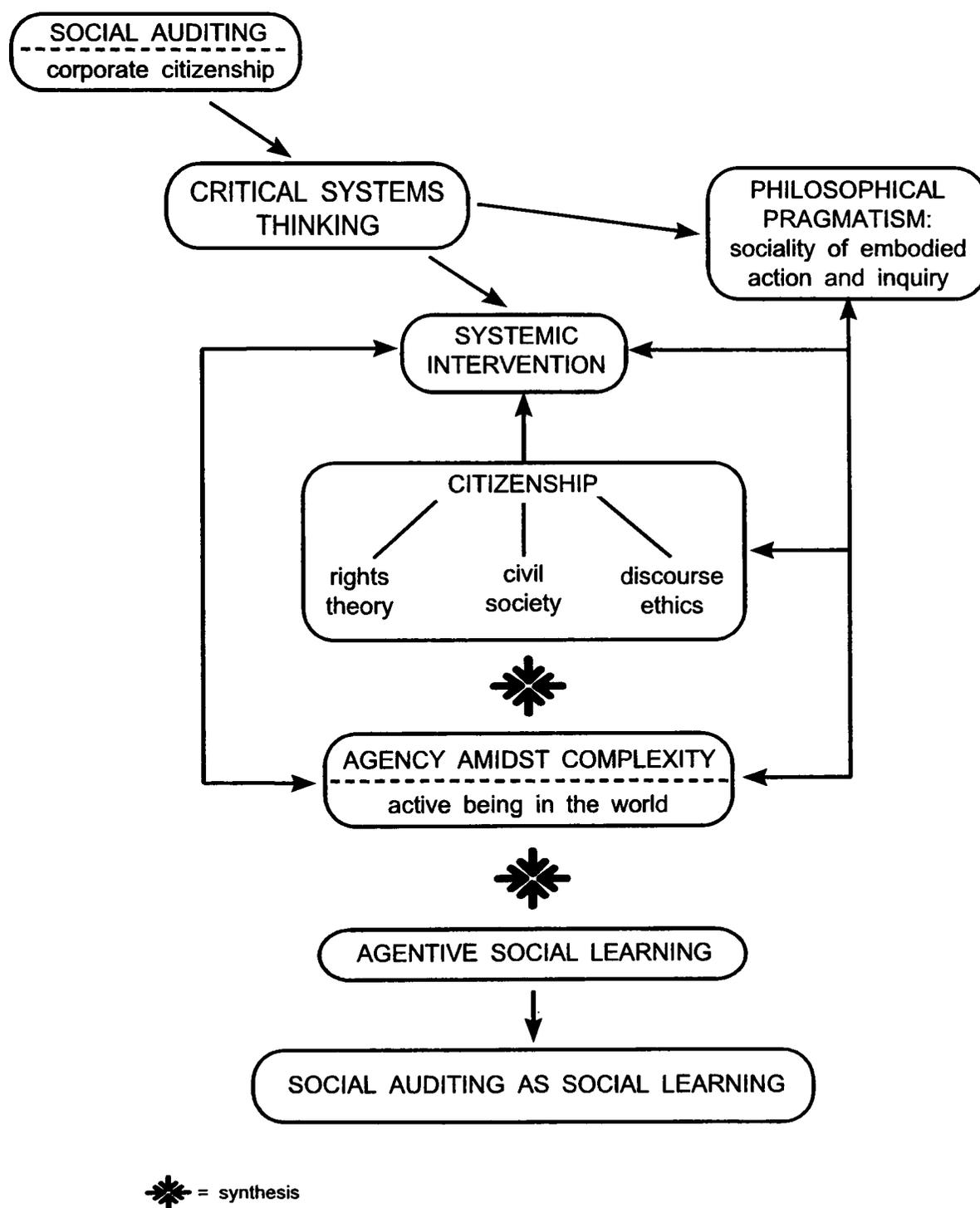
-✳- = synthesis

Fifth, the whole enterprise is expressly ideological in that it is aimed at reconceptualizing social auditing by grounding it in a synthesis of ideas which have potentially radical implications for how people view themselves as agents, citizens and members of organizations.

1. 4. RESEARCH AIMS

1. 4. 1. Overall aim and specific objectives

The overall aim is:

- To reformulate the conceptual basis of social auditing and its relation to corporate citizenship by rethinking social auditing as a form of social learning, grounded in a synthesis of Midgley's theory of Systemic Intervention coupled with an integrated conception of agency, citizenship and social learning.

Specific objectives within that are:-

1. To review how the concept of social auditing and the related idea of corporate citizenship are being constructed.

2. To review CST, particularly the work of Ulrich and Midgley, and assess its capacity for strengthening the conceptual basis of social auditing.

3. To explore the relationship between CST and philosophical pragmatism.

4. To develop an integrated conception of citizenship and agency that complements Systemic Intervention.

5. To develop a concept of social learning that reflects and extends that integrated conception.

6. To formulate a synthesis of Systemic Intervention, agency, citizenship and social learning, and on this basis to conceptually reframe social auditing as a form of social learning.

1. 4. 2. Scoping factors

Finally, I want to mention two factors regarding the scope of the research. One is that I am approaching social auditing *as a field*, so I am not concerned with the detail of particular approaches or methods. And the focus here is mainly on social auditing as formulated by AccountAbility, the Institute of Social and Ethical Accounting, the leading body in the field. However, I have made no attempt to relate the ideas developed here to the various networks and international bodies with which AccountAbility is aligned, nor to engage with other frameworks of corporate governance.

1. 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has set the scene for the development of the thesis by describing its origins, the research process and the aim and objectives. Starting, as it were, from the top left of Figure 1.1, chapters 2 and 3 together present a review of social auditing and its potential development through the allied concept of corporate citizenship, and an analysis of why social auditing needs to be underpinned by a more systemic perspective on agency, citizenship and social learning.

Chapter 2:

SOCIAL AUDITING

2. 1. Introduction

This chapter traces the origins of social auditing, the surge of developments in the 1990s, and the phase of both consolidation and challenge that has ensued in recent years. It does not purport to be a comprehensive review, nor is it an analysis of different approaches. I am approaching social and ethical accounting as a field of research, practice and debate, considering different approaches only in broad terms. Accordingly, this chapter is focused on the general idea of social and ethical accounting, and the factors mainly at issue in the field. So this chapter sets the overall scene, while the next explores how one of the leading figures in the field develops the wider concept of corporate citizenship. These two chapters are therefore complementary; together they give rise to the particular issues that the rest of the thesis addresses.

2. 1. 1. Terminology

Terminology in the field remains unsettled, with similar-sounding terms being almost interchangeable. For instance, Gonella et al (1998: 91) define 'social accounting' as being synonymous with 'social auditing', but promote 'social and ethical accounting, auditing and reporting' (SEAAR) as a generic term and acronym. To minimise confusion I will: (a) mostly use 'social accounting' or 'social and ethical accounting' as generic terms covering

social, ethical and environmental accountability;[1] (b) use SEAAR to refer to the

AccountAbility model; (c) reserve the term 'social auditing' for social accounting that is

independently verified, not necessarily by professional auditors; and (d) use 'social reporting'

for all types of reporting under the broad category of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

I regard verification of social and ethical claims as essential, hence my preference for 'social

auditing' in the title of the thesis.

2. 2. ORIGINS AND EARLY APPROACHES

Interest in social accounting has waxed and waned in its 60-year history, with periods of

intense activity punctuated by stretches when little happened due to changing economic and

political climates. Its recent resurgence follows the 'green' movement's success in pushing

the case for environmental accounting. What follows is based upon work by leading figures

in that resurgence.

According to Zadek et al (1997), one of the earliest uses of the term 'social audit' was in the

USA in 1940 by Theodore J Kreps, who argued that companies should recognize that they

have social responsibilities and publicly report on their performance in that regard. There is

no recorded response to his appeal. In the early 1950s, Howard Bowen argued that

companies should try to audit their social impact in an unbiased way, but for internal

purposes only (Carroll and Beiler, 1975).

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[1] Churchman (1969: 213-4) refers to 'social accounting' in the different sense of putting economic values
on socially-beneficial factors such as aesthetics, recreation, and health.

In Britain, George Goyder (1961: 109) argued that financial accounting is a "one-sided" affair belonging to the days when companies were small and their accountability to the public was not in question. In an economy of big business and potential monopolies, however, social auditing is needed to enable the public to judge what large companies are doing, not only in regard to labour relations and pricing policy but also the company's dealings with customers, suppliers and the community.

In the Netherlands in 1969, the Hoogovens steel company (now Corus) started doing social audits as part of an agreement with trade unions whereby reports were issued to all employees to inform negotiations about pay and conditions. By this time there were demands from various quarters for companies to recognize CSR. The clamour was fueled by left-wing activism across Europe, consumer activism in the US led by Ralph Nader, and growing awareness that large corporations were becoming more powerful than governments. Churches began to question how their funds were being invested. The spotlight was turned on companies and financial institutions that discriminated racially, were in the arms trade or were active in apartheid South Africa. Shareholder activism spread. Institutional investors – universities, churches, insurance companies, banks, mutual funds – were pressed into forcing companies like General Motors and Xerox to disclose, for instance, their employment practices vis-à-vis women and ethnic minorities (Estes, 1976). The pressures for recognition of CSR led to interest in developing accountability mechanisms. The emerging field was about to have a brief hey-day. A survey of Fortune 500 companies in the early 1970s found more than half of them reporting 'social measurement disclosures' (ibid: 29). Another survey showed that disclosures related mostly to environmental standards and employee safety, but matters such as employment of

disadvantaged workers, educational support and community support programmes also featured (ibid: 30).

In 1972 the US National Association of Accountants set up a Committee on Accounting for Corporate Social Performance. Its report in 1974 set out a general statement of objectives and procedures, and a taxonomy of categories of social performance (reproduced in Estes, 1976). It recognized an immediate need to develop ways of accounting for such performance, for both internal and external purposes, and recommended a strategy of building social performance measures onto the ones already familiar to accountants and business managers. That, broadly, is how the field has developed.

2. 2. 1. Early approaches

The first flush of social accounting included a range of approaches, some of which are still relevant today.

One of the earliest and least informative approaches was that of the *social cost* or *outlay audit* relating to community support programmes and charitable donations. Lack of effort to assess the benefits of such programmes led the US Department of Commerce (1979) to dismiss this approach as of no use to the public (Gonella et al, 1998). Nevertheless, it is still common for social reports to include such information as a gesture towards social accountability.

Much more sophisticated is the method known as *the social balance statement*. It is a re-analysis of audited financial accounts according to an organization's stated social mission, as distinct from its financial objectives. This has been used for decades by the National League of Co-operatives in Italy, where support for co-operatives is enshrined in the constitution, and since 1992 all co-operatives are legally required to specify the criteria for fulfilling their social mission. A practitioner explains this as being more than a number-crunching exercise:

"The process provides a means for the management to combine efficiency and social strategy, values and actions, into an integrated approach that reflects the holistic Coop identity, and also its specific entrepreneurial and social culture. Social accounting for the Coop has therefore involved reviewing the meaning of stakeholder involvement ... and ensuring transparency in relationships with various stakeholders." (Vaccari, 1997: 174)

Constituency accounting is another early 1970s approach that has evolved into something current. The original concept was that companies should analyse the demands of key interest groups and report how they performed against them. This approach did not gain much ground in the 1970s, but the seed of stakeholder dialogue was there and with it concern about how the analysis of data would be meaningful to people outside an organization (Gonella et al, 1998a).

Corporate rating (ibid) is another practice that emerged in the 1970s. In various guises, this benchmarks companies against social and ethical criteria set by others. The two main techniques are: (a) simply judging whether the company meets certain criteria, and (b) using rating scales to gauge how well it meets particular criteria. The Interfaith Centre on

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Corporate Responsibility used this approach to rate companies doing business with apartheid South Africa, and since the 1970s the Council on Economic Priorities in New York has used it to educate consumers in *Shopping for a Better World*. Rating schemes have proliferated since the mid-1980s.

In 1978 the Public Interest Research Centre in Britain set up Social Audit Ltd to produce information about corporate social performance, including a handbook for consumers (Medawar, 1978). The company survived, but the 1970s flush of interest in social accounting was short-lived, as some had anticipated (Estes, 1976: 15). With the 'New Right' ascendant in the US and UK, the notion that *business* has social responsibilities was anathema to social commentators and politicians who were keen to put as much distance as possible between *government* and social responsibility. Economist Milton Friedman was in vogue and he declared that "Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their shareholders as possible" (Friedman, 1962).

In this inhospitable climate, social accounting almost vanished from academic debate and actual practice in the 1980s (Zadek et al, 1997; Gray et al, 1997). Yet a resurgence occurred in the 1990s.

2. 3. RESURGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The success of the 'green' movement in getting environmental issues onto the political

agenda paved the way for the revival of social and ethical accounting. This coincided with

reaction against the 1980s economic model, leading in the US to the founding of Business

for Social Responsibility, and in Britain to the promotion of stakeholder theory (Hutton,

1995). There was also mounting concern about the increasing dominance of corporate

interests and the retreat of governments in the face of market globalization. Moreover, the

whole period saw radical changes in civil society mobilization (e.g. Solidarity in Poland) and

the emergence of increasingly sophisticated non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

(Zadek et al, 1997).

The political impact of environmentalism was greatly influenced by the MIT report on *The*

Limits to Growth (Meadows et al, 1972). It convinced many people that, even with the most

optimistic assumptions about technological advances, the combination of trends in world

population, agriculture, industry, resource-use and pollution was unsustainable.[2] Fifteen

years later the UN Commission on Environment and Development made 'sustainability' a

business proposition: practising sustainable development could be profitable as well as

environment-friendly and good for your reputation. It defined sustainability as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs" (Bruntland, 1987: 43).

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[2] Some of the assumptions in *The Limits to Growth* were revised in *Beyond the Limits* (Meadows et al,
1992). Nevertheless, the earlier message was reinforced.

A whole industry sprang up to service this proposition and in its wake came a resurgence of interest in social and ethical reporting. This was aided by the growing respectability of environmental auditing, which set a precedent for alternatives to conventional accounting, and by the rise of ethical consumerism and ethical investment funds. Moreover, engaging in some kind of dialogue with stakeholders gradually became accepted as an integral part of most contemporary approaches to social and ethical accounting.

2. 3. 1. Approaches to stakeholder engagement

One of the most thorough and open-handed approaches to stakeholder engagement is the *ethical accounting* process initiated in Denmark in the late 1980s. There was an element of 'spontaneous combustion' to what happened, according to Pruzan (1997), on whose account the following is based. In an article published in 1988, Peter Pruzan and Ole Thyssen of Copenhagen Business School proposed a process of ethical accounting as a means to integrate ethics and value-based leadership into organizational operations. This came to the attention of management at the Danish bank known as Sbn. A year earlier the bank had initiated a 'code of values' based on psychological theories of human needs. The code consisted of a long list of values and commitments supposedly shared by managers and staff. However, the approach had been top-down, it treated managers and staff as the only stakeholders, and there was more emphasis on the code as a product than on integrating ethical values into business processes and behaviours. Unaware of the bank's initative, Pruzan and Thyssen had anticipated such problems and had set out an alternative approach. They were invited to make a presentation and immediately offered the chance to use the bank for a three-year experiment in applying their ideas.

This was the start of ethical accounting, which – after shaky beginnings – evolved into a process of systematically linking stakeholder consultation and dialogue, organizational learning and corporate planning. Apart from the bank's management, the stakeholders involved by means of questionnaires and dialogue circles include employees, private and business customers, shareholders, and local people who are neither customers nor shareholders. As well as the annual Ethical Accounting Statement there are stakeholder evaluations at regional and branch levels. The purpose of all this is that it "provides the bank with a much richer picture of its relationship with its stakeholders – and therefore of its potentials for surviving, thriving and developing in the long run" (Pruzan, 1997: 66).

Crucially, the bank's management came to recognize the value of differing viewpoints:

> "It is not a sign of weakness that the Ethical Accounting Statement includes interpretation and discussion. It is a strength. If there was only one right interpretation, all dialogue would cease. Ethical Accounting invites discussion and brings conflicts into the open so that they can be used constructively. It is via discussion and conflict that the organization learns and progresses." (Sbn Bank management report, 1994, quoted in Pruzan, 1997: 70).

Ethical accounting is now used by scores of commercial and public companies in Scandinavia and in Japan.

In ethical accounting, stakeholders' qualitative judgements of corporate performance stand alongside financial accounts. An approach called *stakeholder-based valuation* seeks more integration between them. In an earlier form this was called human asset accounting, which

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attempted to value human assets in monetary terms and show them on a balance sheet (Hussey, 1995). It failed to develop because of the inherent difficulties. Now the idea has re-emerged as stakeholder-based valuation, with particular interest in factors such as 'goodwill' (reputation, customer loyalty) and trying to put values on organizational knowledge and capacity for innovation. The growing significance of 'intangible assets' and 'values' makes this a hot topic in accountancy. This reflects the fact that conventional accounting is being challenged not only from ideologically critical perspectives (e.g. Laughlin, 1987; Llewllyn, 1994; Sikka et al, 1995; Reiter, 1995; Power & Laughlin, 1992; Power et al, 2004), but it is also under attack from mainstream quarters because of failure to account for the 'intangibles' that count for so much in post-industrial economies. As distinct from physical assets and capital, intangible assets refer to know-how and capacity to innovate, R+D pipelines, unique technologies or systems, 'intellectual property', reputation, customer loyalty, public support, and suchlike. According to a report for the Smith Institute and the Academy of Enterprise (with funding from PricewaterhouseCoopers), conventional accountancy is "based on a fiction: that the valuations auditors produce reflect the real value of the companies they audit. They simply do not" (Pilch, 2000: 21-22).

Another kind of valuation is through the development of *social and ethical performance indicators*. This differs from corporate rating in that rating is done externally by a public interest group, whereas social and ethical indicators are used internally or with chosen stakeholders. In simple terms, the approach involves deciding: (a) what factors should be assessed (e.g. employment practices); (b) their relative importance and perhaps targets for them; (c) the kinds of activity, input or output which can serve as direct or proxy measures of performance; (d) establishing the baseline position and monitoring subsequent

performance. For instance, Traidcraft developed a schedule of indicators to audit the

fairness of its dealings with trade producers (Evans, 1997). In Traidcraft's case, both the

indicators and performance against them are all subject to dialogue with stakeholders.

It is worth noting that Traidcraft has used conventional performance indicators as well as

specially-developed ones. Gonella et al (1998a) make the point that alongside customized

indicators, ones with mainstream acceptance can also be used – for instance, indicators of

best practice vis-à-vis equality of employment, environmental protection, fair trade, or

ethical investment. It has to be said, however, that government-issue, industry standard or

other broad-brush criteria of social and ethical performance may be designed to obscure as

much as they reveal, and there is often a gulf between general standards and critically-

enlightened practice.

In the early 1990s, a radical change in the approach to stakeholders was initiated by Richard

Evans of Traidcraft in conjunction with Simon Zadek, then pioneering social auditing with

the New Economics Foundation (NEF). As Gray et al (1997) describe it, the approach

adopted the perspective of "polyvocal citizenship" (PCP), drawing broadly on Habermasian

discourse ethics and directly from Guba and Lincoln's (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*.[3]

In terms of specific practice, the approach has similarities with ethical accounting at Sbn

bank; the difference is more a matter of how the praxis is theorized as giving stakeholders a

'voice' in the organization:

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[3] Laughlin (1987), Power & Laughlin (1992), and Power et al (2004) use other aspects of Habermasian
theory to argue for major changes in accountancy. Habermasian theory is explored in detail in later
chapters.

"Focus groups are held with each stakeholder group, from which key issues are identified, and a wider constituency of the stakeholder group is consulted ... The social account comprises predominantly (but not exclusively) a reporting of the voices of the stakeholders. PCP thereby constitutes a different way of seeing the organization." (Gray et al, 1997: 335-6)

This approach moves away from privileging the corporate view of reality. Instead, it treats stakeholders as active participants in *constructing* the reality of the accounting process, content and context (Gray et al, 1997). In passing, I would comment that a constructionist view of accounting surely is valid up to a point, but becomes contradictory if the purpose is to achieve concrete change in organizational impacts. Moreover, there is a problem in reconciling human agency with social constructivism (Burr, 1995).

Two other aspects of this approach are worth noting. One is that Traidcraft's 'core values' formed part of the dialogue. Secondly, following Guba and Lincoln (1989), the social auditor (Zadek) engaged in the dialogue as a "responsive constructivist" rather than a conventional evaluator (Gray et al, 1997). In theory, the constructivist approach meant that there was no role for external verification of the social audit, since 'externality' and 'objectivity' cannot exist in the model (ibid: 336). In fact, the social audit was subject to a degree of 'independent attestation' by an advisory board, and the statutory financial audit was done separately. Subsequent efforts to transfer the process to the sister organization, Traidcraft Exchange, ran into considerable difficulty when the *financial* auditors were asked to express an audit opinion on the *social* accounts. This threw into sharp relief the absence

of standards for social accounting, and developments in recent years have focused largely on putting standards in place.

2. 4. CONSOLIDATION AND CHALLENGE

While social accounting was resurgent in the 1990s, leading practitioners became concerned about the fragmentation of approaches and a lack of standards. An international effort to co-ordinate approaches started in 1994, at a conference on community development held in Dessau in Germany. The story of what ensued (recounted in Zadek et al, 1997) serves to place many of the key figures and the range of interests represented.

One group of people went to Dessau to meet each other and discuss social auditing at the behest of Simon Zadek of NEF. The others were: Richard Evans of Traidcraft; Peter Pruzan, co-architect of the Danish approach to ethical accounting; Maria Sillanpaa, from The Body Shop International; and Jane Press from an Italian environmental research institute. That core group was joined by Tina Liamzon, representing the Italian-based Society for International Development and the New York-based People-Centred Development Forum, and John Pearce, founder of Community Enterprise Consultancy and Research in Scotland, who had pioneered social auditing for community enterprises.

> "All shared the view that SEAAR was a critical ingredient of effective social responsibility, whether for the business community, private non-profit organizations, or the state. Equally shared, however, was a concern that the proliferation of different approaches and models – whilst exciting – carried the

dangers of confusion, misrepresentation and ultimately deterioration in the quality

of practice." (Zadek et al, 1997: xi)

That group's first meeting led to a flurry of networking. In March 1995 a conference on

SEAAR took place in Edinburgh, organised by NEF. It was attended by practitioners from

across Europe, the US and elsewhere. At this and later meetings, others who contributed

significantly to the debate about standards included John Elkington and Andrea Spencer-

Cooke of SustainAbility, the environmental consultancy; Rob Gray, head of the Centre for

Environmental and Social Accounting Research at the University of Dundee; and Charles

Medawar, director of Social Audit Ltd.

A month later it was agreed that a professional body needed to be established and standards

developed. A working group was formed, consisting of the original Dessau group

supplemented by Henk van Luijk, Professor of Business Ethics at Nijenrode Business

School in the Netherlands; Alice Tepper Martin, director of the New York-based Council

on Economic Priorities, and David Wheeler, then head of ethical auditing at The Body

Shop. In 1996 the Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility (known as AccountAbility)

was formed, with Claudia Gonella seconded from NEF to get it up and running.

While 1994-5 was something of a watershed for SEAAR, the period November 1999 to

November 2000 marked a coming of age. November 1999 saw the launch in Copenhagen,

after much debate and consultation, of the Institute's framework for SEAAR, AA1000.

A year later NEF disbanded its social audit unit and published a stinging attack on social

reporting in general (Doane, 2000). I will outline the consolidation of SEAAR first, and the parallel debate about regulation, and then describe NEF's change of heart.

2. 4. 1. The AccountAbility framework and process

The basis of AccountAbility's consolidation of SEAAR is the AA1000 framework, comprising principles and a set of process standards intended to help users to develop accountability processes, measures and reporting systems through stakeholder engagement (Peirce, 1999). The emphasis is on *how* the process should be approached rather than *what* should be reported. The framework *per se* is not directly relevant here, but the underlying rationale is. Figure 2.1 overleaf shows the rationale for SEAAR as used in key documents (e.g. Gonella et al, 1998a and b). Also central to the approach is the principle of 'inclusivity', according to which: all stages of the process are meant to reflect the views and needs of all stakeholder groups; the process allows them to express their views without fear or restriction; and the concerns of 'voiceless' stakeholders are considered, including future generations and the environment (Zadek and Raynard, 2002: 10).

In 2002 AccountAbility produced a series of resources (AA1000S) to reflect the lessons of experience. Three propositions underpinned this: (a) that stakeholder engagement is at the core of the accountability process; (b) that accountability is about 'organizational responsiveness', meaning the extent to which an organization *takes action* on the basis of stakeholder engagement; and (c) responsiveness requires the organizational capacities to learn and innovate effectively on the basis of stakeholder engagement (Editorial, *AccountAbility Quarterley*, 2001: 2).

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Figure 2.1: The AccountAbility rationale for SEAAR (Gonella et al, 1998b)

Managerialist perspective
To survive and prosper in society, organisations need to know what is happening, what people think about them, and how best to influence those perspectives.

Public Interest Perspective - Organisations are not merely choosing to undertake social and ethical accounting, auditing and reporting as a means of understanding their social environment, but are rather being driven to respond to demands from the actors that make up that environment.

Managerialist/ stakeholder management

Value shift/base

Public interest/ accountability

Value Shift Perspective - Organisations are searching for a broader array of explanations and measures of success than those provided by economic indicators.

As the AccountAbility standards have evolved, the auditing process has been depicted in various ways. Figure 2.2 shows how it was visualized in 2004. This depicts a central set of processes relating to the embedding of social and ethical accounting, assurance and reporting taking place within the dynamics of organizational learning, innovation and performance improvement by virtue of the development of accountability through engagement with stakeholders.

In 2005, the principles represented by the four central triangles in Figure 2.2 were re-defined (AA1000SES, 2005) as: Inclusivity in accounting for stakeholders' needs and

aspirations; Materiality (referring to whether an audit report provides sufficient basis for evaluating organizational impacts); Completeness (in disclosure of information); and Responsiveness to stakeholder concerns. However, I regard the model below as being clearer for the purposes of the thesis, so in chapter 10 it is this one that I use to depict how the synthesis I have developed reconstructs social auditing.

FIGURE 2.2: the AccountAbility process as depicted in 2004
(adapted from www.accountability.org.uk/aa1000)
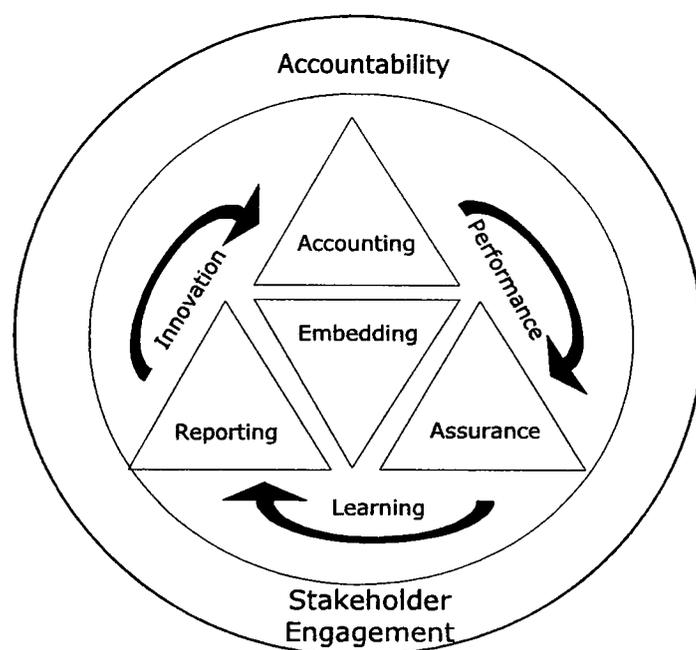
In tandem with these developments, *AccountAbility Quarterly* and the Institute's website became increasingly substantial resources and forums of debate – debate about practice and about the case for doing it in the first place.

2. 4. 2. The 'business case' and the debate about regulation

Despite all this progress, and a very impressive network of practitioners and supporters across the globe, social accounting has not yet gained mainstream acceptance. Only a small minority of firms have adopted it, and the resulting reports are of dubious value (Doane, 2000; Rubbens et al, 2002). Part of the explanation is that opponents see it as a Trojan horse designed to subvert the straightforward pursuit of financial success (Burke, 2001). That is precisely the argument levelled against stakeholder theory by Sternberg (1997), who claims that the 'new orthodoxy' is incompatible with business, and undermines both established forms of accounting and the rights of property-ownership.

That kind of opposition is what drives the argument that social accounting has little future unless the 'business case' – which corresponds roughly with the managerialist rationale in Figure 2.2 – can be 'proven' in terms of adding measurable value for business. On the other hand, Owen (2001) observes how the themes of a much-trumpeted conference on 'Making Corporate Social Responsibility Count' boil down to soft forms of voluntary accountability designed to manage non-financial performance, enhance corporate reputation, and improve risk management strategies – precisely the benefits claimed by Burke (2001) in a 'commonsense' approach to stakeholder engagement. Missing entirely from the agenda, as Owen (2001) points out, is the role of social audit in holding powerful organizations to account for the impact of their activities, as envisaged by Medawar in the 1970s. Owen's argument is that without mandatory rights to information disclosure and verification, stakeholder dialogue is a façade, because the power differentials between stakeholders are skewed in favour of financial interests. Indeed, even well-organized shareholder groups and

pension fund managers struggle to enforce corporate governance under weak regimes of statutory compliance (as in the UK). Moreover, the proliferation of public-private partnerships makes the situation even more problematic.

Owen's critique of the 'business case' strategy for promoting SEAAR highlights two problems. One is that conflict between interests is a feature of most organizations, and in business it is "invariably resolved in favour of the financial stakeholder" (Owen, 2001: 35). The other is that greater accountability entails wresting substantial elements of unaccountable power from narrowly-conceived corporate interests (ibid). Voluntary disclosure and self-regulation is no match for such power. Among other things, corporate interests are strongly represented in the bodies promoting social and ethical accounting. Those interests favour the business case rationale, but it diverts attention from other means of achieving greater transparency (e.g. legislation) and more balanced allocation of economic and social costs. The latter would mean forcing companies to directly absorb the full costs of their activities instead of allowing (or encouraging) them to pass social and environmental costs on to society at large. As Owen sees it, the sidelining of such alternatives is blunting the radical edge of social accounting.

Responding to Owen's article, Wheeler (2001) argues against taking an exclusive position. The business case should not be regarded as the only route to change. Neither should there be a "retreat" into thinking that only reform of corporate governance or of the global economy "will actually deliver a positive result for the planet and its growing number of dispossessed, alienated and angry citizens" (ibid: 39). He is fully in favour of higher standards of accountability for social and ethical performance (ibid: 43): "Let's raise the bar

there and punish the under-performers. There is no room for voluntarism when it comes to abuse." But for companies that are more responsive because of the nature of their relations with markets and stakeholders he advocates a strategy of capacity-building.

Figure 2.3 illustrates Wheeler's model, which has been used to facilitate thinking about organizational impacts and stakeholder relationships. It classifies firms in relation to Elkington's (1998) concept of the 'triple bottom line' (TBL) of economic development, environmental quality and social justice/equity[3], but the model also allows for the fact that a company can be in Tiers 1, 2 or 3 vis-à-vis different TBL factors.

Figure 2.3: Model for classifying organizations with respect to degree of enactment with stakeholders in three dimensions of sustainability (Wheeler, 2001: 41)

Tier 3: Engaged	3	Maximise TBL value (do maximum good)
Tier 2: Responsive	2	Balance stakeholder value (meet reasonable demands)
Tier 1: Compliant	1	Avoid negative TBL impacts (do no harm)

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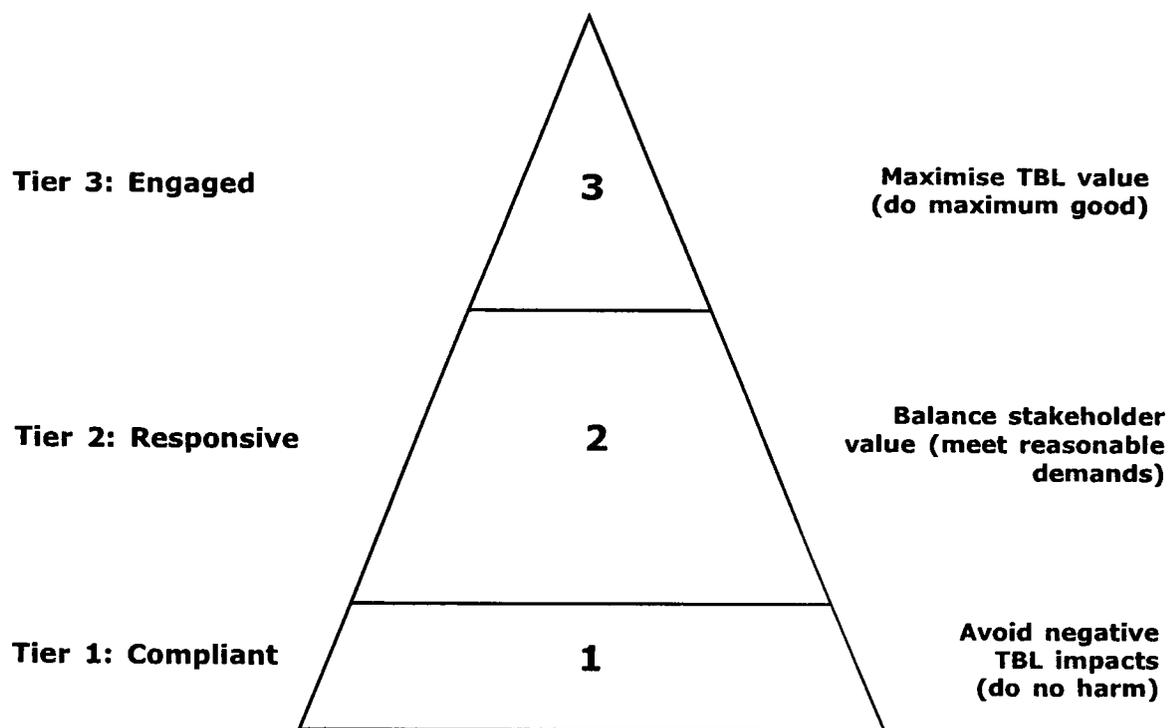
[4] Henriques and Richardson (2004) review the conceptual and practical limits of the TBL metaphor.

In short, Wheeler's case is that higher standards of compliance certainly are needed, but that aiming for the 'win-win', Tier 3 agenda calls for skilful support to help enlightened firms to learn how to prosper in accord with TBL values. This chimes with the spirit of Zadek's (2001) model of the civil corporation, discussed in the next chapter. However, the merit of the social accounting enterprise as a whole still remains hard to gauge.

2. 4. 3. NEF's change of heart

NEF's misgivings about social auditing were flagged in April 2000, at the launch of its own audit on Camelot, the lottery operators. It announced that henceforth NEF's role would switch to making sure that "social audits aren't used as corporate whitewash" (*new economy* newsletter, May 2000: 1). Later that year it published *Corporate Spin: The troubled teenage years of social reporting* by Deborah Doane (2000), based on interviews with people in the field and experienced commentators. The report concludes that social reporting is here to stay but that despite all the effort by companies, NGOs and practitioners to build up the practice, as yet "there is no evidence that social reporting results in improved social and ethical performance" (ibid: 9). Giving examples of how leading companies use it to manipulate the truth and ignore stakeholders' interests, the report charges that social reporting now is more about managing interests than enhancing real accountability, in the sense of responsibility for action/inaction.

NEF recommended five things to re-align social reporting with its original purpose. First, research and more critical analysis to show whether it actually leads to desired changes in practice. Second, simpler tools and a more standardized approach. Third, reform of

corporate governance to give greater influence to non-financial stakeholders because the dominance of financial interests is a barrier to full accountability.[4] Fourth, social reports need to be challenged more rigorously. Fifth, NEF called for social reporting to be mandatory rather than voluntary — something the British government has been resisting.

AccountAbility Quarterly responded to the demand for regulation with a special issue on the topic. In the lead article, Monaghan (2003) dismisses the voluntary *vs* mandatory debate as "clouded by ideology" and argues that the real question is what makes reporting effective and for whom. Yet he acknowledges that research by AccountAbility and CSR Europe (Rubbens et al, 2002) concludes that "little evidence to date exists of social and sustainability reporting [making] a real difference to corporate decisions, practices and outcomes" (Monaghan, 2003: 4-5). He foresees increased regulation but argues for it to be 'smart' so that it actually enhances the usefulness of reports, and warns that inept standardisation can be just as damaging as a laissez-faire approach.

In response to the proliferation of frameworks and codes for social accounting, a briefing paper by the chief executives of the Global Reporting Initiative and of AccountAbility (Ligteringen and Zadek, 2005) envisages convergence around the architecture of 'de facto standards' shown in Figure 2.4. As well as alignment and integration of standards, they predict increased alignment of methods with civil society expectations. However, they recognize that this may not happen: if governments adopt a 'hands-off' approach; if financial markets ignore sustainability-related performance; if the accounting professions don't facilitate convergence; if business sees no value accruing from the cost of introducing

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[4] In a similar vein, Hutton (2001) argues for *Putting the Public back into PLC*.

and implementing standards; and if NGOs react against "the need to harness private sector

strengths" in the face of growing problems of sustainability and turn away from engagement

in partnership approaches (ibid: 4).

Figure 2.4: The emerging global architecture for corporate responsibility standards
(Ligteringen & Zadek, 2005)

Normative Frameworks (i.e. what to do)	Provide substantive guidance on what constitutes good or acceptable levels of performance	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises UN conventions and declarations on suitainable development issues UN Global Compact Principles OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)
Process Guidelines (i.e. how to measure and communicate it)	Enable measurement, assurance and communication of performance	AA1000 Assurance Standard GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines
Management Systems (i.e. how to integrate it)	Provide integrated or issue specific management frameworks to guide the ongoing management of environmental and social impacts	AA1000 Framework ISO 14001 (specialised) ISO Social Responsibility Guidance (proposed) Social Accountability SA8000 Sigma Guidelines

2. 4. 4. The 'mask' of CSR

Confidence in CSR was dealt another blow by the Christian Aid report, *Behind the Mask: the*

real face of Corporate Social Responsibility (Pendleton et al, 2004). Focusing on three erstwhile

champions of CSR — Shell, BAT and Coca-Cola — the report shows how they fail to meet

standards they claim to have embraced. Christian Aid dismisses CSR as "a completely

inadequate response to the sometimes devastating impact that multinational companies can

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have", especially on vulnerable people in developing countries and on their environments (ibid: 2). Arguing that business has consistently used CSR to block mandatory international regulation of their activities, the report sets out ten reasons to regulate (ibid: 51-56). It also urges penalties for non-compliance, and improved redress for individuals and communities affected by corporate misconduct (in line with the demands of the CORE Coalition for Corporate Responsibility).

Clearly, the field of social accounting is struggling to prove that it stands for more than good intentions and 'reputation assurance'. Yet the need for greater accountability by corporate interests is widely accepted. And the case for raising the legal standards for social and ethical performance could hardly be clearer: "There is no room for voluntarism when it comes to abuse" (Wheeler, 2001: 43). It is also clear that without some forms of external verification – not necessarily by professional auditors – social accounting cannot be credible.

2. 5. CONCLUSIONS

2. 5. 1. Social auditing and its problems

Despite considerable progress in consolidating the AccountAbility model of social auditing, the acknowledged lack of impact on actual performance (Zadek and Raynard, 2002: 9) suggests either that the methods used in practice fall short of the promise, or that there is an even more fundamental problem in linking stakeholder engagement to organizational and social change.

I suspect that this gap between promise and performance can be better understood from the perspective of agency and social learning than from that of organizational learning or Zadek's (2001) concept of 'civil learning'. I am referring, not to conventional notions of social learning, but to the concept of it that is developed in the last part of the thesis, where it derives from a synthesis of ideas quite different to Zadek's but with the potential to ground social auditing in a deeper concept of citizenship, and a view of citizenship as our main bulwark against the capacity for agency being overwhelmed by corporate interests and market-driven politics.

From a conventional Marxist perspective, the problems with social auditing merely reflect the evils of capitalism and its capacity to appropriate reformist efforts to its own ends. There is much in that, but not the whole story. If the alternative is communist, then on past and present evidence I would argue that the need for social auditing is merely repressed, not ended. Unless it is held in check, the state can be just as exploitative as any capitalist cartel, and what communism denies is that genuine collective action is grounded in individual agency. If the alternative is the socialism of nationalization, central planning and rule by bureaucratic dictat, then the public interest becomes a cipher and dictatorship usually follows. If, however, the alternative is the socialization and democratization of society, as envisaged by Castoriadis (1957, 1989) — with democracy meaning "freedom to contribute to the making and remaking of society" (Curtis, ed., 1997: xi) — then that dovetails with what this thesis is driving at.

2. 5. 2. Development of the thesis

By reviewing social auditing and identifying its problems, this chapter partly fulfils the first

objective of the thesis. The next chapter will complete this phase of development by

examining the associated concept of corporate citizenship.

CHAPTER 3:

THE 'NEW ECONOMY OF CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP'

3. 1. Introduction

The previous chapter ended by relating the problems with social auditing to issues of

agency, social learning and citizenship – concepts that will be developed chapters 6 to 9.

This chapter examines the concept of corporate citizenship, focusing on Zadek's (2001)

radical development of it in *The Civil Corporation: the New Economy of Corporate Citizenship*.

More comprehensive than any other theory of corporate citizenship, it depicts a new era of

partnerships and alliances, new modes of accountability and governance, and what he calls

'civil learning'.

3. 1. 1. Synopsis of Zadek's theory

Zadek regards the role of business in society is the "most important and contentious public

policy issue" of the 21st century (Zadek, 2001: 1). This is because business increasingly

penetrates and moulds public policy across the world, and there is a corresponding need for

business to accept social and environmental responsibilities commensurate with its

economic and political power. While business has made some effort to gain greater trust

and legitimacy under the banner of CSR or corporate citizenship, surprisingly little has been

said about how such approaches can bring about the kind of change needed to reverse the

dynamics of unprecedented wealth creation coupled with a global crisis of poverty,

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inequality and environmental degredation. For Zadek, the remedy lies in developing a

realistic basis for joining corporate citizenship to sustainable development.

His theory is based on four propositions which can be stated as follows (ibid: chapters 1

and 17), each of which will be outlined in turn.

- A *new kind of corporate citizenship* is emerging from the dynamics of the New Economy. It

  is practised by *civil corporations* working with new forms of *civil governance* that are

  supported by frameworks of *civil navigation*.

- A *civil corporation* is one that integrates learning and action for sustainable development

  into its core business.

- New forms of *civil governance* are emerging from partnerships between business,

  governments and not-for-profit NGOs.

- Tools and frameworks of *civil navigation* are needed to support civil behaviour and

  instutionalize it sufficiently to minimize the costs associated with it and to underpin the

  alliances that are needed to deliver sustained improvements in social and environmental

  performance.

3. 2. THE 'NEW ECONOMY OF CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP'

Belief in a "new economy of corporate citizenship" is fundamental to Zadek's theory. He

describes it as:

> "a social revolution that implies radical changes in the nature of the institutions of
>
> the state and business, and redefines the roles of the citizen, both individually and
>
> collectively. The New Economy is characterised by the acceleration of every aspect

of social life; the collapse of geographical distance as a basis for defining and sustaining difference; and the growing significance of knowledge and innovation as the primary source of business competition and economic value" (ibid: 7).

He goes on to argue that "corporate citizenship as an institutional phenomenon is essentially an outcrop of the New Economy" (ibid: 8), for two reasons. First, a company's success in the New Economy depends as much on its ability to cultivate trust with its stakeholders as on the technical quality of its products or services, because such integrity "lowers the cost of establishing and maintaining increasingly complex networks of suppliers, franchisees and agents, [and] physically dispersed staff" (ibid: 28). Secondly, the distribution and nature of power is changing, as exemplified by mobilization of pressure for action on social and environmental issues, and the emergence of NGOs as arbiters of civil governance. However, this does not necessarily translate into *good* corporate citizenship:

"Just as the New Economy opens opportunities for businesses to strengthen their competitive position by positively addressing social and environmental aspects of their performance, so too does it offer ample scope for business to externalize social and environmental costs" (ibid: 8).

'Externalizing' the costs means letting the public (here or elsewhere) carry the can for unethical and unsustainable corporate conduct. Hence the need to identify and activate the 'drivers' of progressive engagement with sustainable development. This ties in with Zadek's view of how corporate citizenship is developing.

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3. 2. 1. 'Third generation corporate citizenship'

In simple terms, corporate citizenship is about business taking account of its 'footprints' –
social and environmental as well as financial. But Zadek has more than this in mind. He
uses the idea of three 'generations' of corporate citizenship (ibid: 73-4).[1] The *first generation*
equates it with philanthropic community involvement and public relations designed to
mould opinion and marginalize criticism – as exemplified by the tobacco and alcohol
industries. The *second generation* sees corporate citizenship as part of a company's long-term
strategy – e.g. Shell, Ford, The Body Shop, Sainsbury's, the Co-operative Bank. The
underlying assumption is that responsible companies will prosper, as dominant or niche
players. *Third generation corporate citizenship* goes a stage further by seeking to align business
success with concerted action to redress poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.
It has inspired alliances such as the UK-based Ethical Trading Initiative, the UN Global
Compact, the Global Reporting Initiative and the Ethical Globalisation Initiative.

3. 2. 2. Scenarios of take-up or set-back

Zadek couples this with three scenarios of how current trends in corporate citizenship may
play out. Companies that have embraced aspects of good corporate citizenship have sought
to enhance or stabilize their market positions, and also sought to avoid being at a cost-
disadvantage from adopting good practices by pressurising competitors to follow suit. But

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[1] McIntosh et al (1998: xxi) portray a continuum that stretches from minimalist compliance with
legislation, through discretionary philanthropy, to a strategic interlocking of rights and responsibilities
between a corporation and its 'communities' that is normalized into the running of the business. Like
Zadek, they also foresee a future based on new partnerships between business, government and civil
society.

this 'virtuous circle' may not work. British Telecom has championed corporate citizenship but has been steadily losing market share, for complex reasons. The same goes for Sainsbury's, whose commitment to the Ethical Trading Initiative is being tested by the takeover of Asda by Wal-Mart, with its enormous purchasing power and strategy of intense price competition. Companies committed to corporate citizenship may not be strong enough to sustain a virtuous circle and may end up either in niche ghettos or abandoning their principled approach. Moreover, progress towards corporate citizenship may be stalled or reversed by factors such as short-termism in the City, good behaviour not being recognized or rewarded, or excessive codes of practice. Band-wagoning by self-serving audit firms must also be a serious threat.

Zadek foresees three main possibilities. Companies practising good corporate citizenship can create 'micro-climates' where a small number of businesses can survive and indeed prosper. Or they can be squeezed out of the market by other businesses capitalizing on any competitive disadvantage in 'doing the right thing'. Or they can lead the way to changes in market conditions that extend the take-up of good practices.

The three 'pathways' – illustrated in Figure 3.1 – are dubbed Oasis, Desert and Mecca (ibid: 35-4). *Oasis* represents the current situation. While some companies, NGOs and governments are trying to align business with accountability and sustainability, most of the business world and much of civil society are unaware of the possibilities or have opted not to engage. *Desert* represents the erosion of an oasis as a result of good corporate behaviour

Figure 3.1: Corporate citizenship scenarios or pathways
(reproduced from Zadek, 2001: 34)
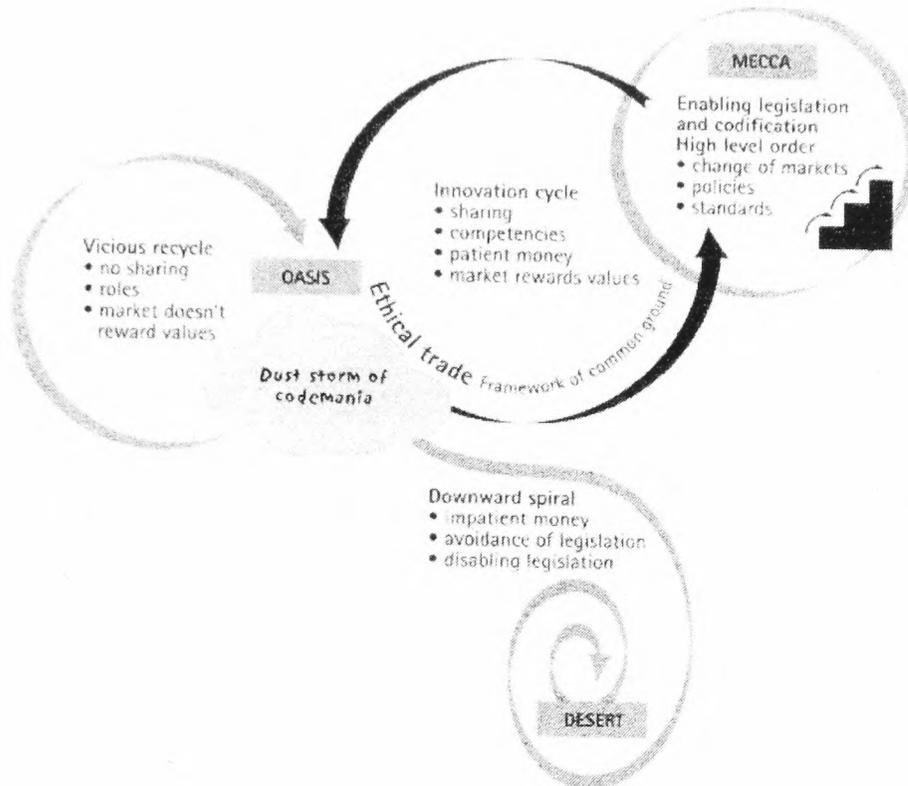
not being rewarded, making it increasingly risky to follow that path. *Mecca* – a pathway, not an endpoint – comes about because leading companies demonstrate competitive advantage from business strategies that deliver accountability and sustainability, leading others to move in similar or compatible directions.

The Body Shop is a useful example. It succeeded in creating a profitable Oasis, and went part of the way to Mecca by influencing the market with its campaign against animal testing of bodycare products. Now competitors are gaining ground in the market niche it had created. The Body Shop's pioneering of social auditing was also influential, but Zadek acknowledges that the company "made few if any significant competitive business gains" from it (ibid: 35).

The three scenarios may co-exist within a business sector or even across different parts of a large company. The pathways can also have radically different implications for people with different values. The anti-globalization movement foresees Desertification if corporations continue to be as powerful as they are; Mecca, for them, means localizing and curbing the power of the multinationals. For Zadek, the road to Mecca should be thronged with civil(ized) corporations and their partners.

3. 3. CONCEPTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The civil corporation portrayed by Zadek practises corporate citizenship by engaging with other social agents in learning how to deliver sustainability on viable terms. Viability – "sustainability as the art of the possible" (Zadek, 2001: 122) – is the mainstay of his theory.

Mads Øvlisen, former chief executive of the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk, has an evocative definition of sustainable development: "A way of dealing with the planet as if it is on loan from our children rather than inherited from our parents" (quoted in Zadek, 2001: 105). More prosaic is Elkington's (1998) idea of the 'triple bottom line', which is widely-used but reinforces the 'bottom line' mentality that gives the metaphor its appeal. Nonetheless, it will, as Zadek remarks (2001: 107), "continue to serve a useful purpose in bringing elements of what is important into what are often conservative, risk-averse and not particularly well-informed people and institutions".

Another formulation is the UN's view of the spheres of economic development, social development and environmental protection as being interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Zadek points out that this glosses over the trade-offs between the spheres and within each of them. He takes issue with the metaphor of three overlapping spheres (Figure 3.2a) because it suggests that social phenomena occur mainly outside the natural environment, and that the economic sphere is largely independent of the social. In the 'literal' version (Figure 3.2b), the economic is entirely within the social and both are entirely within the environmental – as in The Natural Step model of sustainability. Zadek (ibid: 112-3) takes issue with that too, because "Sustainable development is an entirely human, or socialized, conception ... [and the] environmental element of sustainable development is, similarly, an entirely socialized phenomenon". In contrast, "a *cognitive* visualization [Figure 3.2c] ... would place the social as the outer boundaries [sic], and incorporate both the economic and the environmental entirely within it" (ibid, original italics).

Figures 3.2: Concepts of sustainability (Zadek, 2001)

(a) 'metaphoric'

(b) 'literal'

(c) 'cognitive'
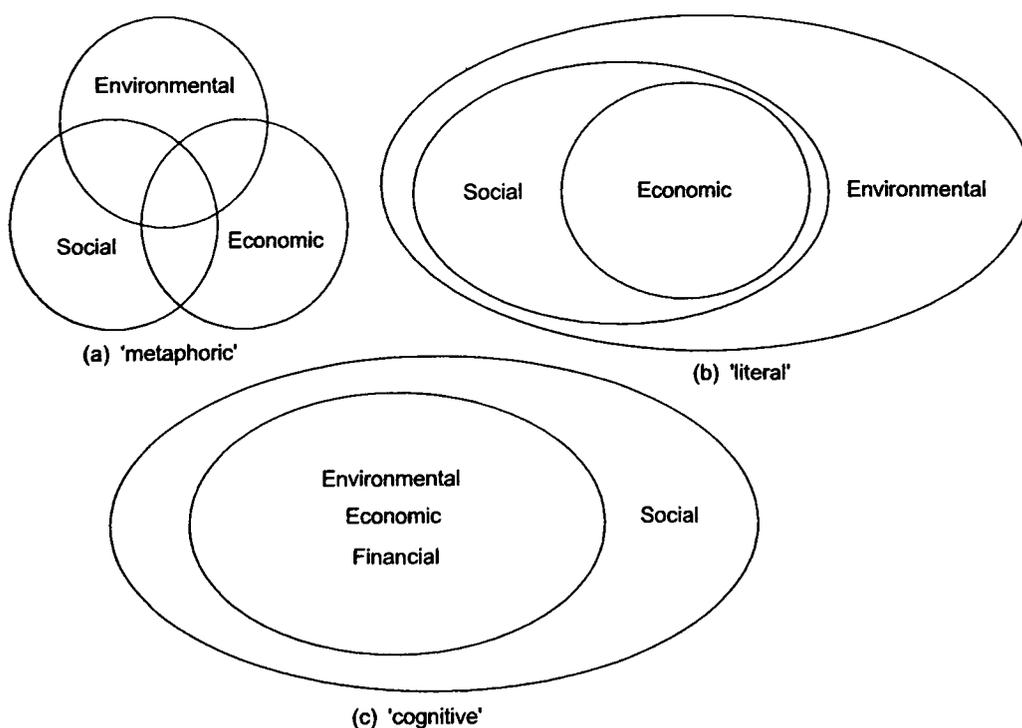
Zadek concludes that knowing that everything is inter-related is not much help in figuring out what needs to be done, so he looks to economics for another perspective – because economics "is about why and how choices are made, and to what effect" (ibid: 113). More to the point, an economic perspective stresses the need for trade-offs between competing goals and possible uses of resources. However, economics is not a distinct sphere of activity. Rather, economic activity *"is no more or less than the process through which humans create social and environmental outcomes"* (ibid: 114, original italics, quoting Zadek & Tuppen, 2000). This is the basis for arguing (ibid: 114) that economics is best thought of as a means to social and environmental ends within a hierarchy of importance between the spheres:

> "The economic is a primary instrumental driver of social and environmental outcomes that are relevant to any benchmark of sustainable development. Both [types of outcome] can also be instrumental in that each can create outcomes in the other two spheres. But the social and the environmental, unlike the economic, also represent end goals."

Next, Zadek takes up the argument for reframing the concept of 'capital'. He proposes a threefold conception, admitting that it begs several questions. *Environmental capital* would comprise the natural resources and capacities that can be made into goods and services or used as a 'sink' for our waste. *Social capital* would be the skills, relationships, norms, social institutions, conventions and organizing fabric that make up the capacities of societies to organize to meet perceived needs. This links the idea of individual human capital with a fairly broad notion of social capital. *Economic capital* would be the material and financial wealth that is produced by people combining environmental and social capital.

Reframing capital on this basis has two major implications for Zadek's approach to sustainable development and corporate citizenship. First, it raises questions about which forms of capital count, the dynamics between them, and how to think about accounting for such dynamics. Secondly, saying that the relationship between different forms of capital is dynamic rather than fixed entails accepting that they have to be weighed differently in different contexts. It follows that there is no single frame of reference for working out how societies and organizations can contribute to sustainable development.

This paves the way for Zadek's argument for sustainability as the art of the possible. It also sharpens the distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' notions of sustainability. The strong version holds the environment as sacred; anything that degrades it is contrary to sustainability, *irrespective* of the social and economic effects. The weak version maintains that there have to be trade-offs between environmental, social and economic considerations. What matters in this view is that human needs are met while the system as a whole remains viable.

The multi-capital model is firmly in the second camp. Indeed, it challenges the presumption that sustainability is served by environmental protection at the cost of social inequity, and that sustainable development necessarily entails scaling down economic activity. This is why advocates of un-dogmatic stances on sustainability are more concerned with devising frameworks for looking at options from different perspectives than adherents to the strong version tend to be – since for them environmental protection is the over-riding criterion – and why the resulting frameworks and accountability mechanisms are relatively complex philosophically (as distinct from technically).

3. 3. 1. 'Sustainability as the art of the possible'

What Zadek (2001: 122) means by 'sustainability as the art of the possible' is quite different from the misleading notion of a 'sustainable' business or organization. Irrespective of whether its practices are good or bad, the fact is that no organization is sustainable on its own, and we have no way of knowing whether a particular company is having a more or less sustainable impact in the long run across social, environmental and economic factors. Nevertheless, we can work out the direction towards sustainable development. The extracts quoted in Box 3.1 show how a UN seminar concluded that sustainability has to be anchored in systemic thinking and coupled with recognition that understanding of it will change culturally and over time.

It follows that being able to determine the *direction* towards sustainabilty is the key to making progress in regard to what companies should be expected to be able to do. As Zadek observes, no-one (so far) has put pressure on Reebok to change IMF policy, for the very good reason that no-one believes the company has such influence, but it *is* under pressure to pay the workers in its factories better, because people believe it could do so without harming its business. On the other hand, Shell *is* expected to use its influence to prevent human rights abuses in Nigeria and elsewhere precisely because people have good reason to believe that the company can influence governments. The implication for action towards sustainable development is that it has to make sense in terms of a company's freedom of action, how it evaluates the risk relative to the investment, and the potential impact on sustainability.

Box 3.1: **What** *is a* **Sustainable Enterprise** (UNEP, 1998; quoted in Zadek, 2001: 123)

What is a Sustainable Enterprise?

"Sustainable development is a concept that is dynamic, requiring a built-in flexibility in its application ... as a 'meta-concept' similar in nature to 'justice' or 'democracy', the concept of 'sustainability' should be expected to change over time, becoming, in all likelihood, increasingly demanding.

"A firm cannot be considered on its own to be 'sustainable' in isolation from its economic, social and environmental context. Sustainability is a holistic concept. Making the transition to sustainable development is a societal question that is answered at the level of policy.

"Environment is interpreted differently by different cultures and in different countries. It is over-ambitious to attempt to define what is a sustainable enterprise since the meaning of sustainable development is deeply rooted in culture.

"Sustainable development is defined by the aggregate. While it may be more possible to determine the sustainability of industries (firms in the aggregate), it is more difficult to determine the sustainability of individual companies, although the *direction* that is needed for a company to move towards sustainability can be determined."

Source: United Nations Environmental Program: *What Is a Sustainable Enterprise?* Workshop report, UNEP, Paris, 1998

The *degrees of freedom* that a company has in a given situation relate to general factors in its operating environment and company-specific factors such as organizational capacity and financial resources. The scale of *risk and investment* runs from negligible (e.g. energy-saving measures) to high-risk strategic investment (e.g. BP's and Shell's investment in renewable energy). In practice, decisions about opportunity, risk and investment seldom are distinct choices; companies usually try to ensure that long-term strategic risks are counter-balanced by interim tactical gains.

The *level of impact* a company can have on sustainable development also relates to differing degrees of freedom and types of investment and risk. At the simplest level, most companies are capable of *some* sustainability-enhancing action within current business models and market norms (such action producing purely in-market effects). At a higher level of impact, companies can adopt policies that re-mould their markets. The Body Shop's stance on animal testing had that effect. Ethical investment funds represent an in-between category, hovering between in-market impacts and re-moulding effects in particular markets.

The highest level of impact is on public policy and institutional frameworks, legal and otherwise. This is the arena within which corporate citizenship is driven back into Desertification or drawn towards Mecca. A case in point, both complex and contentious, is Monsanto's success in lobbying for US and UK government support for its global ambitions, in contrast with the EU's opposition to genetically-modified food imports. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, it illustrates the fact that, for some companies, public policy is "by far the most significant" way they impact on sustainable development (Zadek, 2001: 134). It also highlights the fact that "It will always be in the financial interests of companies to externalize costs until we establish laws that prevent this" (Stephen Viederman, ex-president of the Jessie Noyes Foundation, quoted in Zadek, 2001: 135). The corollary is that companies that are virtuous but uncompetitive will not survive.

This brings us to Zadek's concepts of the civil corporation and of civil learning, of new forms of civil governance, and frameworks of 'civil navigation' to support and institutionalise responsible behaviour.

3. 4. THE CIVIL CORPORATION

"Corporations need to be judged on the basis of how they perform relative to what they are able to do given their contexts and competencies ... Performance benchmarks are needed that calibrate what has been achieved in relation to what *could* have been achieved in the circumstances. Critical here is that such an approach bases its assessment on the will and ability to mobilize learning into relevant knowledge so that it can be and is effectively applied. In this way, the over-arching aspirational pathway and outcome of sustainable development can be meaningfully translated into a dynamic organizational form with real traction in terms of performance assessment, decision-making and accountability. It is through this way of approaching the challenge of how best to direct the business community in pursuit of sustainable development that we finally arrive at the idea of the civil corporation." (Zadek, 2001: 136, original italics)

Zadek's use of the term 'civil' reflects both the ordinary meaning of 'being civil' and the political concept of 'civil society'.

3. 4. 1. Civil society

Current debates about civil society will be taken up in chapter 7. Here I will stay with Zadek's use of the concept (ibid: 136-140), starting from the Aristotelian ideal, summarized by Korten (1999: 139-140), of "an ethical-political community of free and equal citizens

who by mutual consent agree to live under a system of law that expresses the norms and values they share", and who engage in civic duty, not for personal gain or even mutual advantage, but "to be a responsible contributor to the life of the community". A similar conception – but without the Aristotelian identification of state and society – underpins the view of civil society as "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting; autonomous from the state and bound by [its own] legal order or set of rules" (Diamond, 1994, cited in Zadek, 2001: 137). This tends to be equated with a sphere of society that is neither government nor business, and is led by trade unions and not-for-profit associations or institutions. Korten (1999) is against viewing this as a part of society located between the state and individual citizens, arguing instead that it refers to a type of society – a way society might work differently.

Zadek (2001: 138) sees civil society as embodying two principles. First, values and purposes concerning pursuit of the 'common good', but with incomplete consensus. Secondly, the capacity to organize through freely-chosen forms of association underpinned by common values and a sense of common purpose. His concept of the civil corporation combines these two principles with the idea of organizations learning to internalize sustainability and integrating it into the core of their business. However, and this is crucial, he does not accept the idea that civil society excludes the business community, and cites UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan in support:

> "When I speak about civil society, I don't mean only non-governmental organizations, though they are a very important part of it. I also mean universities, foundations, labour unions and – yes – private corporations. Private corporations produce most of the wealth in the world. If only for that reason, we would be

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foolish to ignore them. We would be foolish not to seek to engage them in a search for something beyond short-term profit – the search for a better, more equitable world in which everyone has the chance to participate in the global market, as both consumer and producer. On their side, many corporations now recognize that they have something to learn from us, as well as we from them. We all have to learn from each other, and it is only through dialogue that we can bring about change." (Annan, 2000)

Most social activists and writers on civil society take it for granted that the sole purpose of business is to maximize profits. As Zadek points out, it is one thing to accept that companies have to be profitable to survive, but quite something else to argue that they exist *exclusively* to make profits for shareholders, and therefore cannot have broader social purposes. If the latter is the case, civil society enthusiasts have a problem explaining how it relates to the scale of business investment by ordinary people through insurance and pension policies, and another problem explaining the business activities of some of the leading NGOs. Zadek also advances a much deeper reason that companies can have social and environmental concerns that go beyond merely instrumental motives. It is that they are made up of countless communities of interest, both 'internal' and 'external'. This infuses his descriptions of 'civil learning' and 'civil organization'.

3. 4. 2. 'Civil learning' and 'civil organization'

What Zadek calls 'civil learning' is a model of organizational learning (OL) based on the assumption that stakeholder dialogue can be an engine of change generating progressive cycles of re-alignment of organizational behaviour. His explanation of the learning cycle illustrated in Figure 3.3 is reproduced in Box 3.2. I regard this part of his theory as weak, not because of the general drift, but because (as discussed in chapter 2) it is doubtful how much stakeholder dialogue actually affects organizational performance, and it cannot be presumed that OL is grounded in agency or equates with social learning – linkages that are needed to integrate his concepts of civil organization and civil learning.

Figure 3.3: The Civil Learning Cycle (Zadek 2001: 145)
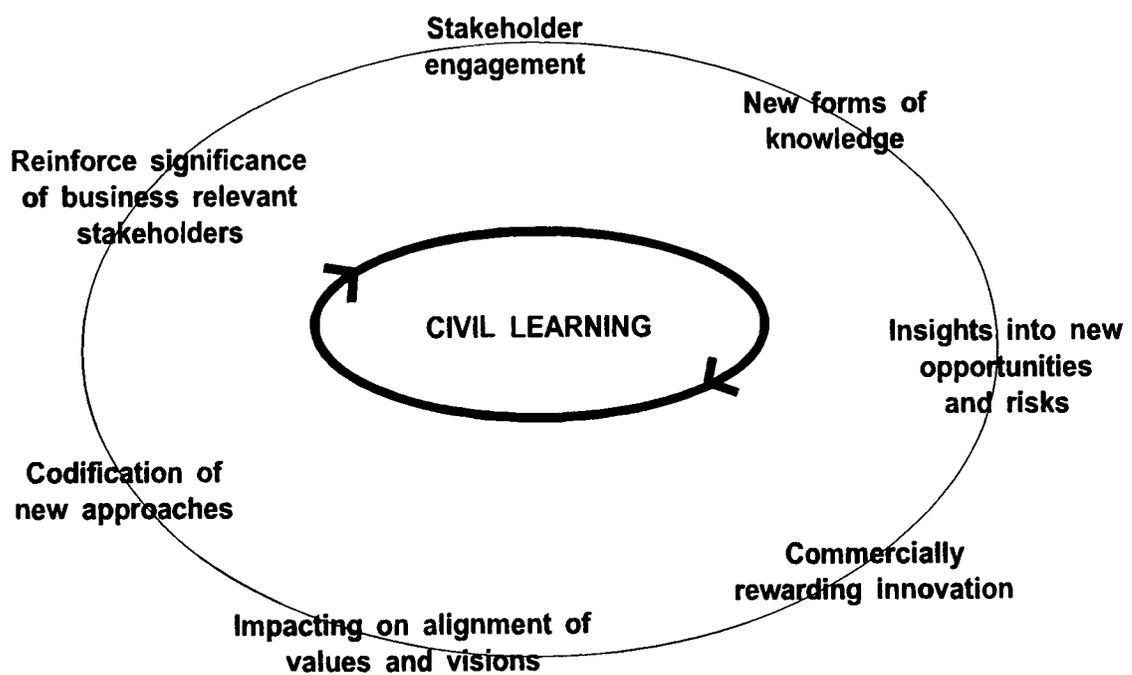
Box 3.2: Description of the civil learning cycle (*Zadek 2002: 144, original italics*)

→ Engaging with *people and organizations* that see, experience and respond to the world in different ways ... leading to ...

→ changes in the *information* acquired by the organization (and its stakeholders) ... resulting in ...

→ development of new *knowledge* for use by stakeholders and the organization for mutual benefit ... opening the way to ...

→ a recognition by an organization's leadership of *new patterns of opportunities and risks* ... allowing for ...

→ *commercially successful innovation* that is aligned with stakeholder's vision, values and behaviour ... creating the need for ...

→ *re-codification of organizational behaviour* to enable effective management in relation to newly aligned business activities, including in particular the basis for personal rewards and overall measures of success ... reinforcing ...

→ *shifts in approaches to communication and engagement* with stakeholders critical in securing the success of the underlying business proposition ... which

→ once again changes the *information* flowing into the organization ... revealing

→ *new patterns of opportunities and risks* ... and so on.

Zadek recognises that the virtuous cycle he depicts may break down. Companies may fail to recognise the opportunities or risks associated with responsible performance, may fail to initiate new patterns of learning and behavioural change, or may reverse progressive patterns. Information generated through stakeholder engagement may not be taken seriously. There may be disabling gaps in organizational ability to access new knowledge or to use it to design and deliver products and services that customers want. Rewards may not be forthcoming because the market fails to see the value of innovations, or because investors or customers are unwilling to trade-off social and environmental gains against additional time or financial cost.

Zadek (2001: 147) also recognizes that "high levels of incoherence, inconsistency and disabled learning are the norm, not the exception". However, he rather naively attributes this to the pace of change nowadays. The passage just quoted continues: "This is hardly surprising in a world characterized by ... ever faster moving forms of ... change" (ibid). Indeed, he almost knocks the stuffing out of his own argument about learning when he says that in the emerging New Economy, "our competencies are often redundant before they have had a chance to mature, both at individual and institutional levels. Organizational change processes on their first outing are already knocking elbows with the next generation of change agents ..." (ibid).[2]

The argument returns to firmer ground with Zadek's description of 'civil organization', and it is here that the potential of his ideas shine through most clearly, bearing out my point about the need to make the links between agency and social learning. The passage bears quoting at length.

> "Civil society cannot be defined in terms of particular categories of *institution*, but in terms of ways of, and reasons for organization. The implication of this for how we think about corporate behaviour is profound. It makes little sense to look at a corporation as a single system. What is needed is to explore which bits function in line with an understanding of civil society that focuses on voluntary and associational organizing in order to realise aims that are perceived as being for the common good. Within this framework it then becomes possible to address

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[2] Reg Revans, the founder of action learning, formulated the axiom that, for an organization to survive and grow, its rate of learning must be equal to or greater than the rate of change in its external environment (Revans, 1980). He believed that, without a radical shift in our approach to learning, the rate of change being experienced nowadays would outstrip our ability to learn.

questions about the extent to which a particular corporation displays these characteristics ...

"Civil organization is about being able and willing to internalize learning from broader society ... Thinking about civil society in this way does not make life easier, but it does open up quite different ways of looking at organizational behaviour, including businesses. It leads one to a more realistic analysis of domains of organization rather than taking the formal institutional framework – the 'corporation' – as the starting (and often end) point. It understands 'civil society' as a phenomenon that exists and evolves within and around institutions across the spectrum, from state bodies, to non-profits to the largest corporate entity. Most of all, by understanding the civil corporation as a dynamic process of learning and change, it allows the focus to shift from a static 'sustainable development' framework to one that is more sensitive to the underlying drivers and enablers of change." (Zadek, 2001: 147-8)

This view of civil organization meshes with his view of new forms of civil governance.

3. 4. 3. 'Civil governance'

The third proposition in Zadek's theory is that a new fabric of civil governance is emerging from the shifting relationships between the business world, NGOs, governments and international institutions. He sees the increasing influence of NGOs as another facet of the New Economy, and rather double-edged. In developing their

capacity to act as *civil regulators*, NGOs have engaged increasingly closely with the 'corporate community', and it in turn has penetrated deeply into the 'NGO community' and become more adept at responding to civil society processes.[3] Moreover, NGOs themselves are under pressure to justify their legitimacy and live up to the accountability standards they expect others to meet. The challenge to them comes not only from conservative quarters (e.g. *The Economist*, 23/9/2000: 129). As Slim (2002) notes, some of the most trenchant questioning has come from within the human rights movement.[4] Alongside confrontational campaigning, Zadek sees a process of normalization occurring in relations between the high-profile NGOs and much of the corporate community – though not business as usual.

3. 4. 4. Poachers and Gamekeepers

NGOs basically use three approaches to influence business: campaigning to build public pressure, working with companies to help them learn better ways of doing things, and processes whereby NGOs confer or withhold a stamp of legitimacy. The FairTrade Foundation's work with the big food retailers is an example of the second, while the development of social and environmental accounting illustrates both the second and third approaches. It is also normal for NGOs to use confrontational tactics in public while

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[3] The terms 'corporate community' and 'NGO community' are problematic, mainly in that they convey more commonality of interest than perhaps exists. Nevertheless, for now I will reflect Zadek's usage, which acknowledges a diversity of interests in both camps.

[4] Slim (2002) cites a paper , 'Why More Africans Don't Use Human Rights Language', which concludes that "Far from being a badge of honour, human rights activism is, in some of the places I have observed it, increasingly a certificate of privilege and blatantly non-participatory practices" (Odinakalu, 2000). The self-serving and neo-colonial practices of some development agencies has long been exposed by Susan George and others (starting with George, 1976).

engaging privately in dialogue with the companies they are criticizing. Campaigners and business executives now sit on each others' boards. Multi-lateral alliances of various kinds have been formed by NGOs, business organizations, trade unions, governments and international institutions. NGOs have become increasingly sophisticated, professional (with the inherent risk of distancing themselves from their constituencies), and in some cases have substantial business interests or investment portfolios. Indeed, NGOs such as Greenpeace and Oxfam are, among other things, global brands with special reputations to protect. These interconnections at various levels raise serious questions about accountability within communities of civil activists and NGOs, and about the role of NGOs in influencing business practices. It is also important to bear in mind that NGOs have mostly built their reputations *not* through active engagement with their supporters but through *representing* engagement with issues that people care about, thereby mobilizing support. It is this identification that underpins the level of trust in which they are held. Unlike Amnesty International and Greenpeace, most NGOs are not membership-based.

Zadek (2001: 89) expects three things to happen as a result of these inter-dependencies. First, corporations will increasingly be able to influence the environment in which NGOs operate, both positively and negatively. Secondly, experience of civil society processes will enable corporations to engage NGOs in developing commercially-rewarding responses to social and environmental challenges. Thirdly, he argues that the ability of NGOs and other non-profit civil organizations to successfully challenge corporate behaviour will depend increasingly on their ability to institutionalise civil regulation through partnerships between business and the more powerful NGOs.

That third point is controversial. The argument turns on two prime issues. One is that companies can use such partnerships to build reputations as good corporate citizens while misbehaving away from the limelight or in another part of the world. The other core issue is that of voluntary standards versus statutory regulation, as discussed in chapter 2. By accepting self-regulation, companies can reduce the pressure for statutory regulation, and undermine the basis for challenging their practices. On the other hand, legislation is often ineffective, and may impose compliance-related costs. Zadek's counter-argument is that enlightened self-interest can make powerful companies favour statutory regulation so that competitors who are not bothered about ethics are forced to comply with certain standards. He reckons that leading corporations "will increasingly support global regulations that establish a floor for environmental and social standards, and in the process consolidate their collective competitive positions against smaller, less powerful companies seeking to enter global markets" (Zadek, 2001: 99). The UN Global Compact between a powerful combination of businesses, NGOs and labour unions, launched in July 2000, is heading in that direction. It is voluntary, and a balancing act, but as Zadek (ibid: 102) says,

> "It is a massive step forward for leading corporations to freely commit to benchmark their performance against the closest we have to an international consensus on what constitutes civilized behaviour: core ILO conventions and key declarations such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights."

Concerted action of that kind probably is a prerequisite for some Mecca developments, but it also means a huge increase in corporate influence over how the rules are made. This is counter-balanced in Zadek's theory by the parallel development of the 'civil governance' which is central to his concept of corporate citizenship.

3. 4. 5. Governance frameworks

Zadek's concept of civil governance goes beyond ordinary forms of civil regulation. It refers to processes and regulatory frameworks created through, and overseen by, partnerships which enable companies to stabilize their commitments and risks in regard to standards relating to human rights, employment practices, development programmes, and environmental protection.

Here, verbatim, is how Zadek (2001: 100, original italics) describes the nature of such partnerships:

- "their basis of *legitimacy* is quite different, incorporating for example the trust afforded to civil society organizations and governments;

- the diverse *access to networks and relationships* afforded in particular through the involvement of NGOs increases the ability of the partnership to enter into areas of society that have historically been shielded from the business community; and

- the combining of organizational *cultures and competencies* enhances the ability and tendency of the partnership to initiate new formations of activities that more closely integrate into an almost seamless pattern of commercial and non-commercial interests and outcomes."

This reflects Zadek's belief that the 'corporate community' is not set apart from (the rest of) civil society. At the same time, he recognizes the fundamental risk that NGOs would take

in extending legitimacy to such partnerships, and the likelihood of conflict between them when one NGO finds itself associated with something another pressure group regards as reprehensible. There is the further problem that some NGOs may be regarded as trustworthy by their peers or corporate partners but distrusted by the people whose cause they claim to represent.

The other significant feature of civil governance as Zadek envisages it is that it does not carry the weight of law, although governments or international bodies may be involved. Rather, it reflects a shift away from the presumption that statutory regulation is necessarily more legitimate and effective than other institutional arrangements. He also sees a shift away from the presumption that rule systems will be stable, clearly-bounded, and consistent with each other, claiming that the

> "new civil governance is most of all marked by an acceptance of partial and
>
> temporary rule systems co-existing in an often dynamic relationship, overseen by
>
> diverse players and institutional arrangements with complex and often unstable
>
> bases of legitimacy and effectiveness." (ibid: 11)[5]

Along withy this, the development of tools to enable effective 'civil navigation' is the fourth foundation stone of Zadek's theory.

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3. 4. 6. 'Civil navigation'

The notion of 'civil navigation' refers to four dimensions of corporate behaviour and systemic learning:

"(1) *Setting boundaries* of learning, accountability and responsiveness.

(2) *Building engagement* that forms the basis of learning.

(3) *Creating measures* that validate ... knowledge ... and so form the

basis for decision-making and actions.

(4) *Institutionalising trust* in ways that create a virtuous circle of practice and further

engagement with stakeholders." (ibid: 12)

Trust is the glue that binds all this together, and critical mass is crucial. Being civil on your own is not enough. Even the most powerful corporations are unlikely to be able to sustain significantly-more-responsible performance acting alone. However, Zadek believes that concerted action to tackle global poverty, inequality and environmental insecurity can happen if corporate citizenship evolves to the point where business goes beyond setting its own house in order and becomes active in "institutionalizing new governance frameworks that effectively secure civil market behaviour, globally ... [thereby enabling the business community] to address, effectively and without contradiction, the aspirations underpinning sustainable development". (ibid: 13)

3. 5. A CIVIL CRITIQUE

Zadek's theory is one of corporate citizenship practised through partnerships between

shifting alliances of business, not-for-profit civil organizations and trade unions,

governments and transnational institutions, all collaborating to make good the potential in

the New Economy to pursue sustainable development as the centrepiece of a global

strategy to redress poverty, inequality and environmental degredation. While agreeing with

much of this, I have doubts about certain parts of it and take issue with others. These

problems relate primarily to the political trajectory of the New Economy, and aspects of

Zadek's concept of corporate citizenship.

3. 5. 1. The political trajectory of the New Economy

The New Economy portrayed by Zadek offers as much scope for business to disregard

social and environmental impacts as it does for positively addressing them. Hence the need

to activate the 'drivers' of progressive engagement with sustainability. However, it is

important to distinguish (where applicable) between the so-called New Economy and the

philosophy of the new economics movement, summarized in Box 3.3. The point is that if

Zadek's 'sceptical optimism' is not justified, his theory loses its bearings entirely.

James Robertson, one of the leading figures in the new economics movement, maintains

that it is not realistic to expect business to change the mentality that got it where it is while

mainstream political and financial institutions reward success on those terms and know or

care little about the consequences (Robertson 1994 & 2002). It is not quite a counsel of

Box 3.3: Principles of the new economic movement *(Robertson, 1994: 157, his italics)*

The new direction for economic progress and the new basis for economic understanding should:-

1. "positively *enable and empower* communities and nations, especially those in today's majority world, to take control over their economic lives. It should positively foster a high degree of co-operative and community self-reliance."

2. "positively *conserve* the earth and all its resources ... [but not be] narrowly anthro-pocentric. It should not attach overriding importance to the interests of humankind."

3. "positively *encourage ethical choice* in economic life, and the reintroduction of ethical values into economic understanding."

4. "*emphasize qualitative as well as quantitative values* in economic life, valuing unpaid as well as paid activities and recognizing that many important things cannot be bought and sold, and understanding that many important decisions, public as well as personal, cannot be based on monetary calculations of costs and benefits."

5. "recognize that we are now a one-world human community, for which we need to evolve fair trading arrangements as part of a *decentralizing, multi-level, one-world economy* that will be enabling for people, conserving for the Earth, and respectful of cultural and religious pluralism."

6. "recognise that - both for its own sake and because it will make an essential contribution to the five points above - the new direction of *economic progress must emphasize feminine values and the key role of women* in economic life ...."

despair: Robertson sees it as being up to "independent citizens and independent people's movements" (ibid, 1994) to compel reform of perverse infrastructures – a course for which there is no single way. That was Robertson's conclusion in the mid-90s and again in 2002 – the latter in response to how Korten et al (2002) see the way ahead for civil society.

Following the view of a post-capitalist world in Korten (1999), Korten et al (2002) claim that we are in the "final stage" of an epic struggle between the forces of "imperial rule (empire)" – now represented by the institutions of elite globalization – and the forces of

"democratic rule (community)" – as represented by "global civil society". They argue that the balance of power "tilts less decisively in favour of empire than it seems", because the "cultural trance" of its legitimacy is being broken by the new social organism of global civil society. Robertson's (2002) response is that it is fanciful to think that community economies can loosen the stranglehold of such entrenched power. The path of reform, he argues, must be much more hard-headed.

Robertson's emphasis on *independent action* of citizens and movements goes to the heart of the partnerships Zadek advocates. Are such partnerships more likely to be misalliances? George Soros has no doubt about it: "Perhaps the greatest threat to freedom and democracy in the world today comes from the formation of unholy alliances between government and business" (quoted in Korten et al, 2002). At a conference in 2001 sponsored by Soros's Open Society Foundation, Susan George summed up the view from the global citizens' movement:

> "We are no longer on the defensive ... People with knowledge, confidence, numbers and organisation can ... undo what some have done. This movement has made a momentous discovery and revealed a dangerous truth: the corporate *coup d'état*, the triumph of rich over poor, market over society, rapacity over nature is not inevitable. And we will be heard." (George, 2001, original emphasis)

She also spoke of mounting anger, the increasing risk that confrontation could turn into violence, mostly by the state, and emphasized that "The citizens movement wants to remain exactly that: a movement" (ibid).

From these perspectives, Zadek's strategy is dangerously misguided. If the 'NGO community' enters into corporatist partnerships that fail to tackle the most glaring needs, *they* will be among the casualties and civil society as a whole will be set back. This suggests that it would be wise to only consider partnerships which are demonstrably in the public interest, with clear and enforceable safeguards, and otherwise suspend judgement about whether current economic changes have any bearing on corporate citizenship.

3. 5. 2. An inadequate concept of citizenship

My quarrel with Zadek's notion of corporate citizenship centres on two points. First, the term 'citizenship' is used uncritically, as if it were universally understood and accepted, and as if there were no question of it being applicable to business and other organizations. (This problem is mirrored in the literature on citizenship, where there is scant attention to the role of organizations in relation to citizenship.) I will come back to this after exploring concepts of citizenship and of civil society, but it would seem obvious that there is as much need to probe the meaning of citizenship as there is to be clear about the concept of sustainability. Zadek's treatment of the concept consists of a three-page review of cultures of *corporate* citizenship. The fault is not his alone; McIntosh et al (1998) make no attempt to explore the primary concept of citizenship either, and it is simply taken for granted in most discussions of corporate citizenship.

Secondly, while *civil society* is essential for Zadek's theory, it is not clear what role citizenship – *being a citizen* – plays in it. Though he is undoubtedly committed to citizen activism, what comes across is a rather abstract notion of citizenship, with civil society somehow having a

life of its own. Again, he is not alone in this, but it leaves a vacuum at the very core of his

theory. In my critique of Midgley's (2000) theory of Systemic Intervention in chapter 4 the

problem of abstraction in relation to the capacity for agency will be spelled out in more

detail, but for now I want to register the point that failure to ground citizenship in agency

erodes the meaning of citizenship and creates a political vacuum that favours the growth of

unaccountable power, much of it corporate. Moreover, in a full-blown version of Zadek's

theory as it stands, business would have a broad social mandate endorsed by a kind of 'civil'

elite or oligarchy which would be accountable only on its own terms to the public or

government – a state of affairs that already obtains in some countries. Alternatively, if one

backs away from the full-blown version of his theory – believing it to be too idealistic or

downright dangerous – a less ambitious and more critical strategy might be more socially

progressive and therefore more sustainable.

The social accounting movement is not necessarily committed to Zadek's theory, but it does

embrace corporate citizenship and the main lines of his theory are reflected in the

AccountAbility approach to social auditing. As I see it, the abstraction of citizenship at the

core of Zadek's theory ties in with the problems social auditing is having in significantly

improving corporate behaviour. I have also suggested that the gulf between the promise of

SEAAR and its actual impact on corporate performance can be better understood by

reconstructing social auditing from the perspective of citizenship and social learning – by

which I mean something quite different to Zadek's civil learning. These issues will be

tackled in depth from chapter 6 onwards.

3. 6. CONCLUSIONS

3. 6. 1. Social auditing and corporate citizenship

As set out in the critique above, and in the conclusions to chapter 2, the field of social and ethical accounting, and the associated concept of corporate citizenship, together need to be more critically and systemically grounded, and to be embedded in an understanding of agency, citizenship and social learning that has concrete meaning for how people act and change the world, and is directly meaningful in relation to social accounting, and social auditing in particular.

3. 6. 2. Development of the thesis

This chapter completes the process of fulfilling the first objective of the thesis by reviewing how social auditing and the allied concept of corporate citizenship are being constructed. The rest of the thesis works towards a synthesis of concepts designed to meet the need just described.

The next chapter considers critical systems thinking (CST) as a candidate for strengthening social auditing, particularly Midgley's (2000) theory of Systemic Intervention. CST's candidacy is based on three factors: (a) CST has engaged critically with systems theory and with Habermasian critical theory, which features prominently in critical perspectives on accounting; (b) within CST there are perspectives on agency and intervention, and on citizenship, that partly resolve the shortcomings in those respects described above; and (c)

CST would have 'face validity' in relation to social accounting because it is oriented towards critically tackling real-world problems and to the pluralist use of methods. Finally, the concept of boundary critique has a bearing on the variable geometry of relationships and values that Zadek espouses.

CHAPTER 4:

CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING AND SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION

4. 1. Introduction

This chapter outlines critical systems thinking (CST) and assesses its capacity to provide the systemic underpinnings for social auditing that have been found lacking.

CST is an approach to research and intervention in social and organizational contexts. At the level of general ideas, it brings together systems thinking and a standpoint of social critique. It is perhaps best appreciated as an arena of debate, with different versions of related ideas jostling for support, and competing methodologies. Here I am using the term 'methodology' to denote the set of theoretical ideas and assumptions underpinning a particular approach to research and intervention – distinguishing between *methodologies* and *methods*, as do Checkland (1999: 32) and Midgley (2000: 105-6).

I will approach this by first giving a general outline of CST's emergence and overall development, and will then trace its antecedents in so-called 'hard' and 'soft' systems thinking. I will then describe four phases of CST's development, with particular attention to the work of Ulrich and Midgley – the main reasons for my interest in CST – followed by an overall appraisal of CST.

4. 2. CST's EMERGENCE AND OVERALL DEVELOPMENT

CST emerged in the 1980s from critical reaction to its precursors in 'hard' and 'soft' systems thinking. Its early phase was framed by efforts to ground systems thinking in critical social theory, and debates about pluralism in respect to methodologies. Then a phase of initial consolidation took place in the early 1990s, with the formulation of core commitments and a methodology called Total Systems Intervention (TSI). However, that attempted consolidation was strongly criticized, leading to a third phase of re-thinking and revisioning (which overlapped chronologically with the previous phase).

This third phase was concerned particularly with working out the implications of pluralism in relation to theories and methods, with adjusting to postmodernism, and with developing more sophisticated perspectives on power. In my view, it is now apparent that since the late 1990s CST has been going through a fourth phase, of what I call 'divergent consolidations', typified by the differences between Midgley's (2000) theory of Systemic Intervention and Jackson's (2000, 2003a) reconstruction of previous consolidations under the banner of Critical Systems Practice.

The main themes of CST's development are shown in Table 4.1, which is based on Munlo's (1997) description of three phases of CST – an early phase, consolidation, and new directions – but with several refinements. I have renamed the phases to put more emphasis on CST being an arena of competing ideas as well as transitions, and distinguished the fourth phase. I have also revised Munlo's framework by changing some of the wording,

Table 4.1: Main themes in the development of critical systems thinking
(adapted from Munlo, 1997:84)

Emergence and alignment	First formulations	Revisionings (*not in chronological or priority order*)	Divergent consolidations
• Emergence from critiques of hard and soft systems thinking • Independent development of Ulrich's critical system heuristics (CSH) • Affiliation with critical social theory • Debates about methodological pluralism	• Five commitments underpinning CST • Streamlining of commitments into three • Modelling of CST through Total Systems Intervention (TSI)	• Postmodernist influences • CST as a debate around themes • Discordant pluralism (Gregory); Creative design of methods (Midgley); Multi-methodology (Mingers & Brocklesby) • Consolidation of the theory of boundary critique • Complexities of power • Re-thinking TSI • Further development of CSH, and critically systemic discourse (Ulrich, 2003a)	• Systemic Intervention (Midgley, 2000) • Critical Systems Practice (Jackson, 2000, 2003a)

integrating certain themes, and making three additions, which are: inclusion of CST's

emergent phase; highlighting the importance of critical heuristics; and also highlighting

boundary critique – all of which will be discussed in due course.

My account of CST therefore starts with an outline of the arguments from within hard

systems thinking that led to the radical break into soft systems thinking and then CST's

emergence from a critique of both standpoints. Then I will outline CST's development,

with the emphasis on the approaches of main interest for the purposes of the thesis. For

narrative coherence I will follow the outline of themes and transitions in Table 4.1, but

slipping between phases in the interests of continuity.

4. 3. EMERGENCE AND ALIGNMENT

4. 3.1. Hard systems thinking

Hard systems thinking is grounded in the positivist scientific tradition and both

functionalist and structuralist social theory (Jackson, 2000). It views human systems in

terms of mechanisms and organisms, and presumes that such systems can be understood

objectively (Checkland, 1981). It also presumes that systems have distinct purposes. It

follows that human systems have, or should have, unitary goals: for instance, that an

organization's purpose is synonymous with its objectives. The aim is to arrange system

components so that goals are achieved with optimum efficiency. Insofar as matters of

judgement or subjectivity are considered at all, they are subordinate to efficacy – achieving

desired results.

Hard systems thinking is characterised by a search for objectivity, systematic methods,

quantification, optimization, and finding efficient solutions to definable problems (Jackson,

1985). In addition to conventional OR (e.g. Churchman et al, 1957), hard systems thinking

includes systems engineering (Hall, 1962) and the kind of systems analysis associated with the RAND corporation (Optner, ed., 1973). Jackson (2000) extends the list of hard systems approaches to include cost/benefit analysis, decision science and management cybernetics – and uses the broader functionalist label to cast a wider net.

4. 3. 2. The break into soft systems thinking

OR started life in Britain in the late 1930s as an interdisciplinary approach to complex problems. Use of its techniques by Allied planners during World War II led to such widespread acceptance that by the 1960s it dominated the field known as management science (Ackoff, 1979; Jackson, 2000). Then in the 1970s the agenda for a radical break into soft systems thinking was set by two of OR's leading exponents – C. West Churchman and his friend Russell Ackoff – and by Peter Checkland of Lancaster University.

Building on arguments about systems philosophy set out in Churchman (1968, 1969), Churchman (1970) challenged the OR profession to rethink its fondest assumptions and to explore ethical issues. His concern was that a profession which, in his view, ought to be leading efforts to tackle social and environmental problems was in fact playing no significant role in these matters. Using Jung's ([1962] 1989) idea of a life having both a rational story and an irrational, elemental one, he contrasted OR's rational narrative of precision and certainty with its suppressed tale of ambiguity and inconsistency. In OR methods he criticized selective attention to data and the masking of practitioners' value systems. He charged OR textbooks with being dangerously negligent on that account, including one he had co-authored (Churchman et al, 1957). He declared that the rational-

empiricist concept of objectivity has no place in OR, or any profession for that matter, proposing instead a Hegelian process of exposing worldviews to their "deadly" opponents (Churchman, 1970: 33). He accepted that this called for courage, a spirit of responsible heroism without which a profession is "degraded" (ibid: 34).

Churchman (1970) took this further in relation to morality. Rejecting relativism, he argued that a non-relativist ethics was implicit in OR's orientation towards improvement. But he also argued that, to be sufficient as an enabling philosophy, it must have a moral foundation with universal force. The grounding for this, he proposed, would be Kant's ([1785] 1998: 38) 'moral imperative' that we should always act so as to treat humanity (in ourselves or in others) as an end, never only as the means to an end.

Churchman accepted that this brought its own complications – tensions between moral principles and practicability; the difficulty of dealing with complex problems without treating *some* people only as means, and related issues of participation; the risk that action that seems good now may turn out to be the ruin of another generation (themes that figure strongly in Churchman, 1968 & 1969). Churchman offered these as matters for study and debate, along with another 'mystery'. Given that OR practitioners not only get things wrong, but the greatest efforts to improve society can be negated by unforeseen forces, how can we come to understand the whole system so that such catastrophes are avoided and improvement can be real rather than illusionary?

Churchman's colleague, Ackoff (1979) pronounced OR to be moribund, having lost its pioneering spirit and withdrawn from reality. Ackoff (1979) laid the blame for this at the

door of OR academics (himself included) and professional societies. OR had become

perversely technical and detached from the real world, failing to take problems as they came

and distorting situations to fit favoured techniques. Moreover, it had stood still despite

mounting evidence that instead of trying to fix problems with 'optimal' solutions, the need

was for approaches to decision-making based on learning and ability to adapt. In reality, he

argued, people dealing with complex situations do not 'solve problems'; rather, they manage

'messes' – messes being systems of interdependent problems. Instead of relying upon

outdated notions of prediction, optimization and evaluation, OR needed to reorient itself

towards "designing a desirable future and inventing ways of bringing it about" (ibid),

recognizing that the more collaboratively this is done the greater our chances of making it

happen. Ackoff also argued for dispensing with the notion of value-free objectivity,

recognizing instead that what stands for objectivity is an accumulated property of collective

processes of approximating to truth as we understand it. That reflects one of the founding

arguments of the philosophical pragmatism that Churchman and Ackoff were trying to

integrate with systems thinking.

Ackoff's philosophical stance took practical shape in the form of Interactive Planning

(Ackoff, 1981), which provides a framework for stakeholder participation in tackling

complex messes. Other approaches to participative planning which entail models of

adaptive learning include Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (Mason & Mitroff,

1981) and Soft Systems Methodology.

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Scholes, 1990) emerged

from what was conceived at the outset as a programme of systems-practice and action

learning about real world problems. That drive and three lines of thinking shaped its development. First, the model of human action which presumes that action is always goal-directed was rejected because it does not reflect the reality of dealing with messy, ill-defined problems. The alternative eventually developed is a concept of 'human activity systems' with emergent properties of purposefulness, which include goal-seeking behaviour but are not limited to that, and allow for differing interpretations of any declared purpose (Checkland 1999: A7).

Secondly, there was Geoffrey Vickers' theory of human 'appreciation' and 'appreciative systems' for sense-making and reaching value judgements (Vickers, 1965, 1972, 1983; Checkland & Casar, 1986). Vickers emphasizes the need to appreciate the worldviews underlying people's perceptions of situations. He also argues that viewing life as being about maintaining relationships gives a much richer and more realistic picture than the pseudo-rationality of pursuing 'ends'. In effect, SSM became a working model of Vickers' ideas (Checkland, 1999: 41).

Finally, there was the development of SSM as a practical method for revealing differing perspectives on situations, generating debate about the issues, and seeking accommodation among conflicting interests (Checkland, 1985; Checkland & Scholes, 1990). It entailed a shift from thinking about models *of* (parts of) the world to thinking about models for arguing *about* the world (Checkland, 1985) – giving it affinities with the concept of framing described in chapter 1, particularly the less politically-oriented approaches to framing. In any case, building 'rich pictures' and fluid models became hallmarks of SSM. Initially a seven-stage process (Checkland, 1981), it has since become a more flexible four-activity

model (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). The concept of intervention as a cycle of learning and action runs throughout.

4. 3. 3. Towards critical systems thinking

CST's emergence was transformative in that it set off a series of debates that arguably have led to new ways of thinking.[1] It was also part of a wider movement to replace reductionist, mechanistic and individualistic thinking about problems with something that is about building capacity for collectively dealing with complex situations. In that, CST's originators shared the soft systems critique of hard systems thinking, while also criticizing soft systems thinking.

Soft systems thinking was recognized as an advance on hard systems thinking because it had put the focus on participation and understanding people's viewpoints and values (e.g. Jackson 1982, 2000). Moreover, the soft approaches had gained respect partly because they were well thought-out and presented (Flood & Jackson, 1991). The criticism was that soft systems approaches did not (or could not) account for the effects of power conflicts in society and were ideologically conservative. Different slants on this were argued.

Thomas & Lockett (1979) present a Marxist analysis, with Checkland's SSM as the main target. Their view is that because SSM is predisposed towards maintaining purposeful relationships, it enables organizations to cope with change despite the conflicting interests

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[1] Midgley (2000), for instance, regards his consolidation of theories under the banner of Systemic Intervention as a proposal for a new paradigm.

of employees and owners. It is, therefore, managerialist, technocratic, and reformist. They conclude that the social application of systems ideas cannot be ideologically or politically neutral – echoes, again, of the debates about framing.

Mingers (1980) approaches SSM from the perspective of the early Habermas's (1971: 302-317) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. This started a debate about Habermas that eventually overlapped with Ulrich's concurrent development of CSH. Holding that knowledge is absolutely inseparable from interests, Habermas claims there to be three universal human interests: a *technical interest* in analysing and controlling what is going on around us; a *practical interest* in mutual understanding; and an *emancipatory interest* in freeing ourselves from obstacles to autonomy and responsibility. These correspond with the spheres of work, language, and power relations. However, the emancipatory interest has been suppressed by distortions in social relations.

In his critique of SSM, Mingers (1980) argues that it fails to account, psychologically and sociologically, for how people come to have their worldviews, or change their minds, and what causes them to accept a consensus. Where vested interests have the upper hand, the consensual view is most likely to be the product of systematic distortion, a false consciousness. Mingers concludes that SSM needs a critical and emancipatory grounding to safeguard against it being used only to serve the privileged.

Jackson (1985a) sees all kinds of problems with SSM's emphasis on open debate and consensual validation of change. It relies on stakeholders being free and willing to participate, on unconstrained debate and genuine consensus. Soft systems thinkers

therefore would have to steer clear of situations where full participation is impossible

because privileged stakeholders are unwilling to cede power or authority. Alternatively,

Habermas's theory of communicative action (discussed further on) could be used to explain

socially-institutionalized distortions of communication and limits on action, and to develop

strategies for resolving them. Jackson (ibid) concludes that soft systems thinking is in urgent

need of the "radical therapy" of a critical social systems theory and practice. Jackson (1985)

was not calling for systems thinking to be fully linked to Critical Theory. It was more a case

of using Habermas's theories to build a systems approach to situations characterized by

coercive power disparities (Jackson, 2000: 297).

These criticisms had little effect on the development of SSM. Checkland's (1999, 2002)

long-held position has been that *methodology* is about the principles of *methods*, so it is

meaningless to label a methodology as managerialist, conservative, emancipatory, radical or

whatever. However, the ensuing 'paradigm war' led to CST's commitment to method-

ological pluralism. During the same period, CST's alignment with critical theory was

reinforced by Ulrich's (1983, 1987) development, independently, of critical heuristics.

Together, these two developments gave CST a distinctive start in life.

4. 3. 4. Methodological pluralism

Methodological pluralism is the theoretical stance that different approaches can be used to

complement each other in tackling problems – provided their distinct purposes and values,

strengths and weaknesses, are surfaced and considered. In simple terms, the idea is that

hard systems thinking is good for some problems but not others, and the same goes for soft

systems thinking or emancipatory approaches (the three-way categorization used in CST from the late 1980s into the early 90s).

The argument for pluralism was launched by Jackson & Keys ([1984] 1991). Looking at different types of problem context they came up with two ways of categorizing them. One is whether the problem is relatively simple or complex (for which they used the terms 'mechanical' and systemic', following Ackoff's distinction between the 'machine age' and the 'system age'). Hence a mechanical/systemic axis. The other axis, unitary/pluralist, refers to the relationship between decision-makers and their objectives. The context is unitary if the decision-makers pursue common goals and courses of action; it is pluralist if they cannot agree goals and pursue different courses of action. This produces a four-way matrix – mechanical-unitary, mechanical-pluralist, systemic-unitary and systemic-pluralist – called by its creators (ibid: 140) "a system of systems methodologies" (SOSM).

Jackson and Keys (ibid) then use this matrix to determine the suitability of various methods for the four problem contexts, finding the approaches of Ackoff and Checkland to be good for dealing with systemic-pluralist contexts. However, Jackson and Keys (ibid: 153-4) had deliberately omitted from this matrix another category of situations: those where different interests conflict and power dictates the outcome, overtly or covertly – i.e. systemic-coercive contexts. In such contexts, they argue, existing systems approaches are likely only to buttress the status quo. They see their analysis as providing the basis for developing a fully-complementary range of methodologies, and suggest that practitioners need to identify problem contexts correctly, taking account of sociological perspectives – on the lines formulated by Burrell and Morgan (1979).

Jackson (1987a) extended the SOSM to include coercive contexts. Meanwhile, Jackson (1987b) considered four developmental strategies for management science: the *isolationism* of disciplinary separation and the assumption of 'paradigm incommensurability' (Kuhn, 1970); the *imperialism* of treating one discipline as fundamentally superior, though capable of incorporating other approaches; the *pragmatism* which Jackson (1987b: 462) characterizes as combining the best of whatever 'works' in practice, without theoretical considerations; and the *pluralism* of treating socially-aware theory and practice as mutually developmental, allowing critical development of approaches for various problem-contexts (as in the SOSM). In chapter 5 I will be arguing that this pejorative notion of 'pragmatism', and failure to connect with *philosophical* pragmatism, has been detrimental to CST's development, but I will leave that aside for now.

Oliga (1988) took up the suggestion of linking methodologies to Burell & Morgan's (1979) theory of sociological paradigms, and also related them to Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. On this basis, the *technical interest* for prediction and control is aligned with the functionalist paradigm, and with empiricism as a methodological framework. The *practical interest* for understanding corresponds with the interpretative paradigm, and with hermeneutics as a methodological framework. The *emancipatory interest* corresponds with a radical/critical paradigm, and with critical theory as a methodological framework. A small but resonating point here is that whereas Burrell & Morgan regard the paradigms as mutually exclusive, in Habermas's theory the interests are inter-related and universal.

As mentioned, Jackson (1987b) expanded the four-way version of the SOSM to six in order

to allow for coercive relationships. The version of it in Table 4.2 is based on the widely-

used one in Flood and Jackson (1991b). In their view, only Ulrich's approach qualifies as

emancipatory and is therefore capable of dealing with coercion – a narrow interpretation of

his main concerns for empowerment, citizenship and civil society.

Table 4.2: The System of Systems Methodologies
(adapted from Flood & Jackson, 1991b)

		RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS		
		Unitary	**Pluralist**	**Coercive**
SYSTEM	**Simple**	*Simple-Unitary:* issues are readily appreciated; general agreement between those defined as involved and/or affected	*Simple-Pluralist:* issues are readily appreciated, but disagreement between those defined as involved and/or affected	*Simple-Coercive:* issues are readily appreciated, but suppressed disagreement between those defined as involved and/or affected
	Complex	*Complex-Unitary:* issues are difficult to appreciate, but general agreement between those defined as involved and/or affected	*Complex-Pluralist:* issues are difficult to appreciate, and disagreement between those defined as involved and/or affected	*Complex-Coercive:* issues are difficult to appreciate, and suppressed disagreement between those defined as involved and/or affected

4. 3. 5. Critical systems heuristics

Ulrich's critical systems heuristics (CSH) (Ulrich 1983, 1987, 1988, 1996b & c) – or simply, critical heuristics (heuristic referring to processes of discovery) – seeks to provide a framework for people to lay open and examine the value judgements being used in decisions about the design and evaluation of social programmes. As well as being an approach to dialogue, CSH is a serious attempt to empower those affected by decisions to stand up to the powers that be. It is, therefore, something of a rarity, and its relevance to stakeholder theory is one of the things that prompted my interest in CST. The approach is based on Churchman's concept of boundary judgement, coupled with Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. I will outline them in that order.

Prior to Churchman's critique of OR, system boundaries were taken as 'given', as if all boundaries function similarly to the outer membrane or perimeter of natural systems. In contrast, Churchman (1968 & 1970) argues that boundaries relating to social systems are constructs that define what we consider to be of value or pertinent to analysis. He also shows that the placing of boundaries is a matter of standpoint, and that pushing out the boundaries of analysis implies widening the range of stakeholders who should be involved. Churchman (1969, 1979) also introduces the notion of reflexivity into systems thinking, advocating a dialectical process of engaging with the 'enemies' of the systems approach. To sum up, boundaries are variable constructs; they are associated with worldviews and values regarding 'improvement'; both of these factors call for involving a range of stakeholders in important decisions because they will have different ideas; and our most cherished ideas and claims must be open to critique.

'Boundary critique', as it as called (Ulrich, 1996c, 2000; Midgley et al, 1998), is the ethical

critique of boundary judgements, aimed at disclosing the inevitable partiality of our claims

and value judgements. Ulrich (2000, 2002) provides a conceptual framework for this in the

form of the 'eternal triangle' of reference system, facts, and values – as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: The 'eternal triangle' of boundary judgements, observations, and evaluations (Ulrich, 2000: 252)

Boundary judgements

'SYSTEM'

'FACTS'   'VALUES'

Observations   Evaluations
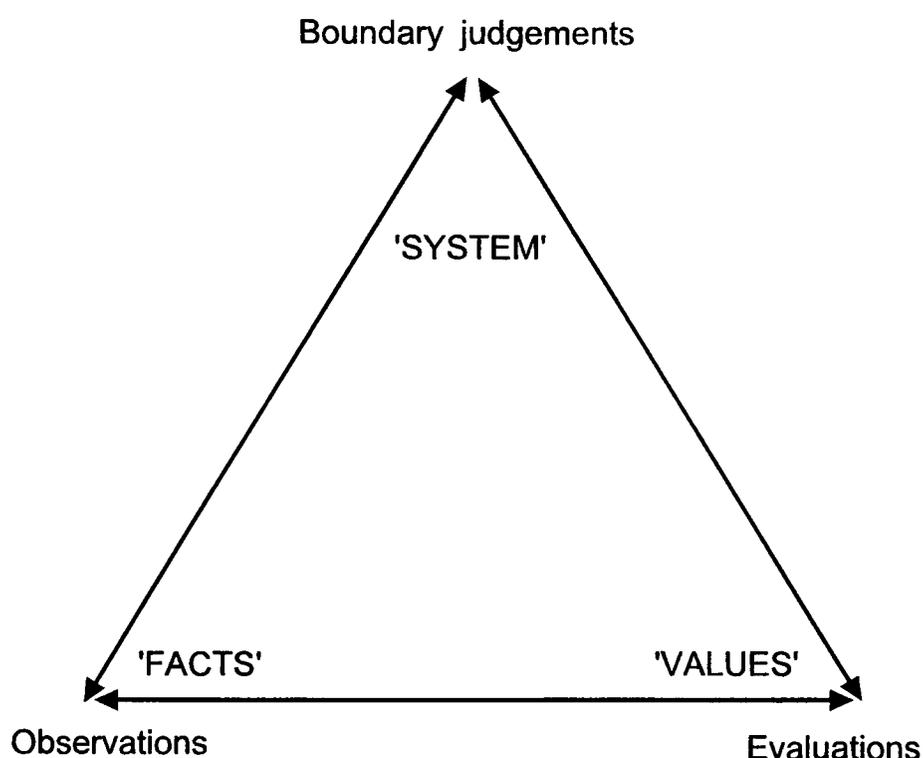
Thinking through the triangle means considering each of the three factors in the light of the

other two, and revising our judgements accordingly. Ulrich (2003a: 339) sees this as

providing "a secure starting point for the effective integration of emancipatory self-

reflection and critique in our concept of rationality" – by which he means (ibid: 337-8)

a unity of critique that recognizes the interdependence of the technical, practical and

emancipatory interests in Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests, and

related validity claims. Moreover, doing this systematically entails looking at the implications

of the reference system and other judgements being made for all parties concerned,

regardless of whether they have been included in the first place. (The role of boundary

critique in Midgley's SI is dealt with later.)

CSH is built on this concept of boundary judgement, and Kant's notion of categorical

imperatives for moral reasoning (i.e. reason that 'commands' what we *ought* to do), as

reworked by Churchman (1971, 1979: 79-80) into categories for designing 'systems of

inquiry'. Ulrich develops Churchman's scheme of categories into a framework of *boundary*

questions designed to help people to uncover: (a) the purpose and value basis of a plan;

(b) the assumptions regarding who will decide and within what parameters; (c) who will be

involved in the design and on what terms; and (d) how account will be taken of the interests

of people who will be *affected* by the plan but are not *involved* in shaping it. The point is that,

to be valid in terms of practical reason, boundary judgements must be legitimate to those

who will be affected by them, so their views must to be taken into account, whether or not

they are actively involved – or ought to be.[2] Furthermore, the questions are meant to be

used in two modes of inquiry, so that what *is* happening can be compared with what *ought* to

happen. Table 4.3 shows how Ulrich has developed the CSH categories. Ulrich (1996c)

provides a full explanation of both the framework and the questions, which in practice need

to be re-phrased to suit specific contexts.

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[2] This has similarities with the 'polyvocal citizenship' approach to stakeholder inclusion in social auditing
described by Gray et al (1997), but critical heuristics is a more structured approach.

Table 4.3: Table of critical heuristic categories (based on Ulrich, 1996c: 43)

Categories	Issues/sources of intentionality		
1. Client	Sources of **motivation**	Those **involved**	**The system of concern** (or context of application) on which depends the meaning of 'improvement'
2. Purpose			
3. Measure of improvement			
4. Decision Taker	Sources of **control**		
5. Resources			
6. Environment of decision			
7. Planner	Sources of **knowledge**		
8. Expertise			
9. Guarantee			
10. Witness	Sources of **legitimation**	Those **affected**	
11. Emancipation			
12. World view			

Ulrich (1983, 1987) also introduces the *polemical use of boundary judgements* as a tactic for laypeople to employ when authorities fail to consider the implications of what they plan to do, or when a challenge to their authority or expertise is dismissed as being 'subjective'. The tactic is based on the argument that, when it comes to justifying how they make value judgements, experts are no more qualified than ordinary people. Inspired by the Kantian ([1787] 1929) notion of the 'polemical employment of reason', the polemical use of boundary judgements means countering an unwarranted claim to superior knowledge, not by trying to refute it or by questioning its theoretical justification, but by simply offering one's own subjective view of what ought to happen – without making any claim to objective validity or superior reasoning. The idea is to turn the argumentative table on the experts by putting them into the position of having to justify how they see what ought to happen, and embarrassing them into recognizing that their boundary judgements are just that – matters of judgement, not something one can be dogmatic about. Once that happens, both sides can engage in dialogue on a more equal footing.

Underpinning CSH is Ulrich's approach to Kantian practical reason[3] and Habermas's theory of communicative action and rationality. Whereas theoretical reasoning is concerned with what is thought to be 'true' and empirically verifiable, practical reason is concerned with the validity of social norms and claims. Validity in social relations is therefore a matter of ethically justified consensus (Ulrich 1988).

The question arises: how does Ulrich's thinking (a) help stakeholders to reach an ethically justified consensus, and (b) safeguard against a bogus consensus being cooked up by a clique furthering their own narrow interests? The answers lie in similar directions. First, CSH can be used by any combination of stakeholders to explore or challenge the legitimacy of boundary judgements. Secondly, Ulrich grounds his approach in Kant's practical philosophy and Habermas's theory of communicative action, both of which give priority to validation through rational dialogue, and such dialogue cannot be fully rational if it excludes counter-arguments. Third, CSH has at least *some potential* for restraining self-serving or coercive interests. I will come back to the point about coercion after outlining Habermas's theory of communicative action.

4. 3. 6. Habermas's theory of communicative action

I have already outlined Habermas's theory of 'knowledge-constitutive interests': the technical interest in prediction and control, the practical interest in mutual understanding, and the emacipatory interest in freedom from obstacles to autonomy. His theory of communicative action builds onto this sideways. For Habermas (1972: 311-317), humanity

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[3] "By 'the practical' I mean everything that is possible through freedom" (Kant [1787] 1929: 828).

is in a process of evolution towards autonomy and responsibility. Communication and rational discourse are central to this. As well as enabling reasonable social interaction, Habermas regards 'communicative action' as having redemptive capacity in modern societies.

Habermas's (1984a, b) theory of communicative action (TCA) rests on his conviction that the human capacity for language carries with it a predisposition towards mutual understanding and uncompelled agreement, as prerequisites of autonomy. This is clearly stated in Habermas (1970: 50): "The idea of autonomy is given to us with the structure of language. With the very first sentence the intention of a common and uncompelled consensus is unequivocally stated." When such agreement is prevented by instrumental thinking (taking ends for granted and only considering means) and alienating processes in the socio-cultural lifeworld, the result is "systematically distorted communication" (Habermas, 1984a: 333). We can, however, overcome the false consciousness this creates – through communicative action.

Habermas uses the term 'communicative action' for situations in which people *co-ordinate* their actions, "not through ego-centric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (1984a: 285-6). Such acts are distinct from ordinary communication. He also makes a distinction (ibid) between *communicative action* from *strategic action*. The later is designed to influence the decisions of a rational opponent, and may be overt or concealed – concealed in the form of conscious deception (manipulation) or unconscious deception (systematic distortion), both of which defeat the object of *co-ordinated* communication.

The normative thrust of TCA hinges on Habermas's (ibid: 99-100) views about validity-claims and 'ideal speech situations'. The central idea is that normal linguistic interaction entails reciprocal processes of accepting or rejecting four kinds of validity-claim: (a) that statements are intelligible; (b) that their propositional content is verifiably true, or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content are satisfied; (c) that the speaker is justified according to social norms in saying what is said, or that the normative content the statement is meant to satisfy is itself legitimate; and (d) that speakers sincerely mean what they say. In regard to propositional content, Mingers (2005) points out that Habermas (2003) abandons his "epistemic conception of truth" (ibid: 31) – i.e. based on discursive reason – and adopts a Pragmatist conception of 'truth' as rationally justifiable assertion (see chapter 5).

The intelligibility criterion is often taken for granted, but can also be interpreted as cultural intelligibility. That apart, the three other validity-claims correspond to the objective/material world, the social/normative and the subjective worlds. In communicative action, participants jointly examine any contested claims. Habermas (1984a, b) treats any discursive statement, regardless of express content, as entailing these criteria of validity, and maintains that it is a normal expectation to have to defend any validity-claim, and the outcome *should* reflect the better argument, not any prior constraints. Indeed, he argues that since communicative action "demands an orientation to validity-claims, it points from the start to the possibility that participants will distinguish more or less sharply between having an influence *upon* one another and reaching understanding *with* one another", and this engenders a generalized willingness to accept valid arguments (Habermas, 1984b: 74, original emphasis).

In an 'ideal speech situation' there are no constraints on reaching understanding and agreement, all have an equal say, and discussion is not rigged by inequalities in power or knowledge. Under these conditions, any agreement that is reached is rational and genuine. Moreover, we can deploy the criticizability of validity-claims and the conditions for ideal dialogue to tackle 'systematically distorted communication' and situations where power or ideology are determining whose say counts.

4. 3. 7. Critical heuristics and coercion

Midgley (1997c, 2000) has reviewed the criticisms of CSH[4] in more detail than is needed here, particularly as he finds that it withstands most of them.

In his review of Ulrich (1983), Jackson (1985b) asks why the powerful should bother to consider the views and interests of those less powerful. As a platform for criticizing Ulrich's position, this seems somewhat besides the point. For one thing, no methodology can by itself produce the conditions for unconstrained dialogue (Ulrich, 1998) or make the powerful less so (Flood, 1990). For another, the whole strategy of CSH presumes that the powerful will *not* want to bother about people they marginalize. Yet it does presuppose that they will want to make their own views and interests appear rationally defensible. As Flood (1990) points out, vested interests usually prefer to conceal their hand behind some façade of social rationality. They rely to some extent on blurring the lines between 'commonsense'

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[4] Midgley (2000: 142) cites thirteen papers criticizing Ulrich's approach, and concludes that this is a sign of Ulrich's influence rather than intellectual weakness.

and 'common good'. CSH at least has the potential to reveal the façade.[5] The risk of embarrassment might not seem great, but the care large organizations put into 'reputation management' testifies to it having some power. Otherwise, CSR and social auditing simply would not be on the agenda.

Another important factor is that CSH is not just another form of systems practice to be compared *on the same terms* with, for example, Checkland's SSM or Flood and Jackson's TSI. Critical heuristics is part of an approach to the progressive empowerment of citizens and to promoting critically reflective practice in civil society (Ulrich, 2000, 2003a). Unlike Jackson, Ulrich is not especially bothered about extending the sway of systems thinking. Rather, he wants to integrate practical philosophy into systems thinking so it can contribute to the development of citizenship and a vigorous civil society.

As mentioned earlier, Flood and Jackson (1991b) regard CSH as the sole methodology capable of dealing with coercion, although they limit this to 'simple-coercive' contexts, not 'complex-coercive' ones. Midgley (1997c) concludes that this alignment is wrong because coercion is not about overpowering people in debate; usually it is more about closure of debate. "Either those with power simply refuse to talk to other people, they use their power to subdue or get rid of people who challenge them, or they have 'reasons' why everything that is being said during the debate misses the point" (Midgley, 2000: 208). And faced with the polemical use of boundary judgements, either there is a 'higher authority' to whom the powerful feel it necessary to defer (e.g. public opinion, a regulator, an arbitrator), in which

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[5] Gregory (1997) suggests combining CSH with Stake's (1980) approach to Responsive Evaluation, using the latter to uncover what *is* the basis of value in an organization, and using CSH to explore what the basis of value *ought* to be.

case there is in fact no closure of debate, or no such higher authority is recognized and the polemical tactic is doomed to fail. Another problem is that some forms of rational argumentation are themselves oppressive (Midgley, 1997c).

For the polemical tactic to work, Midgley argues, rational argument between the parties must at least be possible to some extent. Instead of assigning CSH to dealing with coercion, Midgley suggests that its strength is as a method for clarifying values and generating accommodation within a stakeholder group or between different groups. As for coercion, he acknowledges the lack of systems approaches that come anywhere near dealing with it, and suggests active political campaigning by practitioners as a new direction for CST.

From the general thrust of Midgley's arguments in the 'revisioning' phase of CST, he undoubtedly shares Ulrich's concern with citizenship, so it is curious that he does not develop that link, since it seems crucial to the whole issue of power imbalances. We will come to the 'revisionings' after outlining the formulaic phase of CST.

On his part, Ulrich (1996 a, 2003a) rejects any analysis of coercion that locates it singularly within the boundaries of particular situations – the basis, as he sees it, of both Jackson's and Midgley's critiques of CSH – as distinct from recognising that suppression of participation and debate is part and parcel of a more complex social reality, one which is better understood in terms of reframing CST to help empower citizens and develop capacity for critical discourse in civil society.

4. 4. CST's FORMULAIC PHASE

4. 4. 1. Overview of developments

Critical heuristics arrived on the scene fully-fledged while other strands of CST were separately taking shape – the critical perspective and the approach to methodological pluralism. While Flood and Jackson (1991) acknowledged the importance of critical heuristics, its influence was more marked in the 'revisioning' phase of CST, along with a shift in philosophical bearings. In fact, the developments which I am treating as 'revisionings' began in the late 1980s and early 1990s but acquired a distinctive character after the formulations of CST by Flood and Jackson in the early 1990s. The latter constituted an attempt to consolidate CST around certain core commitments and the methodology called Total Systems Intervention (Flood and Jackson, 1991c). The aim was to establish CST in a meta-relationship to other approaches, capable of critiquing and directing the best use of them. Indeed, the approach was quite prescriptive, and even domineering (and as such was quite different in tenor to the revisioning approaches). The prescriptive tendency is evident in the following passage: "In seeking to establish itself as the dominant new paradigm, therefore, critical systems thinking demonstrates that earlier systems approaches are all special cases with limited domains of application. The valid and successful use of the earlier approaches for systems intervention depends upon the broader understanding of them provided by critical systems thinking" (Flood and Jackson, 1991a: 2).

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4. 4. 2. Core commitments

Jackson (1991 a & b) claimed that five commitments distinguished CST from other systems approaches. These were: (1) critical awareness vis-à-vis problem-contexts; (2) social awareness and appreciation of the ideological implications of different systems approaches; (3) complementarism (i.e. pluralism) at the theoretical level; (4) complementarism at the methodological level; and (5) an emancipatory stance, aiming to counteract the previous neglect of the emancipatory interest within systems thinking.

Other versions of these centred on the three notions of critique, emancipation and pluralism/complementarism (Flood and Jackson, 1991a; Schecter, 1991). The trend of later formulations is summarized in Table 4.5. Midgley (1996b) argues that the concept of 'emancipation' is too closely connected to belief in humanity's 'march of progress', the idea of which separates human development from the natural environment. Instead, he argues for Churchman's concept of 'improvement' because it is closer to the spirit of sustainable development – the understanding of which in any context is a matter for boundary judgement rather than universal precepts.[6] Variations aside, these writers all regard the commitments as being are inter-related and inseparable, so each reflects the whole CST approach (Brown and Packham, 1999).

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[6] Ulrich (1988), too, rejects ethical generalization, but, for the purposes of practical reason, also holds involved stakeholders responsible for considering the views and needs of the uninvolved but affected, so he is arguing neither for generalizability nor moral relativism.

Table 4.5: Two later versions of CST's commitments

	From Midgley (1996b), in the terms on which he reviewed and critiqued CST	From Brown & Packham (1999), reflecting further developments during the 'revisionings' phase
Critical Awareness	Examining and re-examining taken-for-granted assumptions, along with the conditions that gave rise to them.	Using boundary critique to consider boundary issues and marginalization, and surfacing different views on the context of intervention and associated power relations.
Emancipation/ Improvement	Ensuring that research is focused on 'improvement', defined temporarily and locally, taking into account issues of power (which may affect the definition).	Emancipation, development, or desired change which builds on critical awareness by asking 'improvement for whom?', and exploring this from different stakeholders' perspectives.
Methodological Pluralism	Using different research methods in a theoretically coherent manner, becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to various issues.	The flexible, dynamic and locally decidable use of methods. Here the researcher plays a key role in the design of methods through dialogue with stakeholders, taking issues of power into account.

4. 4. 3. Total Systems Intervention (TSI)

Another aspect of the early drive to formulate CST is Flood and Jackson's (1991b)

development of TSI, intended to give a 'practical face' to CST. The 'total' stands for

critically viewing issues in the round, and reflects the authors' involvement with Total

Quality Management (Flood, 1993). In this formulation, CST was seen as standing above

supposedly paradigm-constrained approaches (functionalist, structuralist, interpretative,

emancipatory), allowing them to be used according to their strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis prevailing social conditions (Jackson, 2000).

TSI is designed to work in cycles of creativity (using Morgan's (1986) metaphors of organization), choice (using the SOSM) and implementation, cycling recursively between stages to consider the implications of different perspectives or emerging conclusions.

The 1991 version of TSI is, to my mind, overly-systematic and rationalistic, imposing categorical frameworks in a way that is not conducive to being openly considered or challenged. In fairness, the authors were quick to recognise that TSI had to be improved (Flood et al, 1992): by finding alternatives to metaphor analysis; by reconsidering the SOSM as the framework for choosing methods; by allowing greater flexibility in regard to methods; and by paying more attention to process issues. Flood (1995) considerably re-worked TSI – re-labelled in Flood (1996) as Local Systemic Intervention – to make it more accessible to non-academic users, abandoning the SOSM and replacing it with four domains of intervention: design, process, culture and politics. He also reframed it for use in three modes: traditional problem-solving mode, critical review mode (awareness about methods) and critical reflection mode (for evaluation purposes). Jackson (2000) accepts the need for further modification of TSI and for it to be more process-sensitive, but favours keeping the SOSM.

Jackson (2003a) moderates his position further in that direction, while maintaining his enthusiasm for classificatory schema. Among the issues acknowledged (ibid: 297) is the postmodernist critique of TSI by Taket and White (2000), who regard TSI as seeking to

tame pluralism and diversity instead of embracing them. Significantly, Jackson (2003a: 306) also abandons the claim to "metaparadigmatic status", and reframes TSI as "the best known version" of what he now calls Critical Systems Practice (CSP) (ibid: 301), providing 'holistic' awareness and guidance, while leaving it up to people to decide the ethics of method-ological choices.

Perhaps because Jackson (2003a) is intended for managers, Midgley's theory of Systemic Intervention (SI) does not feature in the book, though his work on CSH does. Given Jackson's lack of interest in boundary critique, and Midgley's (1996b) deconstruction of CST as a unified set of ideas, this supports my view of CST's fourth phase as being one of 'divergent consolidations'. The rest of this account will focus on the revisionings of CST leading to Midgley's consolidation of SI.

4. 5. REVISIONING CST, AND DEVELOPING 'SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION'

Midgley's (1996b) review of CST talks about the emerging outline of a new vision, and calls for CST to be viewed as a debate around themes rather than toward a definitive position. I will trace these developments under the headings of pluralism, boundary critique and power, and will register how they contributed to the development of SI.

4. 5. 1. Pluralism

In regard to pluralism, there were four notable developments: (i) Midgley's anchoring of pluralism in complexity; (ii) Gregory's concept of discordant pluralism; (iii) Midgley's

argument for the creative design of methods, and (iv) the arguments leading to the concept of SI.

4. 5. 1. 1. Anchoring in complexity

Up to this point, the argument for pluralism had been mostly about complementarity of methodologies within frameworks. Midgley (1992a) began to move towards a different basis of comparison between systems approaches by anchoring pluralism in what he called 'ontological complexity' – the complexity of different views of reality and of what matters. In Midgley (2000) the notion of ontological complexity is abandoned in favour of process philosophy. However, I will briefly outline the earlier concept since it plays an important part in how his concept of boundary critique developed.

Midgley's (1992a) core point is that pluralism is essential for the legitimacy of future systems thinking. Almost equally important is the point that the assumptions underpinning any pluralist stance need to be declared, so that legitimate pluralism can be distinguished from untheoretical pragmatism. Midgley's argument starts from the interdependence of sustainable ecosystems, social justice and personal freedom. It is not that these cannot be appreciated individually, but that concentrating on one to the exclusion of the others gives only part of the picture. Midgley (1994b) argues that the kind of humanist philosophy that privileges human interests above all others is no longer legitimate. We can instead adopt an ecological perspective which allows choice between boundaries without uncritically prioritizing the human element and marginalizing the environment, or vice versa.

Midgley's (1992a) second line of argument is about the inadequacy of the conventional notion of complexity. Usually this refers to the multiplicity of relationships between elements in a system, as determined by an observer (as in the distinction between 'simple' and 'complex' systems). 'Natural world' views of the environment operate along these lines. However, that notion of complexity becomes inadequate if the interdependence of ecosystems, social justice and freedom is accepted. Moreover, concepts of social justice entail value judgements, which people make as participants, not observers, and inevitably involve subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. Therefore, we need to have a way of taking account of natural world complexity, social world complexity and internal world complexity. Midgley's term for the complexity of the relationships between these is 'onotological complexity' (i.e. relating to the nature of being and reality).

Midgley goes on to link ontological complexity to Habermas's theory of validity in rational discourse. For Habermas (1979, 1984a, b), rational argument entails disentangling the 'three worlds' of the objective, the social/normative, and the subjective, because, he maintains, some cultures reflect a worldview that collapses the three dimensions into each other, so that, for instance, what is considered to be right is also taken to be true. For Habermas this represents a restriction on the ideal of rational argument. In contrast, Midgley (1992a & 2000) argues that notions of what constitutes good argument should themselves be subject to discourse and thereby freed from the cultural bias implicit in Habermas's own position.

Midgley (1992a) also begins to depart from Habermas's attribution of prior importance (indeed, primacy) to language, both as thought-mould and means of communication. I say 'begins to depart' because the shift is clearer with hindsight, but need not be detailed here.

Suffice to say that Midgley (2000: 75) maintains that "all theories of language are, by definition, truth claims", whether or not acknowledged as such. He argues that introducing language into ontology merely complicates subject/object dualism by adding a third category that jostles for ontological primacy; so ascribing primacy to language does not actually resolve the paradoxical relationships between subject, object and language.

Reverting to the issue of pluralism, Midgley (1992a) concludes that if the need to address ontological complexity is accepted, it is contradictory to restrict choice of methods to a partial worldview and its particular notions of truth, rightness and subjective understanding. Hence, methodological pluralism is essential for dealing with complex issues.

4. 5. 1. 2. Discordant pluralism

'Discordant pluralism' is Wendy Gregory's (1996a) alternative to the complementarist approach to methods championed by Flood and Jackson (1991b), which tended to dominate CST in the early 1990s. Her argument is that the aversions and attractions between different paradigms and perspectives should not be smoothed out, nor should conflicting positions be reconciled. Instead, they should be allowed to clash, and differences should be pursued with no expectation of conciliation – but every expectation of dialogue. This is premised on participants being sensitive to critical reflexivity, and acceptance that previous debates ought not prejudge the outcome of current ones.

4. 5. 1. 3. Creative design of methods

Midgley's (1997a, b) argument for the creative design of methods – a line of thinking that started with Midgley (1989, 1990) – goes well beyond the debate about flexibility in using or combining different approaches. It does so by bringing decisions about such matters into the participative realm of boundary critique, and beginning to develop the concept of systemic intervention.

Before developing the conceptual basis of SI, Midgley (1997b) discusses five approaches to mixing methods (all of them distinct from untheoretical pragmatism). These are: (i) the complementarism of the SOSM; (ii) TSI as formulated by Flood and Jackson (1991c); (iii) TSI as re-formulated by Flood (1995) and Flood and Romm's (1995) concept of the oblique use of methods by making an approach serve *purposes* other than what it was designed for by following the *principles* of a different perspective; (iv) Gregory's (1996a) argument for critical appreciation of methodological differences, which goes with discordant pluralism; and (v) Midgley's own concept of the creative design of methods. Other strategies for mixing methods include Mingers (1997), White and Taket (1997), and Taket and White (2000). Mingers & Brocklesby (1995) introduced the term 'multimethodology' for mixing methodologies. Taket and White's stance is postmodernist, whereas Mingers' perspective is grounded in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978, 1989), which holds that reality exists independently of our representations of it, although our knowledge of what is real is subject to various historical and cultural influences.

Midgley's own view is that, so long as it is done in a theoretically coherent manner, differing methods (or parts of methods) can be synthesized to produce results that are more than the sum of the parts. For instance, Ulrich's critical heuristics and Ackoff's interactive planning can be integrated, using CSH to surface power issues which can then be addressed within the framework of debate about idealised design. More important for the development of Midgley's theory is that he places decision-making about the purposes and design of such a synthesis within the realm of boundary judgement, thereby sweeping in the whole issue of stakeholder inclusion – linking the *who* as well as the *what* and the *how* of intervention.

In Midgley (1997b) this view of the creative design of methods is grounded in Habermas's concept of the 'three worlds' and related validity-claims (as discussed). However, it is how Midgley links *that* line of thinking to intervention that takes him towards an 'organic' (my term) notion of intervention that transcends previous arguments about pluralism. The linkage involves two complementary lines of argument. One relates to the differing concepts of power theorized by Habermas and by Foucault. The other is Midgley's concept of 'critical action'.

4. 5. 1. 4. Toward Systemic Intervention

For Midgley (1997a: 273), Habermas's and Foucault's notions of power "could not be more different". The gist of this argument is that Habermas's concept of an 'emancipatory interest' presupposes the possibility of freedom from power relations, whereas Foucault views power as intrinsic to the knowledge-forming processes that reflect and legitimize social relations. My own view is that in this regard the two are not quite as different as

claimed. Both see power as pervasive, legitimated through linguistically-formed knowledge, and Foucault's notion of criticality as the liberation of suppressed knowledges is similar in spirit if not in precise argument to Habermas's notion of liberating the 'lifeworld' from the colonizing effects of systematically distorted communication.

However, as Midgley (1997a) goes on to argue, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality makes for a real difference with Foucault. The whole point of Habermas's communicative action is to reach an undistorted understanding of the rational truth of a situation, arrived at through the unforced force of the better argument. In contrast, the whole point of Foucault's argument is that *all* concepts of truth are inextricably bound up with power relations, so any criteria of quasi-objective rationality are themselves products of power-knowledge formations. In other words, freedom from false consciousness in Habermas's terms *is* false consciousness in Foucault's terms. Whereas Flood (1990) sought to reconcile Habermas's position with Foucault's, Midgley (1997a) argues that the attempt is pointless; instead, we should hold onto and learn from both concepts, in the spirit of discordant pluralism.

However, Midgley (1997a) is concerned about 'pure' critique becoming an end in itself, divorced from action to achieve change for the better. He sees two reasons people might succumb to this. One is the idea that power is always oppressive and knowledge is inevitably tainted by it. The other danger is that of thinking that our personal and social identities are ineluctably formed by power-knowledge relations – losing sight of the fact that we actively participate in making these relations. The key passage linking this to Midgley's concept of critical action is as follows:-

"We need to retain the notion of the subject *intervening* in power-knowledge formations in order to preserve the idea of critical action. The starting point for developing my own philosophical position, then, is the relationship between the *subject*, which acts on power-knowledge formations, and the power-knowledge formations which *frame the identity* of the subject." (Midgley, 1997a: 278, original italics)

Two clarifications are important. Midgley (ibid) deliberately uses the term 'subject' rather than 'self' because 'subject' can stand for any person, group, community or society. And as a general term he refers to 'power-knowledge relations' rather than 'society' because it is those relations that give meaning to the societal identity. Midgley's position puts self and society on the same side of the dynamic, "creating and being created by power-knowledge" (ibid: 278).

The next step in the argument concerns participation in the dynamic. Any identification of a subject or power-knowledge relation constitutes an *act of judgement*, and as such constitutes an *intervention*. It follows that the choice to be self-reflective also constitutes an intervention. As active subjects, we are "caught up in" day-to-day processes of making and re-making value judgements about "which forms of knowledge we wish to promote, which identities we wish to accept, and what we want to reject and challenge" (Midgley, 1997a: 281). This is the essence of Midgley's concept of critical action, which he represents as a cycle of critique, judgement and action (i.e. a cycle that can be operated at will or in reverse order). In terms of systems thinking, *critique* is about boundary judgements, exploring and revealing different possibilities for knowledge and identity; *judgement* is about creative design of intervention,

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choosing which knowledges and identities to promote, and deciding what forms of action should be taken; and *action* to effect improvement is the purpose of it all.

It is this concept of critical action as systemic intervention that Midgley (2000) consolidates with other strands of his revisioning of CST by coupling it with a theory of 'process philosophy'. Essentially this means (ibid: 78-80) breaking out of various subject/object dualisms by treating *the process of making judgements* as being analytically prime instead of treating the *content of any particular kind of knowledge* as prime. This paves the way for boundary critique to be the heart of SI.

4. 5. 2. Boundary critique

As noted earlier, the main contributors to the development of boundary critique have been Churchman (1968, 1970, 1979), Ulrich (1983, 1993, 1996c, 2000), and Midgley (1992b, 2000 and Midgley et al, 1998). Along the way Midgley (1996b) has argued (as has Ulrich) that boundary critique should be an integral part of *any* systems inquiry, not reserved for coercive contexts but interwoven with other systems methods, and he maintains that questioning of boundary issues, including critique of the strengths and weaknesses of methods, should always be up-front in research and interventions. He also argues that just as there cannot be an absolutist or objective notion of 'improvement', boundary critique does away with absolutist notions of 'progress' or 'emancipation', which can only be defined dialogically in a given situation. Moreover, integrating boundary critique into processes of inquiry calls into question the tendency in organizational contexts for there to be uncritical acceptance of narrowly-conceived boundaries. This ties in with the need generally to

question consensus about boundaries, and for critical awareness of what boundaries imply in regard to what is valued and devalued, or 'sacred' and 'profane' (Midgley 1992b & 2000). In effect, therefore, boundary critique challenges power-knowledge formations. This is also the essence of Ulrich's (2003a: 339) principles of critically systemic discourse (CSD), which connects boundary critique with discourse ethics and an emancipatory perspective on civil society.

4. 6. PERSPECTIVES ON POWER

Three issues have dominated discussion of power in CST. First, there was the early grounding in Habermas's (1972) theory of interests, and the implications of the 'emancipatory' interest. In this view, which overlaps with Habermas's (1984a, b) later thinking about lifeworld and system, power represents negative forces mainfest in social relations of dominance and oppression, ideologically rationalized. Hence there is a need for emancipation from these social relations and from the false consciousness that sustains them.

Second, in the argument for pluralism that in the form of the SOSM got hung up on critique of methodologies, the question of power became polarized around the alleged ideological commitments of different paradigms, and whether critical heuristics or any systems approach could tackle coercion.

Third, there were responses to the challenge of postmodernism, particularly Foucault's conception of power and the implications of postmodernist arguments around intervention.

In Foucaulvian terms, power is constituted in power-knowledge formations that legitimate

knowledge and social practices, is not 'owned' by the few but diffused through society at all

levels, and is particularly manifest in the mechanisms for normalising oppression through

disciplinary practices. As Oliga (1990) puts it, the whole concept cuts across notions of the

'haves' and 'have-nots'. Moreover, in this view, knowledge and power are so inextricable

that there can be no legitimate criteria of absolute truth, and it is naïve to think that

anything other than *force majeure* determines the outcome of debate.

Having covered the debates about complementarism and pluralism, I will not rehearse them

again in relation to power. Instead, it will be more productive at this stage to consider

Midgley's perspective on power, some Foucaulvian perspectives, the kernel of Oliga's

complex view, and Ulrich's concept of CST for citizens. My intention is not to conduct a

debate between them but to register the contrasts.

4. 6. 1. Midgley's concept of power

Midgley's concept of power begins to emerge in his argument for anchoring pluralism in

complexity (Midgley, 1992a). To re-cap, starting from the inter-dependence of ecosystem

complexity, social complexity and (inter)subjective complexity, he argues the need to

embrace all three in what he calls ontological complexity.[7] From there, he contrasts three

perspectives on reality: the realist view of 'it' being 'out there'; the idealist view that reality is

constituted subjectively; and the social constructivist view that what we think of as reality is

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[7] As previously noted, Midgley (2000) abandons this notion. However, its influence on his concept of power remains relevant. His later position is close to Foucault's, although differently argued.

the product of social/linguistic processes that shape both our knowledge of 'external' reality and our 'internal' understanding of it. This leads him to suggest that we can only apprehend reality through 'momentary' insights from these different perspectives – what I would call reality-inflections. Having linked this notion of apprehending complexity with Habermas's three criteria for validity-claims – propositional or existential truth, rightness by normative standards, and subjective understanding sincerely communicated – Midgley (1992a: 160) then makes a statement that he has extrapolated from Habermas's thinking:

> "Reality is constituted by objective phenomena ("objects", "systems" and "relations"), many subjectivities, and power (expressed in the evolution and use of normative rules). All three (objective phenomena, power and subjectivity) are absolutely and inextricably interdependent."

Midgley goes on to tease out the interdependencies of objective phenomena, power and subjectivity, and then more or less leaves the issue of power in suspension. Nonetheless, I want to highlight the kernel of analysis that power is inextricably linked to thinking about both the objective world and the subjective world, that subjectivity is inextricably linked to thinking about the objective world and the social world of power, and that thinking about power is inextricably linked to thinking about both 'objective' reality and subjective sensation and perception. ('Thinking' here refers to slipping between 'reality-inflections'.)

The next development I see in Midgley's conception of power is in his concept of critical action, which builds on Foucault's theory of power-knowledge formations. As Midgley (1997a) sees it, we live through processes of making judgements about power-knowledge formations and related identities, with self and society on the same side of the

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'subject/knowledge' dynamic, both co-creating and being created by power-knowledge. Every instance of identifying a subject or power-knowledge relation constitutes an act of judgement, and all such judgements are interventions.

As Midgley (1997a, 2000) sees it, then, far from being powerless, *we are incapable individually and collectively of not intervening.* I see this as a radical argument that is crying out to be connected to a theory of active citizenship and social learning. Such connections would also help to form bridges between the macropolitical dimensions of power and Midgley's micropolitical perspective.

4. 6. 2. Foucaulvian perspectives

Valero-Silva (1996) provides a perspective on CST based on Foucault's later thinking, from which I want to highlight and build on certain points. He sees Habermas and Foucault as representing alternative approaches to critical theory, but argues that their differences make their theories incommensurable, so he opposes any superficial 'mixing' of their ideas (a criticism he levels against Flood, 1990).

In regard to CST, the thrust of Valero-Silva's (1996) argument is that Foucault's thinking is deeply challenging to systems rationality, to the complementarity of methodologies, to any *universal* concept of improvement or emancipation, and to any notion of criticality that defaults into such 'commitments'. Instead, CST should tackle its own sacred cows (ibid: 76).

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From a Foucaulvian perspective, systems methodologies are techniques for control, extensions of the disciplinary mechanisms of contemporary society. Valero-Silva also suggests that the kind of tensions and contradictions in the approach to CST exemplified by the SOSM are due partly to an instrumental use of critical theory – employing decontextualised elements of Habermas and of Foucault – which comes from CST's origins in the 'management sciences' rather than genuine roots in critical theory. As Valero-Silva (1996) points out, the success of management theory is largely due to its ability to recycle concepts so as to reinforce itself, "including those theories that attempt to challenge its very foundations" (ibid: 78).

At the same time, there is another line in Foucault's thinking that fits with Midgley's concepts of power and critical action. I am referring to Foucault's framework of 'three axes' or dimensions that constitute experience: knowledge, power, and self. What he calls the "critical ontology of ourselves" (permanent critique of what we are) (Foucault, 1984a: 50) is about how we are constituted as subjects of our own knowledge, as subjects who exercise or submit to power, and as moral subjects of our own actions (ibid: 49). To my mind, Midgley's concept of power is very similar. And both Foucault and Midgley both reject universal notions of emancipation or improvement.

Another aspect of Foucault's thinking cancels any generalization that postmodernists categorically reject the Enlightenment. It also puts paid to any simplistic reading of Habermas being 'for' and Foucault 'against' what Enlightenment represents. In a comparison of his own view with Kant's, Foucault (1984a) rejects the "intellectual blackmail" of being "for" or "against" the Enlightenment (ibid: 42-5). Rather, he sees it as

an approach to philosophizing, not one of faithfulness to doctrine but rather the continual "reactivation of an attitude" – "one that simultaenously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject" (ibid: 42).

But Foucault counsels against confusing the Enlightenment, an historical process and philosophical ethos, with humanism, which is a worldview that has appeared in various and sometimes conflicting guises (e.g. the humanism of Erasmus, anti-scientific humanism, Marxism, existentialism). Foucault is not arguing that everything to do with humanism is suspect, rather that enlightenment and humanism are in a state of tension, not identity. He concludes by saying that he does not know whether the critical task still entails faith in englightenment, saying: "I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty" (ibid: 50). Again, that spirit is evident in Midgley's work.

Foucault and Midgley both focus mainly on the 'micro-politics' of power.[8] In Foucault's case, the micro-focus goes with, and is limited by, his conception of 'biopower' and 'biopolitics'. This is the régime of normative rationality that operates through subjugation of our physical being, the harnessing of "its usefulness and its docility" for economic purposes (Foucault, 1984c: 261), and juridical regulation and control of populations. Foucault does not see this merely in terms of intricate domination and repression. Rather, the development of European democracy and liberal capitalism went hand in glove with

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[8] Midgley (1992b) does allude to 'sacredness' and 'profanity' being "held together" by wider tensions between discourses, but (personal communication) accepts that this has not yet been theorized sufficiently in his work.

juridical systems that both enabled the "democratisation of sovereignty" and grounded it in "mechanisms of disciplinary coercion" (Foucault, 1980: 105).

Thus, Foucault's concept of power emerges from a broad canvas, but his concern to explain how power-knowledge formations got structured into everyday practices and discourses tends to dissolve the power of the state, and of sovereign organizations. And Midgley's SI needs reinforcement from a theory of social action that works upon a larger canvas.

4. 6. 3. Oliga's perspective

The third perspective I want to register here is Oliga's analysis of the dynamics of power, ideology and social control – three phenomena that are often collapsed into one, making it hard to get a grip on whatever argument is being made. Oliga (1996) presents the only comprehensive analysis of these factors that I have encountered in CST. Oddly, however, while Jackson (2000) and Midgley (2000) both refer to Oliga's (1988) thoughts on complementarism/pluralism, Midgley (2000) does not refer to his work on power, and Jackson (2000: 297-8) makes only passing reference to it, couched in complementarist terms which bypass the implications of Oliga's analysis. In Jackson's case, the sidestep may be due to the fact that Oliga (1996: 293-4) argues that complementarism needs to be reconstructed on a basis which would put the emphasis on the coherent validity of a statement rather than its origins in a particular theory or methodology; so, reconstructing complementarism on these lines would nullify Jackson's approach. In Midgley's case, it may be because Oliga's argument runs on very different lines to his own, and ends up committed to a Habermasian perspective.

Oliga himself is partly to blame for neglect of his work on power. In Oliga (1990) the thrust of his argument is that power, ideology and social control must be addressed explicitly if we are to understand stability and change. Oliga (1996) means to help do this by mapping various theories of social order but gets tangled up in linguistic conceptualizations that tend to emphasize micro-social perspectives, and reflect a rather uncritical acceptance of Habermas's theory of communicative action. Rather than get drawn into those complications, I want to highlight the kernel of the argument in Oliga (1990).

That kernel is that social compliance or revolt reflects complex possibilities that cannot be captured by simple dichotomies such as force versus consent, or legitimacy versus power, and that tendencies toward stability or change in a given context reflect a complex architecture of power, ideology and social compliance or resistance. Oliga (1990) regards power-ideology as the determining matrix, but also recognizes the dialectical nature of social order. So, while he refers to the architecture of power and ideology, I see it as an interplay of all three factors. That aside, I see this aspect of Oliga's thinking as being of value in three ways. One is that it counters the tendency to conflate power and ideology, treating them as if they are the same thing rather than co-constituting one another. Secondly, it allows for complexity in the relationship between ideology, interest and social control. Thirdly, it recognizes that concern for social order presupposes actual or potential conflict, which in turn implies that the terms on which conflict is resolved *cannot* be taken for granted. Social stability and social change both result from the architecture-in-context of power, ideology, and compliance or resistance.

4. 6. 4. CST for citizens

Another contribution to revisioning CST that has met with little response so far is Ulrich's call (1996a, b) for CST to embark on the project of 'pragmatizing' itself to help to empower citizens. He is adamant that this is *not* about taking an advocacy stance on behalf of marginalized people and issues (Flood and Romm, 1995), though he does not exclude it completely. Rather, the challenge is to develop critical systems ideas in such a way that citizens can use them on their own behalf.

Ulrich grounds his proposal in the argument that pragmatizing CST entails not only getting the ideas used but developing them in such a way that their use helps to secure actual improvement. This goes further than fostering deeper understanding among managers and various professional groups, because that does not necessarily secure improvement in the wider system and may even reinforce dominant rationalities. What is needed, he argues, is a shift of rationalities. Instead of requiring citizens to go along with systems thinking rationality, CST ought to recognize them as representatives of alternative, though no less partial, rationalities (Ulrich, 1983: 289 & 1996b: 167). Moreover, a clash of different rationalities is to be expected.

The proposal is that CST should aim to become genuinely pragmatic, in the spirit of philosophical pragmatism, and to do so:

> "in such a way that we make sure those different rationalities ... can express
>
> themselves and can get heard - *without* depending on the help of an "advocate"
>
> researcher or some intervening facilitator. The implication is that we must make

critical systems ideas accessible not only to those who have *the* say yet may not be inclined to listen, but also and first of all to all those who may have *something* to say because they are concerned, be it as stakeholders or simply as responsible citizens." (Ulrich, 1996b: 168, original italics)

The aim would be to empower people for critical participation in civil society, as a sphere of competing, and suppressed, discourses. Ulrich is not suggesting that CST has the answers, but that it can make a contribution by developing CST ideas to make them fully accessible to 'ordinary' people — and in the process make itself more meaningful.

Ulrich (2000) argues that contemporary ideas of professional competence are not grounded in an adequate notion of civil society, and links this to Schön's (1983, 1992) concept of reflective practice, a view of reflection-in-action which couples know-how with artistry. For Ulrich, reflective practice also has to incorporate an ethical dimension, turning it into a form of practical philosophy (which surely underpins Schön's conception, in fact). And Ulrich sees a concommitant need to extend the concept of citizenship to take in what he calls 'civil competencies'. He wants education for citizenship to include training in CSH, seeing boundary critique as a way to equalize relations between ordinary citizens and professional experts or corporate policy-makers. [9] Finally, he calls for the exercise of citizenship through an ethic of 'deep professionalism', based on recognition that reflective

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[9] Ulrich (2000: 253) comments that "the huge body of literature around Habermas' discourse theory of rational action has thus far hardly considered the role of boundary judgements". This is surprising, since, as discussed, his own contribution to CST is mainly about 'pragmatizing' Habermas's idealised view of communicative rationality. Ulrich (2000: 253) also claims that the issue of boundary judgements "has not yet [been] considered ... at all" in the literature around Schön's concept of reflective practice. However, Schön and Rein's (1994) concept of 'frame reflection' is actually about boundary judgements in social policy-making.

professional practice nowadays is fundamentally reliant upon the capacity of civil society to counter-balance corporate power.

Jackson (2000: 320) makes a brief reference to Ulrich's proposition, in the context of an account of boundary critique, which he continues to categorize along SOSM lines, but it does not figure in his account of 'contemporary' CST. Ulrich (1996a: 3 & 26) forcibly rejects the SOSM as a basis for critique, and rejects the association of boundary critique only with coercive contexts. Jackson (2003a) accords a chapter to critical systems heuristics, with comments much in the same vein as previously. The arguments between them are rehearsed again in Ulrich (2003a, b) and Jackson (2003b), with each of them laying claim to a 'deeper' approach to methodological complementarism than the other, and no advance other than Ulrich's reframing of CSH and his ideas about discourse ethics and civil society under the banner of critically systemic discourse. As regards Midgley, Ulrich (1996a: 27) welcomes Midgley's (1996b) recognition that the core of critical heuristics – the ethical critique of boundary judgements – is central to CST, while Ulrich (2003a) reiterates his criticism of Midgley's (1997c) mild critique of CSH and Ulrich (2003a: 1228f13) charges Midgley (2000) with appropriating "CSH's core principle of boundary critique". On his part, the distancing of these proponents of boundary critique from each other is borne out by the fact that in Midgley (2000) Ulrich's call for a CST for Citizens is mentioned only briefly in relation to renewal of civil society.

4. 7. CONCLUSIONS

4.7. 1. Overview

The systems perspective addresses the fact that the more we study the major problems of

our time, the more we come to realize that they are connected and interdependent (Capra,

1997). Yet systems thinking can be overly-systematic, reductionist and oppressive. It needs

the redress of critical inquiry and, as Churchman (1970, 1979) advises, exposure to the

'enemies' of systems rationality – politics, ethics and aesthetics.

It was argued earlier that social accounting and corporate citizenship need to be more

critically grounded and to be embedded in a view of agency and citizenship coupled with

social learning. CST certainly goes part of the way to meeting those needs and has affinities

with social accounting, exemplified by a shared commitment to tackling real-world

problems through stakeholder engagement. At one level CST offers critical perspectives on

an array of methods that might enhance social accounting, well reviewed in Midgley (2000),

Jackson (2003a) and in Rosenhead and Mingers (eds., 2001). At another level, the theory of

boundary critique not only relates directly to stakeholder engagement and dialogue but, as

developed by Midgley, provides philosophical groundings for uncovering and 'holding the

ring' between different frames of reference in the same context. Furthermore, as a model,

boundary critique has the merit of being both simple and reflexively sophisticated.

More radically, Midgley's grounding of SI in critical action goes a long way towards solving the problem in regard to agency. However, his theory is in danger of slipping into what I call 'disembodied abstraction'. The issue is summarized below.

4. 7. 2. Abstraction in the theory of Systemic Intervention

In Midgley's work to date the issue of selfhood is dealt with obscurely and abstractly. This is partly because selfhood figures in his thinking more as a problem than a solution, because he wants to get away from anthropocentric humanism, and is at pains to avoid the marginalizing effects of distinguishing between sentient and non-sentient knowledge-generating systems (Midgley, 2000: 82-88). Nonetheless, in making the case for process philosophy the question is posed: who or what is drawing a particular boundary? Side-stepping some answers that might lead towards more concrete notions of self (including Maturana and Bateson, both cited), his own answer is that it depends on where the boundaries are drawn, and he illustrates this with a list of different perspectives on how agents might be viewed or categorized (and related theoretical perspectives). In effect, this verges on reducing the whole question of lived identity to a notional function in a theory of "knowledge generating systems" (ibid: 87). This impression is reinforced by the technical way he uses that term, in the context of the making of boundary judgements, to refer to what are most likely to be real people making such judgements. And it is further reinforced when he goes on to consider the identity of the self "as a special case of a knowledge generating system" (ibid: 87). Whereas one might expect this to introduce some discussion of the boundaries of self, the spectre it raises for him is the one of endless recursion in making boundary judgements, circling around whether the distinctions we make are all in

our minds or whether whatever is in the mind is determined externally – a spiral that he

sees being resolved in practice by the need to move on to matters other than the self.

As I see it, this abstraction is seriously at odds with the spirit of Midgley's concept of critical

action. If action is not 'personal' (or the collective equivalent), it cannot be 'critical' in any

concrete sense, and the notion of intervention starts to become meaningless. Fortunately,

nothing in Midgley's approach suggests that he drifted into this idly. In fact, the rationale

lies in his strategy of circumventing subject/object dualisms (mind & matter, self & other,

observer & observed) by arguing for giving *analytical primacy*, as distinct from ontological

primacy (Midgley, 2000: 78-9) to the process of bringing knowledge into being – in other

words, giving primacy to the process of making boundary judgements. To justify this he has

to show that the process does not rely upon any single propositional standpoint regarding

the identity of the self/generic agent – that is, any standpoint derived from content

philosophy as distinct from his own process approach (ibid: 78-9 & personal

communication).

For my purposes, however, this abstraction is a barrier to understanding the human capacity

for agency, for reasons spelled out in chapter 8. There is also the issue of human

embodiment. Midgley certainly does not view it in naively realist terms, and he regards the

relatively sophisticated concept of autopoeisis (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1987) as offering

primarily a biological understanding of the social.[10] This is quite different, he maintains, to

"the kind of embodiment that can be interpreted through multiple boundary judgements"

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[10] Mingers (1995: 198-201) recognises that the thrust of Maturana and Varela's work is to show how cognitive processes are inextricably bound up with embodiment. This acknowledgement of our embodiment is rare in CST. The concept of embodied cognition is discussed in another chapter.

(personal communication). Perhaps, but perhaps not. There is nothing in the possibility of multiple boundary judgements that ensures that human embodiment will be 'swept in' or adequately taken into account, and the chances are reduced by the extent to which the issue is disregarded or dealt with simplistically. The variable geometry of boundary judgements is a fine and necessary concept, but as the theory of SI stands, it disregards the nature and complexity of embodiment, which is, for most intents and purposes, the primary (but not only) form of our personal and ecological relation to the world. For these reasons I regard the concept of active being in the world that I develop later in the thesis to be a vital complement to SI.

4. 7. 3. Citizenship and philosophical pragmatism

I have said also that Midgley's theory is crying out for integration with an agentive view of citizenship and social learning. Ulrich's CSH is an important contribution, but it only touches on domains of citizenship that go beyond the range of critical heuristics. Citizenship is not only about relations between citizens and governmental or corporate bodies, it is also about the interrelations between citizens, as individuals and groups, in diverse socio-political domains (Klassen, 1998). Ulrich (2000, 2003a) does refer to tensions in civil society, but he tends to gloss over the fundamental problematics of the civil society idea, and to take for granted the notion of citizenship. Jackson (2003a: 229) describes CSH as "an emancipatory approach of a very limited kind", lacking sociological perspective, yet his own TSI deals with alienation and oppression by means of *metaphors* of organizational/ political coercion, and that amidst several competing metaphors. A more telling criticism of Ulrich, given his call for CST to pragmatize itself, would be that his view of citizenship and

civil society draws only vaguely and narrowly upon the wealth of ideas regarding agency

and the public sphere that are available in philosophical pragmatism.

Ulrich is not alone in losing his bearings in that regard. With few exceptions, from Jackson

(1987a, b) onwards, CST reproduced a degraded notion of 'pragmatism', seemingly unaware

of the philosophical context from which Churchman issued his 'challenge to reason'.

Probing into philosophical pragmatism would have revealed a pool of ideas connecting

uncertainty, complexity, inquiry, embodied agency, social action and democratic

engagement. Doing so would have challenged key elements of the formulaic approach to

CST, and would surely have modified the revisionings strategy. The next chapter is about

recovering the Pragmatist legacy.

4. 7. 4. Development of the thesis

This chapter fulfils the second objective of the thesis by reviewing CST, with particular

reference to the work of Ulrich and Midgley, and assessing its capacity to strengthen the

conceptual basis of social auditing. The next chapter extends this analysis by exploring the

relationship between CST and philosophical pragmatism.

CHAPTER 5

PRAGMATISM: THE PHILOSOPHY OF INQUIRY

5. 1. Introduction

This chapter sets out to recover the ideas of philosophical pragmatism that the CST of

Jackson, Midgley and others neglected, and that remain under-developed in Ulrich's work.

I will use the label Pragmatism (capitalized) as shorthand for philosophical pragmatism

and to distinguish it from the notion that pragmatism stands for expediency. The term

'instrumental' is also problematic in this context because Dewey uses it in an unusually

positive sense.

The neglect referred to can be traced both to some muddled thinking about pragmatism in

the 'formulaic' line of CST, and to the fact that some elements of Pragmatism suggest that it

stands for the expediency of 'what works in practice'. I will discuss the issue in relation to

CST after outlining the main strands of Pragmatist thinking, because it will be clearer in that

context. Indeed, the problem is not peculiar to CST; as Festenstein (1997: 187) nicely puts

it, Pragmatism is "barnacled with ill-informed preconceptions".

The chapter falls into six sections. First, a summary of Pragmatism's origins, its current

revival and unifying themes. Secondly, an outline of C S Peirce's founding ideas about

doubt and belief, and a key aspect of William James's version of Pragmatism. Thirdly, the

approach to inquiry of Peirce's intellectual successor, Susan Haack, which is relevant to

Midgley's thinking. Fourth, John Dewey's belief in uncertainty as the 'antecedent' of

judgement, and his coupling of practical reason with democratic engagement. Fifth, the

revolutionary social psychology of George Herbert Mead, and pragmatist social theory. In

the Conclusions I will revert to discussing CST's mistaken view of Pragmatism, and the

opportunities missed as a result. Finally, I identify some deficits in Pragmatism and their

implications for developing the arguments in this thesis.

5. 2. ORIGINS AND REVIVAL

The Pragmatist perspective dates back to the classical Sceptics who denied the possibility of

fully apprehending the truth and taught instead that, for purposes of practical action, we

must do the best we can with what we know.

Pragmatism as such was founded by Peirce, who also originated semiotics (the science of

signs and meaning), and was one of the first philosophers to understand probability theory.

He regards strict adherence to deductive logic as a hindrance to actual reasoning, which

relies more on induction.[1] Simply stated, as in a letter to James cited in de Waal (2005: 91),

Peirce's maxim is that "everything is to be tested by its practical results", in the sense of its

general implications for thought and conduct.

Pragmatism had a first brief hey-day during the lifetimes of Peirce (1839-1914), James

(1842-1910), Dewey (1859-1952) and Mead (1863-1931). In Europe there was a tendency to

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[1] Deduction means inferring particular cases from general laws. Induction means inferring general
principles from the evidence of particular cases. Peirce ([1901] 1995a) also distinguishes between
induction and *abduction*, meaning the flash of insight that starts an hypothesis or leads us to prefer one
hypothesis over another without being sure why it is most plausible.

caricature it as the philosophy of American capitalism. However, Americans have had no

monopoly on practice-oriented philosophy, as evidenced by the Marxist notion of praxis

(Rescher, 1995). Indeed, Habermas's thinking is largely a re-working of critical theory

combined with elements of Pragmatism (Ray, 2004).

Tracing the formative years of American Pragmatism, Menand (2001: xi-x) sums up the

attitude to ideas among the early Pragmatists thus:

> "They all believed that ideas are not "out there" waiting to be discovered, but are
>
> tools ... that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves.
>
> They believed that ideas are not produced by individuals, but by groups of
>
> individuals – that ideas are social ... And they believed that since ideas are
>
> provisional responses to particular and unreproducible circumstances, their survival
>
> depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability."

Baert & Turner (2004) give several reasons for a revival of interest in Pragmatism since the

mid-1980s. Whereas the early critical theorists were hostile to Pragmatism – a reaction

which largely missed the point of it, and bypassed, the critique of American society by

Dewey and Mead (Joas, 1993, Festenstein, 1997) – contemporary critical theory is "steeped

in the pragmatic tradition", especially in Habermas's case (Baert and Turner, 2004: 267).

Habermas (1972) draws upon Peirce, while Habermas (1984a, b) relies partly on Mead.

However, there is a problem in that Habermas's quasi-transcendental thesis is constructed

"at the expense of a pragmatic commitment to grounding in embodied agency-in-the-

world" (Ray, 2004: 307). And Joas (1993: 90) criticizes Habermas for "hardly ever" engaging

with Dewey.

Another factor Baert and Turner (2004) identify is renewed interest in Mead, and a growing

realization that there is much more to Mead's work than symbolic interactionism (Joas,

1997; Baldwin, 1986; Aboulafia 1991, 2001). There is also Rorty's (1989) neo-pragmatism,

which some regard as close to being a caricature of Pragmatism (Haack, 1995; Turner, 2004;

de Waal, 2005). And there is renewed interest in Peirce's thinking about the nature of

scientific explanation. I would add that some feminist thinkers (e.g. Benhabib, 1995) lean

towards Pragmatism but are critical of Habermas and/or Rorty, and both Dewey and

Habermas are central to the debate about deliberative democracy (Festenstein, 2004;

Mottier, 2004; Ray, 2004).

5. 3. THEMES AND VARIATIONS

While it is "a restless doctrine" (de Waal, 2005: 175), Pragmatism can be characterised by

four principal claims (Joas, 1993; Ray, 2004). First and foremost, there is the principle that

philosophy rightfully starts from an appreciation that human life "entails the capacity for

reason, common experience and mutual understanding through recognition, interpretation

and action" (Ray, 2004: 307-8). For Peirce, the notion of reality involves that of *community*,

and knowledge is the gradual outcome of a common 'will to learn' (Ray, 2004; de Waal,

2005). Mead went a great deal further in explaining the coupling of self and society.

Secondly, Pragmatism holds that judgements about truth and morality are rightfully

grounded, not in abstract mental processes, but in the intersubjectivity of social practices

and symbolisms, and the unity of thought and action, theory and practice. Thus,

Pragmatism is anti-reductionist and opposes both Cartesian dualism and transcendental

notions of knowledge or truth. Thirdly, Pragmatism views human action as adaptation to

the problematics of specific situations; the actuality of human freedom is constituted

through the creativity of action. Underpinning this is an appreciation of human evolution

and of the concept of emergence. Fourth, Dewey and Mead see intelligent inquiry as a

model for social progress based on principles of democratic engagement and rigorous

debate. As Ray notes (2004: 319), the founding Pragmatists lived at a time of intellectual

faith in the capacity of science to create a better future for humanity.

I will start by outlining Peirce's key ideas, and James's troublesome framing of the

Pragmatist concept of truth.

5. 4. PEIRCE AND JAMES

5. 4. 1. The early Peirce

Peirce's ([1877] 1955b) starting point was the problem of doubt and "the fixation of belief".

Descartes ([1637 & 1641] 1968), searching for something that he could believe with

certainty, found a kind of certainty in doubt: that when he was doubting he could be sure

that was so. Peirce (1955b) rejects the whole idea of trying to build philosophy on that

basis. Instead, he begins with the kind of beliefs that make meaningful inquiry possible. He

also grounds inquiry in the different states of mind that go with doubt and belief – doubt

being an unsatisfactory state from which we struggle to free ourselves and reach the calm

state of belief. This induces us to want to change doubt into belief, and to maintain beliefs

so as to avoid relapsing into doubt. Doubt also spurs us into inquiry; like an itch, it requires

immediate response but once the irritant is gone the urge to scratch ceases. In contrast, beliefs predispose us to act in certain ways: they establish *habits* of action. When habits are disturbed or prove to be inappropriate, the purpose of inquiry is to settle the issue and regain a state of belief, like an organism adapting to environmental change so as to regain equilibrium (Dewey, 1929).

Peirce's perspective on meaning follows from that. If the purpose of inquiry is to establish grounds for belief, and if belief is a habit or disposition to act, then meanings must be understood in terms of how they lead us to act. For Peirce (1955b), what a thing means is the habits of thought and action it induces.

Peirce (1955b) goes on to examine different approaches to finding trustworthy terms for settling beliefs. While finding both fault and merit in certain approaches, the one he holds in highest esteem is the scientific method, which Peirce views as fixing beliefs according to our best understanding of natural realities. For him, science is a process of approximations to truth that can eventually yield the right answers if approached by means of genuine inquiry — but he is not suggesting that the scientific approach should replace all others.

Peirce's next step is the influential paper, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' ([1878] 1955c), where he proposes the pragmatic maxim, which Hookway (1995: 649) describes as "a rule for clarifying the content of concepts and hypotheses". The initial formulation of Peirce's maxim (1955c: 31) is rather convoluted, so I will paraphrase it as: our conception of something is wholly a matter of whatever "practical bearings" we think its effects may have. It is important to note that, for Peirce (1955c, d), the practical bearings of a concept or

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proposition refer to its *general* implications for habits of belief and conduct, not merely the *particular* effects for any individual. What matters (Peirce, [1906] 1955e) is the difference an idea ought to make to actual conduct, as a result of reasoning rather than 'pure' speculation. Peirce's maxim puts meaning directly at the centre of inquiry instead of treating it as an abstraction.

Peirce ([1878] 1955c) also contains a hostage to fortune. Instead of directly tackling the notion of truth, he applies the pragmatic maxim to the notion of reality, and argues that the settled opinion "to be ultimately agreed by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth", and corresponds with "the real" (ibid: 38). This notion of truth as settled opinion has been heavily criticized (e.g. Rorty, 1989). Elsewhere, Peirce proposes a view of truth that is more in keeping with critical common-sense, arguing that "the fact that I try to find the truth in respect to each doubt that presents itself involves no assumption on my part that there is any real truth about all questions" (de Waal, 2005: 26, citing Robin, 1964). Critical common-sense is an approach to practical philosophy that combines respect for common-sense with an expectation that its beliefs are open to critical revision (Peirce [1905] 1955f; Bertilsson, 2004).

5. 4. 2. James's version of the Pragmatist concept of truth

While Peirce had offered a hostage to fortune, James framed the pragmatic concept of truth in terms from which Pragmatism still struggles to escape. In *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, James ([1907] 1975: 97) puts the Pragmatist 'question' as: "what concrete difference" will the truth of an idea or belief "make in anyone's actual life ... What,

in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?" He goes on to argue that truth is not an inherent property of an idea but something that *happens to* an idea: it becomes verified (or not) by its practical consequences. "The practical value of true ideas is thus primarily derived from the practical importance of their objects to us" (ibid: 98). Moreover, "Truth grafts itself on previous truth, modifying it in the process" (ibid: 116). James is not talking about an unfolding of eternal Truth, but of pluralistic partial-truths, and of them being made, not revealed: "Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural ... and having only this quality in common, that they *pay* ... Truth is *made* [by verification-processes], just as health, wealth and strength are made in the course of experience " (ibid: 104, original italics). And James (ibid: 100) describes truth as living mostly "on a credit system" which for most intents and purposes allows us to accept and "trade on" each other's verification of things until something challenges our thoughts and beliefs and new approximations of truth get made.

While talking about truth in terms like these was bound to fuel animosity among conventional philosophers, James (ibid: 106, original emphasis) recklessly goes on to link truth and expediency in terms that have facilitated the caricaturing of Pragmatism:

> " *'The true', to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving.* Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of the course, for ... Experience, as we know, has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas."

This led to Pragmatism being depicted as assuming that something is right and true when its effects are good (e.g. Russell, [1946] 2004: 768). That is not what James actually says, nor what he means (Putnam, 1995), and it ignores the context in which his ill-judged statement

is made. The context is an argument against the 'rationalist' abstraction of 'truth' as having nothing to do with "*our practical interests or personal reasons*" (James, 1975: 109, original emphasis). James is polemically countering such abstraction because it is "used [by rationalist philosophers] to oppose and negate what it is abstracted from" (ibid: 109), i.e. the relevance of concrete experience to our under-standing of truth. Moreover, in *The Meaning of Truth*, James ([1909] 1975) restates his view of truth in more careful terms, and rebuts some misunderstandings of Pragamatism.

In fact, James's version of Pragmatism represents a fusion of Peirce's maxim with theories that James himself held independent of Pragmatism. These include James's ([1896] 1977) argument that we sometimes have the 'right to believe' in what we think will be for the best, particularly in regard to questions of law or morality that cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, but call for "the purely judging mind" (ibid: 729). Haack (1995: 202) cites him as distinguishing this view from Pragmatism. James (1975: 172) also distinguishes between Pragmatism and his own radical empiricism – the view that there is no reality apart from that directly experienced.

5. 4. 3. The later Peirce

Partly in resistance to James's tendency to broaden its scope, the later Peirce ([1902-5] 1955d; [1906] 1955e: 272) strove to define Pragmatism more strictly as "a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of what I call "intellectual concepts" [upon which] arguments concerning objective fact may hinge". For Peirce (1955g: 73), the "discourse of reason" is needed precisely in order to "grind off the arbitrary and

individualistic character of thought", and its crucial features are that it is *critical*, that it is

relational (going beyond the mere fact of things or individual views) and that it is *adaptive* (in

terms of the habits of thinking it instils). This ties in with his commitment to *critical*

common-sense (Peirce [1905] 1955f). Peirce's successor, Haack, carries forward that

commitment. Her approach to epistemology chimes with Midgley's view of knowledge, but

goes further in setting out its relation to experience and in tying this in with the nature of

judgement.

5. 5. HAACK'S APPROACH TO EVIDENCE AND INQUIRY

5. 5. 1. The issues

In *Evidence and Inquiry*, Haack (1995: 1) tackles the questions: "What counts as good, strong,

supportive evidence for a belief?", and "What is the connection between a belief being well-

supported by good evidence and the likelihood that it is true?". The first is a matter of

explication, the second one of ratification.

In regard to explication, Haack tries to steer a course between the classic theories of

justification – foundationalism and coherentism – to stake out an intermediate position

which she calls 'foundherentism'. Here, foundationalism refers not to knowledge-theory but

to theories of justification involving two categories of belief: (a) basic beliefs that have a

'factual' status that enables them to stand independent of other beliefs, and (b) derived

beliefs which are justified by basic beliefs. In contrast, for coherentists a belief is justified by

virtue of how it is coherent with other beliefs. So, for coherentists justification is about

mutual support among beliefs, whereas for foundationalists basic beliefs are infallible and their justification is in no way dependent upon derived beliefs (i.e. the relationship is one-directional).

For Haack, neither of these will do, because neither takes *adequate* account of the relevance of experience to justification. Coherentism sidelines experience, requires a degree of consistency between beliefs which is too much to ask, and privileges consistency over the possibility that mutually-supportive beliefs might be seriously mistaken. Foundationalism allows (in principle) for experience but the requirement for basic beliefs to be infallible severely limits the possibilities, results in abstractions, and further removes belief from experience by making derived beliefs conditional on basic ones. Fortunately, neither theory exhausts the options. Haack's intermediate approach is meant to allow for the relevance of experience to justification without privileging empirical beliefs independently of other beliefs. She describes foundherentism as having (approximately) this double aspect:

> "(FH1) A subject's experience is relevant to the justification of [their] empirical
>
> beliefs, but there need be no privileged class of empirical beliefs justified
>
> exclusively by the support of experience, independently of the support of other
>
> beliefs; and:
>
> (FH2) Justification is not exclusively one-directional, but involves pervasive
>
> relations of mutual support." (Haack, 1995: 19)

Two things are immediately apparent: that this approach takes account of personal experience rather than discounting or abstracting it; and since beliefs are justified partly by experience and partly by other beliefs, this is about degrees of justification rather than

categorical conclusiveness. It is "gradational" (ibid: 20): someone is more or less justified in believing a proposition depending on such-and-such. So it is not only a matter of *what* one believes, but *how* one comes to believe it.

These niceties matter for three reasons, all to do with critical common-sense. First, Haack's approach puts common-sense reasoning about justification on an equal footing with other theoretical positions, including other alternatives to foundationalism and coherentism which Haack submits to fine-grained analysis. Alternatives she considers include reliabilism, contextualism, and Rorty's 'conversational' notion of justification. She finds fault with *reliabilism* because it locates justification in the reliability of criteria that are extrinsic to the individual. This sidelines personal awareness and accords objective status to the criteria used to test justification. *Contextualism* defines justification in terms of conformity to the standards of some epistemic community. Within the epistemic community this does away with the need for justification and leads in short order to the thesis that epistemic standards are merely conventional, undermining the prospect of ratifying the truth-indicativeness of the beliefs held. This links to *Rorty's position*. In regard to justification of belief, Rorty (1979: 308) sets up a dichotomy between Kantian transcendental realism and homespun irrealism – the use of 'true' to mean "what you can defend against all comers" – and then concludes that we should accept that there is nothing more to justification than cultural conventions and "conversational" practices. Along with this goes the assertion that differing worldviews are incommensurable. Haack (1995: 188) describes Rorty's dichotomy as "a stunningly untenable dualism" and characterizes his position as not only relativist but cynical:

"because if one really believed that criteria of justification are purely conventional,

wholly without objective grounding, then, though one might conform to the justificatory practices of one's own epistemic community, one would be obliged to adopt an attitude of cynicism towards them, to think of justification always in covert scare quotes" (ibid: 192).

Haack's own position is relatively modest. She freely acknowledges (ibid: 74) that her theory needs improvement and sets out not to prove that our beliefs must be true, but to ground the idea that inquiry can be truth-indicative, not truth-guaranteeing. Secondly, foundherentism reflects the social nature of inquiry processes, in contrast to abstract or atomistic conceptions of reasoning and justification. Thirdly, in the long run the social dimension provides some safeguard against personal bias and cultural convention. In regard to culture, Haack argues that whereas there are good arguments for pluralism in regard to methods of conducting inquiry, the "thesis that different cultures or communities have widely divergent *standards of evidence* [in regard to what constitutes justified belief] is at least an exaggeration, and possibly altogether false" (ibid: 6, my emphasis).

As Midgley points out (personal communication), this line of thinking could smuggle in coherentism by the back door because, if one can talk of better evidence or worse, "then this judgement must be based on either a firm foundation (which Haack clearly disputes) or cultural norms". I am not sure it has to come down to one or the other, and I think Haack's crossword analogy of justification (explained below) helps to resolve the issue by throwing light on the situational nature of judgement vis-à-vis the quality of evidence.

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5. 5. 2. The crossword analogy

The gradational character of justification is confirmed by considering what we mean when we speak about someone 'having some justification for thinking that ...', or that such-and-such 'gives credence to the idea that ...', whereas 'the evidence for X is quite strong/flimsy/at best one-sided', the grounds for believing Y are 'reasonable/quite reasonable/overwhelming'. Justification for the *content* of a belief (as distinct from a perceptual *state* of belief) is a matter of how good the evidence is considered to be. The traditional model of proof is mathematical (or aspires to be), but for most intents and purposes mathematical reasoning is not applicable to evidence in matters of inquiry.

A better model, Haack suggests, is how one goes about determining the reasonableness of prospective entries in a crossword puzzle. In that context, confidence that a certain entry is correct depends upon factors such as: "how much support is given to this entry by the clue and any intersecting entries that have already been filled in; how reasonable, independently of the entry in question, one's confidence is that those other already filled-in entries are correct; and how many of the intersecting entries have been filled in", and so on (Haack, 1995: 82).

This shows the interplay between the two precepts of foundherentism: "FH1 is represented by the relation of the entry to its clue, while FH2 is represented by the relation of an entry to other entries, some of which are already filled in, while others are still blank" (de Waal, 2005: 167). So, the analogy allows for varying degrees of support and conclusiveness, and

for favouring a possible answer *not* because it is conclusive but because it fits the available evidence *and* leaves less room for rival possibilities.

The particular strength of the crossword model, therefore, is that it allows for mutual support and for explanatory integration without lapsing into vicious circles. It explains the interconnectedness of facts, and allows for things that can only be settled by a sophisticated relation between logical analysis and experience. It even allows, at a stretch, for Kuhnian-type paradigm shifts – the abandoning of settled ideas and the ripple effect caused by changing one's mind about key entries in the light of fresh evidence (ibid).

5. 5. 3. Ratification - justification and truth

For Haack, like Peirce, good inquiry is primarily a matter of the right attitude, and without some bearing on truth it can have little value. She does not deal with ought-focused inquiry, except tangentally by describing the goal of inquiry as having two dimensions, roughly equivalent to interest-orientation and truth-orientation, the latter being the focus of her argument. (Haack, 1995: 199, her italics) describes truth as not so much "*the* goal", but rather as "*an aspect of the goal*" of inquiry, and goes on to say: "If you aren't trying to find out how things are, to get truth, you aren't really inquiring" – as political pseudo-inquiry demonstrates.

This brings us back to the second of Haack's starting points. Having probed what counts as strong evidence for a belief (i.e. explication), she asks what the connection is between a

belief being well-supported and the likelihood that it is true (i.e. ratification), and how this applies to foundherentism.

The way Haack approaches the question of whether foundherentism is truth-indicative reflects how she has tackled the issue in relation to rival theories, so it can be used to sum up her approach to ratification in general. Her baseline is that the goal of inquiry, broadly, is "substantial, significant truths"; therefore, in regard to explication and ratification, criteria of justification have to be truth-indicative to be good (ibid: 205). As she sees it, the question of ratification – connecting justification to truth – is too often waylaid by theorists (such as Rorty) who set the standards of truth so high that they are then shown to be unattainable, or by those who deny the notion of truth altogether. For herself, Haack does not aim at proof, nor any guarantee of truth, "but only to give reasons for thinking that, if any truth-indication is possible for us, the foundherentist criteria are truth-indicative" (ibid: 205).

Haack's belief that some degree of truth is possible rests partly on what we can say with reasonable assurance about certain human capacities, i.e. capacities of *all* humans. Specifically, there is the capacity for inquiry, for figuring things out, which Haack regards as the evolutionary advantage that humans have in comparison with other animals. We can say with assurance that experience (both sensory and introspective) is a source of empirical information, and that it is the only ultimate source of such information (ibid: 218). We also know that although we soon learn that we cannot always trust our senses, it is natural for us to trust them *prima facie*. If that were not the case, inquiry as we know it would be utterly pointless. And just as we can be mistaken about anything, it is unlikely that we are mistaken about everything.

Alongside this naturalistic, but nuanced, approach to ratification, Haack runs an argument about completeness of justification. The gist of it is that, for most intents and purposes, complete justification is simply beyond us: "I don't claim that anyone is more than very rarely, if ever, COMPLETELY justified in believing anything, nor that *complete* justification is any guarantee of truth" (ibid: 219; original emphases). Yet, it is implausible to claim that we are wrong about everything we perceive. Again, evolutionary considerations suggest that we can reasonably expect to have at least a minimal competence in relation to matters most closely linked to the conditions of survival (ibid: 220). At another level, this minimal capacity for approximate explanation and gradual correction is the basis of science.

The two approaches to ratification coalesce on the point that "justification is not categorical but comes in degrees" (ibid: 222), and it is by this light that Haack claims the foundherentist criteria to be more truth-indicative than foundationalism or coherentism, if only to a "relatively modest degree" (ibid). She sums up her approach to epistemology in terms that chime with Midgley (2000):

> "Epistemology, as I conceive it, and its meta-theory, are integral parts of a whole web of theories about the world and ourselves, not underpinning but intermeshing with other parts. Standards of evidence are not hopelessly culture-bound, though judgments of justification are always perspectival. And we can have, not proof that our criteria of justification are truth-guaranteeing, but reasons for thinking that, if any truth-indication is available to us, they are truth-indicative; reasons no less fallible than those parts of our theories about the world and ourselves with which they interlock, but no more so, either." (Haack, 1995: 222)

In short, though we should not aspire to certitude beyond human fallibility, neither should we surrender to conventionalism and tribalism; we must settle for less assurance, but need not give up the "quest or hope of truth itself" (ibid: 222).

5. 5. 4. Haack and Popper

It could be argued that Haack's position, as outlined above, is very similar to Popper's (1972) 'critical fallibilism', according to which certainty is impossible and the continual questioning of assumptions (together with peer review by a community of scientists) is the only means we have to refine knowledge, yet this questioning should be guided by the *ideal* of truth, even though fallibility makes *absolute* truth unattainable.

Haack (1995: 96-102) distinguishes her position from Popper's on three main grounds. First, Popper was preoccupied with demarcating science from non-science, and his focus is on 'objective' scientific rationality (as he defines it), whereas Haack's focus is on empirical knowledge generally and she rejects the notion of purely scientific rationality. Second, Popper tries to separate experience from justification for belief. Even though his case relies upon the notion of 'basic statements' about observed events, and he accepts that "the decision to accept a basic statement ... is causally connected with our experiences", nevertheless Popper (1959: 105) claims that "a basic statement cannot be justified by them" (i.e. by the experiences that motivated the decision to accept the observational proposition). For Haack (1995: 99), it is "simply incredible" to argue that psychology plays no part in how experience relates to 'basic statements', and Popper stretches incredulity even further by

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arguing that this holds despite his view that scientific rationality rests upon the conventions of the scientific community. It is this kind of thinking that enables him to promulgate the notion of "epistemology without a knowing subject" (Popper, 1972) and his "allegiance to an evolutionary epistemology couched, not in terms of the evolution of human beings and their cognitive capacities, but of the evolution of theories and problem-situations" (Haack, 1995: 101).

Finally, there is Popper's (1966) view that science should be free from moral and subjective concerns, so the pursuit of truth is divorced from political interests. For Haack (1995: 156), the scientistic argument misses the point that psychological questions can also be philosophical, and flies in the face of the inherent continuity of science and philosophy which animates all genuine inquiry. For Midgley (2000: 25), pure knowledge is not only unattainable but also blinds us to the ways in which power affects the construction of 'truths' and prevents us from appreciating alternative views.

In sum, Haack's position is much closer to Midgley's than to Popper's. Her belief that genuine inquiry must be partly animated by a search for 'truth' complements Midgley's view that truths are always contextual, and contestable through debate over evidence. In addition, Haack's differences with Popper also serve to underscore her affinities with the other main stream of Pragmatism, represented by Dewey and Mead.

5. 6. DEWEY: UNCERTAINTY AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

5. 6. 1. Uncertainity as the antecedent of judgement

Two convictions powered Dewey's thinking: a strong belief in the human capacity to work

things out, and belief that the paradigm of knowledge-acquisition is not the detached

contemplation of Rodin's *Thinker* but that of action in concrete but indeterminate

circumstances that demand a concrete response (Dewey [1910] 1997a , [1920] 1950, 1929).

Both are rooted in his belief that "uncertainty [is] the antecedent of judgment" (Dewey,

1997a: 102) and that it is emancipatory because it calls for intelligent being in the world.

Dewey prefers to call a situation 'indeterminate' rather than 'problematic' because, for

him, it is *inquiry* that produces problems, and it is the indeterminacy of the situation that

provokes doubt and prompts inquiry.[2] An indeterminate situation emerges when

something is seriously wrong and we experience conflicting motives, yet have to proceed

somehow. This chimes with Peirce's doubt-belief theory. However, Dewey frames the issue

more naturalistically by relating human doubt and belief to how organisms seek to maintain

equilibrium in response to environmental change. This puts human behaviour on a

continuum with that of other animals, and is part of Dewey's ([1920] 1950, 1929) non-

dualist conception of body-mind. He distinguishes firmly between the indeterminacy of the

situation and the mental state of doubt. Inquiry is about applying intelligence to try to

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[2] The operative term here refers to Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, which Dewey (1929: 201-5) deploys against the 'spectator' theory of knowledge. On somewhat similar lines, Revans (1978, 1998) makes a distinction between 'puzzles', for which solutions exist already, even if they are hard to find, and 'problems' which are indeterminate and therefore offer opportunities for learning, with learning and action being all of a piece. Revans' concept of action learning is akin to Dewey's notion of experimental inquiry.

resolve the conditions that make the situation indeterminate. So the most important aspect

of inquiry is the quality of response to the situation and the environmental context, and this

counts for more than any personal benefit from resolving a problem (Dewey, 1929).

Dewey ([1925] 1997b) sometimes uses the term 'instrumental' as a label for the means by

which we develop knowledge through inquiry, as distinct from the practical value of the

things known. This positive instrumentalism contrasts, therefore, with the way Habermas

associates instrumental thinking (concerned only with the means to get to a pre-determined

end) with systematic distortion of communication. Like Peirce, Dewey's model of inquiry is

experimental science. He rejects the primacy of abstract rationalism, but not the capacity for

it:

> "Abstract thinking ... represents *an* end, not *the* end. The power of sustained
>
> thinking on matters remote from direct use is an outgrowth of practical and
>
> immediate modes of thought, but not a substitute for them ... Nor is
>
> theoretical thinking a higher type of thinking than practical. A person who has
>
> at command both types of thinking is of a higher order than he who possesses
>
> only one." (Dewey, [1910] 1997a: 142, original italics)

Like James, Dewey recognizes the role of emotion in deliberating conflicting preferences,

and he shifts the focus from rationalism to reasonableness, which he sees as "a quality of an

effective relationship among desires rather than a thing opposed to desire" (Dewey, [1922]

2002: 194). In similar vein, Toulmin (2001) identifies an institutionalized imbalance in

applying reason to human affairs between formal rationality as the demand for correct

answers to questions of theory, and reasonableness as respect for honest disagreements about matters of practice.

At the same time, Dewey denies that Pragmatism subordinates knowledge to the achieving of desirable practical outcomes. The point, rather, is to avoid separating knowledge from other aspects of human nature. "The isolation of intellectual disposition from concrete empirical facts of biological impulse and habit-formation entails a denial of the continuity of the mind with nature" (Dewey, [1922] 2002: 186). And Dewey emphatically rejects the Jamesian idea that truth is related to whether a belief is beneficial. Rather, truth and belief relate to what may be a 'warranted' judgement or assertion in regard to the indeterminate situation and environmental context. This judicial notion of 'warranted assertibility' makes belief a matter of inquiry. As de Waal (2005: 123, citing Dewey, 1925-53, 14: 169) puts it:

> "What we should be on the lookout for, Dewey observes, are "the *conditions* under which we reach warranted assertibility about particular matters of fact" ... Hence, the notion of warranted assertibility has much to do with having the (procedural) right to assert something (e.g. to propose something as true or false), where these rights are themselves an intrinsic part of the procedure in question."

Clearly a forerunner to Habermas's conception of communicative ethics, this points to the close relation between Dewey's concept of inquiry and his views on democracy.

5. 6. 2. Democratic engagement

For Dewey, the exercise of practical judgement and democratic participation are both intimately connected with personal development and autonomy. Underpinning this is "a teleological conception of human self-development as intrinsically social and cooperative which is held to support and clarify the requirements of morality" (Festenstein, 1997: 12). Dewey's combination of psycho-social, moral and aesthetic theories frame an account of positive freedom as the expression of a disciplined and creative individuality that relates self-development to collective development. He rejects *laissez faire* liberalism, with its opposition of individual and society and its exclusion of concerted social action (Dewey, [1935] 1963). Contrary to his portrayal as a standard-bearer for US democracy, he is sharply critical of free-booting capitalism and calls for "unified action for the inclusive end of a socialized economy" (ibid: 91) – on the British socialist model as he then understood it, not revolutionary lines (Festenstein, 1997). This ties in with how he views the evolution of modern societies.

In his analysis of *Pragmatism and Political Theory* – comparing Dewey with Rorty, Habermas and Putman – Festenstein (1997: 11) argues that while Dewey's theory of liberal democracy "rests upon an account of ethics which is more plausible than many of his critics recognise (where they notice it at all), it also involves assumptions which are more problematic than many of his supporters would like". The contentious assumptions are: the epistemic claim that the virtues of inquiry are to some extent constitutive of a wider conception of human flourishing; the claim that one's growth is hampered or warped if it takes place at another's

expense; and the claim that the proper exercise of practical intelligence/judgement must be informed by a substantive consideration of the interests of others (Festenstein, 1997, 2004).

The nub of the issue is the assumption of a reciprocal relationship between human flourishing and an intrinsic interest in practical reason. I will take up Festenstein's (1997) analysis at the point where he compares Deweyan democracy with Putnam's vision of it as a community of respect for free moral thought, and with Habermas's perspective.

5. 6. 3. Democratic morality?

Putnam's claim is different to Habermas's. Whereas Habermas grounds the exercise of practical reason in the presumption of a universal commitment to free communication – thereby connecting my interest with everyone else's – Putnam (1987: 51) bases his notion of human flourishing in the 'internal reason' of the 'moral image', something that is not a prescription for what constitutes virtue, but "is rather a [mental] picture of how our virtues and ideals hang together with one another and of what they have to do with the position we are in". This is tied in with a Kantian view of the ideal community as one where equal respect and the capacity for free moral thinking are mutually reinforcing. As Festenstein points out (1997: 178), this begs the question of "what grip, if any, his moral image is meant to have for those who are inclined to believe or act differently", including those inclined to curb the freedom to exercise moral agency. Hence, Putnam's notion of a fundamental interest in free moral thought entails an idealization of practical reason, so it runs into the same kind of problems Habermas (1972) has in trying to establish a universal interest in emancipation. According to Festenstein, Putnam (like Dewey) links his notion of morality

to the claim that democracy is the most appropriate socio-political context for human flourishing, because it reflects the human capacity for intelligent deliberation, action and experimentation, and without prescribing How We Should Live allows communities to determine their own interests.

Among the problems with this that Festenstein (1997) identifies, and the one that seems best to illuminate Dewey's political thinking, is the problematic linkage between the claimed interest in free moral thinking and the practical exercise of democratic processes (which Festenstein takes to be majoritarian). As Festenstein asks, why should free debate produce decisions that reflect my particular interest, and why should majority decisions over-ride my own moral freedom? Moreover, "why should I not forgo democratic participation in order to pursue other forms of social and political action which may be less cooperative but more likely to achieve my ends?" (ibid: 181).

A crucial feature of Dewey's conception is the argument (Dewey, [1935] 1963) that democratic engagement shapes and transforms our understanding of our interests. This has to be viewed against other important elements of his thinking. First, unlike Putnam, Dewey does not suggest that we are unaware of our interests until we engage in democratic debate. For Dewey, rather, it is through such debate that our view of our own interests is unfixed and transformed by coming to appreciate how our interests can be reframed to be compatible with others'. Secondly, Dewey's account of positive freedom relates self-development to the reflexivity and moral constraints that go with uncertainty. Thus, an interest in shaping our social environment is an aspect of individual autonomy. Thirdly, Dewey argues that the distinguishing feature of democracy lies in the positive potential of

the communicative processes that can yield such shapings, transformations and ethically acceptable collective decisions. The integrating factor in all this is the spirit of agency through inquiry and participation in social evolution, neither of which can be taken for granted but necessitate the exercise of critical reasonableness. This chimes with Churchman's (1968a) *Challenge to Reason*, and with Vickers' (1972) vision of the appreciative society.

5. 7. SHARPENING THE FOCUS

Festenstein (1997: 190) concludes that Pragmatist political thinking has been "bound up in contentious moral hopes". What follows is my own gloss on how he develops the point. Dewey's vision of engaged democracy depends upon the naturalistic assumptions he makes, yet how agents actually exercise practical reason remains obscure. Habermas's concept of ethical discourse (further discussed in chapter 7) relies upon labyrinthine reasoning that ends up converting a communicative predisposition into conditions of debate that allegedly can produce an entirely voluntary but binding consensus on the most difficult moral issues – agreement achieved by subsuming differences into a 'generalizable interest' that allegedly corresponds with what is universally right. This argument relies on the suggestion that *moral* discourse applies only to a narrow range of disputed questions, and that these are ones where participants will feel compelled to settle the issue by consensual means (Habermas, 1996: 103). This in turn relies on a dubious distinction between *ethical* questions for specific communities or individuals (and can be settled on fair terms), and *moral* questions concerning what is right for all human beings (ibid & Habermas, 1998). As well as

endorsing another dichotomy, this implies a lessening of moral agency that seems quite at variance with the thrust of Habermas's whole argument.

As will be seen in chapter 8, Benhabib's (1992) reconstruction of Habermas's case also ends up stretching credulity. Putnam's (1987) quite arbitary notion of 'internal reasoning' guided by a 'moral image' of how 'our virtues and ideals hang together' could be a charter for Rorty's (1998) 'ethnocentric' society and is no more likely to look beyond its own ideological boundaries.

Considering these various positions, the question has to be asked: does this strand of Pragmatism have its feet on the ground at all? In other words, can the vision of open-minded discourse be brought more into line with the reality of diverse worldviews and competing notions of practical reasoning?

I suggest that to some extent the answer lies in focusing Pragmatism more clearly as *a frame of inquiry into matters of value-judgement*. Indeed, that has been its guiding spirit from the outset, notwithstanding the later Peirce's resistance to applying Pragmatism to moral issues. Our greatest need today, perhaps, is to build capacity for moral agency that can cope with substantial differences in worldviews, values, and approaches to practical reason. I believe that Pragmatism can make an important contribution to this, but its potential impact is linked to how successfully it avoids ideological commitments that cut across its value as an approach to inquiry. Similarly, it must avoid slipping into abstraction by losing the grounding that is its greatest strength. The point is to forgo attempts at constructing a

paradigm of discourse and instead accentuate the adaptive purpose that animates inquiry and show how this relates to complex issues.

To tease this out further, I will relate it back to Festenstein's critique of Dewey's naturalistic assumptions and Habermas's similar inclinations. As Festenstein (1997: 188-9) observes, Habermas seems to break with the notion that morality derives from a principle of human flourishing and to plump instead for grounding morality in critical reflexivity. This generates dichotomies – between instrumental and communicative reason, and between morality and ethics – of exactly the kind that Dewey rejects. However, the naturalistic impulse reasserts itself when it comes to establishing the normative commitment to discourse, which Habermas, like Dewey, grounds in the functional role its norms serve for moral agency in modern times. In Festenstein's view, although this emphasis on human nature is not the *only* basis on which Pragmatist moral reflexivity can be grounded, nevertheless it has a good claim to being the *strongest*:

> "Unlike Habermas's quasi-transcendental argument for practical discourse, it is capable of explaining why people with their particular interests and commitments would have a central interest in communicative relations, and why it is a morally significant fact. And it is capable of removing the appearance of arbitrariness from Putnam's moral image" (ibid: 188).

However, there still is the challenge to develop a conception of human nature that bolsters these requirements without making undue assumptions or relying on circular arguments, and then relating this convincingly to moral disputes in practice. My suggestion is that focusing Pragmatism more sharply as a frame of inquiry into matters of value goes part of

the way towards doing this because it emphasizes the concrete connection between the contingency of the issues and the purpose of inquiry. The difference relates to how that affects one's sense of what an inquiry is meant to achieve. This goes back to Dewey's point that it is the indeterminacy of the situation that generates the doubt that is the well-spring of adaptive behaviour. The usefulness of *a priori* conceptions of ideal discourse is likely to be in inverse proportion to the indeterminacy of the situation. In other words, the greater the actual complexity, the stronger the need to focus inquiry on appreciating that complexity.

In chapter 8 I develop a concept of 'agency amidst complexity' that goes some way towards meeting the challenge just mentioned. It is grounded in a notion of 'active being in the world' that has close affinities with Mead's view of human nature. I will turn now to Mead's remarkable but widely misunderstood contribution.

5. 8. MEAD AND THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ACTION

5. 8. 1. Significance of Mead's work

In the Preface to his book on Mead, Joas (1997) refers to "considerable voids" in scholarship about Pragmatism. The position regarding Mead himself is even more complex. He is recognized as one of the founders of social psychology, but even in that regard his revolutionary contribution is "greatly undervalued and widely misunderstood" (Burkitt, 1991: 25), mainly because its basis in his philosophical work is little known. Joas (1997) corrects misinterpretations by Habermas, among others.

Mead's reputation derives mostly from the posthumous *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, [1934] 1967). In fact (ibid: vi), the book is an edited amalgam of incomplete records of lectures and unpublished manuscripts. Doubts about reliability start with the subtitle, which attributes to Mead "the standpoint of a social behaviourist", but the editor (ibid: xvi) admits that Mead never described himself as such. Nevertheless, the book is the basis of Mead's reputation as the originator of a theory of the social formation of self which embraces the reflective and reflexive nature of the self; the importance of language, symbols and communication in human interaction; the ways in which our words and gestures bring forth responses in others through role-taking; and the central notion of the 'social act'. Mead (1967: 7; 1980: 180-1) defines a 'social act' in terms of co-operative attunement of behaviour, the objective of which is found "in the life-process of the group", not in separate individuals. Within the overall scheme of his thinking, this extends the meaning of interaction to include role-interaction, thereby bringing in time and social structure as socializing factors.

The radical significance of Mead's work tends to be overwhelmed by association with Blumer's (1969) theory of symbolic interaction (which focuses on the emergence of meanings through interaction), athough Blumer's view of this is different to Mead's (Joas, 1997). In any case, Mead's thinking ranged much further, taking in the need to overcome Cartesian dualisms, the epistemology of experience, relativity theory and the social construction of time, and anticipated developments in sociobiology and complexity theory through his emphasis on evolution and emergence.

Joas (1997: 33, original italics) identifies three main themes in Mead's work: "*confidence in the emancipatory prospects of scientific rationality; a striving to root 'mind' or 'spirit' in the organism; and the attempt to elaborate a theory of intersubjectivity that would conceive of the self as socially originated*". To this should be added a developmental conception of both self and society. Integrating these themes is a view of creative intelligence in action which has radical implications.

5. 8. 2. Mead's concept of action

Joas (1997: 247-8) argues that American Pragmatism is an "entirely original and autonomous way of interpreting the creativity of action". The essential breakthrough is the linkage made between evolutionary adaptation and action as the creative solution of problems by experimenting intelligence. For Mead in particular, it is the relation between *embodied action* and *consciousness* that makes for the decisive shift in his thinking.[3]

Mead's view of the creativity of human intelligence is rooted in an understanding of evolutionary theory. Thus, for Mead (1980: 27-8), human nature is a part of, not apart from, emergence in nature: "human experiences are as much a part of this world as are any of its other characteristics, and the world is a different world because of these experiences". Together with his view of how each new experience causes us to reconstruct previous experiences (ibid: 23-4), this is how Mead grounds his conception of emergent consciousness (ibid: 68-90; 184-195).

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[3] Gillespie (2005) recognizes this too. The crucial shift in Mead's thinking gets a bit lost in Gillespie's account, whereas Joas's (1993) is more convincing.

Mead's concept of action completely alters the meaning of intentionality in normal circumstances. Action is no longer understood as the realization of ends set beforehand. Rather, action is related to perception and cognitive impulses, and ends are diffusely related to emergent possibilities that are 'played through' in the imagination. Moreover, a course of action is seldom set once and for all; most of the time it is like a working hypothesis, subject to continual revision. Time and again, Mead (1967: 150-164, 364-5; 1980: 185-6) and Dewey (1997a: 217-220; 1980) draw upon children's play and art to explain this relation of action to experimentation. In this view of things, goal-directed action certainly is possible; it is just not the main standpoint for understanding human action.

Not only does Mead's shift in perspective go beyond the relatively simple notions of rational action and normative obligation, or even their interplay, Joas (1993) contends that Mead's model of action can only be fully understood as part of a comprehensive reconstruction of the relation between autonomous embodied action and sociality.

The following passage shows how Joas develops the point and indicates the range and depth of the work that Mead brings to bear on this reconstruction.

"The theory of the individual's sociality that is elaborated in Mead's theory of the self, of communication, and of self-reflection shows then that the interrelation among individual human beings does not consist only of interconnection of their utility-oriented actions or in normative consensus. From the standpoint of the [Pragmatist] theory of action, the conditions of the autonomy of rational actors are thereby illuminated. Beyond that, Mead's theory of the constitution of the body image, of the physical object, and of subjective temporality provide clarification of

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the conditions for the givenness of the body for the actor, while his theories of the psychical and of creativity show what the conditions of goal-directed action are." (Joas, 1993: 250-1)

This ties in with Mead's understanding of human nature as part of an ecology of emergence (my terminology), and of intelligent consciousness as "both the difference which arises in the environment because of its relation to the organism in its organic process of adjustment, and also the difference in the organism because of the change which has taken place in the environment" (Mead, 1980: 4). This, in turn, ties in with what Mead (ibid: 47) calls "the social nature of the present". Here the term 'social' has a double meaning. It refers to processes of adjustment between old and new states of being and of continuity between past and present – "the passage in emergence" when an organism carries the character of both old and new at once (ibid: 76). It also refers to the sociality by which members of a system or society affect each other's nature (ibid: 79-80).

5. 9. CRITIQUE OF PRAGMATIST SOCIO-POLITICAL THEORY

Joas sums up the significance of Pragmatist social theory, as developed by Mead and Dewey, in terms that are subtle but hard to beat.

> "In sociology, the distinction between a creative sociality and normativity makes it possible to conceive of society not just as an agency of restraint, of compulsion, or of obligation in relation to the individual, but to conceive of it also as a source of inspiration, of an expansion of the self, and of a liberation

and intensification of hidden personal energies. This distinction makes it possible to grasp the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and of the intrapersonal relation to internalized norms and socialized drives. Human action is neither the realization of norms nor the fulfillment of drives: the individual is engaged in a continuous process of drawing boundaries and of opening them vis-à-vis other individuals and the collectivities with which he is associated. Out of this "magma" of sociality[4] ... there arise, by means of creative accomplishments of human action, the norms, values, cultural works, and institutions that are accepted and operative in a given society." (Joas, 1993: 255)

However, the conflictual dimensions of sociality are barely discernible here. Mead's own consideration of them was quite inadequate, reflecting a belief that greater communication would overcome hostility arising from inequalities, prejudice or nationalism (Burkitt, 1991: 51-2). As Burkitt points out, Mead's failure to deal with power relations leaves him unable "to begin to consider" (ibid: 52) how social divisions and inequalities impact on the formation of self. Citing Roberts (1977), Burkitt (1991: 52) also charges that Mead's concept of the 'generalized other' plays down the internalization of social conflict within personality. To the extent that society is in conflict, the generalized values that we psychically appropriate to steer our conduct must also be contradictory to some degree. Moreover, Burkitt suggests (ibid: 52-3) that the absence in Mead's thinking (or in Dewey's, for that matter) of any notion of the repressed unconscious reflects a failure to take account of

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[4] Castoriadis (1987) uses the term 'magma' for the irreducible complexity of social being.

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internal conflict.[5] In other words, the Pragmatist theory of the self has a blind spot in regard to conflicting social meanings and interests.

Joas (1997) criticizes Mead's conception of history, his belief in a relationship between scientific progress and democratic reform, and his tendency to dogmatize this as universally valid. At the same time, Joas (ibid: 140) rejects his own previous description of Mead's position as an "ethics of reconciliation" that runs counter to Mead's (1915) view of democracy as "institutionalized revolution". The crucial point, Joas decides, is not a false supposition of harmony among social interests – about which Mead's thinking was merely muddled – but a weakness affecting Dewey's thinking as well as Mead's. It is that there is "an empty space" (Joas, 1997: 143) between the ethos of the democratic-experimental method and action to create the conditions to make it possible. To be complete, the socio-political ethics of Mead and Dewey would need to incorporate action to bring about democratic socialism – a criticism that could be widely applied.

Pragmatist faith in the democratic-experimental method brings us back to Festenstein's analysis of Dewey's view of how autonomy and self-interest relate to democratic engagement. Dewey maintains that participation in democratic debate shapes and transforms our understanding of our own interests by making us aware of how compatible they are with the self-realization of others, and makes us realize when we are wrong about our interests. In Deweyan terms this is an argument for *democracy* because this engagement is the hallmark of democracy, as he sees it. This begs two questions, however: "why should

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5 Stacey (2003) combines the work of Mead, Elias and complexity science into a theory of relational processes that corresponds broadly with Burkitt (1999), on which I draw when exploring the issue of embodied agency.

my interest in autonomy be expressed through participation in democratic politics?", and "why should a democratic decision override the product of my free moral thought?" (Festenstein, 1997: 182). The answers overlap. For Dewey, as for Mead, genuine self-interest and participation form virtuous circles. The communicative aspect of participation helps to make my views more freely intelligent and ethically attuned to the public interest, thereby improving the quality of my moral judgement and rendering it more truly autonomous and developmental. And though there can be no guarantee that decisions produced by good debate will fully reflect individual judgements, the process tends to lead to a convergence of judgement. In other words, the same kind of arguments Habermas uses to make the case for deliberative democracy.

5. 10. THE PRAGMATIST LEGACY

Philosophical pragmatism offers a pool of ideas with radical potential which has been strangely neglected in the development of most strands of CST and remains under-developed in Ulrich's work. Here I first return to the issue of how the main contributors to CST mostly came to have a mistaken view of Pragmatism, and go on to sketch how engagement with Pragmatist ideas is likely to have transformed CST and modified Midgley's Systemic Intervention. I then identify four deficits in Pragmatism which are significant for the thesis.

5. 10. 1. CST and Pragmatism: a case of mistaken identity?

CST seems to have got into quite a muddle about 'pragmatism', *partly* due to a tendency in

Operations Research to use the term 'pragmatic' as justification for an anti-theoretical

stance. In CST, the problem surfaces in the debate about methodological pluralism which

ran from the mid-1980s to the early 90s. That debate paved the way for the second,

formulaic phase of CST's development, characterized by the drive to consolidate CST

around certain commitments and the formulation of Total Systems Intervention as a

methodological framework that, it was argued, stood in meta-relationship to others.

Much of the early debate was about categorizing systems approaches, using Burrell &

Morgan's (1979) theory of sociological paradigms – which they held to be incomensurable –

and Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests (Oliga, 1988). Another line of

thinking was Jackson's (1987a) classification of theoretical standpoints as isolationist,

imperialist, 'pragmatist' and pluralist. In this scheme of things, 'pragmatism' was

characterized (ibid: 462) as distrustful of theory and averse to 'artificial' theoretical

distinctions, concerned only with a 'tool kit' strategy for dealing with 'real world' problems,

and socially inclined to "lend itself to misuse in the service of authoritarian interests" (ibid:

464). That characterization stuck. Gregory (1996b) follows Jackson's interpretation, but

does mention that it should not be confused with American Pragmatism. Flood & Romm

(1996: 82) reproduce the stereotype without qualification, describing 'pragmatism' as non-

reflective eclecticism, heuristically weak, and "likely to maintain or even increase the power

of elites". Mingers (2000: 22-3) dismisses 'pragmatism' as untheoretical, aiming only at

"producing useful knowledge rather than understanding the world". He also conflates it

with instrumentalism – the view that theories are simply instruments for dealing with empirical reality, without necessarily revealing any truth about the world. In fact, Dewey's instrumentalism (Dewey, 1997b) is about the inseparability of the theoretical and practical, and the need for inquiry to aim at comprehending the world instead of applying prosthetic techniques to it. Mingers' criticism may apply to Rorty, but against Dewey and Pragmatism in general it is misdirected. On the other hand, Mingers' (2000, 2004, 2005) accounts of critical realist social theory bear striking resemblances to Dewey and Mead, but this goes unrecognized.

Another part of the muddle is that CST's self-proclaimed complementarism is described in terms that actually chime with Pragmatism. According to Flood and Romm (1996: 83), the question is: "how can we find a way that satisfactorily allows us to theorize and act with different notions of the world at the same time?" It is hard to think of a philosophical tradition that has done more than Pragmatism to come to terms with such issues. But the kind of thinking that would go with Pragmatism is assigned to CST's complementarism, and caricature 'pragmatism' is set up as a straw man. This manoeuvre was noticed by Brauer (1995: 974), who comments that when so-called pragmatists mix methods, CST presents this as an under-theorized tool-kit, while CST doing so "is hallowed as complementarism". Brauer (ibid: 974) attributes the dismissal of Pragmatism to "the aggressive protection of the discourse" of CST/TSI. Lack of engagement with Pragmatist philosophy was surely also a factor. It is ironic, therefore, that Festenstein, author of *Pragmatism and Political Theory* (1997), taught from 1994-9 at the University of Hull, where most of the leading lights of CST were also based.

Brauer also argues that CST/TSI contradicts its own supposedly emancipatory commitment by relying upon a kind of theoretical analysis which is the province of the few, and an unPragmatist disdain for other modes of discourse. In sum, "it seems that pragmatism and [CST] are actually complementary, rather than mutually exclusive; and if critical systems thinkers ignore the potential for [synergy] between the two, they are not serving emancipation, they are merely enforcing their own dogma" (ibid: 978).

Jackson (2000) incorporates another erasure. There, Pragmatism is rightly described as having "ideas of a systemic nature which have had a clear impact upon the development of soft systems thinking" (ibid: 45). However, Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests is discussed without reference to how he relates it to Pragmatism (albeit selectively). Similarly, in relation to his own call for emancipatory approaches, Jackson (ibid: 296-8) outlines Habermas's thinking about theory and praxis in terms that bear directly on Pragmatism, but without mentioning it. The connection between communicative action and Habermas's 'universal pragmatics' is also ignored.

Small wonder, then, that Ulrich's call (1995, 1996a & b) for CST to set about pragmatizing itself for citizens met with little response. Yet it is strange that the muddled thinking about 'pragmatism' remained almost unchallenged – even stranger when, in the light of Ulrich's proposal, the tensions between different notions of 'pragmatism' must have been crying out to be aired.

Like Brauer, Midgley (2000) deplores the degrading of Pragmatism:

"While some (in my view justifiable) scepticism has surrounded a few of the claims of the Pragmatists – particularly the desire of Peirce to find a universal basis for validating knowledge in action (Rorty, 1989) and Singer's over-emphasis of the power of mathematics to solve problems (Churchman, 1987) – their basic argument that philosophy should have a practical face in a morally challenging world still stands." (Midgley, 2000: 108-9)

For CST in general, however, mistaking the nature of Pragmatism snowballed into an array of missed opportunities. Ormerod (2005: 17) sees the potential for OR in somewhat similar terms, suggesting that Pragmatism could provide "an overarching philosophy" which in fact addresses theoretical and socio-political issues, and offers a perspective for evaluating different OR/systems approaches, including CST and Mingers' critical realism.

5. 10. 2. Opportunities missed, and imagined reconstruction

What I am saying is that CST's failure to probe beyond vulgar 'pragmatism' stifled the chances for CST to tap into the radical potential of Pragmatist philosophy. A CST grounded in an appreciative critique of Pragmatism, coupled with a probing and reflexive (Pragmatist) approach to critical theory, might have developed into a more challenging alternative to its precursors than actually took shape. For a start, the approach is likely to have been less judgemental in categorizing systems approaches according to preconceived ideas and then proclaiming for CST a superior position. The 'paradigm war' with soft systems thinking would have been unlikely in that case. In particular, CST's claim to a distinctive identity by virtue of critical awareness, an emancipatory stance and

methodological pluralism, would have been unwarranted – since Pragmatism had got there

already – so something more searching might have emerged.

In particular, the Pragmatist emphasis on the social nature of inquiry could have had a

pronounced influence on CST. Dewey's interest in the relation between inquiry and

deliberative politics would surely have brought citizenship and civil society into the debate,

and perhaps opened those concepts to more searching analysis than Ulrich has yet brought

to bear. Preoccupations with foundationalism (Flood, 1990) would have been worked

through more quickly. Haack's rigorous approach to evidence and justification could have

made a powerful counterpoint to Habermas's, and also reinforced (albeit on different

terms) Midgley's development of boundary critique. The last point prompts the speculation

that, in this re-writing of history, the eventual divergence between 'formulaic' CST and

Midgley's SI would have been less likely because Pragmatism would have provided a more

unifying field of reference. Indeed, the problem of disembodied abstraction in SI (and,

more acutely, in CST generally) could have been resolved by engaging with Mead's

evolutionary concept of embodied social action.

On the other hand, there are significant shortfalls in the Pragmatist legacy, and four in

particular are the focus of the next section.

5. 10. 3. Four Pragmatist deficits

First, while Dewey and Mead are both champions of democratic engagement, they take the

concept of citizenship for granted and have little to say about rights (the concept of which

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is important for social auditing), not to mention the problem of competing rights. In both

cases they scorn the dogma of utilitarian individualism, and set great store by associating

human flourishing with a generalized notion of the common good, but they do not unpack

these commitments or propose how individual freedom and flourishing actually squares

with social development. Without wishing to simplify their position, it is as if they believe

that such questions are settled by overcoming the dualism of self and society, and applying

the concept of freely inquiring intelligence to society at large. That leaves the problem of

constructing a view of citizenship and rights that takes account of the complexities and

conflicts without tying the conceptions to any particular system of socio-political morality.

Secondly, Pragmatism is central to the debate about civil society and deliberative

democracy. However, Dewey, Habermas and Ulrich rely upon similar arguments to justify a

normative commitment to civil discourse, yet their arguments are circular – participative

citizenship being both the end to be desired and the means of realizing that end – an

anomaly that Romm (1995) identifies in Ulrich's view of civil society. This points to the

need to unpack the notions of civil society and discourse ethics.

Thirdly, Dewey has been criticized for being vague about how agency is concretely enacted,

and both Mead and Dewey are charged with having blind spots in regard to social

contradictions and divisions (Burkitt, 1991; Festenstein, 1997; Joas, 1997). A convincing

account of citizenship and rights needs to be integrated with a conception of agency that

takes account of moral and social contradiction and complexity. Moreover, such a concept

must avoid the problem of disembodied abstraction, raised in chapter 4 when Midgley's

(2000) work was reviewed. Pragmatism already holds important elements of such a concept

of agency and morality, from its appreciation of uncertainty as the well-spring of adaptive behaviour to its view of social action and its understanding of the co-constituting nature of self and society. Other perspectives can be brought to bear too, to flesh out a rounded concept of agency. Earlier, I also suggested that sharpening the focus of Pragmatism as a frame of inquiry into matters of value-judgement can help to meet the need to build capacity for moral agency of a kind that can cope with substantial differences in worldviews, values, and approaches to practical reason.

Clearly, the three issues are connected. The challenge is to find adequate responses to them without making undue assumptions, relying on circular arguments or taking refuge in ideological bolt-holes.

The remaining, fourth issue relates to the notion of social learning. Pragmatism abounds with ideas connected to it – the basic orientation towards inquiry and what Peirce called a 'will to learn', the insistence from Peirce onwards that inquiry is inherently relational and social, Mead's concept of action and emergent consciousness, Dewey's concept of freed intelligence as a social force, their joint emphasis on experiment and discovery, and the political model of deliberative democracy. It all points towards an integrated theory of social learning, but no such theory yet exists – and its absence is scarcely noticed. The challenge in that regard, then, is to develop a theory of social learning that integrates with the other conceptual developments specified above.

5.11. CONCLUSIONS

5. 11. 1. CST and Pragmatism

As I see it, philosophical pragmatism certainly contains a range of ideas that could enrich

the debates within CST, and that are particularly relevant for Midgley's Systemic

Intervention and for how critical systems thinking relates to agency, citizenship and social

learning. However, significant shortcomings in Pragmatism have also been identified,

making it problematic in relation to the synthesis I am driving at, and also limit its relevance

to social auditing. It is because of these deficits – as well as the need to draw in or develop

new ideas for social auditing – that I advocate *learning* from Pragmatism rather than a

wholesale adoption of it as a replacement for CST and SI. Hence also the need to lay the

basis for formulating that synthesis by developing concepts of agency, citizenship and social

learning that remedy the deficiencies in Systemic Intervention and in Pragmatism. The next

section outlines how the thesis needs to go forward in that light.

5. 11. 2. Development of the thesis

So far, the first three objectives of the thesis have been met. Relating this to the meta-frame

in Figure 1.1 (reproduced overleaf): (a) the problems with social auditing and corporate

citizenship which the thesis is meant to address have been identified; (b) CST has been

reviewed, and also philosophical pragmatism; and (c) I have begun to indicate how

Midgley's Systemic Intervention could be reconstructed in terms of citizenship, a more

rounded concept of agency, and a concept of social learning that integrates with those ideas.

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Figure 1.1 (revisited): Schematic meta-frame of thesis
(four-way symbol represents synthesis)

SOCIAL AUDITING
corporate citizenship

CRITICAL SYSTEMS
THINKING

PHILOSOPHICAL
PRAGMATISM:
sociality of embodied
action and inquiry

SYSTEMIC
INTERVENTION

CITIZENSHIP

rights
theory

civil
society

discourse
ethics

AGENCY AMIDST COMPLEXITY
active being in the world

AGENTIVE SOCIAL LEARNING

SOCIAL AUDITING AS SOCIAL LEARNING
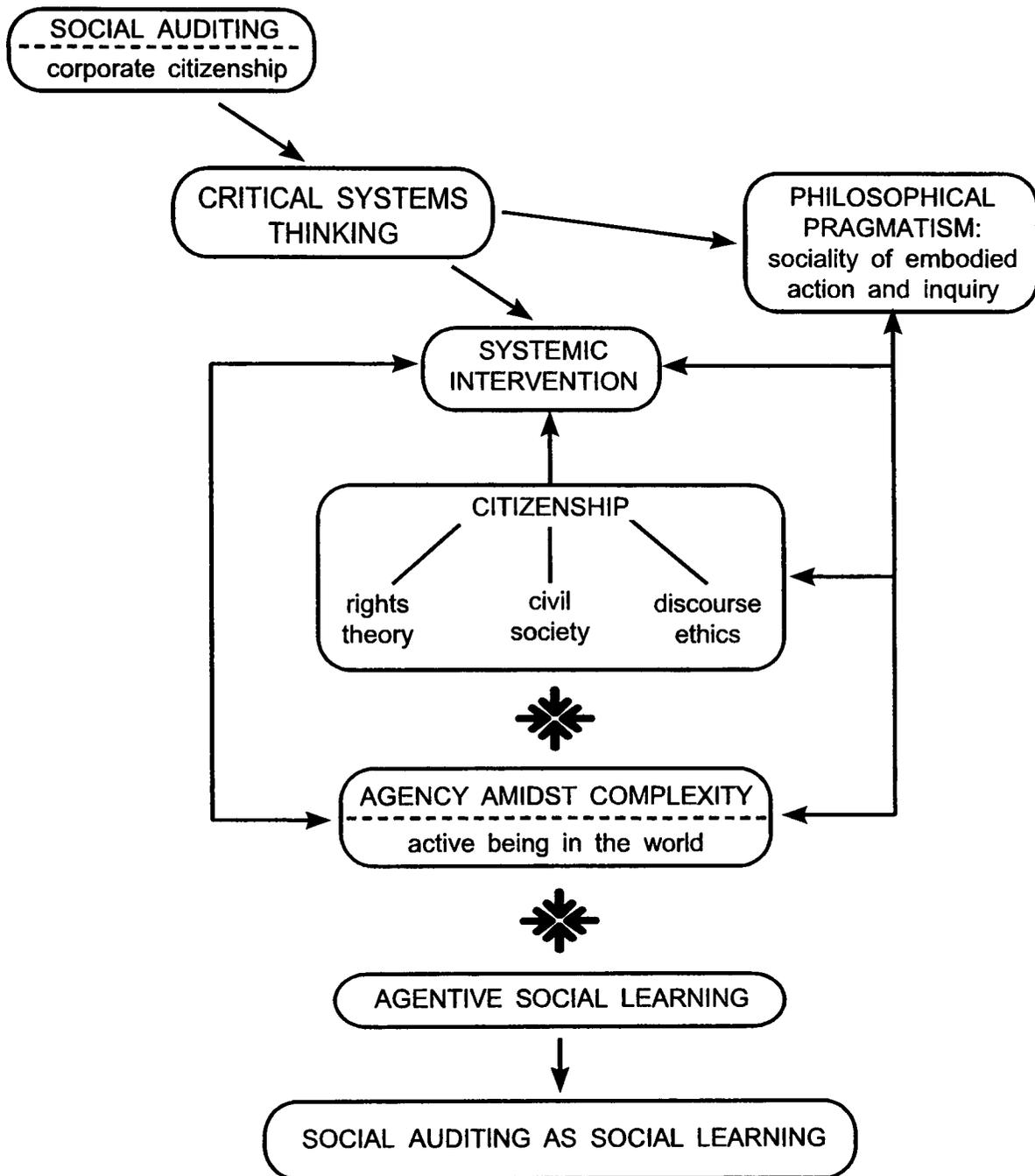
= synthesis

In terms of that schematic meta-frame, the next four chapters do the rest of the conceptual groundwork for the development in chapter 10 of the synthesis which is used to reconstruct social auditing as social learning. Chapter 6 outlines the complicated nature of citizenship, offers my own definition of it, and explores a dynamic perspective on the central concept of rights. Chapter 7 completes the exploration of contemporary citizenship by unpacking the notions of civil society and discourse ethics. Chapter 8 develops my concept of agency amidst complexity, grounded in active being in the world. Chapter 9 reviews a number of concepts of social learning and formulates my own concept of agentive social learning. All this finally paves the way for reconstructing social auditing as a form of social learning.

The next chapter, therefore, focuses specifically on citizenship and rights – concepts that have been largely ignored by Pragmatists as well as most writers on CST, but which matter in relation to social auditing because of its emphasis on engaging with stakeholders, the centrality of human rights and communal interests to evaluating corporate impacts (Pendleton et al, 2004), and appropriation of citizenship into corporate citizenship.

Chapter 6:

CITIZENSHIP AND RIGHTS

6. 1. Introduction

The problem of uncritical use of the concept of citizenship, as if it were universally

understood and accepted, was identified earlier in relation to social auditing and corporate

citizenship. In chapter 4, I identified the need to connect Midgley's Systemic Intervention

(SI) with a more robust view of citizenship than exists within CST. Pragmatism also needs

clearer connections between democratic engagement, citizenship and rights, on a basis that

takes account of social complexity and contradiction.

This chapter outlines current debates about citizenship, and describes an approach to rights

that remedies the deficit in that regard in Pragmatism, and is compatible with SI. The

problematic nature of citizenship is borne out by a range of contemporary challenges and

contradictions which are outlined first. I then offer a definition of citizenship, on the basis

of which the main part of this chapter focuses on the nature of rights. The next chapter

deals with citizenship through the notion of civil society, and concludes by drawing

together the arguments from both chapters.

6. 2. THE 'BEWILDERED NOTION OF CITIZENSHIP'

6. 2. 1. Inherent complications

The complications of modern citizenship can be gauged by considering that it is intertwined with the rise of the nation state, with both the development of rights as constraints on the state and the securing of those rights by the state, and with the interplay between citizenship and national identity. Europe in recent years has seen a resurgence of nationalism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile most European countries have joined in developing the supranational institutions of the European Union. Alongside economic integration, the EU is gradually creating a new 'tier' of citizenship (initiated in 1993), and a framework of rights; yet the future of EU citizenship remains highly uncertain. At the same time, democratic governments across the world have proclaimed or bemoaned their inability to withstand the flux of economic globalization. Yet one of its results, job insecurity for ever greater numbers of people, threatens living standards and social integration in 'post-industrial' as well as 'developing' countries. Hence, in some quarters globalization is seen as reinforcing the importance of the state as the defender of its citizens' interests (Ignatieff, 1995: 76)

Against that, there is the argument that the modern state suppresses citizenship, either by unduly limiting individual freedom (as liberals and neo-conservatives see it) or by stifling democratic agency (the argument from critical theory or radical civil society perspective). And against the idea that citizenship is pre-eminently a matter of national identity there is the multiculturalist or pluralist argument that the state should recognize and protect the

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differing identities of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities. Another kind of pluralism is advanced in the argument for a 'politics of difference' (Young, 1990), which calls for institutional recognition of, and support for, marginalized groups in order to promote social inclusion. Both kinds of pluralism provoke the counter-argument that fragmentation will cut citizenship adrift from its national-cultural underpinnings. Fears of this kind can bring out the coercive face of citizenship, resulting in a denial of rights to non-citizens – the harsh reality for millions of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. The point about coercion also touches on the argument that idealizing citizenship can make people accommodate too readily to political authority (Flathman, 1995).

If all this were not perplexing enough, there are contradictions associated with the development of citizenship rights. In 'Citizenship and Social Class', Marshall ([1950] 1963) formulated the highly-influential idea that modern citizenship is the result of the development – in tandem with capitalism and trades unions – of civil, political and social rights (in Britain, in that order). As he describes them (ibid: 74), the civil element is composed of rights of individual freedom, codified in the rule of law. The political component relates to participation in political power, and is associated with the institutions of democratic authority. The social element ranges from the right to 'a modicum' of economic welfare to the right to share fully in the social heritage of the polity.

The analysis invites criticism, but the relevant point here is that the three categories – which according to Marshall (ibid: 74) are "wound into a single thread" – are not necessarily congruent. They have independent histories, different institutional bases, and can have conflicting implications for different sections of society. As Barbalet (1988: 1) observes,

"A political system of equal citizenship is in reality less than equal if it is part of a society divided by unequal conditions". There can therefore be serious tensions between civil, political and social rights, and contradictions in their relation to capitalism. Moreover, social 'rights' are highly susceptible to changes in political and cultural attitudes.

On a different note, there is also the problem that rights are supposedly connected to responsibilities, but in practice the connection can be elusive. It is because of complications like these that Kelly (1995) refers to "the bewildered notion of citizenship". Nevertheless, the idea is much in vogue again.

Political theorists Kymlicka and Norman (1995: 283-4) attribute renewal of interest in citizenship to two main factors. First, the notion of citizenship "seems to integrate the demands of justice and community membership", so it may bring to a head the issues at stake in the debate between liberals and communitarians. Secondly, various political events and trends in the 1980s and 90s drew attention to the fact that democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable, without a certain level of voluntary participation and social cohesion.

6. 2. 2. The quest for a theory of citizenship

These developments have led to calls for a general theory of citizenship, but none has emerged. Since almost every issue in political theory involves relations among citizens or between them and the state, the scope of such a theory is potentially limitless (ibid). Another difficulty is the 'universalism/particularism conundrum' that bedevils theorizing

about citizenship because the alternatives appear mutually exclusive while neither can stand alone satisfactorily (Beiner, 1995: 12): 'universalism' exalts the inviolable worth of *individual* human beings, beyond any collective or civic identity, while 'particularism' affirms and celebrates exactly those forms of *group identity* that distinguish sets of people from each other. A third obstacle to theorizing citizenship is the tendency to conflate two different concepts: citizenship-as-legal-status and citizenship-as-desirable-activity. One is about legal standing in a particular polity. The other is about the extent and quality of participation in that polity. However desirable such participation may be, theorizing about good citizenship needs to be kept analytically distinct from the legal issue of what it is to be a citizen (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995). The long history of activists deeming it necessary to engage in civil disobedience in order to practice their citizenship raises questions about rights, duties and civic virtues, and points up the dangers of conflating citizenship-as-legal-status and citizenship-as-desirable-activity.

6. 2. 3. A basis for proceeding

Nothwithstanding such difficulties, I propose to define citizenship as follows: as distinct from other forms of association or membership, *citizenship is both a range of rights and a status entailed in belonging to a political community.*

Apart from the initial distinction, this definition has a number of features that need to be spelled out.

(1) Like most approaches, it refers primarily to rights, because rights – both individual and collective – are the basis of any substantive notion of citizenship, providing social capacities that would not otherwise be available.

(2) It connects rights to status, because status is the indicator of one's social capacities, and must be endorsed by others to have legitimacy. I cannot assign such status to myself; only if others accept my expectations as reasonable and legitimate will my status have any relational validity (Barbalet, 1988: 16).

(3) It refers to a 'range' of rights rather than a set or series. 'Set' would suggest that they are fixed and limited. 'Series' suggests progression, one leading to another, which is not wrong but hides the fact that rights can be withdrawn or ceded as well as expanded. 'Range' suggests variety in scope and direction. That is important for the inter-cultural consideration of rights.

(4) 'Entailed' denotes a necessary relationship or function.

(5) I have opted for the phrase 'belonging to', rather than 'membership of', because it catches both the need for affiliation and the sense of 'ties that bind'.

(6) The definition recognizes the pre-eminence of *political* community as the basis of citizenship, yet leaves the nature of that community indistinct, as a matter for boundary judgements.

(7) It implies that the rights entailed are derived communally rather than individualistically, and, by extension, that communities as well as individuals are rights-bearing. This in turn implies that the communal exercise of rights benefits individuals too, by virtue of communal duties to members (Freeden, 1991: 81).

(8) The definition steers clear of conflating citizenship-as-legal-status with citizenship-as-desirable-activity. The latter may be more relevant to the idea of civil society.

(9) Teased out, this combination of features points the definition towards the intersection of the cosmopolitan idea of 'world citizen' and the particularism of nationalist or culturally-rooted conceptions, the elusive synthesis of which is what some call citizenship (Beiner, 1995: 13).

The remainder of the chapter falls into two sections. The main part describes Michael Freeden's (1991) approach to rights, which unpacks the key concepts and reframes them in ways that resolve many of the confusions and contradictions that bedevil debates about rights and citizenship. Moreover, Freeden's approach has close affinities with Midgley's SI, apart from one aspect of Freeden's thinking that clashes with Midgley's.

6. 3. FREEDEN'S THEORY OF RIGHTS

6. 3. 1. Preliminary considerations, and approach

The discussion that follows is framed by two basic considerations. The first is relatively simple. It is that, following Freeden (1991: ix-2), I am concerned with the concept and role of rights in political discourse, not with debates about the logical or semantic truth status of statements about rights, nor the intricacies of legal argument about rights.

The other consideration is more complex. There are arguments for treating human rights as a subset of rights in general, and the same goes for citizenship rights. It is equally plausible to treat human rights as pre-eminent, which is not the same thing as claiming that human beings are intrinsically rights-bearing. As Hannah Arendt (1967: 300-1) puts it, our recognition of ourselves as rights-bearing is a result of willing "human artifice" whereby, although not born equal, "we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights". In contrast, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (UDHR) states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" [better phrased as 'shared humanity']. The Declaration appears to assert a decision of the kind Arendt speaks of, but the two standpoints are fundamentally different. In UDHR terms, notwithstanding all the evidence to the contrary, people *are* born both free and equal, and those attributes derive from the precepts of liberal rights-theory. For Arendt, people are born unequal but can gain equality through collective action. Equality in those terms derives from much more than

theoretical principles. This important distinction brings us to the heart of Freeden's exposition of rights.

I will outline his thinking in six stages. First, Freeden's definition of the concept of human rights and important considerations attached to it. Secondly, his deconstruction of the natural-rights paradigm and the precepts that human beings are born with a core of rights that supposedly are self-evident, irreducible, universal and independent of social conditions. Third, the developmental nature of rights and the need to view them as being dynamic rather than fixed. Fourth, Freeden's reframing of the issues of welfare, choice and intervention. Fifth, his reconstruction of the concept of utility in regard to rights. Sixth, his argument that we not only bear rights as a function of community membership, but that the upholding of rights is a collective responsibility, and therefore that communities have rights in regard to genuine social interests. I then re-cap the main features of this dynamic model of rights, and its affinities with Pragmatism and particularly with Systemic Intervention, and end by touching on the issue of world citizenship.

6. 3. 2. The concept of rights

We need to be able to see how Freeden's arguments relate to his definition of human rights:

"a human right is a conceptual device, expressed in linguistic form, that assigns priority [over other considerations] to certain human or social attributes regarded as essential to the adequate functioning of a human being; [a device] that is intended to serve as a protective capsule for those attributes; and that appeals for deliberate action to ensure such protection" (Freeden, 1991: 7, his italics).

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A series of clarifications are given (ibid: 7-9), which can be condensed as follows.

(1) The issue of *who* regards particular human or social attributes as essential cannot be settled once and for all. Individual rights cannot exist without acceptance by others through the processes by which values become norms and come to claim rights-protection. Individual entitlement is inherently linked to what Freeden calls *reasoned recognition* by others. Whether particular rights are essential is debatable; what matters is that rights are "treated as carefully reasoned notions that reflect some mix of culture-relative and knowledge-impartial views of human nature" (ibid: 7). The notion of impartial knowledge would not be acceptable to Midgley (2000) – a point that will be taken up again later.

(2) 'Deliberate action' includes deliberate inaction – i.e. self-restraint, forebearance.

(3) The protective action called for will have implications for both the rights-bearer and for others upon whom the exercise of the right depends, within the limits of feasibility.

(4) Freeden distinguishes between human rights and moral rights or virtues. For him, rights are founded on ideological beliefs and social norms, so a right implies no objective morality but does imply a normative one. The needs and capacities expressed in rights derive from the practicalities of enabling human beings to exist and flourish, independent of any logic of what is objectively right. Similarly, the waiving of human rights might be detrimental but is not illogical.

(5) The relationship between rights and actions is cemented through moral and/or legal obligations.

(6) Although the definition pertains to human rights, other rights may derive from the general argument, perhaps indirectly. For instance, the right to have a contract respected is not a matter of its inherent importance but reflects the role that respect for contracts and promises plays in social relationships.

(7) Protective action may be internalized through socialization, it may harness public opinion in the form of an ethical imperative, or it may be legally enforced. Equally, the protection may be graded according to the nature of the attribute. In any case, it is unlikely to be water-tight.

(8) The general nature of rights calls not only for specific action to uphold particular rights but also an attitude of general regard for rights-bearers. This is best described not as a duty, but as an ideological and ontological view of the social world, upholding conduct that embodies regard for human beings and communities over conduct that does not – not confined to human life (ibid: 60-61).

Freeden (ibid 9-11) makes three other general points regarding the concept of rights. First, while every person has an equal claim to bear rights, we have the *same* rights as others only inasmuch as our needs and attributes are the same. This allows for justifiable inequality. Thus, for instance, adults and babies have equal rights to nourishment, but require a

different food intake, and a baby will die sooner from lack of nourishment than an adult would. Similarly, specific rights are conferred on groups such as parents and elderly people.

Secondly, it could be argued that the concept of rights has no special significance since it cannot be separated analytically from the aspects of human nature and sociality it serves to protect. Freeden's answer is that concepts cannot be judged solely by their distinctness from others or logical coherence; they can also be judged by their usefulness in ordering ideas, conveying knowledge or aiding understanding. The concept of rights is distinguished not by its content vis-à-vis what it protects, but by its structural properties, its being "simultaneously a *prioritizing, protective* and *action-demanding* concept" (ibid:10, original italics).

Thirdly, rights are not identical with interests, although rights may accord special status to particular interests. This leaves open the question of what interests should be protected, the status they obtain from being elevated to the rank of rights, and the consequences for human behaviour and social organization of according such protection to particular interests. Ultimately it is not rights that have special protection, but the attributes and capacities they are designed to protect.

6. 3. 3. The natural rights paradigm

Freeden's theory stands in opposition to the ideology that dominates conventional thinking about rights. The latter is built on four principles. First, the argument that human beings are born with a common core of rights, famously described as self-evident and inalienable (American Declaration of Independence, 1776). Second, that natural rights are pre-social in

the sense that they are not products of social or political frameworks. Third, that natural rights are absolute, cannot be compromised or whittled away – that they 'trump' any competing claim. Fourth, that natural rights are universal and in that regard all human beings are equal.

Natural-rights theory is rooted in the European idea of natural law, derived from Aristotle's belief in universal and immutable laws of nature, and Aquinas's theology of natural law as being the part of divine law that is discoverable by human reason. Accordingly, human laws derive their validity from natural law and moral precepts based on it. However, when it comes to proving the existential or moral basis of rights, the arguments tend to be circular, reflecting the self-reinforcing character of the four principles rather than the quality of evidence for them. This is why Freeden's own definition treats rights as *enshrining* ethical thinking rather than being *based on* a moral system. Nevertheless, he concedes that "it is very difficult to envisage long-standing social arrangements that dispense with the assumption that people 'have' non-negotiable rights" (ibid: 28). The resilience of that assumption does not mean it has to be accepted; it just shows how the discourse of rights can embrace contradictions, and confusion between claiming non-negotiability compared with according great importance to something while holding it open to revision.

Freeden's strategy is twofold. It entails 'decoding' or deconstructing natural-rights principles and related doctrines regarding freedom of choice, human welfare, and the rights of the individual and society relative to each other. He reconstructs core concepts to encompass individualist and communitarian interests, and to broaden the concept of rights to take

account of the developmental nature of human beings and societies. I will start by

summarising his analysis of natural-rights principles.

6. 3 .3 .1. Self-evident?

The claim that rights are self-evident depends upon what kind of self-evidence is

acceptable. Grounding the claim in dominant patterns of thinking about human nature and

society endorses conservative assumptions about social norms and rules. Reframing rights

as protecting human attributes and social interests that are recognized as fundamental

slightly improves the argument, but, either way, invoking self-evidence tends to presume a

high degree of moral consensus (or hypocrisy). Sociologically and intellectually, this fails to

account for the plurality and complexity of human nature. For Freeden (ibid: 30), it is futile

to construct a theory of rights in which all boundaries are rigid.

On the other hand, denying the principle of self-evidence does not mean that rights have to

be utterly contingent and non-cumulative. The alternative Freeden offers (ibid: 29 and 38) is

the hybrid notion of 'quasi-contingency', based on the historical emergence of rights-

concepts. The right to equal respect is a good example and a crucial one because, among

other things, it serves to protect important differences between people. Nowadays that right

is widely accepted in principle, but it is an idea that has developed over time. Quasi-

contingency paves the way for being more specific about fundamental rights than if they are

seen as wholly contingent, while recognizing that the historical and cultural relativity it

introduces has to be tested against reasonable criteria. This broadens the scope for aligning

the social recognition that is crucial to a rights' *existence* with reasoned argument about its

content.

6. 3. 3. 2. Inalienability and indefeasibility

The idea that rights are inalienable, meaning non-transferrable, derives from the extension

of property-rights to include ownership of one's freedom and sovereignty over one's

actions. This made sense ideologically for 18th-century liberals but contradicts another tenet

of early capitalism: the right of exchange. Rather than accept Hobbes' argument that

possession of a right carries an entitlement to renounce or forbear it, liberals followed the

line that it would be dehumanizing to compromise autonomy for some other good. Hence

natural rights had to be removed from the sphere of capitalist exchange. By the same token,

rights that *do* involve voluntary trade-offs (e.g. within contracts), and are therefore

conditional and transferable, are not included among *natural* rights.

Inalienability is therefore a principle with a built-in contradiction. It is meant to safeguard a

principle of rational autonomy, yet denies the rights-bearer entitlement to freely and

reasonably renounce that right. This implies that people cannot be trusted with their rights.

Another approach (ibid: 32) is to argue that, in special circumstances, people have "rights

against themselves", i.e. against harm likely to result from renouncing rights needed for

their own protection. The example Freeden gives is of a person at risk of self-harm because

of mental illness, and their right to protection from such harm being exercised on their

behalf by a guardian or the state.

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Indefeasibility (ibid: 32-34) means that one's rights cannot be annulled *by others*. It ring-fences individual rights from being voided arbitrarily by others or set aside because society deems the right to be forfeited for some reason. For instance, a right of way across land may be deemed forfeit if it not exercised. The comparative strength of inalienability and indefeasibility depends on whether the inviolability of the individual counts for more than the authority of social norms and laws that limit individual rights.

6. 3. 3. 3. The (pre)sociality of rights

The notion that rights are pre-social – that they exist independently of social and political frameworks – was seen as all of a piece with their 'natural' origin. However, that became less tenable in the 19th century with the advent of the social sciences and their focus on social interaction and structures. Yet rights-thinking did not implode. What the sociological perspective does is to emphasize that rights-concepts derive from social relations and are sustained by collective institutions. Furthermore, we are beginning to appreciate the notion of rights as not only being mediated *in* community, but there also being rights *of* a community – which relate to the contributions to mutuality a society can reasonably exact from its members (ibid: 81). This highly social view of rights will be a recurring theme in this discussion and is fundamental to my own view of rights and of citizenship.

6. 3. 3. 4. Absoluteness and prima-facie rights

The third foundation of the natural-rights paradigm is that individual rights are absolute. The claim to absoluteness often runs into operational problems. For example, a person's

claim to absolute liberty cannot co-exist with the belief that everyone else has absolutely the same right, because one person's unlimited licence necessarily curtails someone else's freedom. Differing interpretations of the right to life illustrate the complications that can arise. If the right to life means the right not to be killed, the only action required of others is self-restraint. However, if it also carries an interdict against deliberately letting someone die, then the right to life would demand that others actively sustain it. The kind of dilemmas that ensue are seen in debates about rationing of high-cost medical treatment, or about abortion in cases where the mother's life may be forfeit if the pregnancy continues. The point is that absoluteness is tenable only in relatively simple cases where the salient rights are compatible with each other (ibid: 36).

By allowing for exceptions, the notion of *prima-facie rights* can circumvent the contradictions of absoluteness. For example (ibid: 36), green traffic lights entitle me to drive on, but ambulances or fire engines have prima-facie rights to cut across my path. This does not contravene my right to proceed in normal circumstances (without endangering others), nor does it allow emergency vehicles to over-ride the basic rule just to suit themselves – there must be a legitimate emergency. Rather, the assertion of a prima-facie right implies that a conditional version of a basic right may be more effective in protecting what it promotes than an absolute interpretation would. Bending the concept allows it to remain viable under stress.

The notion of absolute rights can still be useful, however. Rights do not necessarily involve trade-offs. For example, your right to equal respect is not at all diminished by my right to it

too. On the other hand, prima-facie rights allow for the inevitable complications of life and the impossibility of maximizing all rights simultaneously. As Freeden puts it (ibid: 36-7):

> "the kind of world in which prima-facie human rights would be predominant is one in which ... human beings are believed capable of exercising practical, not pure, reason; ... and in which sustainable compromise is itself a principle of community life".

6. 3. 3. 5. Universality and equality

The natural-rights principle of universality asserts that all human beings have equal rights. Freeden (ibid: 37) compares two approaches to this. One strategy is to identify a core of attributes that are common to all humans and require the protection of rights. However lofty the arguments, in fact this is a minimalist strategy that reduces equality to universal needs and ignores the diversity of human qualities and social structures. The alternative is to ground equality on diversity and the intrinsic worth of human beings. The two approaches can be reconciled by arguing that human attributes, however varied, can flourish only when certain fundamental conditions are met, conditions such as the rights to freedom and well-being. In this way protection of *shared* attributes also safeguards important *differences* between people.

Some rights, which Freeden (ibid: 38) calls 'specific rights', are based on recognition of the temporary inequality of a whole class of people. Pregnant women may be accorded rights to which other women do not qualify and men cannot claim. Children are generally recognised as having rights (in regard to food, shelter and protection from harm) that fade as they

become more responsible for themselves. People who are ill or unable to care for themselves tend to have specific rights that healthy people do not have, but those rights are potentially open to all. Also temporary but in a different category would be the right to special treatment to remedy past deprivation, as in 'affirmative action'. In that case, the right to special treatment would cease to apply if and when equal status is genuinely achieved or restored.

Variants like these necessarily reflect cultural norms. This illustrates Freeden's argument that the significance of a right lies in its threefold function as a prioritizing, protective and action-demanding construct. A right is distinguished by this combination of properties rather than the specific normative content of what it protects. A similar kind of conceptual flexibility helps to keep the issues of universality and cultural diversity in perspective.

6. 3 .3. 6. Universality and diversity

One of the most valuable features of Freeden's approach is that it offers a way out of the universalist/particularist conundrum. Even if a schedule of rights were to be accepted as universal, the practical exercise of them – which constitutes their real substance and justification – would be affected by diverse cultural codes, competing claims, and scarcity of resources (genuine or constructed). At the particularist extreme, any group or society may determine its own rights without reference to others. The problem is "how to obtain a strong enough notion of rights without freezing a particular ideological position, postulating an essentialist or ideal view of human nature, opting for a minimalist number of rights or dispensing with them altogether" (ibid: 41).

Freeden's solution (ibid: 39) derives from three possibilities that must be considered. (1) If there are aspects of human nature that are universal and essential to wholesome human functioning, the rights that protect them must be universal. (2) If there are universal features of human society that are essential to social functioning and the welfare of members, the rights that protect these social factors must be universal. (3) If there are specific features of individuals or societies necessary to their well-bring, or divergences in their natures, the rights that protect such features must be particular, although there may be a universal case for protecting such rights.

While there may indeed be significant human attributes that are almost universally shared, Freeden (ibid: 41) maintains that this still does not justify the natural-rights view of universality. It is equally plausible to argue that historical and cultural factors are just as fundamental. To the extent that some aspects of human nature and society seem hardly to change over time and place, their moral significance seems universal, but equally:

> "to the extent that essential human properties are culturally moulded, the latter will occasion a relativist morality and a changing rights-system. To suggest an *a priori* list of universal morals and allow diversity only with respect to the rest does not fundamentally alter the difficulties encountered by the natural-rights doctrine, with its fixed catalogues of rights." (ibid: 41)

Instead of regarding universality as a powerful black hole that "swallows up and annihilates" the developmental aspect of rights, Freeden (ibid: 41) suggests viewing it as a moderate gravitational force that attracts and orders them. (Cultural relativism need not be a black

hole either.) This allows for recognition of the fundamental nature of rights as protecting important human interests, needs and capabilities – factors that are collective as well as individual. But it also allows for the variety and possible evolution of such attributes, and the discovery of new rights or groups of rights-bearers. These are key features of the historical development of rights and of current rights-discourse.

6. 3. 4. Developmental perspectives

The developmental character of rights reflects shifts in understandings of human nature as well as changes in rights-concepts. The 18th century ideal of freedom and enlightened progress, coupled with the 19th century discovery of evolution, promoted a developmental view of human nature, and in line with this the concept of liberty was expanded to embrace the flourishing of human potential. Such thinking can easily descend into a Just So narrative of progress. Nevertheless, there is support for the view that there has been some deepening of the concept of human nature over roughly the last 250 years, influenced by the advent of the novel, psychology, sociology and the emergence of modern civil society. Interwoven with this is an increasingly complex view of rights. To Marshall's three categories of rights (civil, political and social) must be added the category of industrial rights – which are collective rather than individual – and the very notion of collective rights, both for minorities and for broad communities.

The fact of these changes reinforces the case for a dynamic concept of rights. At the same time, it has to be recognised that there are arguments for and against such elasticity (ibid: 66-7). The main argument in favour is that the general principle of rights is safeguarded by

adjusting the range and content of rights to take account of enduring changes in important human values (leaving aside questions of how they are identified). This can move in either direction: the expansion of rights into new areas; or the shedding or curtailing of rights that become obsolete or (recognized as) discriminatory. Furthermore, the expansion of rights has resulted mainly not from fortuitous 'developments' but directly or indirectly from social struggle (Marshall, 1951; Barbalet, 1988) – struggles against monarchy, state, ruling class, racial domination, or corporate exploitation. That is yet another reason for viewing rights in dynamic terms.

Apart from the essentialist argument that would freeze, and minimize, the nature of rights, the main objection to flexibility is that a creeping expansion of rights devalues the currency, as it were. This is the individualist argument that a growing list of social 'goods' inevitably erodes the rights of the fortunate to pursue their own life-plans, because they will be required to redistribute some of the goods they hold at present. This hinges on notions of fairness, coupled with assumptions about the scarcity of goods. In practice, unlimited pursuit of certain entitlements may impose unbearable demands on a society's resources, and thereby undermine the rights on which the entitlements are based (Freeden, 1991: 67). Highly expensive advances in medicine and surgery are a case in point, insofar as they reduce the resources available for basic healthcare. This brings us to the relationship between welfare and utility – the trade-offs involved in maximizing rights under conditions of contingent or inherent scarcity.

6. 3. 5. Human welfare

Debate about welfare rights has been dominated by trench warfare between adherents of the 'negative rights' view of liberty who oppose intervention in people's lives, and pro-interventionist campaigners for 'positive rights' to welfare. The grounds for dispute are summarized below, followed by an outline of Freeden's reframing of the welfare argument, and his view of welfare rights as inherently interventionist. Here, the connections between Freeden's thinking and Midgley's are particularly evident.

6. 3. 5. 1. From negative rights to positive

In the development of rights-theory, rights emerged as defences around the rights-bearer, protecting them from other individuals and from intrusion by the state. As Freeden (ibid:43-4) points out, the construct of freedom and well-being underlying that conception makes sense only as part of a certain kind of worldview. It assumes that individual well-being requires freedom from intrusion by others; it treats independence as separateness; it discounts the value of co-operation, and takes a poor view of how well-intentioned others are likely to be toward the individual. It also presumes that the individual is a good user of their protected space, and this puts a high premium on his or her capacity to rationally pursue their own interests.

This construction emerged first as a simple negative-rights view of liberty as freedom from intervention by others, with no particular expectation as to the moral or intellectual purpose of liberty. That changed significantly when, influenced by Kantian philosophy, the bearers

of such liberty came to be thought of as being capable of self-determination. So-called 'negative' rights were now linked to the capacity for agency, with the intelligent exercise of freedom being seen as the best expression of human nature and the means of its fulfilment.

There is then the further argument that pernicious inequality makes a nonsense of such notional liberty unless the exercise of freedom is made possible by a right to well-being. This is the nub of the case for 'positive' rights. It is central to Marshall's (1963) concept of social rights, to Rawls' (1972) theory of justice as fairness, and is the starting point of Gewirth's (1982, 1996) case for a wide range of positive rights. Ideologically, it is aligned with various liberal-reformist and socialist positions which argue that people have a fundamental claim to share in the goods of nature and society because, without sufficient access to them, individual potential will be suppressed and society distorted.

6. 3. 5. 2. Revisioning welfare

Like most concepts relating to rights, the welfare principle can be interpreted narrowly or broadly. An expansionist view on one dimension of rights does not necessarily extend to others. One can favour extending welfare entitlements to non-nationals, but be against giving them voting rights. In this context, (in)consistency on different dimensions is more a matter of worldview and practical reason than pure rationality. This is a problem only if one rejects the view of rights as being dynamic.

The *narrow view* of welfare relates it to material assistance to individuals deemed to be in need. The material factor limits the scope of welfare to concrete things, and a distinction is

made between *needs* which are sanctioned and *wants* which are discounted. The *broad view* extends welfare to cover all the needs and capacities essential for satisfactory human functioning. From either viewpoint, welfare is usually viewed either in terms of upholding individual autonomy or of encouraging/requiring people to act in their own 'self-interest'. This emphasis on autonomy has deep implications with regard to welfare.[1]

Freeden (1991: 52) argues that, if the capacities for moral choice and autonomy are regarded as the paramount human attributes, this means that people's physical, emotional, psychological and mental capacities are relegated to being "mere servicers of the moral essence of the individual". Such reductionism would restrict welfare provision to whatever was deemed sufficient for people to exercise choice and autonomy, while other types of human activity that may be equally important (e.g. friendship or creativity) would be seen merely as means to that end.

Freeden's alternative is a comprehensive reframing of the welfare argument. His starting point is that the "extension of welfare to encompass every aspect of human well-being would *include* the choice and self-determination that give vent to our moral capacities" (ibid: 52, original emphasis). Among other things, this dispenses with the conventional premise that welfare-rights have to be augmented by or made subject to (rational) choice-rights. Instead of channelling welfare-rights into autonomy-rights, *most* autonomy-rights would be absorbed into welfare-rights (while treating the kind of rights that relate to contracts or promises as option rights that are important in particular contexts but do not qualify as

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[1] Freeden's argument here is partly a critique of the emphasis on individual agency in Gewirth (1982). I doubt that the critique still holds up, given the importance of reciprocity and mutuality in Gewirth (1996).

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human rights.) This strategy of absorbing most autonomy-rights into welfare-rights becomes clearer if questions of choice are (re)directed towards discovering *interests* rather than 'needs' or 'wants', and if the notion of 'interest' is purged of its association with private gain.

6. 3. 5. 3. The false opposition of choice and welfare

Freeden's revisioning of welfare exposes the contradictions involved in trying to differentiate choice-rights from welfare-rights, a distinction that underpins the individualistic concept of rights. Three kinds of contradiction are involved. First, the proposition that welfare and autonomous choice are inversely related (so that welfare can only be promoted at the expense of liberty) does not necessarily hold. Second, since total autonomy is not humanly possible (nor total welfare), there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the pursuit of partial or imperfect autonomy is more worthwhile than other aspects of well-being. It follows that judgements about choice and welfare can only reflect differing concepts of human nature and society, not some axiomatic preference for one concept of rights over all others. Third, not all restrictions on liberty-as-choice necessarily curtail autonomy, since some types of choice (e.g. the habitual use of addictive mind-altering drugs) may be harmful to both autonomy and welfare, and the exercise of choice hardly compensates for an unintended loss of self-determination or health (ibid: 53).

What, then, of 'the right to be wrong'? Since being wrong *per se* is hardly a valuable attribute, if there is such a right it must refer to making mistakes. This is an inevitable result of our capacity to exercise choice (no matter how rationally), so there is a case for protecting

people from unacceptable damage or retribution when mistakes are made. Indeed, our capacity for learning or for maintaining relationships collapses when the cost of making mistakes is too high.

A further argument against according over-riding importance to the freedom necessary for moral agency is that it can unnecessarily restrict the concept of rights. For instance, if the capacity for choice and autonomy is regarded as paramount, the extent to which infants, foetuses, or mentally incapacitated people are rights-bearers is reduced to their actual or potential ability to exercise self-determination. This kind of reductionism can be avoided if, first, we agree to regard human beings as "clusters of diverse properties and potentials, physical, psychological, emotional, mental, *as well as* moral, each of which is necessary to being human" (ibid: 59, original italics), and then decide that it is sufficient to pass *any one test of eligibility* to qualify as a rights-bearer. This maximizes the protection afforded by rights, and allows for groups having different rights, yet in no way diminishes the importance of moral agency for those who are able to exercise it.

Reframing the issue of choice and welfare on these terms provides a more flexible basis for judging human interests than one based on a narrow calculus tied to the liberal-rational model of social competition. Furthermore, it brings rights-discourse into the realm of inquiry and boundary judgement. Moreover, a strategy that avoids rigid boundaries or categories paves the way for acknowledging that there is no inherent reason for some rights to be exclusively human (ibid: 60-61). Indeed, from a human rights perspective it does not makes sense to deny rights to animals in regard to features and capacities they share with human beings.

6. 3. 5. 4. Intervention

Welfare-rights are interventionist because, going beyond self-restraint or forbearance, they require others to do things that enhance an individual's capacity to act by securing for them a reasonable standard of well-being with, insofar as possible, the individual's consent and preferably their active involvement (ibid: 54-58). Ideologically this reflects a view of human nature and society in which:

- human personality, needs and conduct are shaped through social interaction

- mutuality and reciprocity are the intended norm

- membership of society is a fundamental need that demands protection

- the regulation of a society by its members is a necessity of social organization, as is institutionalized mutual assistance.

Intervention therefore has a twofold character: action to secure the well-being of individuals, and action to harness the capacity for intervention. We are rights-upholders as well as rights-bearers. From this perspective, "The very idea of intervention may then be a misnomer, for it becomes a necessary rule rather than an untoward exception" (ibid: 57).

This aspect of Freeden's thinking dovetails with Midgley's in two important respects. First, Freeden's view of people as necessarily being rights-upholders as well as rights-bearers is akin to Midgley's view of people as active participants in co-constituting power-knowledge formations in society and related identities rather than being abstractly constituted by them. Secondly, Freeden's view of rights (not just welfare rights) as being intrinsically

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interventionist is similar to Midgley's argument that since all acts of judgement are interventions, we are by nature incapable of *not* intervening, individually and collectively. As will be seen, the affinities extend into Freeden's reconstruction of the notion of utility, and his communitarian perspective on rights.

6. 3. 6. Reconstructing utility

In philosophy, utility refers to what is considered good for human beings (or, more generally, for sentient creatures). Utilitarianism is the theory that an action is right insofar as it promotes happiness and minimizes pain, and that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of morality – precepts set out by Jeremy Betham in 1789. In *On Liberty* (1859) and *Utilitarianism* (1863), John Stuart Mill modified the theory and laid the basis for the considerable influence it continues to have, crossing conservative, liberal and socialist camps.

6. 3. 6. 1. Bentham and Mill

Bentham famously dismissed the notion of natural rights that cannot be taken away as "nonsense upon stilts" (Bowring, ed., 1843: 501). For him, a right can exist only as a product of law. "Right ... is the child of law: from real laws come real rights; but from imaginary laws, from laws of nature, fancied and invented by poets, rhetoricians, and dealers in moral and intellectual poisons, come imaginary rights, a bastard brood of monsters" (ibid: 523). Small wonder that Bentham is something of a *bête noire* for rights-advocates. Freeden (1991: 18-19, 83-4) makes two general criticisms: first, that Bentham's concept of

humanity is reductionist, concerned only with pleasure; secondly, that in dismissing natural rights he ignores the fact that rhetorical nonsense can make ideological sense. Yet Bentham had a point when he described natural rights as imaginary; as noted previously, Freeden and I both argue that rights are the product of human artifice.

Mill deepened the utilitarian concept of happiness by infusing it with Enlightenment humanism. In particular, he grounded the principle of liberty in human flourishing, and linked rights to social justice, defining the right to justice as "the claim we have on our fellow-creatures to join in making safe for us the very groundwork of our existence" (Mill, 1863, quoted in Skorupski, 1995: 569). Accordingly, such rights take priority over the direct pursuit of general utility and over the private pursuit of personal ends. *On Liberty* is an eloquent defence and definition of the freedoms of the individual against social and political control, formulating the liberal axiom that in his or her private domain "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant" (Mill, 1859, quoted in Skoppuski, 1995: 569). Mill defends this on the grounds that it enables individuals to realize their potential in their own way, and that by liberating creativity and dynamism it provides the pre-conditions for intellectual and moral progress: "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being" (ibid). Yet, as Skorupski (1995: 569) concludes:

> "the limitations of [Mill's] Benthamite inheritance, despite the major enlargements he made to it, residually constrain him. His defence of the principle would have been still stronger if he had weakened (or liberalized) its foundation – by

acknowledging the irreducible plurality of human ends and substituting for

aggregate utility the generic concept of general good."

6. 3. 6. 2. Critiques of utilitarianism

The poverty of the individualistic notion of liberty has been discussed, so it will suffice to

note several other criticisms of utilitarianism. First, there is the fundamental difficulty of

calculating the amount of one good compared with another, or of weighing one person's

welfare against another's. Secondly, it is arguable that utilitarianism undermines moral

agency by turning the exercise of judgement into a form of instrumental evaluation of the

consequences of action. Contemporary utilitarianism holds that "acts are not right or

obligatory because of their inherent character, their underlying motives, or their relation to

divine or social dictates, but because of how much overall human or sentient well-being

they produce" (Slote, 1995: 892). And there is the further implication that any means can be

justified by a good enough end. This leaves no room for values such as justice and equality

– because *quantity* of well-being is the overriding value. Substituting "a calculus of happiness

for protection of human rights" attacks the principle of equal respect that is the basis of

most moral theory (Freeden, 1991: 84). Thirdly, rule-utilitarianism – the school of thought

that an act is right if it accords with rules that yield beneficial consequences – chimes with

conventional notions of morality, but there is no convincing reason that *rules* should be

evaluated by their consequences while *acts* should not be (Slote, 1995: 892). Fourth, there is

the argument that utilitarian concern with the general good conflicts with individual rights-

theory because it threatens individual liberty in the name of the greater good. However,

things are not that clear-cut. For instance, the right to medical care is intended to enhance

individual well-being, but it can also serve the communal end of maintaining the population's health as part of a community's right to ensure *its* optimal functioning (Freeden,1991: 88).

6. 3. 6. 3. Reframing utilitarianism

That last point is the basis of Freeden's re-working of the concept of utility. Under-pinning it is the point, already noted, that appreciating human nature as a bundle of needs and capabilities, of which autonomy is only one aspect, entails no lessening of concern for individual rights. Quite the opposite, since the liberal-rational autonomic model reflects a simplification of the complexities of human nature and the paradoxes it creates. Nor is the value of the individual, or of differences between people, compromised by situating the person in a context of community rather than one of aggregated individualism. Indeed, a society of aggregated individualists would surely require more elaborate norms and rules to govern interaction and prevent conflict than one in which the presumption of a degree of mutuality provides a kind of open space for the interplay of self-expression and incoherence, understanding and misapprehension. I am referring here to uncertainty and confusion about one's own motives and behaviour as well as that of others.

In setting up his basis for reframing the concept of utility, Freeden notes that critics of utilitarianism often use an extreme version of it as an Aunt Sally, omitting important modifications of the theory. Freeden himself seeks to balance critique with preserving the rights-enhancing aspects of utilitarianism, building particularly on the works of Green

(1836-82) and Ritchie (1853-1903), both of whom adapted 19th century idealist thinking to British concerns — Green to liberal political theory, and Ritchie to socialism.

Rejecting natural-rights theory, Green advanced the concept of social recognition based on mutual appreciation of human agency, coupled with awareness that each person's exercise of their capacity for agency depends upon allowing equally free exercise to everyone else. For Green, human nature is self-determining, and involves conscious membership of society. Rights are simultaneously powers "claimed and recognised as contributory to a common good" (quoted by Freeden, 1991: 21). Moreover, the notion of "a right against society, in distinction from a right to be treated as a member of society, is a contradiction in terms" (ibid).

Ritchie is particularly relevant because he sought to transfer Green's ideas into the realm of practical social theory, and to combine critical philosophy with evolutionary theory. Though critical, like Green, of the notion of natural rights, Ritchie (quoted in Freeden, 1991: 73) argued that:

> "if there are certain mutual claims which cannot be ignored without detriment to
> the well-being and, in the last resort, to the very being of a community, these claims
> may in an intelligible sense be called fundamental or natural rights. They represent
> the minimum of security and advantage which a community must guarantee to its
> members at the risk of going to pieces."

The third plank in Freeden's strategy of salvaging the rights-enhancing aspects of utilitarianism is to replace the utilitarian emphasis on *maximizing* human desires or interests

with the more inclusive and more flexible notion of *feasible optimality*, described as follows (Freeden, 1991: 91, original italics):

> "The optimal result for the realization of a particular value will fall at any point between an irreducible minimum and the most that can be obtained in a concrete social and historical situation ... Although differing desirable goals may be (partly) compatible, one has to acknowledge the conflicts that can exist among them and seek therefore to achieve those goals only and up to the point where the realization of one does not *seriously* curtail the attainment of another. This is feasible optimality, based on empirical possibilities of human potential and social organization. But it is not simply what *can* be achieved *now*. It is the nearest approximation to what *could* be achieved if a society were to pursue those ends wholeheartedly."

Freeden (ibid: 91-2) acknowledges that the burden placed on the word 'seriously' leads to another sphere of value judgements which, in rights-respecting societies, goes to the heart of political argument over rights. I would prefer to see that point couched in terms of public debate rather than political argument, particularly since political notions of optimality tend to mean maximising for the majority or for sectional interests, but I accept that civil society can fall into those traps too, as discussed in the next chapter.

On the complicated issue of trade-offs between values and competing rights or components of a right, Freeden's analysis reflects four key points (ibid: 92-95).

(1) Some goods are essential to human welfare, so that the more of them there is the better – health and education, for example. The *rights* to such goods should be maximized. At the same time, the *incremental utility* of those goods may decrease beyond a certain point.

(2) Some goods are important for human welfare but not in maximized quantity. Choice may be vital, but unlimited choice is not. Similarly, even if the right to property is considered essential, it does not follow that *all* property or superabundant property is essential.

(3) Trade-offs should be restricted to inessential or optional matters, or apply not to a *right per se* but to the *quantity or quality of the good* the right protects.

(4) The multi-dimensional model of human nature accords equal status to a range of human needs and capacities. Decisions about the relative quantity or quality of goods will reflect social values. Nevertheless, it is vital that a core of each and every good identified as essential for human functioning is secured for all members of a society as of right. Ideally, only outside that core should trade-offs be considered.

The issue of sustainability does not feature in this analysis. However, the second of these four factors provides at least an opening for taking it into account. The possibility of doing so highlights again the need to question the role of intellectual, moral and professional groups that are particularly influential in rights-discourse – because rights-theory is infused with humanist thinking that presumes that the natural world exists for human control and consumption (Midgley, 1994). Moreover, the liberal-rational doctrine of rights is closely

associated with the ethos of free-market capitalism, and therefore with *laissez-faire* attitudes to the exploitation of resources of all kinds. Currently this seeks to frame the issue of sustainability solely in terms of the cleverer and more long-sighted use of resources rather than a more ecological perspective.

6. 3. 6. 4. Social utilitarianism

Freeden draws the lines between conventional utilitarianism and his socially modified version as follows and gives new purpose to the concept of utility within a pluralist view of humanity.

> "First, a modified, constrained utilitarianism will dissociate itself from classical act- and rule-utilitarianism, retaining instead a commitment to those acts and rules that are conducive to the values held to be humanly pertinent and socially desirable ... Second, a social-utilitarian perspective can combine the protection and encouragement of individual flourishing with the preservation of social interests, because it assumes that, prima facie, the promotion of human rights that ensure such flourishing *is* conducive to the general welfare ... Third, a modified utilitarianism will attach significance to the role of individual wills in contributing towards the articulation of basic interests. It will crucially retain an interest in the plurality of individual lives and in the utility of the right to a generous range of forms of self-expression." (Freeden, 1991: 98, italics original)

In relation to other aspects of rights-discourse, "a rights-supportive modified utilitarianism would have to be superimposed on and secondary to" (ibid: 98) the primary considerations

regarding human flourishing that ultimately provide what Lyons (1984: 114) calls the 'argumentative threshold' that gives rights theory its force. Accordingly, rather than treating human rights as natural or axiomatic, the modified utilitarian approach regards them as "reflecting significantly useful cultural assumptions (irrespective of their truth) made in order to secure arrangements congenial to social organization" (ibid: 99). The linkage between rights and utility can then be reframed on lines suggested some years ago and cited by Freeden (ibid: 99): "a *prima facie* rights-theory would have no affinities at all with [unconstrained] utilitarianism other than having a maximizing calculus. However, it would be a calculus about maximizing satisfaction of rights and only that" (McCloskey, 1985: 132).

6. 3. 7. Rights in community, rights of community

Freeden's communitarian perspective now comes into view. It goes beyond the pluralist view that certain groups in society – e.g. families, trades unions, ethnic minorities – have collective rights, which may be negatively protective or positively welfare-enhancing. The deeper conception is that human nature is essentially relational, that it is bound up with social membership and depends upon mutual recognition and support. This shifts the analysis from a focus on the individual person or aggregated individuals to one in which the dynamics of membership are the primary interest. It is also avowedly interventionist.

Societies, in this view, "accept responsibility for doing all they feasibly can to maintain and enhance their members' well-being" (Freeden, 1991: 71), for three reasons. First, because without social interaction and support individuals would ultimately be dehumanized. Both the shared nature and practical consequences of the human condition demand an ethos of

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mutual responsibility. Secondly, many of the constraints on individuals arise from various kinds of social dysfunction (not to mention factors beyond societal control for which society may compensate people). Thirdly, the protection of individual rights also serves specifically social interests – cultural, economic or political interests that depend upon a mix of diverse contributions and collective powers. "From this perspective a right constitutes a claim that directly or indirectly enhances the quality of life *in* a community and *of* a community" (ibid: 71-2, italics original).

However, the concept of *social interests* has to be qualified. The interests of a community:

"are not identical to those of its members in toto, but only to two types of interest: first, the interests of its members that depend on cooperative communal action or that are moulded by concerted behaviour; second, those individual interests the pursuit of which will benefit the community at large" (ibid: 72).

This serves to distinguish between interests and rights that are properly social and the interests people have as existential members of a community. It also introduces the notion of community as a specific *bearer* of rights. This is not about national or cultural self-determination, nor about institutions of representative government or agencies of collective action. Rather, it is about communal entities having rights in regard to those specifically social interests. It follows that a community may not only assert its proper rights against other communities or social actors but also claim those rights from its own members.

"We can thus conceive of two types of such legitimate social intervention in individual lives. The first would apply when crucial social interests are at stake. The second [discussed earlier] would apply when crucial individual interests are at stake

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but the individuals concerned do not or cannot take the required steps to safeguard those interests." (ibid: 76)

This conception of social interests is neither paternalistic nor authoritarian (ibid: 81). It is in the nature of communities that they flourish only as much as their members do. Individual liberty and diversity is therefore always in the social interest. So too is the discharge of individual duties towards society – in respect of the contributions a society may rightly expect of its members. It is simply the case that the demands a society makes on its members are shaped by issues broader than individual perspectives. It can therefore be said that recognition of social interests is the ultimate safeguard of individual rights, and the means to ensure that individuals see the benefit of discharging their duties to their society.

Before summarizing Freeden's approach to rights, I will just touch on two other points. First, I have bypassed arguments about the precise relation between duties and rights, on the grounds argued by Freeden (1991: 76-82) that it is simplistic to expect the relation between them to be directly reciprocal or fully consistent between cases. Secondly, the degree to which rights-theory is a product of Western thinking *is* problematic, but to my mind does not invalidate the concept of rights because there are parallel concepts in other cultural traditions. However, it does underscore the need to steer clear of absolutist approaches to framing rights. I see Freeden's pluralist view of both individuals and communities as being very helpful in that regard, as is MacIntyre's (1985) view of communities as evolving their own concepts of the common good.

6. 4. A DYNAMIC MODEL OF RIGHTS

6. 4. 1. Prime features

Freeden's approach to rights is dynamic in several ways: its complex view of human nature

and social membership; its coupling of a robust defence of the concept of human rights

with a supple argument for extending their scope; and its emphasis on action and

intervention. It unblocks the dichotomies – individual/community, negative/positive,

choice/welfare – that bedevil rights-theory, yet never loses sight of "the network of

concepts and ideas in which rights are located" (Freeden, 1991: 53).[1] The outcome is a

three-dimensional model of rights, "incorporating the equal weighting and indivisibility of

fundamental human attributes, the communal nature of human beings and their inherent

developmentalism" (ibid: 101). In place of fixed categories or rankings it offers flexible

rights-clusters to be deployed within a strategy of culturally-relative social utility that aims at

"a sustainable level for every attribute that the various rights in the cluster protect or

enable" (ibid). This does not mean that Freeden is against supranational rights declarations,

covenants or charters; the closing chapter of his book includes some comments on

developing these.

As noted in the previous chapter, Dewey's Pragmatism sets great store by democratic

engagement but lacks a theory of rights that develops Dewey's ([1935] 1963) critique of

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[1] For those seeking theoretical purity, it is worth noting Freeden's observation (1991: 43) that "The peculiar nature of the concept of rights, as a capsule surrounding other social and political concepts such as liberty, welfare, interest and self-determination, makes it quite impossible to disentangle the analysis of rights from the properties of those client-concepts".

natural-rights liberalism. Freeden's theory does just that, showing how rights-concepts can be comprehensively reconstructed to combine individual and societal perspectives and to reflect the developmental nature of rights and of society. Notwithstanding that potential for synergy with Pragmatism, the affinities between Freeden's thinking and Midgley's are more important for the purpose of this thesis.

6. 4. 2. Comparison with Midgley's thinking

I have drawn attention to several affinities between Freeden's thinking and Midgley's. Four points of agreement are crucial. First, that the essence of human nature is simultaneously social and individual, requiring constant reflection on boundaries. It follows that communality gives purpose and meaning to individual freedom rather than fundamentally compromising it. Secondly, that social life is inherently interventionist. Freeden defines rights in terms that require deliberate action to protect the human or societal attributes regarded as important, and regards intervention as inherently bound up with welfare rights. For Midgley, all acts of judgement constitute interventions in power-knowledge relations, and explicitly reflecting on this when acting is the essence of critical action. Thirdly, Midgley would concur with Freeden's view of rights as conceptual devices, not as products of allegedly objective moral principles. At the same time, Midgley, given his (1992a, 1994a) resistance to anthropocentric thinking, would be more circumspect about the humanist tendencies in Freeden's thinking. Fourth, in both cases there is a philosophical commitment to breaking out of dualisms, doctrines or false dichotomies. In Freeden's case, the issue is framed in terms of unpicking the dichotomies and rigid boundaries set up by natural-rights doctrine and replacing them with more flexible concepts. Midgley's strategy is to undermine

dogmatism of any kind by treating the process of making judgements as being analytically prime, as opposed to prioritising the content of any particular kind of knowledge.

There is one serious drawback in Freeden's approach which was mentioned earlier only in passing, and which clashes with Midgley's (2000) SI. In setting out his definition of rights, Freeden (1991: 7) refers to societies as containing significant groups, not necessarily majoritarian, that become "acknowledged producers of dominant values, with moral, ideological or scientific appeal ... [reflecting] some mix of culture-relative and knowledge-impartial views of human nature". These values get incorporated into public discourse but are constantly subject to revision as ideas change. In a footnote, Freeden (ibid: 113) explains that knowledge-impartial "implies correspondence with current scientific and scholarly knowledge which claims impartiality but falls short of an absolute standard" – and gives medicine and psychology as typical examples, along with some branches of philosophy. Elsewhere (ibid: 30, original italics) he says that "while the social recognition crucial to a right's *existence* will emanate from intellectual, moral and professional groups with acknowledged standing, the *content* of a right will reflect the reasoned values and the reliable information about human needs and functions those groups produce".

This seems to be reinforcing the status of knowledge elites and giving them primacy in debate about rights. Yet the whole thrust of Freeden's analysis is to align debate about rights with evolving social interests, and an elitist stance contradicts his belief in the active upholding of rights by both individuals and communities. The problem is not solved by Freeden's rider that such claims to impartiality fall short of absolute standards, because all too often that limitation is treated as theoretical rather than substantive. The fact that

Freeden's approach entails a radical reframing of mainstream rights-theory only goes to show how unwarranted mainstream authority actually is. In contrast, Midgley (2000) is committed to the 'democratisation' of knowledge, in the sense that processes of participation can challenge elite views about what constitutes 'relevant knowledge' in any context. For me, what this highlights is the extent to which issues of rights-discourse and recognition need to be subject to inquiry and boundary critique. Reframing Freeden's model of rights on those terms paves the way for integrating it with Midgley's SI.

Before concluding, I will touch on the prospect of globalized rights.

6. 5. THE ISSUE OF GLOBALIZED RIGHTS AND WORLD CITIZENSHIP

It has been an 'article of faith' among Western political and corporate leaders that globalization is not only compatible with human rights but actively creates rights-favourable conditions. In contrast, here is how Gibney (2003: 13) sums up the views of most of the contributors to the 1999 Oxford Amnesty Lectures on globalization and rights:-

> "In an era of globalization, the spread of rights is haunted by two concerns. The first is that the current proliferation of rights across the globe may owe more to the inequalities in power, resources, and technology that epitomize international society than to the intrinsic appeal of the idea of rights itself. The second is that the spread of civil and political rights might collude in the expansion of global capitalism by reinforcing a view of human entitlements that greatly undervalues the importance of economic equality and security. These joint concerns suggest the possibility of a

world where human rights are in the ascendancy, but where many people are

becoming more insecure and exercising less power over their lives."

The gap between rhetoric and reality is a direct result of globalization-from-above (Falk,

1995) going hand in glove with states actively intervening to advance the interests of

corporate capital and consumerism (Sivanandan, 1998; George, 2003; Likosky, 2003). The

alternative being pursued by citizens' movements is globalization-from-below, characterised

by active engagement in winning social, economic and environmental rights – the very ones

that matter most in relation to social auditing.

Also problematic is the related notion of world citizenship. The UNESCO committee that

drafted the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights associated human rights principles

with world citizenship: "These rights ... are claims which all men and women may

legitimately make ... not only to fulfil themselves at their best [but also to become] in the

highest sense citizens of the various communities to which they belong and of the world

community" (UNESCO, 1949: 260). However, it remains debatable whether human rights

can be equated with world citizenship rights. There is the prior argument that there is a

fundamental difference between human and citizenship rights, because human rights

precede the rights of state-specific citizenship, extend beyond them and necessarily have

primacy over them. Moreover, as Heater (ibid: 105) concludes, world citizenship rights

"cannot be secure without an entrenched system of cosmopolitan law, and the obligations

of world citizenship cannot be exacted without an effective system of global monitoring" –

and enforcement, if necessary, without which rights are chimerical.

As things stand, world citizenship is an ambiguous phenomenon. Moral commitment is being evoked and activated, but the institutions are sketchy and caught up in *realpolitik*. The most troubling questions relate to what interests those institutions will serve and on what terms, and to whether and how national/ethnic patriotism will adapt to, or confound, the development of other forms of civic allegiance.

'Civic allegiance' refers to ideas such as Habermas' (1988) 'consitutional patriotism', Delanty's (2000) 'civic cosmopolitanism', and Appiah's (2003) evocation of a cosmo-politanism rooted in diversity. Also relevant here is Rorty's (1998) elusive notion of 'ethnocentrism', an idea that reflects Rorty's (1979, 1989) postmodernist rejection of naturalistic or universal foundations for human rights or conduct. Not intended to refer to a particular ethnicity, ethnocentrism combines a generalized notion of communitarian solidarity with a kind of liberal-democratic patriotism, with Rorty using the terms 'we' and 'our country' as referring to the USA (Festenstein, 1997; Turner, 2004). Relating this to cosmopolitanism, Turner (2004) points out that cosmopolitanism *does not mean not having a country or homeland*, but it does involve critical distance from such attachment (as well as scepticism towards ideologies). As Turner says, tolerance of others springs from uncertainty regarding the authority of one's own culture. Festenstein (1997) points out that Foucault offers a way of reframing the meaning of 'we', and does so in direct response to Rorty's charge (not referenced by Foucault) that Foucault avoids appealing to any of the 'we's' whose consensus and values provide cultural frames of reference. For Foucault (1984b: 385) the real question is whether to place oneself within a given 'we' in order to endorse ideas one accepts, or to make possible the future formation of an alternative 'we' by questioning what it ought to mean.

These considerations suggest that perhaps the truest embodiment of world citizenship right now is the struggle to shape it through global civil society.

6. 6. CONCLUSIONS, AND THESIS DEVELOPMENT

The fourth objective of the thesis is to develop an integrated conception of citizenship and agency that complements Midgley's Systemic Intervention. Freeden's dynamic approach to rights ties in with how I defined citizenship early in this chapter – as both a range of rights and as a status entailed in belonging to a political community – and he provides a comprehensive argument to support the agentive view of citizenship that I am driving at. Freeden's theory also has essential affinities with Midgley's thinking, with the proviso that issues of rights-discourse and recognition need to be subject to boundary critique. Indeed, there is a synergy between boundary critique and the kind of critical reflexivity that goes with a dynamic approach to rights. That synergy is developed further by the synthesis formed chapter 10. However, there is more to citizenship than rights, which is why the next chapter explores the nature of contemporary civil society, the idea of which bears directly on how we belong to various polities and other forms of association, and brings in the issue of discourse ethics. Chapter 7 is, therefore, complementary to this one, and – referring back to the centre of the schematic meta-frame of the thesis (see page 17 or 180) – together they explain my view of the complex notion of citizenship.

Chapter 7:

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DISCOURSE ETHICS

7. 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the nature of civil society, a topic that was touched on at the end of chapter 6 (in relation to the struggle to shape world citizenship) and earlier when discussing Zadek's concept of the civil corporation.

Because the notion of civil society is easily bandied about, and seen as a political cure-all, I want to explore it in sceptical terms, starting with a view that broadly favours the idea of civil society but doubts the supporting arguments. The focus then shifts to a critique of the idea of civil society and of Habermas's view of it as a sphere of discourse ethics in action. This leads into a general appraisal of Habermas's thinking, and reconsideration of Dewey's perspective. The chapter ends by relating these issues to the main themes of the thesis.

7. 2. WALZER'S ASSESSMENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ARGUMENT

For Walzer (1995a: 153), "The words "civil society" name the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks ... that fill this space". He starts by comparing four ideological responses to the question: what is the preferred setting for the good life?

The first setting is Rousseau's ideal of republican democracy, where citizenship is understood as moral agency. Nowadays this ideal is particularly associated with calls for the renewal of society through civic engagement, to remedy fragmentation and alienation. For Walzer, this misrepresents the dull reality of democracy, and privileges a notional community of 'high citizenship' over ordinary concerns for making a living. Flathman (1995) criticizes high citizenship for being arrogant and too readily inclined to accommodate to political authority.

The second setting is the co-operative economy of Marxist socialism. In its Romantic conception, the outcome of class struggle would be a society in which all are creatively productive, social divisions disappear, and the state eventually withers away. No place for civil society in that scheme of things (Dewey, 1963; Walzer, 1995a).

Walzer's third setting is the capitalist marketplace, where autonomous individuals exercise their rational choices and the whole market operates to generate commodities and maximize options. In fact, capitalism, like socialism, relies upon state intervention to favourably regulate the economy and legal systems, and to provide minimal welfare for the large proportion of the population who otherwise could play no part in the market and may bring the whole thing crashing down. The contradictions multiply. The profit motive conflicts with democratic regulation. Unconstrained competition conflicts with communal interests. Globalization overwhelms government.

Walzer's fourth setting is the nation, commanding loyalty to a shared heritage and to one another by virtue of blood and history. It requires no political choice or action beyond

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"ritual affirmation" (Walzer, 1995a: 161). If threatened with foreign rule, however, nationalism requires self-sacrifice, not for the sake of individual autonomy but for national identity. Once the nation is secure, nationalism calls only for token participation. However, as Walzer (ibid: 161-2) observes: "The ease with which citizens, workers and consumers become fervent nationalists is a sign of the inadequacy of the first three answers to the question about the good life. The nature of nationalist fervour signals the inadequacy of the fourth."

All four of these ideological conceptions are 'wrong-headed' because each is one-dimensional. Walzer envisages civil society as a fifth and different kind of setting, one which serves as a corrective to the others, challenging their singularity and reframing their account of citizenship. For him (ibid: 162-4, original italics),

> "the associational life of civil society is the actual ground where all versions of the
>
> good are worked out and tested … and proven to be partial, incomplete, ultimately
>
> unsatisfying … Ideally, civil society is a *setting of settings* … accepting them all,
>
> insisting that each one leave room for the others, therefore not finally accepting any
>
> of them … [because] There is no ideal fulfilment and no essential human capacity.
>
> We require many settings so that we can live different kinds of good lives."

Walzer then explores how civil society might actually reframe the four stock answers. Citizenship in contemporary democracies is mostly a passive role: "citizens are spectators who vote" (ibid: 164). But in the associational networks of civil society – trades unions, political parties, grassroots movements and pressure groups, NGOs, voluntary organizations, community groups, churches, and so on – those same citizens have a hand in

myriad decision processes that have *some* influence on the remote determinations of state and economy. In a more densely-organized and egalitarian civil society, people might play those roles to greater effect (ibid: 164). This pluralist view also loosens up the republican ideal and brings it more into line with the reality that most people are only intermittently engaged; that conflicts of interest cannot be expunged; that in practice citizenship shades into a diversity of decision-making roles, sometimes divisive; and that economic activity shades off into a multitude of social activities, sometimes competitive (ibid: 164).

However, the fact that social life is sometimes divisive and competitive does not mean that we have to accept the liberal-capitalist doctrine of competitive survival and inequality as the price of liberty – a doctrine that Dewey (1963) regards as completely outmoded. Walzer's point is that civil society encompasses a variety of agents that function in the market but respond to other values and views of society. This includes family businesses, co-operative enterprises, publicly-owned and municipal companies, mutualized investment funds, not-for-profit organizations of many kinds, universities and other educational and cultural institutions, and so forth. Their capacity to protect social interests and set limits to disadvantage depends on how effectively they mobilize as associational networks. Moreover, the extent and density of associational networks can moderate and pluralize nationalist or ethnocentric politics and culture.

Nonetheless, "there is no escape from power and coercion" (Walzer, 1995a: 167), no real possibility for large numbers of people to turn their backs on the state altogether and choose civil society instead. Apart from short-term exceptions, civil society and the state are dialectically related. As the implosion of communist states in Europe demonstrates, "no

state can survive for long if it is wholly alienated from civil society" (ibid: 168). The success of the dissident movements also shows that civil society cannot dispense with the apparatus of state power.

The two kinds of power challenge each other. Civil society requires political agency, even as its networks resist state intrusion. Yet, left to itself, civil society can degenerate into uncontrolled rule of might over right or internicine conflict on ethnic, racial or sectarian lines – problems that tend to be most intensely destructive when there is a power vacuum or when state power is one-sidedly deployed. Hence the special relationship between civil society and the state, and the reason why "citizenship has a certain practical preeminence among all our actual and possible memberships" (ibid: 170). The workings out of the relationship are diverse and uncoordinated. The tests of its quality are also twofold: whether the state can sustain authoritative participation when people believe that they need it (which is not necessarily all of the time), and whether civil society can empower citizens with the capacity, when necessary, to look beyond their own interests in order to foster the wider political community (ibid: 171).

This brings us to what Walzer, for want of a better term, calls "critical associationalism" (ibid). The 'critical' part reflects wariness about the antipolitical tendencies that often go with enthusiasm for civil society, and doubts about its capacity for mobilization. He suggests three general aims for the civil society project:

> "(1) to decentralize the state, so that there are more opportunities for citizens to take responsibility for (some of) its activities; (2) to socialize the economy so that there is a greater diversity of market agents, communal as well as private; and (3) to

pluralize and domesticate nationalism ... so that there are different ways to realize

and sustain historical identities" (ibid: 172).

I would extend this programme to include pluralism in religion of all persuasions.

Walzer concludes that these aims cannot be accomplished without using the political power

of the state to redistribute resources and to sponsor 'the most desirable' associational

activities. Yet it is not at all clear how to grow a pluralized society in which people are more

actively connected and responsible as well as more genuinely free and equal.

> "These are not aims that can be underwritten with historical guarantees or achieved
>
> through a single unified struggle. Civil society is a project of projects; it requires
>
> many organizing strategies and new forms of state action. It requires a new
>
> sensitivity for what is local, specific, contingent – and, above all, a new recognition
>
> ... that the good life is in the details." (Walzer, 1995a: 173-4)

Kymlicka and Norman (1995: 296) find this strategy suspect, arguing that instead of

supporting civil networks, it may "unintentionally licence wholesale intervention in them".

After all, on what terms would the state encourage people to be less deferential to authority

and more collectively resourceful? They also criticize Walzer's willingness to contemplate

reconstructing associational networks that don't meet democratic standards of freedom and

equality, or to apply "political correction" to activities that are "narrowly conceived, partial

and particularist" (Walzer, 1995b: 106-7). This smacks of the coercion he excluded at the

outset. Moreover, associational networks cannot be presumed to be seed-beds of civic

virtue. People join social groups and networks for various reasons that may have little to do

with civic virtue. Indeed, joining a religious or ethnic association "may be more a matter of

withdrawing from the mainstream of society than of learning how to participate in it" (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995: 296).

At a more general level, Kymlicka & Norman challenge the emphasis on civic virtues that pervades most accounts of the need to promote good citizenship. Pessimism about the state of society is a persistent theme in history. In the absence of a convincing analysis of legitimate and illegitimate ways to promote or compel public-spiritedness, "many works on citizenship reduce to a platitude: namely, society would be better if the people in it were nicer and more thoughtful" (ibid: 301)

7. 3. SELIGMAN'S CRITIQUE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IDEA

Seligman (1992) is also deeply suspicious of current notions of civil society. He concludes his comprehensive analysis by comparing the use of the idea as a slogan by political parties and movements, as an expression of a kind of political order, and as a normative concept of society.

7. 3. 1. Three uses of civil society idea

Use of the idea as political slogan matters only insofar as it can mask significant differences in associated concepts. The role of organized religion can be a case in point. As Seligman says (1992: 201):

> "It is one thing to assign to the Church a role as a political actor within a pluralist
> society, a role akin to that of any other interest group, and quite another thing to

identify the Church with the very essence of that national identity which, supposedly, finds expression in the workings of civil society."

He is referring to Poland, where the idea of civil society is interwoven with national identity, and the Catholic Church is a major political force – although resistance to its influence is also potent. Obviously, the issues this raises have much wider resonances. Turning to another use of civil society as political slogan, whereas in Anglo-Saxon countries it stands for upholding communitarian interests against the ideology of individualism, in Eastern Europe the slogan is more likely to champion the cause of the autonomous social actor.

This brings us indirectly to an enormous problem in regard to comparative notions of citizenship and civil society that can only be touched on here, and only one facet of it. The problem is the Western orientation of most of the literature on citizenship and civil society. For instance, the ideology of autonomous self-determination is deeply at odds with the Islamic conception of *ummah*, usually taken to mean the universal community of Muslims, transcending nationality and culture, in which selfhood is not internally constructed but exists as the sum of its interactions with others (Raban, 2003). In that case, the communitarian perspective may be a more fruitful ground for respectful engagement with Islamic social thinking. Yet, as always, we have to be wary of over-simplification. According to Ahmed (1990: 104-5), the 15th century social philosopher, Ibn Khaldun, surmised that Muslim communities were strongest in tribal environments, and that solidarity, *asabyah*, disintegrates in urban settings. Ahmed (ibid: 221 & 231) argues that this holds true today, and that it has a direct bearing on tensions within Muslim societies.

Seligman next considers the idea of civil society as representing a type of political or institutional order. Here, some forms of social activity that used to be associated with the idea of democratic citizenship are now attached to the notion of civil society. Seligman (1992: 203) argues, wrongly I think, that this view of civil society adds little to existing accounts of democracy or of citizenship, particularly as described by Marshall. He cites in support the following analysis of the characteristics of democracies:

> "(1) the freedom to form and join organizations, (2) freedom of expression, (3) the right to vote, (4) eligibility for public office, (5) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, (6) alternative sources of information [a free press], (7) free and fair elections, and (8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference" (Seligman, 1992: 203-4, citing Dahl, 1971).

In fact, that is a list of the characteristics of representative democracy, so Seligman is overlooking the notion of civil society as a means of spreading participation in political decision-making, akin to what is called participative democracy or 'direct democracy' (Smith, 2005), meaning people working in equal partnership with the statutory, private and voluntary sectors – a four-way partnership. Seligman is also overlooking, at this point, something he refers to elsewhere, which is that Marshall's concept of citizenship encompasses the right to economic inclusion in society. That aside, Seligman claims that Dahl's list contains the essence of what is generally meant by civil society in East-Central Europe, although that may have altered since the early 1990s.

The third usage Seligman considers is that of civil society as a normative concept, whereby "civil society is identified with some more or less universalistic mode of orientation on the part of social actors" (ibid: 204), and with the understanding of citizenship in highly generalized terms. He is referring to the liberal-rational model of self and society, and his argument is that this has produced a society in which public morality has been privatized, with the result that the notion of civil society based on such norms is one devoid of communality. This version of civil society is fine only if one accepts a Parsonian, rational-functional view of society centred on individual morality. That leaves the conundrum, however, of how to summon up any sense of community among social actors who are valued primarily in terms of individual autonomy and private morality.

7. 3. 2. Reconstitution of the public and private spheres

To understand how Seligman sees the inversion of the public and private spheres, first one has to look at how he views the relationship between the rationality of citizenship and the mutuality of civil society. This part of the argument (ibid: 118-143) builds on certain ideas from Durkheim and Weber.

For Durkheim, who insists that people are neither self-sufficing nor capable of full autonomy, universal solidarity is the organizing principle of society and the milieu of individual life and citizenship. This emphasis on the social basis of individual existence, coupled with a Kantian view of reason and morality, led Durkheim to the idea of collective *conscience* (the French word meaning both consciousness and conscience). While society is the source of morality, it is in the *conscience* of the individual that morality finds agency and

ethical questions are resolved by the workings of reason. For Seligman, the logic of this is the embodiment of the public and social within the private and individual, and that it is within the sphere of private judgement that the conflicting demands of society and self-interest are to be settled.

The next stage of the argument builds on Weber, who, according to Seligman, realized better than most the intimate connections between the idea of citizenship as founded on reason and the religious/ethical origins "of those natural and self-evident rights upon which the modern world order is based" (ibid: 127). In Weber's own words,

> "freedom of conscience may be the oldest Right of Man ... at any rate, it is the most basic ... because it comprises all ethically conditioned action and guarantees freedom from compulsion, especially from the power of the State. ... All these rights find their ultimate justification in the belief of the Enlightenment in the workings of individual reason, which, if unimpeded, would result in the at least relatively best of all worlds, by virtue of Divine providence and because the individual is best qualified to know his own interest." (Weber, 1978: 1209)

Yet Weber also exposed the danger inherent in rationalization of the world. It would rob more and more realms of life of any value beyond the instrumental calculus of means and ends – a 'disenchantment' leaving us "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" (quoted by Seligman, without reference). As Seligman points out, this cuts to the core of the civil society idea, if that idea is meant to be something more than merely the self-interested activities of legally free individuals. However, if that *is* all it means, the universal values

originally associated with modern citizenship have been inverted, resulting in a privatization of those values. As Seligman (1992: 130) puts it:

> "The contemporary Western terms of society based on the equality of citizenship [have] somehow denuded citizenship of that universal solidarity of moral affections and natural sympathy which was at the core of the idea of civil society. What I wish to claim is that this loss was inherent in the very terms of citizenship based on the principles of universal Reason."

The idea that mutuality could be achieved through private reason inserted a paradox at the centre of the idea of citizenship. Thus was generated the difficulty of relating self to society in terms other than those of instrumental reason, and thus the concept of rights was abstracted from the sense of mutual solidarity that should charaterize civil society.

Perhaps the most telling example of this, Seligman writes, is in regard to racial equality in the USA, where the extension in 1954 to the black population of the formal, legal, and abstract rights of citizens has opened the avenues of economic and social mobility for many, while leaving millions of black people as a huge underclass, "excluded from precisely the more informal terms of solidarity and mutuality that we have come to associate with the idea of civil society". (ibid: 131).

The existence of civil society as a sphere of mutuality is stymied, Seligman claims, because the ideology of rational autonomy voids the public sphere of any values independent of the individuals inhabiting that space. What Seligman (134-143) sees, particularly in the US, is the public sphere being re-constituted by the projection of the private onto the public

realm. There are several strands to this argument. One is the proposition that in lieu of a more genuinely public sphere, matters that otherwise would be private are publicized in an attempt by individuals to gain public presence and validation. Seligman sees this underlying the peculiarly American fondness for self-validation through public confession. Secondly, he regards (ibid: 135) his fellow Americans as being: "absolute subjects, each "ontologically" self-contained, existing in a state of "metaphysical equality" and united only by the logic of rational exchange". Thirdly, because of this, American society exemplifies more than any other the 'iron cage' predicted by Weber, where, devoid of any sense of community, people are left as individuals pursuing their own interests. But this also comes from defining individuals in universal terms and reducing relations between them to a utilitarian calculus of interests. "This process, which began with the ethical validation of individual conscience among ascetic-Protestants, eventually voided the [public sphere] ... of any autonomous value" (ibid: 137).[1] Fourth, Seligman (ibid: 140) views these developments not as aberrations but as "inherent to and consonant with the defining contradiction of modern civilization. Private and personal matters become public concerns precisely because it is the private individual who represents the universal category of the ethical."

Fifth, Seligman regards the utilitarian devaluing of the public sphere, and the transposition of ethical considerations into the private sphere, as concomitant with the failure of civil society to provide a viable arena for critical discourse – the issue of greatest concern to Habermas. Seligman (ibid: 206) sums up the situation as follows:

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[1] Seligman's argument about this is weakened, but his analysis of the USA is supported, by noting that de Tocqueville in the 1830s was struck by the incessant apartness of American life and lack of real social interaction.

"The presumed synthesis of public and private, individual and social concerns and desiderata, upon which the idea of civil society rests, no longer holds. The social as well as philosophical conditions for this synthesis have changed drastically, and a return to more classical formulations will not suffice."

Leaving American social mores aside, the key issue is whether the set of concepts connecting rights, citizenship and civil society *are* inextricably shackled to instrumental rationality. If not, Seligman's thesis falls down. He admits as much when (ibid: 140) he identifies the *liberal-individualist model of autonomy* as being the obstacle to renewal of civil society. Moreover, in relation to discourse ethics, he says that if the contradictions he identifies in the idea of civil society can be overcome or synthesized, "a way would seem to be open to imbue the older idea of civil society with concrete contemporary meanings – at least in theory" (ibid: 192). I believe that Freeden has shown how the basis of rights can be rethought so the false dichotomy of individual and society is resolved, and he has also shown how the concept of utility can be reconstructed and given new, social purpose. Nonetheless, it is worth seeing how Seligman's critique plays out in relation to discourse ethics.

7. 4. DISCOURSE ETHICS

Seligman and Habermas converge in seeing the global rise of new social movements as a field for testing the idea of civil society as discourse ethics in action. Given their unique social base, the dynamics of their social and political influence, and the very nature of their demands, these movements present "something akin to a practical demonstration" of

Habermas's concept of communicative rationality (Seligman, 1992: 189). So this seems to provide firm ground for bringing their argument to a head.

7. 4. 1. Seligman's critique of Habermas

Although Habermas and Seligman concur to some extent, Seligman disputes Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and his concept of discourse ethics. In essence, the latter is about valid argument and legitimate consensus. Seligman takes issue with this set of ideas both on practical grounds and on the theoretical problems of interpreting civil society in terms of discourse ethics.

Seligman (1992: 191-2) sees two *practical* difficulties. One, previously identified by Benhabib (1986), is the assumption that all participants in the debate do in fact share the orientations to rational communication, consensus and ethical validation that Habermas claims to be universally endowed through the faculty of language. Seligman questions this, but recognizes that at the end of the day it may not really matter. The other practical issue is more problematic. It concerns the necessity for free and equal participation by everyone with a legitimate interest in the debate. In a context of transnational issues and globalization there could be no limits to participation. This criticism of Habermas has also been advanced by Ulrich (1983), and it is why Ulrich wishes to limit participation through boundary critique. Linklater (1998, quoted in Heater, 2002: 81) suggests that the normative commitment to 'limitless communication' which cosmopolitan citizenship implies is actually effected through "participation in diverse communities of discourse". Seligman cites debate

about immigration as particularly challenging to the concept of discourse ethics and the scale on which it can be practised.

The *theoretical* argument that Seligman levels at Habermas is crucial for both of them. Seligman's case turns on whether the concept of communicative rationality manages to overcome the dichotomy, as he sees it, between communitarian solidarity and universalist rights to justice. As Seligman notes, Habermas is well aware of the problem, and he provides a clear statement by Habermas of the point at issue:

> "Justice conceived in postconventional terms can converge with solidarity as its reverse side only when solidarity has been transformed in the light of the idea of a general discoursive will formation. ... The ideas of justice and solidarity are present above all in the mutual recognition of responsible subjects who orient their actions to validity claims. But of themselves these normative obligations do not extend beyond the boundaries of a concrete lifeworld of family, tribe, city or nation. These limits can be broken through only in discourse, to the extent that the latter is institutionalized in modern societies. Arguments extend *per se* beyond particular lifeworlds, for in the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation, the normative content of the presuppositions of communicative action is extended – in universalized, abstract form and without limitations – to an ideal communication community ... that includes all subjects capable of speech and action." (Habermas, 1990a: 41-46)

The key point here is that Habermas takes solidarity as being transferable to the realm of abstract justice and morality rather than as being separately constituted. Seligman's

reasoning is that human community always has boundaries, which by enveloping solidarity

provide the security for mutuality and trust. As he sees it, Habermas's manoeuvre entails a

generalization and abstraction of solidarity that contradicts the very notion itself (Seligman,

1992: 194). Moreover, as Benhabib (1992) has argued, if the notion of community is to have

any real meaning it must be about solidarity with flesh and blood individuals. Figure 7.1

shows how Seligman represents the opposing positions schematically.

Figure 7.1: Solidarity as source of moral agency vs Morality of communicative action
(adapted from Seligman, 1992: 186 and 194 by capitalising the concepts)
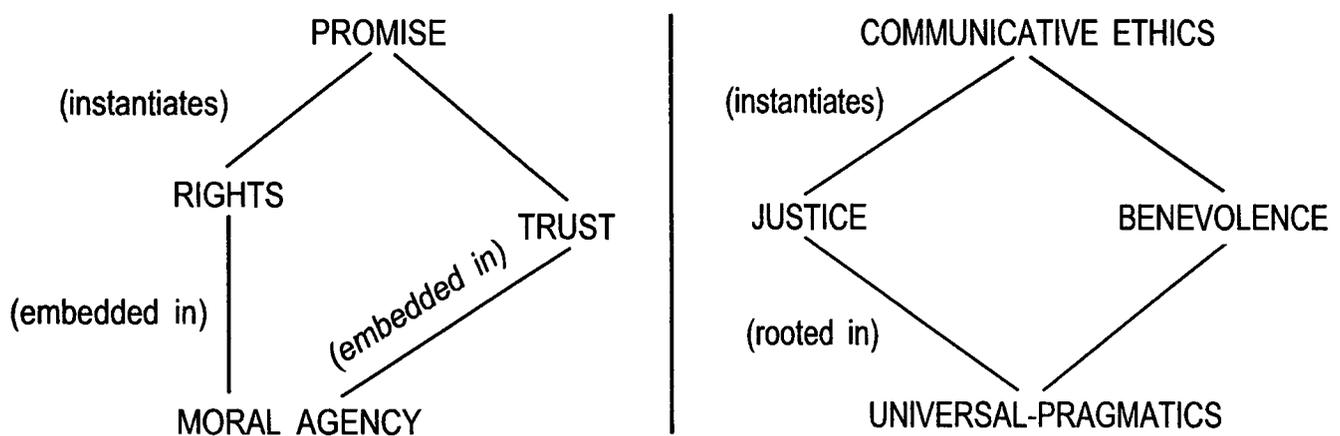
For Seligman, therefore, the Habermasian notion of communicative rationality is an

elaborate *trompe l-oeil*: something designed to be so lifelike as to create the illusion of three-

dimensional reality. Hence his conclusion that discourse ethics is a very risky basis for

reconstituting civil society. As Seligman (1992: 195) puts it:

> "The conflicting character of justice and solidarity cannot be overcome simply by
>
> positing their unity. ... The practical obstacles [to] realizing civil society in the
>
> theory of the New Social Movements are thus ... complemented by theoretical
>
> problems that cut to the core of any idea of civil society as a workable synthesis of

conflicting claims (of interest) and (moral) desiderata ...the constitutive problems of

(ethically) integrating individual and social life are elided, not solved."

He goes on to conclude that, if the concept of discourse ethics is seriously flawed, especially

when taken from the abstract philosophical realm and placed in a more sociological context,

this attempt to resurrect the idea of civil society "will ultimately leave us empty-handed"

(ibid: 195).

7. 4. 2. Habermas's conception of the public sphere

Before looking at Habermas's defence of this part of his theory, I want to recap certain

elements of his theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984 a, b). (1) He maintains

that, fundamentally, the capacity for linguistic communication entails a predisposition

towards mutual understanding and uncompelled agreement. (2) He makes a distinction

between 'communicative action' and 'strategic action' to exert influence overtly or covertly.

(3) He sees communicative action as being the basis of rational trust. (4) He believes that

communicative action, if sufficiently practised and institutionalized, has redemptive capacity

in contemporary society, specifically that it can unmask and counter the systematic

distortion of communication that results from instrumental thinking and the 'colonisation'

of the 'lifeworld' by the 'system', made possible by the 'uncoupling' of the two. Habermas's

'lifeworld' has a twofold meaning: it refers to spheres of informal life and communication,

and also denotes substructures of meaning and validity-context (Layder, 1994: 191-2).

Habermas's social theory hinges on the idea that in modern societies social integration through communicative understanding is increasingly replaced by system integration through the operation of markets and power. This results in the uncoupling of the lifeworld from the system. Yet these processes can be reversed and we can reclaim lost ground by communicative action, public discourse and resistance politics. Habermas (1992: 447-8) explains that the discourse-centred approach does not stop at deriving a general principle of morality mediated by rational debate, but, through the principle of participation, extends to the political institutionalization of rational public discourse. This is the strategy of deliberative democracy set out in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1998).

In his own contribution to *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Calhoun, ed., 1992), Habermas tackles the issue at the centre of Seligman's critique. His response, however, is rather eliptical. The problem is stated clearly enough:

> "the question remains of how, under the conditions of mass democracies constituted as social-welfare states, a discursive formation of opinion and will can be institutionalized in such a fashion that it becomes possible to bridge the gap between enlightened self-interest and orientation to the common good" (Habermas, 1992: 448-9).

Habermas's (1992) response consists of the following six steps. (1) The presumption of impartiality and willingness to submit one's starting position to rational argument are preconditions of communicative action. These preconditions need to become routine. (2) Modern law began to come to terms with this through the concept of legitimate legal coercion. The question of how that could be controlled was settled by Kant's idea of a state

subject to the rule of law. (3) A discourse-centred approach takes the further step of institutionalizing legal procedures that guarantee "an approximate fulfilment of the demanding preconditions of communication required for fair negotiations and free debates" – including "the complete inclusion of all parties that might be affected, their equality, free and easy interaction, no restriction of topics and topical contributions, the possibility of revising the outcomes, etc." (ibid: 449). (4) These procedures are meant to uphold the ideal conditions insofar as possible within an empirically existing community of communication. (5) This goes beyond democratic institutional arrangements or corporatively organized opinion formation. Habermas describes it extending into the public realms that are "not geared towards decision-making but towards discovery and problem solving in a sense that is *nonorganized*" (ibid, original italics). He then announces that:

> "If there still is to be a realistic application of the idea of the sovereignty of the
>
> people to highly complex societies, it must be uncoupled from the concrete
>
> understanding of its embodiment in physically present, participating, and jointly
>
> deciding members of a collectivity." (ibid 451).

The suggestion is that popular sovereignty is dispersed and its one remaining 'embodiment' is in the "communicative power" (ibid: 452) of public discourse to bring topics to public attention, to interpret values, to contribute to the resolution of problems, to generate good reasons and debunk bad ones. And since discourses do not govern, this influence is limited to the procurement and withdrawal of legitimation. Communicative power achieves its impact "in a siegelike manner" (ibid: 452).

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(6) Reverting to the question about bridging the gap between enlightened self-interest and interest in the common good, Habermas concludes that it can no longer be answered in welfare-state terms or through holistic faith in the political self-organization of society.

"Rather, this is the place where the circle closes between the structural transformation of the public sphere and those long-term trends that the theory of communicative action conceives as a *rationalization of the lifeworld*. A public sphere that functions politically requires more than the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state; it also needs the supportive spirit of cultural traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture, of a populace accustomed to freedom." (ibid: 452-3, original italics)

Habermas pins his hopes on the idea of civil society and talks (ibid: 453) of a "political public sphere unsubverted by power" and, without questioning either idea, proposes that associational networks enable citizens to engage in 'responsible behaviour'. He also cites the suggestion by Keane (1988) that the task of such networks is to regulate the boundaries between civil society and state through the expansion of social equality and liberty and the re-democratization of the state.

The contrast between Habermas's hopes for civil society and his sense that it can only have a 'siegelike' effect on political institutions is even more evident in *Between Facts and Norms*, where he says that Cohen and Arato (1992) are right to stress "the *limited scope for action* that civil society and the public sphere afford to noninstitutionalized political movements and forms of political expression" (Habermas, 1998: 371, original italics). Habermas identifies three particular limitations. First, a robust civil society can only develop in the context of a

liberal political culture and rationalized lifeworld (in his sense of 'rational'). Otherwise, popular movements will blindly seek to preserve the vanished solidarity of a pre-industrial world (ibid: 371 & 557). Secondly, within the boundaries of the public sphere, actors can only gain influence, not political power. To generate political power, the influence of "popular sovereignty" must affect the deliberations of democratically elected assemblies (ibid: 371-2). Thirdly, civil society can *directly* transform only itself and (at most) only *indirectly* effect transformation of the political system (ibid: 372). Therefore, democratic movements must abandon aspirations to a self-organizing society.

Notwithstanding these limitations, "The self-limitation of civil society should not be understood as incapacitation", because, in spite of asymmetrical access to expertise and limited problem-solving capacities, civil society plays a part in knowledge-generation and can differentiate the essential questions and reasons for decisions (ibid: 372-3). Moreover, Habermas goes on to argue (ibid: 379) that, whilst there is some validity in depicting the public sphere as infiltrated by bureaucratic power, social power and domination by the mass media, this pertains to "a public sphere at rest", whereas in "periods of mobilization, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate. The balance of power between civil society and the political system then shifts."

7. 4. 3. Habermas: a general appraisal

In my opinion, Habermas comes out of this virtual contest with Seligman the worse for wear. The arguments built on the theory of communicative action are circular and

increasingly insubstantial. A general appraisal of his thinking is appropriate, therefore, because it is so influential in shaping ideas about civil society and deliberative democracy.

First, in my view it was very important to rescue critical theory from the cul de sac of despair into which Horkheimer and Adorno ([1944] 1997) had driven it – equating the Enlightenment with domination, and modernity with social stultification and barbarism – and Habermas must be credited for playing a leading role in critical theory's revival. And I share his conviction that we need to rediscover aspects of the Enlightenment, but without any presumption of 'progress'. Put the other way round, I cannot see why we have to abandon Enlightenment possibilities in order to discard modernist excesses. By the same token, I believe that we can develop some of the insights of postmodernism without going a bundle on the whole farrago, because I am wary of postmodernism's role as the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1991)[2].

On the other hand, Habermas's theory of communicative action is a dubious concoction, for several reasons. A first set of concerns centres on the idea that communicative reason is embedded in the capacity for language. By claiming that we have an innate predisposition towards reasoned understanding and 'uncompelled consensus' (Habermas, 1970), the theory presupposes its own success: communicative action yields agreed understanding. I also have problems with his separation of 'communicative' and 'strategic' action – the latter being designed to influence, and which Habermas associates with instrumental success.

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[2] By this I mean that, in its perception of depthless ambiguities and its drive to relativize values, postmodernism undermines the grounds for social critique. It creates a kind of free-fire zone in relation to moral values. It also happens to be very much a project of the affluent world (Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 1992).

Specifically, Habermas (1984a: 285-6) draws a distinction between action oriented to success (subdivided into instrumental action, i.e. relating to the efficiency of an intervention, and strategic action, concerned with "influencing the decisions of a rational opponent") and action oriented to reaching understanding. He then goes on to say: "By contrast [with success-oriented action] I shall speak of communicative action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (ibid: 285-6). But why bother reasoning with someone other than to try to influence them? Purely to understand their point of view, perhaps, but according to Habermas we reflexively co-constitute each other's consciousness, so the two aspects of action must be bound up. And the more things matter to people, the more likely that 'communicative' and 'strategic' action will be inextricable. These contradictions are compounded by the fact that Habermas sometimes sweeps all kinds of interaction into communicative action – a point taken up further on.

Related to that is what I sense to be a lack of emotional depth in Habermas's portrayal of people. And, despite drawing on Freudian theory, Habermas seems to regard the unconscious as 'not conscious' linguistically rather than as having the capacity to drive our behaviour – an "inner foreign territory", as Whitebrook (1985) calls it. So there is little sense in Habermas of the interplay of language, reason, desire and unconscious motives (Elliott, 1992).

Another problem is that the presumption of a disposition towards *rational* consensus seems unfounded. As Layder (1994: 199) points out, there is no compelling reason why people should yield to 'the better argument', and there are many reasons we might resist doing so,

even if we appreciate the quality of another's reasoning. It may not be *recognized* as being

'better', and there is a great difference between *understanding* someone's point of view and

agreeing with it (ibid). There is also the problem that the better argument (given local political

realities) may not approximate, even theoretically, to truth – though in Habermas's model it

would have to do so. Moreover, for purposes of practical action, mutual understanding is

not necessarily based on the better argument. Lots of other things come into play, but

Habermas's tends to overlook the fact that *all* communication is subject to distortion

(Layder, 1994, citing Turner, 1988). Furthermore, as Jackson (2000: 324) points out, if

Foucault is right, the claim to a better argument represents just another claim to power, so

power cannot ever be excluded or abstracted from debate. Moreover, as Dewey (1963)

argues, discussion is of little value compared with concerted action to effect change.

There is also the problem that consensus can be a deadly weapon, smothering dissent and

providing justification for the worst human excesses. We should therefore be consciously

wary of it rather than treat a presumed drive towards it as the keystone of social discourse

and ethics. In Habermas's view, 'universal pragmatics' will overcome these problems, but

that seems rather naïve. Rather, the problematical nature of consensus highlights the value

of 'discordant pluralism' (Gregory, 1996), especially as regards who or what is regarded as

'sacred' or 'profane' (Midgley, 1992b) – advice which Habermas might accept but which

comes from sources much more sceptical about rationality than he is. Even more to the

point, in contrast with Habermas's rationalistic arguments, Toulmin (2001) presents a

thoroughly Pragmatist argument for practical reason and pluralism without any recourse to

the grand assumptions or tortuous reasoning on which Habermas relies.

Campbell (1998) identifies another kind of problem, which relates to Habermas's idea of social action. Habermas (1984a: 85-6) distinguishes five concepts of 'social action': teleological, strategic, normatively regulated, dramaturgical, and communicative action. Teleological action is about ends and means; according to Habermas the central concept is that of "a *decision* among alternative courses of action" (ibid: 85, original emphasis). Strategic action is about calculating success in utilitarian terms, as in game-theory. The normative model of action lies behind role theory and is connected with internalizing values. The dramatrugical model is about presentation of self, as in Goffman's (1971) micro-sociology. Habermas describes communicative action as referring to:

> "the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations ... The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* ..." (Habermas, 1984a: 86, original emphasis).

He goes on to say that he will use the term 'action' only for symbolic expressions with which an actor takes up a relation to the world (ibid: 96). However, further on he is at pains to explain that communicative action is not just communication.

> "Concepts of social action are distinguished ... according to how they specify the coordination among goal-directed actions of different participants ... In the case of communicative action the interpretative accomplishments on which cooperative processes of interpretation are based represent the mechanism for *coordinating* action; communicative action is *not exhausted* by the act of reaching understanding in an

interpretative manner ... [it] designates a type of interaction that is *coordinated through* speech acts and does *not coincide* with them." (ibid: 101, original emphasis)

The point is that Habermas, while clearly conscious of the need for an agentive theory of action, in effect replaces the action-orientation with an interactive paradigm, thereby reducing the concept of social action to one of interaction, and rather abstract interaction at that (Campbell, 1998: 18). Habermas (1985: 151) also suggests that many of the crucial questions concerning action – free will, causality, intentionality – "can be equally well dealt with in the contexts of ontology, epistemology, or the philosophy of language". In fairness to Habermas, Campbell (1998: 8) diagnoses the problem of "action reported missing in action theory" as being widespread in current social theory. This follows the 'linguistic turn' in social theory, and a 'cognitive turn' too. The effect is to lose sight of the capacity of social actors to use their meaning-creating capacities to take deliberate action, "let alone transcend the situation in which they find themselves, or even, single-handedly, to transform it for others" (ibid: 149).

Habermas's tendency to treat power abstractly manifests itself again in the relationship between 'system' (including 'strategic' rationality) and 'lifeworld' (Habermas, 1984b). While he presents the distinction as being an analytical device, he sometimes describes these concepts as if they refer to separate aspects of society (Layder, 1994: 202). Honneth (1991) argues that the system-lifeworld distinction operates as a kind of dualism that enables communication to be separated from power. To overcome the pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno, Habermas wants to locate – at least as a normative model – a sphere where communicative reason can occur without being corrupted by power relations. This enables

him to distinguish between a 'normal' and a pathological view of the lifeworld. But his

theory of the colonization of the lifeworld – recasting relations that were communicatively

structured into instrumental and strategic system-serving forms – is possible only if there *is*

a distinction between system and lifeworld (i.e. if the distinction is ontological rather than

analytical). The same goes for the lifeworld being a sphere from which systems incursions

can be driven out.

Rasmussen (1990: 53-4, citing the 1985 edition of Honneth, 1991) argues that the

distinction between system and lifeworld sustains two theoretical fictions, "namely that

certain social systems are constructed independently of processes of consensus, while the

lifeworld can be conceived independently of power and domination". This has the effect of

insulating the system from criticism while isolating the lifeworld from the sphere of

concrete praxis – notwithstanding the early Habermas's grounding in praxis. Rasmussen

concludes that the system-lifeworld distinction tends to rob the theory of communicative

action of its emancipatory force, producing "a series of contradictions which echo the

beliefs of their author but remain in the insecure world of desire" (ibid: 55). He attributes

this loss of force to "the utopian insight" upon which Habermas's thinking rests having

been lost in the "supposed scientism of a biocybernetic insight regarding the primacy of

ideas derived from system theory", which Rasmussen associates with the influence on

Habermas of Luhmann's (1989) systems theory. Ironically, Luhmann would never have

proposed such an *unsystemic* split between system and lifeworld. That kind of dichotomy

would be unacceptable to Dewey too.

7. 4. 4. Dewey's perspective

Habermas and Seligman both advance the thesis that modernity entails a fragmentation of the public sphere as a result of the processes of individualization that first brought about the rise of the bourgeois civil society. Dewey (1963) partly subscribes to this in his critique of natural-rights liberalism, but the basis of the alleged fragmentation is challenged by Dewey's (1946: 13-14) argument that 'public' and 'private' *do not* equate with 'social' and 'individual'. Many private acts contribute to social well-being, directly or indirectly, so there is no necessary connection between the private character of an act and its social character, just as public or collective acts are not necessarily socially beneficial (e.g. antagonism to foreigners, or warfare).

For Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) the ambiguities of late modernity are associated with radical uncertainty, whereas (as discussed in chapter 5) for Dewey (1929) and Mead ([1932] 1980) and uncertainty is the basis of their concept of inquiry as action. The view of the public sphere that is particularly associated with Dewey is grounded in the Pragmatist belief in the sociality and developmental character of human nature, coupled with a conviction that a new ethos of inquiry and on-going experimentation provides the model for socio-economic reform and a "democratically organized public" (Dewey, [1927] 1946).

One version of this is presented in *Liberalism and Social Action* (Dewey, [1935] 1963). Here Dewey argues against natural-law liberalism and the individualistic notion of intelligence, and calls for a radical liberalism based upon recognition that it is "useless to talk about the failure of democracy until the source of its failure has been grasped and steps are taken to

bring about that type of social organization that will encourage the socialized extension of intelligence" (ibid: 53). Reviewing the book, Niebuhr ([1935] 1993: 154) voiced an enduring criticism of Dewey and a "constitutional weakness" in the liberal approach to politics:

"It does not recognise the relation of social and economic interest to the play of intelligence upon social problems ... Its ideal of a "freed intelligence" expects a degree of rational freedom from the particular interests and perspectives of those who think about social problems which is incompatible with the very constitution of human nature. This weakness reveals itself at every turn."

Dewey (1963: 79) expressly denies ignoring the problem of conflicting interests, saying: "The method of democracy is to bring these conflicting interests out into the open, where their special claims can be seen and appraised and where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests". The parallel with Habermas is obvious. What Dewey has in mind is that such disputes will give way to impartial and scientific inquiry into social issues. Niebuhr responds that it is futile to hope for objectivity in relation to social policies.

In *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, [1927] 1946), the argument is presented more subtly. Here it is clearer, for instance, that Dewey believes that the basis of social co-operation lies not in shared political values but in the pooling of resources in response to problems in diverse spheres of life and contexts of inquiry (Pellizzoni, 2003). Dewey (1946: 177-180) speaks of inquiry in this political sense as being both quotidian and continuous, and asserts the sociality of knowledge: "knowledge cooped up in a private consciousness is a myth" (ibid: 176). And he tries to counter criticism of his belief in science by saying that one of the

reasons for 'backwardness' in social knowledge, compared with scientific knowledge, is that physical science is still being applied *to* human concerns rather than *in* them. He also insists that learning for human society is not like other learning, because of the relational complexity of human life (ibid: 154-5).

To sum up, Dewey rejects the dichotomy of public and private that so concerns Habermas and Seligman. Yet I am inclined to think that what mainly distinguishes Dewey's thinking from theirs is his embracing of evolution and radical uncertainty, and his view of inquiry as social action, both shared with Mead. In regard to Pragmatist political thinking, I think Festenstein (1997: 190) is right to conclude that, while it has been bound up with contentious moral hopes, that does not negate the "protective" importance of free and open public discussion. However, that in itself is "a rather plastic notion, which may not bring with it any commitment to democracy as the mode of decision-making, let alone a belief in the radicalization of democratic ideals" (ibid: 190).

7. 5. CONCLUSIONS

7. 5. 1. Citizenship and the civil society argument

The exploration of citizenship in chapter 6 and of civil society here began with Zadek's development of the notion of corporate citizenship, which I objected to mainly because he uses the concept of citizenship uncritically, and as if there were no question that it applies to the corporate world. In view of the many issues concerning citizenship that have been discussed, the notion of corporate citizenship as it stands clearly is both naïve and a

misnomer, the latter because it contains only a shadowy notion of rights. Nevertheless, it

may remain useful as a slogan. At the same time, there is a strong case for aligning active

citizenship with social justice and sustainability, and much could be gained by reframing the

world of work as a domain of citizenship, both individual and collective.

Zadek is on surer ground in regard to civil society, though it seems wise not to put too

much faith in its capacities. In its various manifestations, civil society certainly seems to be a

growing force, but it is also quixotic, and public opinion can be mobilized for foul purposes

as well as fair – as evidenced by the various 'isms' that scorn the promise of 'common

humanity'. On the positive side, civil society is demonstrating a capacity for sophisticated

politics and agile tenacity, aided by what Sivanandan (1998: 17) calls "an insurgent

intelligentsia" who may not always be in the engine rooms of "information capitalism" but

are very resourceful in turning its fabric to their own ends.

Undoubtedly, civil society and citizens' movements can be effective proponents of the

cause of rights – though not on the terms Zadek envisages, because as Marshall (1963: 116)

advises: "Rights are not a proper matter for bargaining." Equally important, as political

structures become more fluid and fissiparious, it is essential that rights are safeguarded by

institutional structures which matter sufficiently to states for it be in their interests to

uphold rights within their own jurisdiction or with carefully calibrated forms of

transnational legitimacy (Heater, 2002).

It is not yet clear, in my opinion, whether globalization necessarily is detrimental to most of

the world's population, but unchecked capitalism certainly is. Thankfully, there still appears

to be enough volatility in the system to make counter-intervention a viable strategy (George, 2003; Likosky, 2003). Moreover, there is an aspect to globalization that has yet to be "exploited": it does away with most excuses for scarcity thinking. In the main, there are enough resources to go round; the challenge is to reorient and reorganize our institutions, both political and corporate. More effective institutions of global citizenship can help too, because, among other things, citizenship is a political device for demanding and ensuring accountability (Heater, 2002).

The challenges of contemporary citizenship mostly call for resolution of dichotomies between individual and community, particularism and universalism. It needs to be a dynamic synthesis, not a suppression of opposites. Lister (1998: 84) uses the term "differentiated universalism" to capture the idea of the achievement of the universal being contingent upon attention to difference. "If the notion of citizenship is to be of theoretical and political value to those groups that have been casualties of its false universalism, it has to integrate both universalist and pluralist perspectives in addressing its own exclusionary tendencies." (ibid: 84)

Freeden's three-dimensional theory of rights – incorporating the equal weighting and indivisibility of fundamental human attributes, the communal nature of human beings and their inherent developmentalism – unblocks the dichotomies that have bedevilled rights-theory, yet never loses sight of the nexus of concepts and ideas in which rights are located, and reframes the concept of utility to allow for social as well as individual interests. This approach has important affinities with Midgley's Systemic Intervention (SI), particularly in

the synergy between boundary critique and reflexive citizenship. This makes for an exciting combination of ideas.

7. 5. 2. Thesis development

Referring back to the meta-frame in Figure 1.1. (see pages 17 or 176), the concept of citizenship has been analysed in terms of rights, the notion of civil society, and discourse ethics, including the Pragmatist perspectives of Habermas and Dewey. Furthermore, an approach to rights has been set out which chimes with Systemic Intervention. Yet the problem of disembodied abstraction in SI remains. Apart from that, a dynamic strategy of rights and citizenship needs to be underpinned by a deepening of agency, and a rounded concept of agency can help to clarify the relation between citizenship and civil society. The next chapter explores how an embodied concept of agency and citizenship can be grounded.

Chapter 8:

ACTIVE BEING IN THE WORLD and AGENCY AMIDST COMPLEXITY

8. 1. Introduction

This chapter sets out to develop a rounded conception of our embodied relation to the world and our capacity for agency, to replace the abstraction of self-agency currently present in Midgley's (2000) Systemic Intervention (SI).

The way I will go about this is to first consider Seyla Benhabib's (1992) attempt to 'situate the self' by reconstructing the morality of enlightenment universalism. Despite her intentions, I find that the self she evokes remains an intellectual consciousness, almost as disembodied as the abstraction she wishes to remedy. I then tackle this abstraction and begin to undo some of the obstructions to a fully embodied portrayal of what it is to be human, particularly the false dichotomy of mind and body that – along with the dualism of reason and feeling – philosopher Mary Midgley (1996: 13) has called "one of the most serious mistakes that the learned have ever made". The argument then moves to consider the contention (Gray, 2002) that the notion of the conscious self as agent is a destructive delusion. I hold that his view of consciousness contains important insights but that he ends up reproducing the notion of consciousness as disembodied abstraction, splitting it off from the living embodiment of agency. I argue instead for an integrated view of consciousness, cognition and action based on Varela's (1999) concept of enacted cognition.

I then explore Mary Midgley's (1996) evolutionary perspective on human sociality and

moral agency, and go on to relate it to the interdependence of reason and emotion.

The chapter ends by describing my own view of active being in the world and the

complementary notion of agency amidst complexity, and shows how this more rounded

view of selfhood supports the combination of Systemic Intervention and a dynamic

approach to citizenship, and helps to ground it more deeply.

8. 2. BENHABIB'S PERSPECTIVE ON SITUATING THE SELF

8. 2. 1. The "contradictory potentials of the present"

In *Situating the Self*, Benhabib (1992) reconstructs universalist morality from a feminist

perspective and tries to put the embodied self of everyday life at the centre of public

discourse. Her starting point is that critical theory must be reconstructed to allow for our

existence as embodied, finite and fragile creatures, "not disembodied cogitos or abstract

unities of transcendental apperception" (ibid: 5). For her, the root of the problem is that, in

the formation of self, false dichotomies relating to what is properly regarded as public and

private are socialized into the constitution of the self – antagonisms "between autonomy

and nurturance, independence and bonding, sovereignty of the self and relation to others"

(ibid: 158). This starts with how the female is constructed in opposition to maleness.

Woman is what man is not – "not autonomous, independent, but by the same token,

nonaggressive but nurturant, not competitive but giving, not public but private" (ibid: 157).

This results not only in the exclusion of women from the public realm, but a denaturing of

that sphere. The female is relegated to the realm of reproductive nature and nurture, the

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interior domain of intimacy and care. She and her concerns are excluded from the public sphere of discourse, justice, culture and historicity. For the supposedly autonomous male, selfhood is bound up with this dichotomy between self and society, and internal confusion between "the law of reason and the inclination of nature, the brilliance of cognition and the obscurity of emotion" (ibid: 158). For both male and female, the self strives for unity but is caught up in these false dichotomies.

Benhabib's point is that only by recognizing that self and society are inseparable, and by adopting a "reformulated universalism", can we bring forth a politics which befits "the contradictory potentials of the present" (ibid: 4). This means reconstructing the "legacies of modernity" rather than jettisoning them altogether. Benhabib (1992: 2) defines these legacies as:

> "moral and political universalism, committed to the now seemingly "old-fashioned" and suspect ideals of universal respect for each person in virtue of their humanity; the moral autonomy of the individual; economic and social justice and equality; democratic participation; the most extensive civil and political liberties compatible with principles of justice; and the formation of solidaristic human associations."

Comparable approaches to reframing the contradictions of modernity include 'reflexive modernity' (Giddens, 1990), 'reconstructed modernity' (Rasmussen, 1990; Kemmis, 1996), and Habermas's (1997) project of re-appropriating the 'lifeworld' by connecting modern culture with everyday praxis.

8. 2. 2. Reframing enlightenment

Benhabib's (1992: 3-4) argument is that enlightenment universalism must be re-thought to take account of feminist, communitarian and postmodernist critiques. In particular, three prime features need re-thinking: (a) the claims of "legislative" reasoning to form a "moral point of view"; (b) the illusion of a disembodied and disembedded subject; and (c) the idea that reasoning detached from historical and cultural contingency can respond to the indeterminacy and complexity of real-life situations.

Benhabib refers to legislative rationality in much the same way that Bauman (1987) divides intellectuals into two ideal types, 'legislators' and 'interpreters'. The legislative strategy is to settle controversial issues by making authoritative statements that are legitimized by claims to superior knowledge with 'objective' status. Such knowledge is more accessible to intellectuals than to ordinary people because of procedural rules that supposedly assure "the attainment of truth, the arrival at better moral judgements, and the selection of proper artistic taste" (Outhwaite, 1999). Hence its timeless, universal validity. In contrast, the interpretative strategy consists of translating statements made in one communal tradition so that they can be understood in another tradition.

What Benhabib (1992: 6) proposes is a shift of ethical standpoint "from legislative to interactive rationality". Against the privileging of legislative reason and morality, she argues for justification and validation of truth claims to be a matter of discourse among communities of enquirers. This is how "the moral point of view" can be reconceptualized – if the enquirers are not viewed abstractly, but as embodied actors, of both genders, dealing

with the real complexities of life, in which there are no boundaries between public and private spheres (ibid: 5-6 & 12-13).

It follows that the way we think of others in relation to the moral self must also be re-focused. While the democratic polity has been constituted through the development of rights, it also enshrines an abstract view of the person. The problem for Benhabib is that the 'concrete' self, uniquely immersed in the lifeworld, disappears behind this abstraction. We need a more integrated view, and development of it calls for understanding why the concrete and personal has been so marginalized in our skewed conceptions of the moral sphere and moral autonomy (ibid: 170). "The exclusion of women and their point of view is not just a political omission and a moral blind spot but constitutes an epistemological deficit as well." (ibid: 13)

Benhabib is alive to the tension for discourse theorists between the desire for dialogue to be free of rights-liberal constraints and concern to avoid subjecting the dynamic nature of rights and liberties – which she speaks about mostly in constitutional and legal terms – to majoritarian rules. For her, nothing is ever really off the agenda in democratic politics, yet there are fundamental rules of engagement that cannot be abrogated, and the same goes for basic rights and liberties.

> "In communicative ethics and in democratic politics we assume critical and reflexive distance precisely toward those rules and practices which we also cannot avoid but uphold. One cannot challenge the specific interpretation of basic rights and liberties in a democracy without taking these also absolutely seriously; likewise one cannot question the texture and nature of our everyday moral commitments in

communicative ethics without permanent and continuous embroilment in them on a day-to-day level." (ibid: 107)

In other words, democratic engagement trumps majoritarian rubrics as well as rights-liberal precepts of autonomy, to the extent that discourse ethics produces normative conditions that transcend the traditional opposition between those standpoints. For Benhabib, the transcending factor is a kind of communicative consciousness.

Before describing that consciousness, it is worth noting that Habermas qualifies his commitment to universalism in terms that are sympathetic to Benhabib's stance. He is firmly of the view that human rights must have legal standing and should have universal force, precisely because breaches of rights should be dealt with, not from a moral standpoint, but by enforcing the law, through international institutions where necessary. This view is partly driven by concern that enforcement of rights "must if it comes down to it be able to prevent an event such as the Shoah happening again. Otherwise they are worthless and cannot be justified" (Habermas, 1986: 226). At the same time, Habermas is striving for a balance between universalism and reflexive relativism:

> "What does universalism mean? It means that one relativises one's own form of existence in relation to the legitimate claims of other forms of life, that one attributes equal rights to the alien and the other, with all their idiosyncracies and incomprehensible aspects, ... that spheres of tolerance must become infinitely wider than they are today – all this is what is meant by moral universalism" (Habermas, 1990b: 153).

He goes on to say that ever since the Shoah, "a *conscious* life is no longer possible without a mistrust directed at continuities which unquestioningly assert themselves and purport to derive their validity from their unquestioned character" (ibid, original italics).

8. 2. 3. The need for 'enlarged thinking'

Benhabib (1992: 7-9) rejects notions of discourse ethics that are rationalistic or presume any counter-factual consensus. In particular, she argues that Habermas tends to blur the distinction between 'consensus' and 'reaching agreement', and to overstate the case for the 'general interest'. Instead, we should be developing a capacity for reasoning based on the "reversibility" of trying to appreciate each others' views, and what Hannah Arendt (1961: 220-1) calls "enlarged thinking" – her term for judgement that "knows how to transcend its individual limitations" through communication with others and taking their views into consideration, even when we are alone in making up our minds.

The 'other' that Benhabib (1992: 10 & 164-5) has in mind is both generalized and concrete, combining the moral dignity Habermas accords to the 'generalized other' and the embodied and socially-embedded identity of the 'concrete other'. While accepting that self-definition by constituting difference from others is a feature of humanity, Benhabib regards this as a dialectical process; she also recognizes that, historically, difference and domination is not only a matter of gender but is also bound up with racial ideologies of identity and otherness. Her argument is that combining the standpoint of the 'concrete other' with that of the 'generalized other' and 'concrete other', as on a continuum, allows "reversibility of perspectives" and "enlarged thinking". Viewed in these terms, the main issue for discourse

ethics is not *consent* to a proposition but "to seek understanding with the other and to reach some reasonable agreement in an open-ended moral conversation" (ibid: 9). Similarly, in politics, identifying the general interest is less important than having procedures for reaching collective decisions that are "radically open and fair to all" (ibid: 9), with everything that implies for re-defining the conventions of public discourse. As those last two quotations indicate, Benhabib's reframing of the moral point of view goes some way towards resolving the flaws she identifies in Habermas's version, but in my view the kind of decision-making she envisages is no less idealized than his conception.

Benhabib (ibid: 11) sees 'civic friendship' and solidarity as ways of embodying enlarged thinking. Cultivating these qualities will enable us to bridge the gap between the principles of justice and the socially-embedded demands of virtue. Civic friendship and solidarity can also mediate between generalized and concrete perspectives, enabling us to shift from 'generalized' to "collective concrete others" (ibid: 11-12). But crucially this can happen only in the *public* sphere: "Such understanding ... is a product of political activity. It cannot be performed ... by the moral agent in vacuo" (ibid: 12). The 'enlarged' mentality entails engagement with multiple perspectives. Moreover, if public discussion follows established precepts of neutrality, it is likely to exclude groups who have been marginalized in framing notions of legitimate discourse, especially women and racialized minorities. Overall, therefore, Benhabib is wary of Habermas's conception of discourse ethics, maintaining that gender-blindness distorts his view of the public sphere, reproducing the old separation of the public sphere from the private familial-domestic realm of situatedness. Benhabib (1992: 11) also distances herself from what she calls the "integrationist" model of communit-arianism, which aims to revive community by "regrouping and reclaiming an integrative

vision of fundamental values and principles". For her, this is "incompatible with the values of autonomy, pluralism, reflexivity and tolerance in modern societies" (ibid). In contrast, the "participationist" model envisages community emerging organically from democratic debate and action.

This brings us to the nub of the issue I am pursuing. In effect, the consciousness Benhabib describes is situated in an intellectual commitment to a kind of discourse, so in that regard the conventional rules of engagement hardly change at all. By associating consciousness primarily with the exercise of higher mental faculties in rarified discourse, the mind-body dualism is carried over into the enlightened reflexivity of enlarged thinking. The embodiment we are left with is something of an immaculate conception. I want now to directly tackle this abstraction and begin to show how we can situate the self in a more fully embodied view of what it is to be human.

8. 3. THE EMBODIED DOMAIN

8. 3. 1. Gormley's *Domain Field*

This section deals with the mind-body dualism and the issue of consciousness, leading to the concept of enacted cognition as the embodiment of agency. Before entering the argument proper, I first want to provide an illustrative metaphor from the arts that captures the sense of embodiment that I am trying to create.

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Sculptor Antony Gormley's *Domain Field* consists of 290 figures made from casts of people of various ages, shapes and sizes from Newcastle/Gateshead who volunteered for the project. Although the figures are all distinctly human, they have no mass or boundaries, and are so lightweight that they move slightly as you pass among them. They consist only of short stainless steel rods joined at all angles, without any pattern or any suggestion of inner organs or outer boundary of skin, so it seems to be only the play of the light and your own imagination that makes strangely personable figures of them. Yet it takes only a shift of visual perspective to make them blur into ghostly thickets. Gormley has said that edges "are the relation between something and nothing"; they "both define and release us" (quoted in Leader, 2003). The figures in *Domain Field* somehow constitute the body without putting boundaries on it, and this, combined with the way they were made, brings out "the network of *relations* constitutive of a body" (Leader, 2003 original emphasis) and challenges the false dichotomies that befuddle our sense of embodied relation to the world.

One of the main contentions in this chapter is that the mind-body dualism is false, because no human attribute or capacity is separable from bodily relation to the socio-natural world. Specifically, there is no such thing as 'mind', 'consciousness' or 'self' independent from that flesh and blood relation. Rather, what we call mind, consciousness or self is an emergent effect of active relation to the world (Mead, [1932] 1980; Burkitt, 1999). It is this that makes thought possible and evolutionarily necessary, not that thinking produces consciousness. However, the mind is not reducible to the brain and nervous system (a reductionist interpretation of embodiment); nor is consciousness merely a product of linguistic constructs (another kind of reduction). We are constituted as persons relationally and live only in relation to the socio-natural world. And just as there is no separation of self and

active being in the world, there is no separation of self and society. However, the complication that goes with these fusions is that practical and moral questions are often bound up with contradictory impulses and conflicting emotions. I will go on to develop the argument that uncertainty and contradiction are not so much symptoms of the 'human condition' as conditions of human evolution. First, however, the 'mind-body problem' has to be considered and consciousness grounded in the concrete reality of embodiment.

8. 3. 2. Disembodied abstraction, real problems

The persistent notion that the human mind is somehow separate from and superior to the animal and material world in general can be traced to various influences. Ones I would highlight are: (a) the intriguing but everyday reality that we can 'inwardly' observe and reflect upon our 'outward' appearance, presence and actions; (b) the Christian belief in the soul as the immaterial essence of being human; (c) philosophical dualism, exemplified by Descartes; and (d) the Enlightenment faith in reason as the highest human capacity and the means of progressively achieving the full potential of humanity. That all this pre-dated modern evolutionary theory also has to be taken into account, along with the fact that only in recent decades has neurology begun to produce the kind of evidence regarding consciousness that decisively confirms the ordinary sense of unity of body and mind.

While recognizing that he is "very closely united" with his body, Descartes insists that "it is certain that I, that is to say my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it" (Descartes, [1640] 1968: 156). This has come to be known as 'Cartesian dualism', and, as Erlich (2002: 120) observes, it is "so contrary to the

views of most researchers today" that neurologist Damasio (1994) called his first book *Descartes' Error*, referring to the separation of consciousness from the body. On its own Cartesian dualism could hardly have had much influence were it not for the fact that it chimed with the other religious, intellectual and cultural factors that have maintained belief in the mind-body split. At this stage what matters is not the faulty rationale but the continuing ramifications of this idea.

Abstraction of human embodiment has a number of effects that diminish our capacity for active being in the world. First, it devalues and compromises the aspect of our being — active presence in the world — that is the very basis on which we relate to the socio-natural world and through which we become individuals and form collectivities. Secondly, the vaunting of abstract rationality above all other faculties denies the significance of sensation, emotion, instinct, intuition and all modes of consciousness that are not amenable to rationality — along with the interrelations they entail — and, if followed through, would rob us of the feelings (both physical and affective) that constitute our essential feedback on being in the world. Moreover, these are the very means by which we judge the merits and limitations of reason, and how to act when reason fails us. Thirdly, the combined effect would be to empty human life of any sense of active being, and in the process reduce reason itself to mere rationalism reflecting only a narrow 'bandwidth' of consciousness. It also produces an artificial and very limited conception of learning. Fourth, this kind of thinking sets us apart from our animal origins and evolutionary embeddedness.

Finally, all this sets formidable barriers against understanding the nature of human beings as actively relational in all respects. By this I mean that what we call human nature (a term to

be further clarified shortly) is brought into being through relation to the socio-natural world, and the complex of inter-dependencies this entails inevitably involves us in affecting the lives of other people and being affected by them, and in affecting the natural world and being affected by it. This would seem blindingly obvious, if the self-denying ordinance of disembodied abstraction were not so persistent. I am referring to concepts of humanity that privilege our capacity for rational thought or symbolic/linguistic representation but fail to recognise that *all* human attributes are intrinsically coupled with embodiment, not merely as a biological relation but in the sense that this embodied coupling is the primary (but not only) form of our personal and ecological relation to the world. Burkitt (1999) relates this to what Foucault (1979: 143) calls "bio-history", described as "the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another". Apart from that brief mention, Foucault says no more about it, preferring to develop the concept of bio-power. For Burkitt the notion of bio-history is vital for understanding embodiment because it captures the idea of our bodies being at the axis of life and history.

To put it another way, disembodied abstraction de-activates our sense of active relation to the world, proposing instead a rationalistic-linguistic simulacrum with no grip on the world and no prospect of directing its hollowed-out consciousness in any purposive way. Having made the point, I now want to say that it does not go far enough. Disembodied abstraction is doubly de-naturing, both as I have just described and by ignoring the relational and ecological nature of all life.

As Burkitt puts it, following Bateson (1973) and Leontyev (1981): "life is a relation that can only be sustained as an ecology" (Burkitt, 1999: 16). Burkitt (1999: 25) quotes Leontyev

(1981: 10) as saying that "we are compelled, both theoretically and factually, to regard life

first and foremost as an interaction between an organism and its environment". Bateson

(1973: 309) argues that the relationship is more radically relational, constituting an ecology

of animals and environment, and contrary to reductionist notions of evolutionary survival,

it is "the [particular] ecology which survives and slowly evolves". Elsewhere (ibid: 459) he

argues that the unit of survival is organism plus environment, and then goes on (ibid: 459)

to note a vital implication for human survival. It is that once the concept of survival is

corrected to include the environment and the interaction between organism and

environment, it becomes evident that evolutionary survival is intrinsically linked with

cognition, as a general property of living systems. This is very much in line with the ideas I

am trying to develop.

This dynamic is not a one-way relation in which the ecological system selects and sustains

human life but an interrelation whereby embodied human beings act on the ecological

system in order to select and change aspects of it (ibid: 25). It is no longer a matter only of

human adaptation *to* environment but also a matter of deliberate adaptation *of* our

environment:

> "In human evolution the usual relationship between organism and environment has
>
> become virtually reversed in adaptation. Cultural invention has replaced genetic
>
> change as the effective source of variation. Consciousness allows people to analyze
>
> and make deliberate alterations, so adaptation of environment to organism has
>
> become the dominant mode." (Levins and Lewontin, 1985: 65)

Biologist Paul Erlich (2002: x) describes evolution as "the explanatory principle that connects all biological phenomena, including cultures, into a seamless whole". He regards human evolution as a process of "genetic and cultural evolution and gene-culture coevolution" (ibid: 331). He also advocates a pluralist conception of what it is to be human – human *natures*: "The universals that bind people together at any point in our evolution are covered in the word *human*. The word *natures* emphasises the differences that give us our individuality, our cultural variety, and our potential for future genetic and – especially – cultural evolution" (Erlich, 2002: ix-x, original emphasis). For Erlich, (2002: 14), greater familiarity with evolution can help us to steer the cultural evolution of the more troublesome features of human *natures* (plural) – the features producing the worst excesses of conflict, cruelty and hate, extremes of injustice, and environmental destruction – in ways that could improve the lives of most human beings and relieve pressure on the planet. Erlich is cautious about the possibility of conscious evolution, saying that "it's worth a try" (ibid: 14) and "I tend to be optimistic that we *can* do it but pessimistic about whether we *will*" – the 'it' being "to learn to deal sensibly with nature and our *natures*" (ibid: 330, original emphases). Though political philosopher John Gray (2002)[1] does not comment directly on the prospect of conscious human evolution, he clearly regards it as hopelessly misguided, a product of the false consciousness he deplores. Gray does not use Marx's famous phrase in this context but it seems apt because he includes Marx in the pantheon of Western philosophers who have mistakenly led us to believe that – through full consciousness and reason – we can become "authors of our lives" (Gray, 2002: 111).

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[1] Not to be confused with the author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.*

8. 3. 3. False consciousness?

Straw Dogs (Gray, 2002)[2] is a polemic against modern humanism and the dogma of progress, which Gray sees as being founded on the notion that human consciousness enables us to master our existence. Gray defines modern humanism in its various guises as "the faith that through science humankind can know the truth – and so be free" (ibid: 26), along with the philosophical conceit that the world only acquires meaning through human intervention.

The following gives the flavour of Gray's view of what underpins these delusions:

> "Other animals are born, seek mates, forage for food, and die. That is all. But we humans – we think – are different. We are *persons*, whose actions are the result of their *choices*. Other animals pass their lives unawares, but we are *conscious*. Our image of ourselves is formed from our ingrained belief that *consciousness, selfhood* and *free will* are what define us as human beings, and raise us above all other creatures.
>
> In our more detached moments, we admit that this view of ourselves is flawed. Our lives are more like fragmentary dreams than the enactments of conscious selves. We control very little of what we most care about … Yet we insist that *mankind* can achieve what *we* cannot: conscious mastery of its existence … Once we switch off the sound-track – the babble of God and immortality, progress and [humanism] – what sense can we make of our lives?" (ibid: 38, original italics)

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[2] The title comes from the *Tao Te Ching*: "Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs" (Gray, 2002: 33).

Gray's answer is to renounce our anthropocentric view of the world, and our delusions of progress and autonomy. Instead we must learn to live more contingently, expecting no more of life than other animals do. Yet we cannot revert to animal spontaneity, and are plagued by contradictions, the only remedy for which is to adopt a more *effortless* (Taoist) cast of mind that would allow us to be less burdened by the sickness of morality (ibid: 116). However, we seem fated to wreck the balance of life on earth and thereby to bring about our own annihilation. The best we can do, Gray suggests, is to come to terms with the Gaia hypothesis and learn to follow the Taoist precept to avoid conscious striving, acting only according to the needs of the situation, without projecting ourselves upon the world. The Gaia hypothesis is the theory that the earth is a self-regulating system (Lovelock, 1989; Margulis, 1998; Turney, 2003). The idea is not that Gaia is an organism; rather, it is an emergent property of interactions among organisms, the planet and the sun (Margulis, 1998: 149). Mary Midgley (2001) has observed that for systems thinkers the concept of Gaia is not only compelling but almost inevitable, one that bridges the dualisms that have fragmented our understanding of the earth, revealing it "as an intelligible working system rather than as a jumbled meaningless background to human life" (Midgley, 2003: 133).

Gray also looks forward on Gaia's behalf to an era of post-human evolution by means of artificial intelligence. As machines evolve, he envisages that they will "do more than become conscious. They will become spiritual beings ... Not only will they think and have emotions. They will develop the errors and illusions that go with self-awareness" (ibid: 188). The implication is that 'posthuman evolution' will be more in keeping with Gaia by virtue of its artificiality. Indeed, Gray gives only passing consideration to the possibility that our artificial successors might turn out to be even more destructive than us.

While it is tempting to dismiss this dystopian cocktail, the supporting arguments contain some important insights about consciousness that bear directly on the issue of embodiment and agency.

8. 3. 4. Untangling consciousness

Gray does not distinguish between levels of consciousness, so that is a useful starting point for considering how his views compare with those of others. Erlich (2002: 110) defines consciousness in general as the capacity of some animals, including humans, to have mental representations of things that are happening to or are perceived by them. Alongside this 'ordinary' consciousness, he uses the term "intense consciousness" (ibid) for the capacity to be acutely aware of our physical and social surroundings, to remember feelings and happenings, to 'talk' to ourselves about the meaning of these thoughts and feelings, and to have a continuous sense of 'self' – and of mortality. Similarly, neurologist Damasio (1999: 195-200) distinguishes between 'core' and 'extended' consciousness.

Gray (2002: 59-60) attributes what he sees as the prevailing concept of human consciousness to a mix of Platonic and Cartesian ideas. From Plato there is the belief that ultimate reality is what we perceive when we are most acutely aware spiritually. From Descartes there is the claim that knowledge presupposes conscious awareness, and the mind-body dualism already mentioned. Both Plato and Descartes tell us that consciousness is what sets humans apart from animals and makes us superior to them.

In contrast there is the view I have presented that 'mind', 'consciousness' or 'self' are inseparable from bodily relation to the socio-natural world, with consciousness as an emergent effect of that relation. As for how human consciousness may have evolved, I see no better answer than it evolved from animal consciousness, with there being various indistinct degrees of animal consciousness, from, say, amoebas to earthworms to dogs to chimpanzees to humans (Mayr, 2001: 301; Erlich, 2002: 112). And along with Margulis (1998: 141-2) and Gray (2002), I see no need to draw a distinct line between animal consciousness and the forms of proprioception (sensing of self) in plants and organisms that existed long before our ancestors. The differences in humans, particularly the evolution of 'intense' or 'extended' consciousness, are mainly the result of relatively complex social evolution (Burkitt, 1999; Erlich, 2002; Capra, 2003).[3]

Now let us see what insights that Gray (2002: 59-64) brings to this. First, he is right to say that the Platonic/Cartesian notion of consciousness counts for less in the scheme of things than we have been taught. Sensation and perception simply do not depend on conscious awareness, nor are they uniquely human. As Margulis (1998: 141-2) puts it: "The Earth has enjoyed a proprioceptive system for millennia, since long before humans evolved. Small mammals communicate the coming of earthquake or cloudburst. Trees release 'volatiles', substances that warn their neighbors that gypsy moth larvae are attacking their leaves. Proprioception, the sensing of self, probably is as old as self itself." Gray (2002: 60) quotes this, but he omits the sentence about self.

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[3] Erlich (2002) also cites a view of the evolution of consciousness by Humphrey (1992) that links it to bodily sensation and relates the development of intellectual faculties to the complexities of social life. However, my understanding is that Humphreys' position clashes with my own because he equates mind with brain, and holds that all states of mind can be explained *purely* as neuro-psychological functions, without need for further explanation.

Second, what we know from conscious perception is only a fraction of what we know through all our sensory capacities. Subliminal perception is a case in point. We are unaware of using it but it is a normal and continuous mode of scanning our environment. It is precisely because subliminal advertising works so well, but people are unaware of its influence, that it is banned in many countries. Third, there is the much-overlooked phenomenon that highly-skilled behaviour often goes beyond conscious awareness of what we are doing – from breathing to walking to driving a car or playing music. The marvellous fact of the matter is that, as Gray (2002: 64) puts it, "The life of the mind is like that of the body. If it depended on conscious awareness or control it would fail entirely." Furthermore, consciousness is not constant but is continually fluctuating, and the fluctuations are closely related to biological factors that we are only dimly aware of, even when we think about them – metabolic regulation, our sensori-motor systems, our nervous systems and brains – factors upon which our survival and sense of presence in the world depend entirely, yet our bodies manage them without consulting us. All this serves to reinforce the point that most of what really matters about consciousness is preconscious or unconscious, and that is without even considering the realm of feelings and emotions. Indeed, the signs are that, in human information processing, conscious awareness follows perception, not the other way round, in the sense that we become aware of stimuli as a result of preconscious 'pre-attentive' processing (perception), as distinct from conscious 'focal-attentive' processing; the latter happens milliseconds after integration of input and dissemination to the brain, unconsciously (Velmans, 1999).

This may seem counter-intuitive, but the evidence is quite strong. The following is the gist of Velmans' (1999: 17, original emphasis) conclusions.

> "When does perception become conscious? On present indications, only once analysis is complete and attended-to information is sufficiently well-integrated to be disseminated throughout the brain ... In what sense does perception become conscious? Only in the sense that analysis of input can *result* in a conscious experience. Consciousness of familiar stimuli, rather than *entering into* input analysis, appears to *follow it*, in human information processing. Information processing most closely *associated* with conscious awareness of input appears to *operate* unconsciously in the economy of mind."

Feelings and emotions play only a vestigal part in Gray's account of humanity. This is odd, since among his sources he cites two books by Damasio (1994, 1999), both with 'emotion' in the subtitle. It is consistent, however, with Gray's hollow view of the self. Despite emphasizing our animal natures, Gray subtly persists in splitting consciousness from embodiment. He cites Maturana & Varela (1980) and Margulis (2001), and approvingly quotes Capra's (1997) statement that "Living systems are cognitive systems. And living is a process of cognition". Yet he shies away from the connection between consciousness and embodiment. At the same time, Gray's dismissal of the "ordinary sense of self" as "illusive" depends entirely on associating it with conscious awareness and agency defined as willed action (Gray, 2002: 69-73). However, the illusion he deplores is one of his own making. He identifies "the poverty of consciousness" (ibid: 59) with the mistake of privileging awareness, and then depicts the ordinary sense of self as having no grounding other than

conscious awareness. This is because it is not so much selfhood as such that Gray regards as a delusion, but its association with personal autonomy.

> "We see ourselves as unitary, conscious subjects, and our lives as the sum of their doings. Recent cognitive science and ancient Buddhist teachings are at one in viewing this ordinary sense of self as illusive. Both view selfhood in humans as a highly complex and fragmentary thing." (ibid: 70)

He is referring to evidence from neuroscience that makes nonsense of the notion of a 'ghost in the machine' directing perceptions and behaviour. Almost despite his own arguments, Gray (2002) seems to be blind to the mounting evidence that the notion of a controlling homunculus is no longer the issue. As Velmans (2002b: 94, original emphasis) puts it, "the thing-itself and mind-itself are *fundamentally* psychophysical". In other words, phenomenal consciousness and the physicality of being are just different dimensions of the same self, the one mode of being (McCardell, 2003).

Gray's point is that we project ourselves onto to our actions because by doing so we can maintain an illusion of continuity. Neuropsychologist Paul Broks (2004) has given an account of this that is much more startling than Gray's depiction. Broks himself (ibid: 241) confesses to having difficulties "finding my own coordinates when it comes to the problem of consciousness". He has no compunction in saying that there is no 'stuff of the self' to be found in our brains. Yet it is proven that the hippocampus is where memories are laid down (ibid: 27), and the amygdala links thoughts and feelings, and also activates the autonomic nervous system (ibid: 29). Still, no 'self stuff' can be located – "There just *isn't*" (ibid: 112; original emphasis). Yet the cases Broks recounts of people with brain damage bear out the

weird capacity of our minds to construct a meaningful narrative of experience, sometimes to Broks' own amazement. They fly in the face of Gray's (2002: 73-6) assertion that we know we are nobodies.

On two key points Broks and Gray are in accord, though their outlooks are very different in spirit. As Broks (2004: 56) puts it, "Minds emerge from process and interaction, not substance. In a sense, we inhabit the spaces between things. We subsist in emptiness. A beautiful, liberating, thought and nothing to be afraid of. The notion of a tethered soul is crude by comparison." This chimes with Gray's hope of release from the tyranny of the imaginary homunculus, and with the gnomic suggestion that we cope with things only because we are a succession of fragments. The two viewpoints also converge (almost) on the relational nature of minds. For Gray (ibid: 72-3), "Selfhood in humans is not the expression of any essential unity. It is a pattern of organisation, not unlike that found in insect colonies ... In humans, as in insect colonies, perception and action go on as if there were a self that directs them, when none in fact exists." For Broks (2004: 102; original emphasis):

> "The working brain has to be understood not only as part of a larger biological
>
> system (the rest of the body), but also as a component of the wider social system.
>
> What we refer to as the 'self' is a product of biological and social forces arising from
>
> the *interaction* of individual, isolated, brains. There is no spark in a single stone but,
>
> struck together, two stones can start a blaze."

8. 3. 5. Enacted cognition – the concrete mode of agency

Gray (2002: 71-3) quotes from Francisco Varela (1999: 74-5) in support of his plea for life without the illusions of agency, but ignores the fact that Varela's scientific work centres on the idea of action and cognition being mostly inseparable – the concept of life as a process of *enacted cognition*.

For Varela (1999: 8) cognition is grounded in the concrete activity of an organism; that is, in its sensori-motor coupling with the world. He uses the term "enaction" because it connotes this "bringing forth" by concrete activity, always immediately situated (ibid). "The concrete is not a step toward something else: it is both where we are and how we will get to where we will be" (ibid: 7). He gives the example of the cockroach. It has only four basic modes of locomotion – standing, slow walking, fast walking, and running – yet these creatures can successfully navigate any environment on the planet, natural or artificial. How does it select the appropriate behaviour? Varela describes it as the "*commonsensical emergence*" of behaviour from known experience (ibid: 11; original emphasis). He goes on to say that "the key to autonomy is that a living system finds its way into the next moment by acting appropriately out of its own resources" (ibid). And it is during breakdowns in 'ready-at-hand' action (immediate coping) that the creative side of living cognition comes into play and new behaviours emerge concretely. The coupling with cognition is that "cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided" (ibid: 12). Thus "cognition consists not of representations but of embodied action" (ibid: 17).

Lest there be any misunderstanding, Varela is not discounting deliberate reasoning.

> "My interest in immediate coping does not mean that I deny the importance of deliberation and analysis. My point is that it is important to understand the role and relevance of both cognitive modes. It is at the moments of breakdown, that is, when we are *not* experts of our microworld anymore, that we deliberate and analyze, that we become like beginners ..." (Varela, 1999: 18).

And in case there is any doubt about what Varela means by 'embodied', let me quote him again (ibid: 11-12):

> "Embodiment entails the following: (1) cognition dependent upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities; and (2) individual sensorimotor capacities that are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological and cultural context."

This corresponds with Burkitt's (1999) argument that thought is an embodied social activity. Embodiment means active being in the world, and the notion of 'self' is an emergent effect of the networks of relations that constitute and continually re-constitute that interactive being. The sense of agency is not an unfortunate "artefact of conflicts among our impulses", as Gray (2002: 70) maintains. It is simply an artefact of being human.

Gray's insistence that morality – "supposed to be universal and categorical" (ibid: 90) – is mired in the 'insoluble contradictions' in our make-up brings in another perspective on agency that contrasts with his fatalism. What he says (ibid: 116) is: "If humans differ from other animals, it is partly in the conflicts of their instincts ... Morality is a sickness peculiar

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to humans ... Arising from our animal natures, ethics needs no ground; but it runs aground in the conflicts of our needs."[4]

Against that, I will turn now to the argument for grounding morality in the perplexing legacies of human evolution. In other words, I will be arguing that moral dilemmas *are* built into our natures, but not as a sickness. Rather, they arise from our capacity for active being in the world.

8. 4. EVOLUTION AND MORAL AGENCY

8. 4. 1. Evolution and freedom

The fact that we *do* sometimes experience conflicting motives is parlayed by Gray (2002) into the assertion that most of humanity is bound up in insoluble contradictions that make nonsense of the notion that we are capable of authentic agency. I mean 'authentic' in the sense that something is genuine (not sham), warranted (authorized in the circum-stances), and is to some extent ratifiable (can be confirmed). In contrast to his view, the one to be developed here follows Mary Midgley's (1996: 3) argument that "human moral capacities are just what could be expected to evolve when a highly social creature becomes intelligent enough to become aware of profound conflicts among its motives". Appreciating this entails getting away from abstractions and reductionist views of humanity, and coming to

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[4] Gray implies that other animals do not experience conflicting impulses. Mary Midgley (1996: 171-2) cites evidence to the contrary – e.g. signs of visible distress, confusion and ambivalent behaviour when violence breaks out among chimpanzees – and suggests that the more advanced the animals are, the more sophisticated the experience of conflict is.

terms with two key points. First, morality is not the product of detached rationality but arises from experiencing our interdependence with others – and with the rest of the socio-natural world. Second, morality cannot be derived from ideological certainty or any other denial of the complexity of life and of our own make-up. Rather, as Midgley argues, each of us is capable, to some extent, of acting as a whole in dealing with our conflicting desires (ibid: 102-3), and reaching this wholeness "is surely the core of what we mean by human freedom" (ibid: 168).

An important aspect of the concept of enacted cognition is that it shifts the locus of perception from that of an external observer to that of the perceiver guiding their actions (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Varela, 1999). Indirectly, this is also the starting point for Midgley's re-framing of agency. She argues that taking consciousness seriously involves accepting the need for convergent explanations from both 'inner' and 'outer' standpoints[5] – both together, insofar as we can think that way, rather than viewing life as guided purely by inner consciousness (the Cartesian view) or insisting that the idea of agency is mere superstition defying biologically-driven reality (e.g. Skinner, 1973: 206; Wilson, 1975: 3; Dawkins, 1976: x). Once a convergent view of consciousness is accepted, the notion of agency that we use for everyday purposes has to form part of the explanation. As Midgley (1996: 102-3) argues, it is useless to invent theories that marginalize the fact that ordinary life depends completely on the assumption that people have some degree of agency, however limited.

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[5] Maturana & Varela (1987) attempt to do this, in describing the emergence of language, by bringing the notion of an observer into the concept of autopoiesis. I find this part of their theory unconvincing. Palmer (1998) sees it as smuggling subject/object dualism into autopoietic theory. Midgley (2000) criticizes Maturana's (1998a) notion of a 'standard observer' as being an 'independent observer' by another name.

This does not imply any claim to unconditional autonomy, nor does it associate freedom with a single faculty such as 'will'. The claim is simply that "each of us can, to however slight an extent, understand our own position and our choices and thereby act individually, as a whole" (ibid: 102). We know that this sense of personal wholeness is limited and vulnerable – that goes with biological reality and social interdependence – yet it is the manner of our being in the world: "the only kind of life that is possible for our species" (ibid: 103).

None of this alters the fact that we experience conflicting impulses; this is freedom *with* inner conflict, not freedom *from* it. This is why we have developed a batch of concepts for how agency is enacted *with people*, not just with things. There is the concept of acting deliberately rather than casually or accidentally, and gradations in between. There is the idea of having reasons for choosing to act this way or that, and the need to reconcile competing options – which brings in the notion of priorities and how situational change can affect them. There are concepts relating to the ease or difficulty of doing something, and notions of success or failure. And for actions affecting other people there are degrees of responsibility, co-operation, approval or disapproval, and they bring into play notions of praise, blame or excuse. Midgley's argument is that the whole 'tool-kit' of limited freedom is necessarily one for making *value* judgements. "It is a kit whose use naturally leads people to develop a morality." (ibid: 104)

This is not about the *content* of morality. It is about making the rise of morality intelligible. The core argument – based on ideas put forward by Darwin – is that morality is a response to natural conflicts of motive, and its development is to be expected in a socially-dependent

species with a highly-evolved capacity for self-awareness, including consciousness of inner conflict. "Inner conflict itself ... is thus seen to be central to freedom and to the morality by which we try to manage it" (ibid: 20). This perspective puts Midgley at odds with the Hobbesian notion of egotistical self-interest held in check by social contract; with Social Darwinist interpretations of 'the survival of the fittest' and other forms of biological determinism; with Cartesian dualism and Kantian shrinkage of autonomy to a nebulous concept of will. Referring to the latter, Midgley (1996: 114) remarks that "Like householders in a flood, they keep moving upstairs, gradually losing the use of the lower floors." Her view is also at odds with the classical Utilitarian emphasis on the common good above all other, and the liberal view of individual autonomy; at odds with reductionism and dogmatism in general; and against the notion that moral questions can only be properly determined by experts with privileged knowledge. All of these have stood in the way of finding an intelligible relation between human evolution and moral agency. The connection is our animal origins, and particularly the role of sociality.

8. 4. 2. The significance of sociality

As Gray (2002: 110) puts it: "The roots of ethics are in the animal virtues", but there is great resistance to recognizing this aspect of evolution. This is because of adherence to the notion of a step change in evolution, separating humans from the higher primates and bestowing *humans alone* with the powers of consciousness, language, reason and feelings. This amounts to a denial of evolution, and flies in the face of the evidence accumulated over the last forty years of the psychological and social similarities between ourselves and other animals, especially chimpanzees (e.g. Goodall 1971, 1990).

That said, insofar as we can tell from our vantage point today, what makes us different to

our primate cousins is a combination of brain development, greater *capacity* for

consciousness, and cultural evolution. The key factor is *sociality* – a range of relational

capacities shared with our animal cousins but evolved to far greater complexity in our

species. That greater complexity is due to the fact that beyond a certain stage of brain

development, consciousness and cultural evolution became the prime factors in human

evolution. Again, sociality is the operative factor.

This is not to suggest that sociality explains everything about human evolution and

individual development, nor to suggest that it trumps all other factors when there are

competing explanations. I simply want to nail down the point that moral agency is an

attribute of a species that is highly evolved both in its capacity for social relations and in its

awareness of the strains of self-consciousness.

So what is the moral significance of natural sociality? As Midgley (1996, 136) explains:

"On Darwin's suggestion, the relation of the natural social motives to morality would be

much like the relation of natural curiosity to mathematics and science, or the relation of

natural wonder and admiration to art, or that of natural amusability to jokes." These natural

motives do not of themselves create the artefacts and institutions that channel them, but

they provide "a certain appropriate motivational force" (ibid) that has to be there for such

channels to be created. This relation also holds true in another way. These motives pre-exist

culture, because without them culture would not exist; at the same time, the form the

motives take at particular places and times is culturally determined; yet they needed to take

particular forms in the first place in order to give shape to the culture. "Not just anything becomes a custom." (ibid: 137)

Sociality, then, supplies favourable conditions[6] for morality to develop but does not in itself produce ethical guidelines. "What makes rules necessary is the fact that motives clash, and clash in the context of a mental life that badly needs to work as a whole" (ibid: 138; original emphasis). It is to be expected, therefore, that chronic conflicts of motive strike us as problematic, and that some ways of reconciling them come to be regarded as more acceptable than others.

8. 4. 3. The evolutionary basis of morality

Regarding the emergence of ethics, Darwin thought it highly probable "that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or anything like as well developed, as in man" (Darwin, [1871] 1981: 71-72). This ties in with Darwin's view ([1871] 1981: 166) of the cultural advantages of morality and social cohesion: "It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe, yet that an advancement in the standard of morality, and an increase in the number of [people well-

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[6] 'Favourable conditions' is a biological term referring to factors that favour metabolism, growth and reproduction. Typical examples are having enough food and shelter, the right temperature range, availability of oxygen and water, and the ability of organisms to attract a mate, reproduce and successfully rear their offspring.

endowed with the virtues of social solidarity] will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another."

Of course, Darwin could be wrong about this, and there is no way of proving or disproving it conclusively. As Mayr (2001: 283) observes, few aspects of evolution have been more controversial. The classic objection to linking ethics and sociality is that social motives are strongly biased towards kin. This objection usually serves as a back-stop to the argument that altruistic behaviour is incompatible with natural selection, because natural selection only rewards selfish behaviour. Midgley (1996: 141-3) observes that bias towards kin does not in fact preclude the forming of bonds with strangers, and bonding between groups who originally were strangers is an important feature of most human societies. Underpinning this is the natural ability, shared with other animals, to get used to strangers and to learn to rub along with them. More significant again is our ability to imagine ourselves in someone else's position and to sympathize (or empathize) with their feelings.

Mayr's (2001: 283-287) untangling of the issue generally supports that view. Altruism is conventionally defined as action that benefits the recipient but at some cost to the altruist. This excludes all acts of thoughtfulness and kindness that carry no noticeable cost, and therefore discounts much of the behaviour that makes social life possible, merely because it is performed without cost. Hence the need to distinguish between different kinds of altruistic behaviour. As Mayr sees it, certain kinds of altruism clearly *are* favoured by natural selection: behaviour that benefits one's own offspring, actions favouring close relatives (kin selection), and altruism towards members of the same social group, whether kin or not. On the last point, Mayr supports Darwin's view that natural selection probably favours the

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development of friendly and cooperative relations between all members of the same social group. Obviously, social cohesion is also enhanced by reciprocal helpfulness – sometimes called reciprocal altruism (and deemed by some to be inherently selfish, because there is a 'pay-back'). As Mayr notes, such mutual help is found not only among members of the same social group, but also between members of different groups, and even between species (e.g. the small fish that accompany large ones and clean them of parasites). Conceivably, the whole range of symbiotic relations could be included in this category.

The picture changes, however, when it comes to relating natural selection to altruism towards outsiders, where there is more deep-seated resistance to giving up one's interests in favour of other people's. It is hard to see how *natural selection* would favour altruism towards strangers. What does support it, though, is *cultural learning*, which Mayr sees as having a twofold impact on the development of ethics. First, the propensity for altruistic behavior towards others of the *same group* is a vital aspect of the emergence of ethics, but it is not an axiomatic effect of evolution. It requires cultural leadership and endorsement to become formulated. Secondly, altruistic behaviour towards *outsiders* can only be acquired through cultural learning, because it calls for the redirecting of altruistic tendencies towards an 'unintended' target. But there is a powerful factor in its favour: the fact that reciprocal helpfulness works as successfully with outsiders as it does with insiders. Even more important, in Mayr's view, is the capacity, favoured by the increasing diversity of human populations, to overcome rigid notions of insider and outsider and to move towards more inclusive notions of human ethics. That may be optimistic, but only if we choose to ignore

its potential and retain outmoded ideas about what evolution probably does and does not entail.[7]

Nevertheless, the suspicion remains that cooperative motivation has insufficient authority to underpin morality. The fact of bias is inescapable, and we tend to have strong feelings that are not necessarily supported by reason. Does this arbitrary partiality disqualify the emotive part of our make-up from contributing anything important to morality? Midgley (1996: 149) argues that such progress as there has been in extending the protection of rights to people previously excluded or oppressed – painstaking, surely, and often flouted, but undeniable if one compares, say, Kant's time with ours – would not have happened, nor further progress be conceivable, without an undercurrent of natural sympathy to sustain it.

On the other hand, humanity is haunted by the ravages of socially-mobilized emotion. Does this mean that we are slaves to our emotions, so cannot be free? Thinking that it does, Kant ([1785] 1998) sought a rationale for pure reason to control the emotions. This led him to argue that people have dignity as 'ends in themselves', by virtue of their autonomous wills – operating independently of one's natural desires and emotions. Combined with the

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[7] A general feature of gene-reductionist notions of evolution is worth noting here. It is that for evolutionists committed to the idea that natural selection operates only or almost entirely at the level of *genes* – with organisms serving only as usefully adaptive carriers (eg. Wilson, 1975; Dawkins, 1976) – this touchstone serves the same argumentative purpose as the zero-sum notion of individual autonomy does for liberal-rights theorists. They see it as trumping all other arguments. The flaw in the reductionist argument is that they are confusing *genes* – which are merely replicators – with the *host* organisms that actually do the adapting, so the gene-determinist version of evolution is topsy-turvey. Erlich (2002: 339) challenges Dawkins' understanding of DNA, and most of the leading theorists now emphatically support the principle that evolution occurs in a symbiosis of genes, host organism and environment (Lewontin, 2001; Mayr, 2001; Erlich, 2002; Gould, 2002). Cultural evolution takes centre stage in Erlich (2002) and, on different terms, in Dennett (2004). Dennett (1991, 2004) and Midgley (1980, 1996, 2003) are poles apart on some basic issues. Nonetheless, once he gets past some very contrived arguments about free will and determinism, Dennett's (2004) view of the social evolutionary basis of agency supports Midgley's (1996) argument.

'imperative' of universally-applicable ethical maxims, this produces the ideal of the kingdom of ends, one of people respecting each other's autonomously universalizing wills. However, this fails to account for the fact that what gives reason its force is partly emotional. Conscience would have little claim on us otherwise, and without it practical reason is unlikely to translate into commensurable action. At the same time, while respect for others "has its roots in the natural structure of feelings that is our social heritage", it does find expression in how we think, and translating it into action calls for coherent reasoning and careful articulation (Midgley, 1996: 151-2). Thus emotion and reason are complementary, but this complementarity does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in relation to another element of "the structure of feeling that shapes our thoughts" (ibid: 152) – our embodied selves.

In a moment I will take up the question of what kind of freedom goes with this view of moral agency. However, first I want to bring in the partly contrasting perspectives on reason and emotion put forward by Damasio and Burkitt, both of which endorse the complementarity that Midgley wants to uphold. From yet another standpoint, Maturana and Varela (1987) also insist on the inseparability of emotion and cognition. However, more relevant here are the differing ways in which Damasio and Burkitt support Midgley's argument.

8. 4. 4. Differing views of emotion

Damasio (1994, 1999) confirms the interdependence of reason and emotion from neuroscientific evidence. Commenting on cases of brain damage resulting in selective reduction of emotional connectivity, he says that the findings:

"suggest that selective reduction of emotion is at least as prejudicial for rationality as excessive emotion. It certainly does not seem true that reason stands to gain from operating without the leverage of emotion. On the contrary, emotion assists reasoning, especially when it comes to personal and social matters involving risk and conflict." (Damasio, 1999: 41-2)

Stressing that emotions are not a substitute for reason, but that certain levels of emotion help reason to work most efficiently, he goes on to say (ibid: 42) that:

"Well-targeted and well-deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly. These results and their interpretation called into question the [historical] idea of dismissing emotion as a luxury or a nuisance or a mere evolutionary vestige. They also made it possible to view emotion as an embodiment of the logic of survival."

To help in studying their biological underpinnings, Damasio draws a distinction between emotions and feelings, while recognizing that they are continuously related. He would reserve the term *feeling* for the private mental experience of an emotion, and use the term *emotion* to denote the outward expression of responses. Underpinning this is the argument that the mechanisms underlying emotion do not require consciousness, whereas feelings "have a privileged connection to consciousness" (ibid: 43). This is because, in his view, consciousness must be present if feelings are to influence us beyond the immediate here and now.

In partial contrast with Damasio's view, Burkitt (1999) is against the idea of emotion as something inwardly generated. Instead, he argues that emotions have to be understood as arising from relations between people. From this standpoint, emotional conflict is not produced by internal contradiction or ambivalence; rather, it emerges within social contexts which themselves are inherently ambivalent or conflictual.[8] So, for instance, aggression does not well up in people of its own accord. Instead, relations that are vexed by conflict – e.g. a breakdown in trust, a sense of unfairness, injustice or prejudice, or institutionalized oppression – may stir aggressive emotions between people. Thus emotional experience is inextricably bound up with embodiment in social relations; emotional conflict arises from contradictions or conflicts in social relations or practices; and this forms the link between emotions, social values and norms, morality and power relations.

The correspondences and contrasts between Damasio's view and Burkitt's show why there is a respectable case for saying that maybe our minds have not evolved in a way that makes it possible for us to explain the phenomenon of consciousness – a possibility Damasio recognizes, as does Erlich (2002), citing philosophers such as McGinn (1999). Damasio and Burkitt are fully in accord on the embodied nature of experience and consciousness, and in rejecting any inherent opposition of reason and emotion. They also both place emotion in the wider context of feeling, though Burkitt does not observe the distinction between feeling and emotion that Damasio makes. Without pursuing the point, I think their differences in regard to inner experience and outward expression can be partly resolved by using Burkitt's notion of consciousness as an emergent effect of active being in the world.

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[8] In support of the point about conflict, Burkitt cites Elias (1988). In support of his relational view of emotion, he cites Gergen (1994).

From that perspective, 'inner' and 'outer' are simply modes of consciousness, or modes of linguistic explanation, or both. Beyond that, however, Burkitt's sociological view (which is unusual in its field) is at odds with Damasio's (1999: 51) view that whilst "learning and culture alter the expression of emotions, and give emotions new meanings, emotions are biologically determined processes".

Nevertheless, in their different ways, these perspectives both support Midgley's argument for the complementarity of reason and emotion, and its relation to the embodied structure of feelings that shapes our thoughts – as does Maturana and Varela's (1987) position, which is different again. The relation between Damasio's position and that of Maturana and Varela is problematic. The latter also insist on the intertwining of reason and emotion, and describe emotion as, in effect, underpinning the structural coupling or interdependence which is the basis of social life (Maturana & Varela, 1987: 247-8). However, they identify consciousness with the emergence of language, which for them "makes possible new phenomena such as reflection and consciousness" (ibid: 210). In other words, they are talking about what Damasio calls extended consciousness, and defining it as a linguistic phenomenon. Damasio (1999) has no problem with this view of extended consciousness, but for him extended consciousness "rides on top of" a foundational core consciousness (ibid: 188) which he defines as a nonverbal, imaged form of neural mapping (ibid: 186), occurring moment by moment at a multiplicity of levels (ibid: 154) and associated with the embodied nature of the nonconscious "proto-self" (ibid: 22 & 154). From his different perspective, Burkitt (1999) would object to the way Maturana & Varela privilege language over all the other kinds of artefact – tools and utensils, technologies, symbols and signs – that humans have evolved to mediate relations with the socio-natural environment.

I will now take up the question of what kind of freedom goes with the concept of moral

agency rooted in that structure of embodiment, sociality and feeling.

8. 4. 5. The Cage of Freedom[9]

Midgley's (1996) view of human freedom is aimed at overcoming three types of idea that

undermine the concept of moral agency. First, there is the account of human nature that

reduces motives to little more than biological mechanisms. Secondly, there is the vision of

"antiseptically isolated human essence, a purely spiritual or intellectual pilot arbitrarily set in

a physical vehicle which plays no part in his or her motivation"(ibid: 159). Thirdly, there is

what she sees as the most influential myth today, that which holds egotistical self-interest to

be the paramount motive. This relies upon a highly selective account of human capabilities

and tries to turn a dangerously one-sided notion of morality into irrefutable commonsense.

Midgley's strategy, however, is not about splitting the difference, as it were. Instead, it

pivots on the notion that human freedom needs a plurality of aims, and this is just the kind

of freedom that would be expected from our evolution. Unlike machines which have single,

fixed functions, *"evolved organisms have a plurality of aims, held together flexibly in a complex but*

versatile system. It is only this ... complex arrangement that could make our kind of freedom possible at

all" (ibid: 164; original emphasis). Allowing for the fact that we have motives that conflict

unpredictably, this produces a concept of human freedom centred on the endeavour to act

as a whole in dealing with the conflicting desires that freedom entails. As Midgley (ibid: 168)

puts it, although only an endeavour, and "though the wholeness is certainly not given ready-

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[9] This heading is explained further on.

made and can never be fully achieved, yet the integrative struggle to heal conflicts and to reach towards this wholeness is surely the core of what we mean by human freedom". This does not mean trying to become immune from such conflict. Rather, the more clearly we are aware of it, and the more we can – to some extent – see our impulses in context and feel ourselves as whole beings containing them all, the freer we become.

Something else is integral to this. There is a tendency to ground human distinctiveness and freedom on *self-consciousness*, but *consciousness of others* is just as necessary. Indeed, the two must develop together. The integrative endeavour cannot be one-dimensional. Another view of human distinctiveness pins everything on the advent of language as the event that set us apart from other animals. As Midgley points out, it is not remotely plausible to suggest that there was a language-less phase in our evolution, and then, without any intervening process, another one when we had the whole paraphernalia of language. What about our higher intelligence then? Midgley's answer is that it helps us to build culture, in which language plays a crucial part. Burkitt's (1999) argument is that our species' development of intelligence and artefacts, including language, is primarily a response to the growing complexity of socio-natural relations. Midgley (1996: 181-2) cites a similar argument (Humphrey, 1978, 1979), and points out that our extreme sociality is a more central feature of being human than abstract intelligence – something that needs to be much more taken into account than it has been with all the harping on about uniqueness and individual autonomy.

All these factors highlight the degree to which Midgley's concept of moral agency grounded in the reality of evolution, embodiment, and contingent, relational freedom is consistent

with Freeden's concept of rights, explored in chapter 6. Like Freeden (1991), Midgley (1996: 110-3; 2003: 8-10) opposes the natural-rights doctrine of individual autonomy and its view of morality as a social contract for self-interest. Like Freeden, Midgley argues that the idea that human rights are universal should not be interpreted reductively or from a single cultural/ethical perspective. Rather, it should be treated as expressing "the outgoing, generous, sympathetic" aspect of Enlightenment thinking about rights (Midgley, 2003: 8). Moreover, she argues (ibid: 107) that we must always be developing and updating our conception of human nature, but we must "never try to do without it. We need it for understanding both our own moral reactions and other people's, rather than merely fighting about them." That chimes with Freeden's (1991: 66-7) view of human nature and society as inherently developmental; hence the need to treat rights as dynamic rather than fixed. And Midgley's (2003: 152-162) view of animal rights supports Freeden's (1991: 60-61) argument that from a human rights perspective it makes no sense to deny rights to animals in regard to attributes they share with human beings. Finally, Midgley's (1996) concept of moral agency in response to conflicting motives and interests both complements and strengthens Freeden's (1991) view of the kind of practical reason involved in weighing different rights against each other, and in fulfilling our roles as both rights-bearers and rights-upholders.

For me, the relation between Midgley's thinking and Freeden's is captured metaphorically in a sculpture called *The Cage of Freedom* by Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002). It stands in a square in Trier, one of the oldest towns in Germany and a place of importance in the history of jurisprudence. Weighing nineteen tons, the scuplture consists of massive bars of steel joined together in a series of curved spaces that form the sketchy outline of a cage. Yet because it is big, the spaces are large enough for people to pass through.

For me, this sculpture evokes the essence of what Midgley's view of freedom, and Freeden's view of rights, are both offering us, especially as it stands in a public place.

Midgley's point of departure was Darwin's suggestion that morality – as an evolved response to natural conflicts of motive – works to harmonize our complex motives rather than to super-impose a new and separate pattern on them. A closing quote from her captures the gist of her view of this freedom that is no less real for being paradoxical: "For Darwin, this obscure and alarming workplace, this muddle of conflict-ridden motivation emerging from evolution, is still our home. It is the only mind we have. It is where we must make our choices and exert our freedom." (Midgley, 1996: 178)

8. 4. 6. Socialist freedom

This seems an opportune point to explain where I stand vis-à-vis another kind of freedom – freedom from oppressive systems of domination, as particularly associated with Marxism. I think that Marx was right in much of his analysis of the oppressive nature of capitalism (though he sidestepped its capacity to overcome inbuilt contradictions), but that his modernist vision of 'scientific socialism' was wrong.

First, I have no doubt that economic relations greatly influence the social and political processes of life, but it is hardly the whole story to say that they ultimately 'determine' them. Secondly, any view of humanity as caught up in inevitable super-processes is profoundly at odds with the praxis of agency, at individual or collective levels. This applies as much to the

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dogma of market forces as it does to doctrinaire communism. Thirdly, Marx wishes for

individual agency to be identical with communal being, and would do away with its personal

character. He scorns the life of the individual and "the sphere of human needs", which he

associates with membership of *non-political* civil society, describing the "intimate reality" of

the private individual as the "profane" illusion of civil society, to be supplanted by the

"religion" of the perfected political community (Caute, ed., 1967: 187-8). Yet he also scorns

political emancipation, seeking a transcendental state of communal emancipation, as the

following passage shows.

> "Political emancipation is a reduction of man, on the one hand to a member of civil
>
> society, an *independent* and *egoistic* individual, and on the other hand, to a *citizen*, to a
>
> moral person. Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual
>
> man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in
>
> his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*
>
> [i.e. not bound by material life]; and when he has recognized and organized his own
>
> powers *(forces propres)* as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power
>
> from himself as *political* power." (ibid: 187-8, original emphasis)

Finally, the perfected society is to be one of pure reason.

In contrast to such ideas, I regard authentic agency, concrete citizenship, and freedom from

poverty or environmental destruction as the basis of freedom from oppression – economic,

societal or statist. This is much closer to the socialism of Castoriadis (Curtis, ed., 1997), who

recognizes that the first condition for the existence of a properly democratic society (what

he calls an autonmous society, one of freely responsible individuals) is "that the public/

public sphere become *effectively* public, become an *ekklesia* and not an object of private

appropriation by particular groups" (Castoriadis, 1989: 407, original emphasis). In regard to

the private sphere, the public/private *'agora'* of social interaction and deliberation, and the

sphere of public/public politics, Castoriadis argues that "an autonomous society will have

to guarantee their greatest possible mutual independence. The freedom of the private

sphere, like the freedom of the *agora*, is a *sine qua non* condition for the freedom of the

ekklesia and for the becoming [properly] public of the public/public sphere" (ibid: 409).

This contrasts sharply not only with Marx, but also with Rorty's view of freedom, in that

Castoriadis connects private freedom to public justice, understood in socialist terms,

whereas Rorty equates private freedom with bourgeois liberal culture and makes hardly any

connection between private fulfilment and public justice (Festenstein, 1997).

8. 5. DRAWING THE STRANDS TOGETHER

The aim of this chapter has been to develop a rounded conception of our embodied

relation to the world and our capacity for agency, in order to reinforce Systemic

Intervention (SI) and a dynamic view of citizenship and to ground them more deeply. I will

summarize the main strands of my thinking about embodiment, agency and citizenship

under four headings: (a) active being in the world; (b) agency amidst complexity; (c)

restoring the balance of reason and rationality; and (d) pluralism, rights and citizenship.

8. 5. 1. Active being in the world

For me, 'active being in the world' means having an embodied and emergent presence that develops through relation with the socio-natural world and exists by continually being re-formed by and in turn re-constituting that inter-relation, however imperceptibly, with an indissoluble connection between acting, thinking and feeling of various kinds.[10] The consciousness that goes with this (whether 'pre-attentive' or 'focal-attentive') is an emergent effect of being of this evolved nature. The personal notion of self is no more or less than a sense of boundary that enables one to cope with this way of being in the dimensions of space and time. It is also what enables us to be actors in our own bio-history.

Clarifying the last couple of points will throw more light on the others. First, our biological systems have to operate within boundaries. Even if we could not think about this, our sensori-motor faculties would generate a sense of boundary for us. Secondly, physical self-awareness fluctuates in response to a mix of biological, physical, mental and social factors. In all four domains it is the means by which we place ourselves in space and time, and by which we embody at varying levels of consciousness the fluidity of our relation to those dimensions. Thirdly, as one manifestation of that sense of boundary, the mental concept of self is our means of coping in that domain with relational existence in space and time and the emergent nature of consciousness itself. It is our means of interpreting, insofar as we can, the network of socio-natural relations and bio-history in which we are embedded.

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[10] Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that cognition is closely connected with the *metaphorical* representation of embodiment, and they recognize the unity of reason, emotion and the unconscious.

This conception is closely aligned with the notion of self that can be glimpsed in Midgley's Systemic Intervention. The difference is partly because Midgley (2000) deals with consciousness mainly in terms of perception, whereas I am relating it to embodiment – a perspective that in Midgley's work is subsumed into the problem of subject/object dualism. Both perspectives are animated by what I call agency amidst complexity, but with the added dimension that an evolutionary perspective on gives. Before defining that agency I just want to note that there is a fundamental difference between my own concept of active being and Heidegger's one of "being in the world" or "*Dasein*" (Krell, ed., 1993; Inwood, 1995, 2000). The crucial difference is that, for Heidegger ([1947] 1993: 217-265), the self of actual experience is *inauthentic* – because of that concrete actuality and because it is co-dependent and co-constituted with others.

8. 5. 2. Agency amidst complexity

Although they can be distinguished analytically, active being in the world and agency amidst complexity are like two facets of a Mobius strip. To reiterate, active being in the world means having an embodied and emergent presence that develops through relation with the socio-natural world and exists by continually being re-formed by and in turn re-constituting that inter-relation. Agency amidst complexity is the dimension of active being that involves awareness of socio-natural complexity and action in response to it. In particular, it is the capacity, albeit modest, to act as whole beings in response to practical uncertainty, conflicting motives and dilemmas of practical reason. Agency in this sense is both uniquely personal and thoroughly relational.

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The argument developed here about agency and complexity is that moral dilemmas are part of our make-up as a result of our evolutionary heritage, and unless we accept this we are prone to being crushed by certainty or overwhelmed by nihilism. This is based on Mary Midgley's view of human moral capacities as just what could be expected to evolve in a highly social creature with the intelligence to be aware of the conflicts between its motives. The gist of the argument is in two points. First, morality does not spring from detached rationality but from seeing ourselves in interdependent embodied relation with others and with the rest of the socio-natural world. Second, morality cannot be derived from ideological certainty or any other denial of the complexity of life and of our own make-up. Rather, human freedom is about each of us being able, to some extent, to act as a whole in dealing with complex thoughts and feelings. Extreme arguments aside, we know that this sense of personal wholeness is limited and vulnerable; that goes with the mix of biological reality and social interdependence. But those are the coordinates of the only kind of life our species can have, and this (as Midgley says, and I agree) is the only kind of freedom that fits the facts of our existence.

None of this alters the reality of conflict among our impulses. Rather, it highlights the point that the exercise of human freedom or autonomy is about making value judgements, infused by the complication that our highly evolved sociality is what enables us to imagine how others may experience things. Yet that is also the well-spring of our powers of reason, which through feelings and emotions are grounded in our embodied relation to the world.

8. 5. 3. Restoring the balance of reason and rationality

In *The Plague*, Albert Camus' narrator remarks that "To struggle against abstraction one must come to resemble it a little" (Camus, [1947] 2001: 71). Things went too far in that direction, however, resulting in what Toulmin (2001) describes as a divide between *rationality* as the demand for correct answers to questions of *theory*, and *reason/reasonableness* as respect for honest disagreements about matters of *practice*. It is now increasingly clear that over-use of rationalist methods that privilege abstract thinking prevents us from dealing with complexity as well as we might, by diminishing our capacity to exercise reason as the faculty that makes sense of our active being in the world.

In the systems field, the break with hard systems thinking was an important contribution to restoring the balance between rationality and reason because of the role applied systems thinking plays at the interface of political and organizational theory and practice. It is why the critical perspective matters, as a counter-weight to the continuing sway of instrumental rationalism, and to help make the case for reason-that-recognizes-emotion, which is so crucial to agency and our ability to deal with complexity.[11]

In both cases, restoring the balance of reason and rationality means abandoning the myths of predictable certainty and stability; otherwise reason (in the sense defined above) does not

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[11] Midgley (2000: 256n) notes that writers such as Festinger (1957) and Aronson (1976) assume that it is 'natural' for human beings to wish to reduce 'cognitive dissonance' between clashing ideas. On the other hand, authors such as Taket and White (1993) argue that this is a cultural phenomenon, not a natural one, and we should not be constrained by the Western taboo against logical contradiction. Midgley's own view is that no new ideas would develop unless there is both acceptance of a degree of contradiction and action to resolve contradictions. The frame of mind being discussed here also recognizes the need to keep on resolving intractable questions.

get a proper hearing. Abandoning the quest for certainty in favour of reason in human affairs also entails reasoned acceptance of pluralism – i.e. pluralism in regard to beliefs about human nature and moral agency. Kekes (2000), whose argument for pluralism has much in common with Haack's (1995) approach to epistemology, and with Midgley's (2000), describes pluralism as giving up on the search for universal answers in regard to standards of reasonable belief and understandings of what makes life worthwhile. For reason to serve our interests well in regard to such matters, it has to help us to deal with the complexities they entail without being sucked into absolutism or relativism.

8. 5. 4. Pluralism, rights and citizenship

The need to give up the search for general answers and to adopt instead a pluralist mode of inquiry is highlighted by the claim that human rights have no foundation unless we accept the principle that human nature is universal – the natural rights paradigm. In chapter 6 I set out Freeden's careful and comprehensive argument against this and his reconstruction of core concepts to encompass individualist and communitarian interests, and to broaden the concept of rights to take account of the developmental nature of human beings and societies.

The developmental character of rights is not only a matter of changes in rights-concepts but also reflects shifts in understandings of human nature(s). However, we have to be wary of thinking that there is a 'natural' unfolding of rights, and equally circumspect about assuming that the elasticity of rights can be taken for granted. It is for these reasons that Freeden (1991:10, original italics) advocates viewing the concept of rights as being "simultaneously a

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prioritizing, protective and *action-demanding* concept". And it is with this kind of rigorously reasonable approach that we could take seriously Erlich's suggestion that we need to start thinking in terms of human natures, plural, rather than one universal conception of something that we still only dimly understand.

Freeden's agentive view of rights and responsibilities connects my idea of active being in the world with how I defined citizenship in chapter 6. It is carefully worded as follows:
As distinct from other forms of association or membership, citizenship is both a range of rights and a status entailed in belonging to a political community. Among other things, defining it in these terms avoids conflating citizenship-as-legal-status with notions of citizenship-as-desirable-activity, which pertain more to the sphere of civil society. The reason to avoid that conflation is so that *rights* are not dependent on conditions for the proper exercise of citizenship which may be merely expedient or (un)intentionally exclusive. Distinguishing the two modes of citizenship also ties in with agency amidst complexity. It is our capacity, however limited, to exercise moral agency that comes into play in the enacting of citizenship-as-desirable-activity. It is this combination of agency, the dynamic conception of rights, and citizenship-as-desirable-activity, that underpins the concept of *citizen-agency* in the synthesis formulated in chapter 10.

Regarding the actual 'content' of citizenship-as-desirable-activity, again it is important to steer clear of prescriptions for what it entails. Generically, however, two things stand out. One is that the capacity for agency and the use of reason, which are plainly connected, are grounded in our embodied relation to the socio-natural world and cannot adequately be explained without allowing for both the deeply relational and the uniquely personal nature

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of our existence. That plus the assurance of uncertainty are the touchstones of agency amidst complexity.

The second general point is that, though it may be counter-intuitive, radical uncertainty is what makes possible our limited yet real autonomy. Certainly, we depend upon there being some order in the world, especially in how our bodies function, but if our ability to impose order on the world were as reliable as the rationalist mentality would like to believe, the notion of reasonable agency would become as redundant as the human appendix. On the other hand, it seems to me that our best prospect for dealing with the problems we face at this juncture in our cultural and social evolution is by building capacity for agency amidst complexity. It is in this sense that I am suggesting that radical uncertainty provides 'favourable conditions' for radical autonomy – not of the individualistic kind but one of relationally embodied and multi-dimensional being in the world. This is the 'ecological niche', as it were, of the concept of social learning that will be formulated in the next chapter.

8. 6. CONCUSIONS

This chapter completes the process of meeting the fourth objective of the thesis by developing the concept of agency amidst complexity, grounded it in an evolutionary conception of active being in the world, and integrating it with a concept of citizenship that complements Systemic Intervention.

Referring back again to the schematic meta-frame in Figure 1.1, these concepts are the basis

of my reconstruction of Systemic Intervention, which will be set out in chapter 10, and they

also form the lynchpin between citizenship and my concept of social learning. The next

chapter develops that concept.

CHAPTER 9:

SOCIAL LEARNING

9. 1. Introduction

This chapter explores different perspectives on social learning (SL) and formulates my own

conception of it, based on the concepts of active being in the world and agency amidst

complexity. The abbreviation SL does not denote any particular model of social learning. In

due course I will designate my own conception differently.

As I see it, if we take learning to be the development of ability and knowledge through

experience, *learning* in the generic sense is an effect of active being in the world, and as such

is both conscious and unconscious (or preconscious), and *social learning* is an emergent effect

of agency amidst complexity; that is, the dimension of active being in the world that

involves awareness of complexity in socio-natural relations, and agentive response to it. The

distinction between learning generically and social learning reflects my view that *social*

learning is not merely psychological, nor does it happen remotely at a societal level, but is an

effect of the concrete exercise of agency, which – as our response to the complexity of

socio-natural relations – involves matters that cannot be solely individual. This is why

agency in this sense is both uniquely personal and deeply relational.

I will come back to this concept of SL after reviewing several different conceptions, ranging

from views that contrast with my own to ones that come close to it. I then formulate my

own concept of SL, and relate it to these other views.

9. 2. CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL LEARNING

Here I outline several different concepts of SL, starting with the psychological theories that crop up most frequently in academic or general searches using the term 'social learning', and moving towards ideas more in line with my own.

9. 2. 1. Psychological social learning theory

In psychology, social learning theory (SLT) centres on learning by observing others, also known as 'vicarious learning'. It dates from the publication of *Social Learning and Imitation* (Miller and Dollard, 1941). The title nearly says it all for a field that started off sharing some of the tenets of behaviourism (Skinner, 1938, 1973) but broke with it in important respects, and followed the trend towards cognitive psychology. Prominent theorists of SLT include Rotter, Mischel and, most notably, Bandura.

Rotter (1954, 1982, 1990) is concerned with the development of behavioural options, and the influence of internally-generated expectancies on the initiation and internal reinforcement of behavioural choices. Mischel (1968, 1973) emphasizes the subtle relationships between cognitive variables and situational/environmental factors — far more complex and variable than the behaviourist model allows — and proposes the idea of cognitive 'competencies', which are analagous to personality traits but more environmentally contingent.

Bandura (1977) put 'vicarious learning' at the centre of personality development. For him, imitation of others in childhood is the first stage in social learning, a short-cut to learning complex behaviour without trial and error. Through identification with role models, such learning becomes assimilated into the child's self-concept, enabling whole styles of behaviour to be learned, not just particular sequences. Also, by imagining how a role model might behave, we acquire the ability to invent novel behaviour. Moreover, identification can extend to entire social groups (Hayes, 1998), which explains the use of SLT for marketing purposes.

The concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986) is another component of SLT. This refers to beliefs about our own abilities, and how they influence self-perception. Self-efficacy also plays a part in the development of self-regulatory processes which guide the exercise of moral agency (Bandura, 1986).

These theories, especially Bandura's – re-named as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) – have been widely applied to matters such as sexual behaviour, youth and family studies, health issues, drug abuse, pornography, violent behaviour, and various forms of delinquency. There is a fundamental problem in proving the relation between cognitive cause and behavioural effect, because it can only be inferred (Hogben and Byrne, 1998), but that is of no concern here.

A more pertinent issue for my purposes is that SLT is essentially individualistic. Social influences certainly feature, but in terms of how they affect cognitive processes and become internalized. This reflects the disciplinary parameters of the theory, and its orientation

towards predicting and changing behaviour, but results in a narrow conception of the

'social' in social learning. Recognising this, Conte and Paolucci (2001) set out a model of

'intelligent social learning', intending to take account of sociological factors, but their

description of how the extended model works in practice remains tethered to individualistic

conceptions of intelligence and learning. As Eder (1999: 199) argues, the idea of *social*

learning needs to reflect a non-individualistic theory of action: "it is not important what

people have in mind but what they share ... the understanding of modern society itself

forces us to take the step from an individualist to a relational theory of social action". This

is central to my own view of SL.

Turning to another perspective, the notion of vicarious learning, and the individualistic

rationality that goes with it, link these theories with economic conceptions of SL, outlined

below.

9. 2. 2. Economics and social learning

The economic model of SL is underpinned by exchange theory and the rational-choice

perspective. Exchange theory views social order as the unplanned outcome of acts of

exchange (Marshall, ed., 1994). Rational-choice theory focuses on self-interest in acts of

exchange, and views social order in terms of the balance of self-interest and public interest

– in the allocation of scarce resources, for instance. Together these provide the rationale for

free market economics.

Against that background, the economic version of SL combines vicarious learning with the power of word-of-mouth communication. Ellison and Fudenberg (1993: 612) define SL by the simple fact that "agents base their decisions, at least in part, on the experience of their neighbors". Gale (1996: 617) regards SL as occurring "in any situation in which agents learn by observing the behavior of others". Vives (1996: 589) describes it more vaguely as "the process by which certain mechanisms in society aggregate the information of individuals".

Ironically, the efforts of these writers to develop their notions of SL actually underline the danger of over-simplifying the concept. For example, from decision-modeling experiments with notional agents deciding between two technologies, Ellison and Fudenberg (1993: 637) conclude that "even very naïve learning rules can lead to efficient long-run social states, at least if the environment is not too highly nonlinear". In this case 'nonlinear' means that players might use historical data to make decisions, or might change their minds when they sampled a technology, or might even interact in more complex ways than the linear model allowed. In other words, things would be quite different in more life-like circumstances. Similarly, Gale's (1996) review of what has been learned from SL does not look beyond the technicalities; indeed, it only considers models "in which an agent's payoff is *unaffected* by the actions of other agents" (ibid: 618, my emphasis) and limits itself to purely "rational" models of behaviour (ibid), disregarding ad hoc decision-making or learning from experience.

Vives (1996) explores whether SL casts doubt on rational expectation models of market mechanisms, and reaches conclusions that could be interpreted either way. In particular, he draws attention to the fact that learning from others sometimes aids the spread of 'good'

information, but it is also prone to inefficiency, as shown when rumours spread rapidly

among people playing the stock market and 'herding' results in stock market bubbles and

crashes. In those circumstances, greater 'inefficiency' in the spread of information would

produce a less frenzied outcome. However, that insight gets lost in treating SL as an adjunct

of the rationality paradigm, and the case is argued more with mathematics than with social

analysis. Similarly, Bala and Goyal (1998) attempt to understand how neighbourhood

structures affect information flows and choices vis-à-vis optimal action, but their efforts get

lost in equations and anodyne observations regarding diversity and conformity.

Ironically, the poverty of such views is accentuated by comparison with computerized

simulations of imitative processes. For example, Kennedy (1998) reports a series of

experiments with strings of five-digit numbers programmed to interact according to certain

rules. Even in such an artificial set-up, it soon becomes evident that group-level processes

emerge and help to spread useful 'knowledge' throughout a population (e.g. the spread of

optimal numerical effects). Findings like these reinforce the conclusion that theories of SL

need to take full account of complexity instead of rationalizing it away, particularly since

complexity theory is showing us that self-organizing systems have global properties that

cannot be predicted from the properties of the individuals making up the systems

(Kauffman, 1996; Eve et al, 1997).

9. 2. 3. Social learning and public policy-making

A more complex view of SL pertains in studies of public policy-making. In a much-cited

paper, Hall (1993) predicts that SL "is on the verge of becoming a key element in

contemporary theories of the state and of policymaking more generally" (ibid: 276), but the concept remains sketchy because it is not clear how SL would change the practicalities of policy-making, or how it would affect state autonomy relative to organized interests and civil society.

Hall describes the 'prevailing' model of political SL as having three main features. First, the view that policy-making responds less directly to current socio-economic conditions than to the 'legacies' of previous policies and reactions to them. Second, the learning process is seen as being driven mainly by experts, working either for the state or occupying privileged positions at the interface between the bureaucracy and policy studies. Thirdly, the model views SL as occurring mainly under the aegis of the state, so state autonomy is taken for granted. Hall is keen to sharpen up the notion of learning operating here. Using the conventional idea of learning as assimilating knowledge and applying it to action, he defines SL as occurring when a policy changes (for good or bad) as a result of the aims or methods being altered in response to past experience and new information. He also suggests that SL takes different forms in relation to three levels of change: first-order change in the operation of policies, second-order change of policy instruments without radically altering the underlying goals, and third-order change involving wholesale re-direction of policy (equivalent to a Kuhnian paradigm shift).

Hall develops his argument by analysing the interplay of policy-making processes, party politics and debate about economic goals in Britain from 1970 to 1989 vis-à-vis the three orders of change, and how they relate to the prevailing model of SL. The details need not concern us; suffice to say that this analysis makes for a more discerning model of SL. It

highlights the fact that only parts of the process take place under the aegis of the state itself, and that even in the relatively technical area of economic policy, change can be subject to · socio-political pressures. It also highlights the power of the media, acting as "both a mirror of public opinion and a magnifying glass for the issues it takes up" (Hall, 1993: 288). Hall's main conclusion is that a SL perspective draws attention to the role of *ideas* in politics. Referring to the adage that "Governments not only 'power' ... they also puzzle" (Heclo, 1974: 305-6), Hall reflects that the 1970s in Britain were dominated by collective puzzlement about economic problems, and "the play of ideas was as important to the outcome as was the contest for power" (Hall, 1993: 289). He goes on to say that 'powering' and 'puzzling' often go together in the formation of public policy, and the competition for power can itself be a means of social learning.

9. 2. 3. 1. The impact of policy legacies

Peterson (1997) analyses the legacy of repeated efforts to introduce a comprehensive healthcare system in the USA, and uses this to develop his own model of SL. Such efforts have been stymied not only by the machinations of those with vested interests in privatized healthcare but also by the lessons of political experience. Such lessons do not have to be accurate; they only have to count (Hall, 1993; Peterson, 1997). Despite all the political and economic advantages the Johnson administration had when it introduced Medicare in the mid-1960s, the scheme provided only limited hospital coverage and only for the elderly. Why? Because, Peterson reckons (1997: 1081), the consensus among policy-makers was that it was not politically feasible in the US to introduce a government-constructed system of comprehensive healthcare. Forty years later, the defeat of the Clinton healthcare reforms

renewed that legacy, as well as adding its own in terms of feasible options, raw politics and

the combined power of anti-tax, anti-government and pro-market forces (Stockpol, 1996).

As Peterson (1997) says, policy legacies constitute a form of *feedback*. Even more to the

point, they constitute what Vickers (1987) calls *feed-forward*, guiding future action. It often

produces a kind of 'lock in' that constrains institutional capacity to make policy changes

(Stocpol, 1992) – what Schön (1971: 31) calls "dynamic conservatism".

9. 2. 3. 2. A model of political social learning

Peterson's (1997) model of SL in democratic policy-making is reproduced below.

Figure 9.1: Model of Political Social Learning *(Peterson, 1997)*
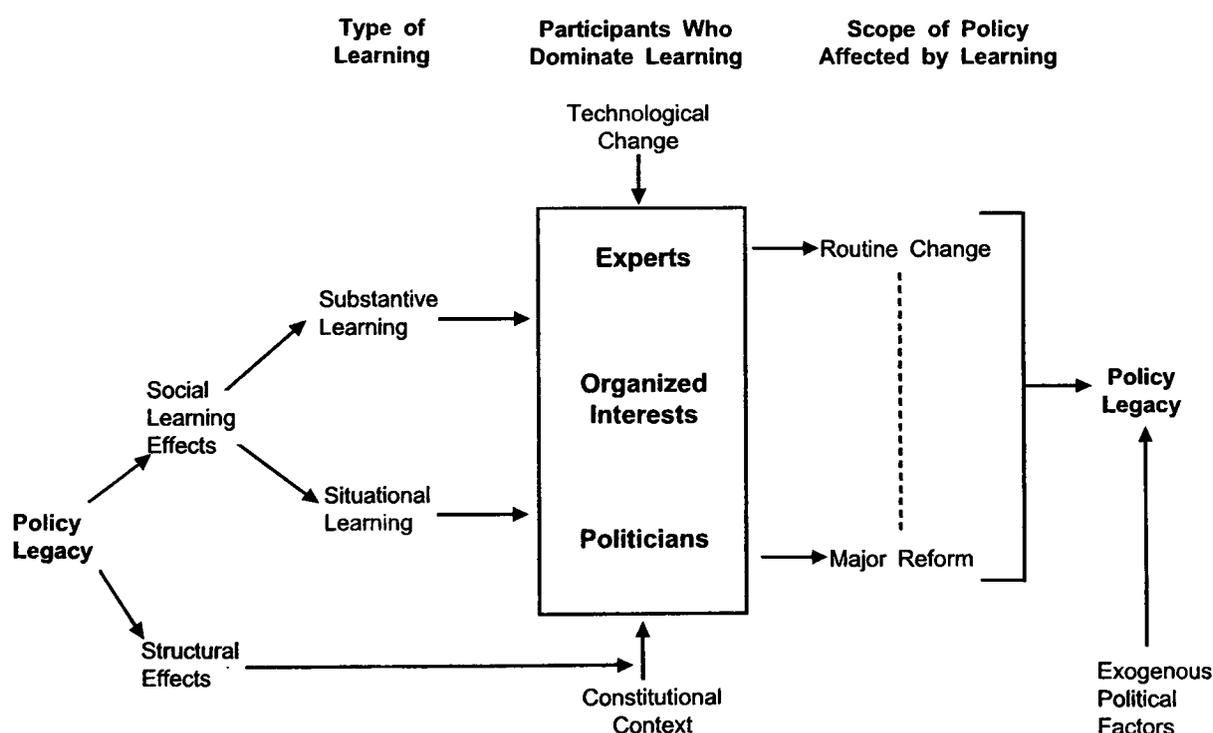
The model depicts a cycle starting from a policy legacy which generates structural effects and two modes of SL (explained below). Along with contextual factors, these effects set parameters for the current policy-making process and the interactions between the dominant players. Routine and/or major change ensues, generating a new policy legacy which feeds into the next cycle (and perhaps ramifies into other spheres of policy).

In Peterson's model, the *structural effects* of a policy legacy refer to institutional, legal or administrative changes, and changes in power relations, that indirectly affect the SL process by altering the power-bases and influence of significant players in the system. The model distinguishes two types of SL. *Substantive learning* refers to the mass of knowledge available to policy-makers from various sources. Peterson cites the effect of better understanding of disability as an example of how attitudes and policy have changed substantively (e.g. in regard to independent living). He also emphasizes that policy debates are never value-neutral; ostensibly they are conducted through reasoned analysis, but in fact "Policy analysis *is* political argument, and vice versa" (Stone, 1988: 307, original emphasis). Evaluation studies serve as one of the main currencies in such debates, their findings often ignored and their mantle of objectivity often abused (Weiss, 1973; Patton, 1996; Sanderson, 1996).

The tacit politicking of policy debates becomes explicit in what Peterson calls *situational learning*, pertaining to what is known, learned, and communicated about what is politically feasible.[1] Regardless of an option's analytical merit, the issue comes down to what is reckoned to be politically and socially feasible. In practice, therefore, the two forms of

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[1] Peterson's 'situational learning' is different from Lave and Wenger's concept of 'situated learning' and the associated idea of a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1990; Wenger 1998 & 2001; Coakes and Clarke, 2005).

learning converge, sometimes foreclosing options that are recognized as being substantively better.

The *public* does not feature in Peterson's model, except insofar as it influences the dominant players – experts, organized interests and politicians. Public attitudes and behaviour, along with media activities, affect the relevance of particular players and their influence on the political process. In relation to US politics, the model helps to explain the supremacy of pro-market and anti-government forces. In a European context, the model would need to be altered to reflect the greater power of NGOs and their ability sometimes to set the agenda – the GM foods controversy being a prime example in EU and UK terms.

Peterson's main point is that we need to know how these processes operate, and recognize why, where and when substantive analysis can make headway. That leaves out intervention at the situational level, but the scope for that too becomes more evident if his model is re-worked to take account of civil society's capacity not only to shape both kinds of SL but also to affect perceptions of the legitimacy of these processes. Moreover, just as including civil society would alter the dynamics of Peterson's model, the concept of policy legacies applies to NGOs too. This is demonstrated by Greenpeace's brush with reputational damage over the Brent Spar affair, which prompted it into more 'constructive engagement' with the corporate world, and is demonstrated in another way by the lessons being learned in the social accounting movement as CSR finds mainstream acceptance but finds its own credibility being questioned.

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9. 2. 4. Vickers' concept of appreciative learning

So far we have been catching only glimpses of anything with the kind of dynamics implied by the term 'social learning'. Such a conception begins to emerge in Geoffrey Vickers' work in the 1960s and 70s, and in some perspectives on organizational learning. The connecting factor is systems thinking.

Vickers was among the first to introduce systems thinking to general audiences, bringing cybernetics and evolutionary biology to bear on socio-political issues and a growing sense of global crisis. He also influenced the development of systems thinking: Checkland and Scholes' Soft Systems Methodology is based on Vickers' concept of 'the appreciated world'. Vickers (1972: 98-9) describes the appreciated world as "carved out by our interests, structured by our expectations and evaluated by our standards of judgement". It organizes our experience, mediates our communication, and guides our actions. It is based on hypotheses, more or less developed, about how and why things happen as they do, much of which is highly uncertain and perhaps very wrong. Although personal to each of us, it is a social construct, a composite of views from different standpoints, and inexhaustible in that these viewpoints change and multiply without limit. Awareness of this diversity heightens the importance of value-judgements and the need to recognize differing accounts of what matters as being complementary rather than conflicting or cumulative. All this has much in common with Dewey's worldview. Another aspect of this is that Vickers views self-regulation as a universal property of biological order, and regards appreciation as integral with regulation, the classic example being the cybernaut steering a boat.

Vickers (1987) refers to SL without quite defining it, but what he means can be deduced from his views on learning, appreciation, and cultural evolution. For Vickers (1972), learning (as distinct from appreciative learning) is purely a phenomenon of individual psychology, and he draws a sharp distinction between psychological and biological order. Whereas biological development occurs on an evolutionary time-scale, and "not to individuals but to populations or whole species" (ibid: 75), psychological development relates only to the span of human life. So learning occurs within individual life-spans, and as Vickers sees it, "a lifetime is usually too short to bring [conflicting impulses and motives] into anything approaching a coherent, self-supportive whole" (ibid).

I disagree on three counts. First, while Vickers is right about the level at which evolutionary change occurs, the hard distinction he makes between the biological and psychological is no longer tenable in the face of the evidence to the contrary discussed in chapter 8. Secondly, I do not see how individual development in any of the three spheres of experience Vickers describes (ibid: 75) – sensory experience, communicative and reflective experience, and the acquiring of ways of acting, seeing and valuing – can be separated from learning with and from others. Thirdly, the contradictions of life do not all have to be resolved before we can act as a reasonably coherent whole; rather, that wholeness consists of acting here and now despite such contradictions, and knowing that we may encounter them again.

Something different emerges when Vickers (1987: 93-5) moves on to develop the concept of appreciative learning. Here he draws a distinction between learning to *appreciate* and learning to act, and in regard to appreciation he distinguishes between seeing and valuing. His point is that readiness-to-do is matched by a *readiness-to-value*. Our views start to

converge when he argues that what happens as a result of readiness-to-value is as much a form of learning as any other – only "grudgingly acknowledged" by psychologists as a form of *latent* learning (ibid: 94) – and when he says that the human capacity for self-regulation must develop from membership of a communicating group, since it "is a condition of becoming human" (ibid: 95).

Vickers (1987: 110) goes on to link appreciation and self-regulation with cultural evolution:

> "Communication has built and constantly renews the appreciative system ...
> Each of us participates for good or ill or (usually) both in repairing and
> renewing this invisible fabric, on which human life subsists in dependence as
> complete as the dependence of biological life on the tattered robe of humus,
> inches thick, which surrounds our otherwise arid planet ... The physical soil is a
> complex and vulnerable structure; ... Our cultural soil is an even more complex
> structure and even more vulnerable; and we depend on it no less."

In an essay on the ecology of culture, Vickers (1987) endorses T H Huxley's point that cultural evolution is not only different in kind to biological evolution, but actually opposed to it. "Social progress means the checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another which may be called the ethical process" (Huxley, 1970: 30). I will return to the issue of cultural evolution after looking at SL in the context of organizational learning and the concept of the learning society.

9. 2. 5. Organizational learning perspectives

The notion of organizational learning (OL) (Merton, 1940) reflects a mix of concerns about organizational problems and pressures to keep pace with technological and social change. The idea began to take hold in the 1960s and 70s (e.g. Lippett, 1969). Schön (1971: 30) developed the argument that an irreversible loss of social stability was making it imperative for companies, social movements and governments to become learning systems "capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation". A few years later Argyris and Schön (1978, 1996) applied Bateson's (1973) concept of 'deutero-learning' to organizations, reformulating it as the highly-influential concept of 'double-loop learning'. Peters and Waterman (1982) popularized the idea that 'excellent' companies are learning organizations, but did not develop it. As the pace of technological change increased, there was talk of organizations building capacity to *thrive* on change (Kiechel, 1990), and Senge (1990) captured the *zeitgeist* in a best-selling synthesis of systems thinking and techniques for developing a learning culture. However, the most substantial work on OL (according to Hawkins, 1994) has been done by the trio of Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (e.g. Pedler et al, 1988, 1991, 1997).

Pedler et al (1997) favour the term 'learning company' because 'company' stands for a collective endeavour, whereas 'organization' is rather lifeless. They define a learning company as one that facilitates the learning of all its members and *consciously* transforms itself *and its context* (ibid: 3). The emphasized words reflect two changes in perspective compared with their earlier definition of a learning company as "an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" (Pedler et al,

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1991). First, the learning is now described as conscious rather than continuous, because it is unrealistic to expect an organization to continually transform itself, when the evidence points to such change being episodic – more like Gould and Eldredge's (1977) concept of punctuated equilibria – and the word 'consciously' brings in the awareness and intentionality with which such transformation is achieved. Secondly, adding *context* to what is transformed reflects the authors' growing awareness of sustainability as a fundamental issue for OL. While OL is usually viewed as a matter of adapting efficiently to take advantage of environmental change, for Pedler et al adaptation is just a mid-point in a progression from surviving to adapting to sustaining. At the third stage, sustaining:

> "learning companies not only adapt to their environments and learn from their
>
> people, they *also contribute to the learning of the wider community or context of which they are a*
>
> *part.* Stage 3 organizational learning is not just individual *or* organizational *or*
>
> contextual – it is simultaneously all three." (Pedler at al, 1997: 4, original italics)

This bridging of organizational and social learning is rare in its field. I will not try to review the field of OL, which is highly diverse – ranging from the practical and prescriptive ('how *should* an organization learn?') to the theoretical and descriptive ('how *does* an organization learn?') with little integration between those perspectives (Tsang, 1997) – and draws upon several disciplines, with great disparities in assumptions and agendas (Dodgson, 1993; Easterby-Smith, 1997). Instead, I will keep the focus relatively tight by framing it in terms of a paper by Brown and Packham (1999) that relates OL to critical systems thinking (CST) and their own concept of systemic learning. A synopsis of that concept will make the approach clearer.

9. 2. 5. 1. 'Systemic learning'

As formulated by Bawden and Packham (1993), systemic learning is a form of praxis that

has affinities with CST but originated in Australia from work relating to agriculture and

rural development. The nub of the approach is to create a critical heuristic – combining

inquiry, critical awareness, and practical reason (as in Ulrich, 1983, 1987) – which integrates

experts and clients into a system of action inquiry, working in cycles of experiential learning.

The approach and resemblance to CST is summed up thus:

> "Systemic learning ... contends that enriching learning for responsible change in
>
> problematic situations requires the facilitation of stakeholders' consciousness of,
>
> and competence with, a plurality of systems methods, theories and practices, which
>
> are integrated by a practical philosophy. The parallels with CST are clear, consisting
>
> of the common commitment to improvement, methodological pluralism and critical
>
> awareness (including boundary critique), yet with the added dimensions of learning
>
> and cognition from systemic learning." (Brown and Packham, 1999: 11)

Instead of following Brown and Packham's argument, I will use the same frame of

reference – the three commitments – to highlight certain issues regarding the relation

between organizational and social learning, and then comment on their concept of systemic

learning.

9. 2. 5. 2. Critical awareness

Critical awareness, enacted through boundary critique, is the core of CST as formulated by Ulrich (1983) and Midgley et al (1998), and consolidated into Midgley's (2000) theory of SI. If intervention is understood as purposeful action to create change, critical reflection upon boundary judgements is crucial because "it is only by way of boundary critique that the ethical consequences of different possible actions (and the ways of seeing they are based upon) can be subject to analysis" (Midgley, 2000: 129). Inevitably, and intentionally, this draws attention to power relations and calls into question the ways in which particular stakeholders and interests are privileged and others are marginalized.

As Brown and Packham (1999: 13) observe, the literature on OL tends to disregard such issues, mostly treating learning as an instrumental means to increase efficiency and maintain competitiveness. One of the principal barriers to learning identified by Harrison and Dawes (1994: 200) is the "Inability to acknowledge publicly aspects of the organization's doing and being that are contrary to the ways organization leaders and members would like to think about themselves". Boot et al (1994: 233) challenge the assumption, implicit in most views of organizations and learning, "that the future already exists and is waiting there for us to arrive like travellers on the road to an unknown land". Easterby-Smith (1997) argues for OL to be seen, not as another lever of management, but as a development of understanding between stakeholders. Pedler et al (1997: 14) put the issue with blunt authority:

> "If the Learning Company idea is seen as being about the 'survival of the fittest' whatever the cost to staff, business partners, or localities and environments, then it is not sustainable. Successful but selfish organisms impoverish and destroy rather than enrich their contexts and environments."

Among other things, stakeholders are likely to have different ideas about what constitutes 'improvement'.

9. 2. 5. 3. Improvement

A critical approach to improvement has deep implications for OL. In Argyris and Schön's terms (1996: 21), it switches the focus from learning defined as the detection and correction of error to "learning that results in a change in the values of theory-in-use, as well as in its strategies and assumptions"; i.e. double-loop learning.[2] In Vickers' (1970) terms, a critical approach to improvement accentuates the importance of appreciation and feed-forward. In Senge's (1990) terms, it switches the focus from adaptive learning to 'generative learning', involving continuous experimentation and 'systemic thinking' about the 'creative tension' between current realities and a regenerating 'shared vision'. Essentially, it is the difference between coping with incremental change and being able to maintain a high degree of adaptability to continuous and unpredictable change (Malhotra, 1996). A more radical interpretation would be that this means learning to understand organizations from the perspectives of complexity theory, using notions of disorder, emergence and self-organization (CMC, 1996; Stacey, 1992, 1996; Eve et al, 1997; Rosenhead, 1998).

For Pedler et al (1997), a critical approach to improvement goes beyond survival and

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[2] Swieringa and Wierdsma (1992) advance the idea of triple-loop learning, the third loop coming into effect when double-loop learning fails to resolve an important issue and fundamental questions get asked. Flood and Romm (1996) re-interpret this idea by identifying it with different types of discourse, and Romm (1998) applies this to different ways of envisaging sustainability and fostering a spirit of 'discursive accountability' vis-à-vis alternative discourses and action agendas.

adaptation to encompass sustainability. Other approaches that are intended to foster critical

awareness vis-à-vis improvement include Schön's (1983, 1992) 'reflective practice'; Argyris's

(1990) *Overcoming Organizational Defences*; Revans' action learning (Revans, 1980, 1998;

Weinstein, 1999); Bohm's approach to dialogue (Bohm et al, 1991; Bohm, 1996); and – in

the praxis of boundary critique – Ulrich's critical heuristics (Ulrich 1983, 1996a b & c,

2000).

9. 2. 5. 4. Methodological pluralism

CST's third commitment relates to the basis on which different methods of intervention are

used. Brown and Packham's stance on this is similar to Midgley's (1997c, 2000), from

which perspective there are no preconditions about the methods to be used, and actual

choice is an exercise of critical action – part of the role of the researcher or facilitator being

to help raise awareness of issues regarding power, inclusivity and suitability of methods.

While critical awareness is emphasized by some writers on OL (Hawkins, 1991; de Geus,

1997; Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997; Reynolds, 1997), in general the field is beset by a

yearning for blueprints for ideal states (Brown and Packham, 1999) and indiscriminate

usage of ideas and methods.

The need for critical awareness in regard to methods is well argued by Cayer (1997), where

he compares Bohm's approach to dialogue with Argyris's 'action science' (Argyris et al,

1985). Having identified similarities between the two approaches, Cayer goes on to highlight

important differences. There is a difference in purpose. For Argyris, the purpose of double-

loop learning is to develop problem-solving capacity so that the problems solved remain

solved. Dialogue, however, "has no apparent goal", nor does it lead "in any detectable

direction" (Bohm et al, 1991: 7). Yet it has "a sort of purpose, which is to explore talking

together and thinking together", but any more definite purpose would carry assumptions

that could be unduly restrictive (Bohm and Edwards, 1991: 196). So, the indeterminate

purpose of Bohm's dialogue contrasts with Argyris's goal of increasing problem-solving

effectiveness. The two approaches also differ in the human capacities they aim to develop.

Argyris (1987: 92), who regards human beings as "designers of action", wants to harness the

power of productive reasoning. For Bohm, however, "the ultimate source of all these

problems [environmental, social, political, and cultural crises] is in thought itself, the very

thing of which our civilization is most proud" (Bohm and Edwards, 1991: x). Instead of

raising our game cognitively, we need a special kind of attention, "a kind of intelligence that

goes beyond thought ... and is more subtle than memory" (ibid: 148). So from Bohm's

perspective, what Argyris teaches is part of the problem.

Cayer's concern is that if dialogue is subjected to OL purposes, it loses its power to search

for meaning beyond conventional assumptions about the functioning of society. "This

challenging of assumptions, which is inherent to the process of dialogue, is much too

important to be hindered by the pursuit" of organizational effectiveness (Cayer, 1997: 61-2).

He is not suggesting that dialogue should take precedence over double-loop learning, nor

that dialogue is no use in organizations. Quite the contrary, "dialogue could help

organizations redefine their raison d'être, their place in society, and their interactions with

the environment" (ibid: 64-5).

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9. 2. 5. 5. Critique of 'systemic learning'

Like Midgley (2000), Brown and Packham (1999) view systems thinking in terms of process philosophy. They regard the world as an unfolding process of change and emergence, calling for methods of intervention that genuinely reflect this, as opposed to treating the manifestations of change as realist phenomena to be managed. Chia (1997) argues for the re-orientation of management methods to reflect the primacy of flux and process over 'steady state' models of organization and learning. Brown and Packham argue for a reflexive and contingent approach to management, enlightened by awareness of management as a form of social construction. They also stress the need for learning methods to incorporate "critically reflexive processes that encourage the development of the learner across all [of Bateson's] three levels of learning" (Brown and Packham, 1999: 33), with the means of doing this being chosen in dialogue with stakeholders and kept open to revision.

According to Bateson (1973: 263-4) Zero learning is a stimulated response which is not subject to correction. Learning I is a change in response by correcting errors of choice within a set of alternatives. Learning II is change in the process of Learning I, that is, a correction in the *set of alternatives* from which a choice is made, in other words 'deutero-learning' or 'learning to learn'. Learning III is change in the process of Learning II, a corrective change at the level of the *system of sets of alternatives* from which choice is made. Learning IV would be change in Learning III but such change happens at the level of evolution rather than individual adaptation.

This aspect of Brown and Packham's approach puts a premium on critical reflexivity, but treats it as a kind of elevated sensibility. The problem, as I see it, is that their view of learning presumes a capacity for what I call agency amidst complexity without giving this any grounding apart from placing it at the higher reaches of learning, notwithstanding Bateson's belief, which they cite, that Level III learning "is likely to be ... rare even in human beings" – something that occurs occasionally in psychotherapy, religious conversion, or "profound reorganization of character" (Bateson, 1973: 272). Brown and Packham suggest that this kind of transformation will follow from the gradual development of critical reflexivity, stakeholder dialogue and boundary critique, as a process of both personal and organizational development. I take issue with this. Linking a 'need for' critical reflexivity to a level of transformation that seldom occurs is elitist and rather pointless, but reflects Brown and Packham's (1999: 11) belief that progression from Level II learning to the reflexivity of Level III results in "freedom from bondage" to unexamined habits of thought and a "profound redefinition of the 'self' ". All this implies a rarified kind of reflexivity, and it is hard to see what is 'systemic' about that, or how it would overcome the endemic decoupling of agency from organizational thinking. Confusion of a different kind undermines the learning society idea.

9. 2. 6. The learning society concept

This is another idea on which Schön had a formative influence. For Schön (1971), the ending of the 'stable state' means that we have to invent 'learning systems' capable of continuous transformation. Among other things, this entails finding out what are "the forms and limits of knowledge that can operate within processes of social learning" (ibid:

30). Further on Schön distinguishes between SL and 'public learning', and clearly focuses on the latter – something I will come back to. First, I want to note some other contributions to the learning society idea, and the emergence of the so-called knowledge economy.

Arguing that existing systems could not fulfil the need for continuing education, Hutchins (1970) called for a 'learning society' modelled on the *agora* of Athens in the 5th century BC, the market/assembly-place where those with the status of citizens met for purposes of public conversation and collective governance. Whereas slavery made such democracy possible for the (male) citizens of Athens, technology, Hutchins suggested, would do the same for modern societies. For UNESCO, Faure et al (1972) forecast that lifelong learning would be *the* educational policy of the future. Husén (1974) predicted a 'knowledge explosion' resulting from a revolution in communication technology and the advent of the 'knowledge industry'. With globalization, Reich (1991) argues that post-industrial societies are becoming knowledge-based economies and that the quality of national education and training schemes would determine the fate of nations. Nevertheless, according to Guile (2003: 90), Reich (1991) anticipates that, even in knowledge-based economies, only 30% of the 'jobs of the future' would be for new types of knowledge-worker. The other 70% of the jobs would be in routine production and personal services. I would therefore suggest that it is over-stretching things to cast the knowledge-society thesis in terms of wholesale change from an epoch of relations organised around production to one organised around cognitive resources, communication networks and information systems. Moreover, the more pervasive the knowledge-making becomes, the more integral with culture it would be, so the less identifiable as knowledge (Osborne, 1998)

Citing Coffield (1999), Guile (2003) identifies conflicting influences on policy for 'lifelong learning' in Britain, particularly in England. On the one hand, there is some recognition of the need to counteract massive changes in employment prospects in post-industrial societies by investing *nationally* in human capital and seeking to make education more inclusive. For governments, however, the learning society idea offers the comforting illusion that the problem of re-aligning education and the economy can be solved by emphasizing *individual responsibility* for acquiring employment credentials, and by adopting a quasi-market approach to educational provision (DfEE, 1998).

Guile (2003) presents a detailed critique of the 'credentialist' strategy, from which I will pick out certain points. The strategy promotes a narrow conception of skills and qualifications, which may leave people ill-equipped for the unpredictable future. Moreover, the 'risks' of late modernity (Beck et al, 1994) are largely the unintended consequences of applying scientistic ideas to social problems. Following Lash (1999), Guile notes that, while information and communications technology is destroying many ways of making a living, it also opens up spaces for aesthetic, cultural and economic innovation, provided people are able to respond creatively and 'reflexively'. As Guile (2003: 95-8) sees it, the creation of a learning society involves shifting from an *informative* relationship with the world to a *transformative* one, which means participating in transforming social practices and forms of work in the emerging conditions of knowledge economies or societies. He suggests adapting the concept of communities of practice to involve people in developing new forms of 'knowledge-ability'.

Among early advocates of the learning society, it was assumed that greater participation in more diverse forms of learning would lead to the development of more democratic societies (Ranson, 1998; Guile, 2003). Influenced by Freire and Illich, Boshier (1980) saw radical potential in this. In Schön's case, the distinction between social and public learning distances him from such radical possibilities and positions him closer to the political-institutional models of SL outlined earlier. The distinction is stated plainly, as a clarification of 'social learning':

> "A social system learns whenever it acquires new capacity for behavior, and learning may take the form of undirected interaction between systems ... But government as a learning system carries with it the idea of *public* learning, a special way of acquiring new capacity for behavior in which government learns for the society as a whole. In public learning government undertakes a continuing, directed inquiry into the nature, causes and resolutions of our problems." (Schön, 1971: 116, original emphasis)

Schön is rightly concerned about overcoming 'dynamic conservatism' in governmental policy-making, by building capacity for learning agents to be more responsive to change by virtue of being more attuned to real-life conditions, more adept at learning by inquiry, and more capable of holding conflicting perspectives – what Schön (1971: 210) nicely calls "the *Rashomon* effect", referring to the film in which the same story is retold from different perspectives. The public itself, however, remains in the shadows.

By sidelining the general public in this way, Schön is missing something crucial about democracy. As Follett ([1918] 1998) points out, the prevailing view of democracy is based

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on the assumption that 'the people' is merely a mass of crowd-individuals, with little or no interest in or capacity for agency, whereas the evolutionary potential of democracy lies precisely in that capacity. In a detailed critique of the learning society discourse, which cannot honestly be considered without acknowledging the gulf between the rhetoric and "the grim realities of wasted human potential littering the global landscape", Welton (2005: 210) links a "modestly resilient hope" for a *just* learning society with the need to foster the capacity for agency, both individual and collective. But formidable roadblocks have to be overcome, particularly in relation to how the contexts in which we work, live as citizens, and express our uniqueness, enable or constrain how we interact with others and exercise agency in association with them (ibid, citing Gould, 1988). It is on such terms that stakeholder engagement can contribute to genuine social learning.

9. 2. 7. Social learning as an emergent effect of stakeholder engagement

The centrality of stakeholder dialogue to social accounting was discussed in chapter 2, and in chapter 3 I described Zadek's concept of civil learning, which is based on the idea that stakeholder dialogue can generate convergence between interests and progressive cycles of change in organizational behaviour.

Similar ideas animate the concept of SL underpinning the EU-funded SLIM research project on sustainable use of water.[3] SLIM is premised on viewing sustainability not as a technical property of the ecosystem but as an emergent property of stakeholder interaction

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[3] SLIM = Social Learning for the Integrated Management and Sustainable Use of Water at Catchment Scale

(SLIM, 2004a: 2). The project framework (ibid) sets out its concept of SL, which is about developing processes of interaction between diverse stakeholders, ecological issues, perceptions, practices and policies – processes that promote concerted action. In contrast with the conventional transfer of fixed knowledge, in this context 'knowing' develops from the extended act of collectively constructing the issues and solutions (ibid: 18). Viewed in this light, learning is inseparable from agency and interaction (ibid: 19). The framework describes SL as both "a feature of knowing and doing and at the same time an emergent property of the process to transform a situation"(ibid: 19) through engaging in new ways of thinking together to address the common good (SLIM, 2004b). Such interaction calls for effective facilitation, institutional support, and a conducive policy environment (ibid: 19). Given these, SL may be a more powerful lever for change than regulation or inducement. Whereas Zadek's model lacks grounding in regard to agency, the SLIM model makes it plain that SL is indeed grounded in agency. It also emphasizes that favourable conditions are needed to generate concerted action.

Turning to another view of SL that is grounded in agency, Wildemeersch et al (1998) have developed a model, reproduced in Figure 9.2 overleaf, which centres on the idea that SL is about balancing tensions within and influences upon the learning situation. Central to this are the four processes of *action, reflection, communication* and *cooperation*. Each 'axis' is characterized by tensions and contradictions that are never simple or constant, which they describe as follows.

> "Action moves to and fro between *need and competence*, reflection is the product of the
>
> opposition between *distance and identification*, communication swings ... between
>
> *unilateral and multilateral* control, and ... cooperation oscillates between *consensus and*

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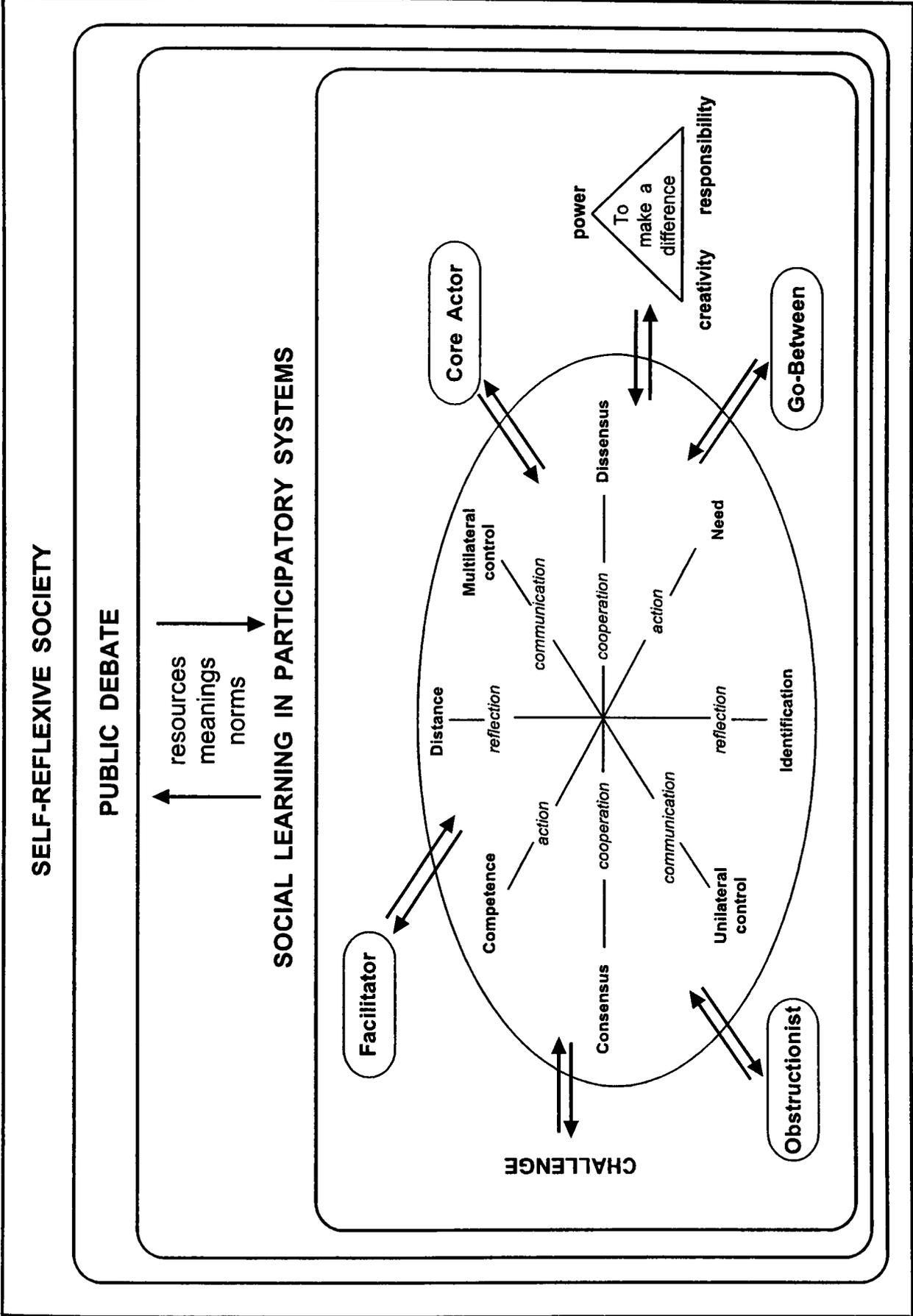
Figure 9.2: Model of Social Learning (after Wildermeersch et al, 1998)

dissensus. Social learning therefore heavily revolves around the finding of optimal and dynamic balances between [these] oppositional processes, [within] the peculiar conditions and needs of concrete contexts and challenges." (Wildemeersch et al, 1998: 253, original italics)

This restless interplay of tensions and balances is also affected by certain roles agents may play, enhancing or inhibiting SL by how they opt to 'make a difference' in relation to the issues of power, creativity and responsibility which always obtain – much as Ison (2002) describes the recursive relation between being *response-able*, vis-à-vis process, and *responsible*, as an ethic. All this is set within the risky conditions of reflexive modernity.

Certain features of this model, and how it relates to the SLIM framework, are worth noting. On the *action* axis, a serious discrepancy between the need/motivation to act and perceived competence/capacity to make a difference produces feelings of powerlessness, unless the situation can be reframed in more enabling terms. The SLIM framework is attuned to this. In regard to *reflection*, Wildemeersch et al have observed that environmental activists tend to expect other interest groups to exercise critical reflexivity but pay little attention to the quality of their own processes and strategies. Also, if reflection is limited to the examination of *rational* justifications – as is often the case – this can reinforce feelings of alienation, because rationality is one-sided unless it is balanced by an 'aesthetic reflexivity' vis-à-vis things that help to create and sustain a sense of identification, belonging and communality (Eder, 1993; Maffesoli, 1995). The SLIM framework highlights the importance of 'relational capital' in building capacity for SL.

Both models serve to emphasize that the temporary 'community' of SL has to be created and sustained. Hence the importance, on the *communication* axis, of learning to deal with communication-inhibiting factors. Moreover, the tensions between unilateral control and multilateral steerage are usually exacerbated by the kind of inequalities between experts and laypeople with which Ulrich is particularly concerned, and by the complicated relations between power(s) and knowledge(s). On the axis of *cooperation*, the need to strike a balance between consensus and dissensus makes it imperative to explore contradictions and avoid pre-emptive decision-making procedures.

In theory, an agent can play any of the four roles, depending on the situation and the interplay of factors involved in making a difference. Wildemeersch et al (1998: 261-2) stress that their model has no "archimedic point". Indeed, for them, SL is all about dynamic balances in situations that are never the same twice. The dynamic is created by the interaction between the challenging nature of the situation and how people respond to the need for creativity given the tensions described, coupled with the mediation of power by contingency and the need for negotiation, and the fact that all of this entails the interweaving of personal responsibility and social responsibility – which is why there is a "politics of social learning" (ibid: 262).

9. 2. 8. The politics of social learning

In the chapter on CST I drew attention to certain perspectives on power, particularly the Foucaulvian aspects of Midgley's (1997a, 2000) thinking; Ulrich's (1996a & b; 2000, 2003a) concern for citizen-empowerment through recognition of the contestability of rationalities,

boundary critique, and the emancipatory potential of civil society; and Oliga's (1990) argument about the dialectical nature of power, ideology and social order/control. These three perspectives can be seen to tie in with the model of social learning in Figure 9.2.

First, the equivocal nature of our participation in the dynamics of power-knowledge relations – both constituting and being constituted by them – is reflected in the model by the interplay of tensions and contradictions on the four central axes, coupled with the personal and social dynamics of how actors can make a difference according to how they relate the interplay of tensions and contradictions to the framing of the issues in question and to the generation or imposition of resources, meanings and norms.

Secondly, the model incorporates the capacity to challenge the rationalities at work within the situation with regard to how the necessary balances are negotiated, but also with regard to the resources, meanings and norms brought to bear on the issues. The model also reflects the point that such challenging or endorsement of rationalities not only affects perceptions within the situation, but that reframing these factors also has some potential to affect the wider social context. In that regard, the model would be strengthened if 'resources, meanings and norms' were extended to include issues, practices and policies (as in the SLIM approach).

Thirdly, the whole process and its contingency within the wider context reflects the complex relationships between: power, creativity and (irr)responsibility; interest and ideology; social co-operation and control – all of which are inherently unstable. Apart from the factors already mentioned, a fundamental cause of instability is that the interactions

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involved occur at varying levels of consciousness, and especially at different levels of awareness of particular complexity within the overall situation.

Recognition that there is a politics of social learning is implied in the SLIM framework, and in the view of multi-stakeholder processes that is promoted by the International Agriculture Centre, which defines SL as: "Facilitated social change based on collective learning processes, democratic participation and empowerment" (MSP, 2006). I will come back to the relation between SL and democracy, but first want to deal with a question arising from consideration of these models.

9. 2. 9. Emergence and design

The models just discussed both treat SL as an emergent effect of temporarily-created processes that must be facilitated. That prompts one to ask whether there is any contradiction between emergence and the intentionality of intervention design and facilitation. Emergence is the phenomenon of coherence arising from instability that occurs spontaneously in complex adaptive systems and which manifests itself in the phenomenon of self-organization (Kauffman, 1996; Capra, 1997). It is like 'becoming'. The allied concept of emergent properties refers to phenomena that result from the interactions of a system as a whole rather than from parts of it in isolation (von Bertalanffy, 1968). In the contexts being discussed, there is no *inherent* contradiction between intentional design/facilitation and the emergence of SL *to the extent that* the learning/concerted action results from free interactions between the stakeholders rather than being determined from outside, however subtly, or controlled by a sub-group or vested interest. This is not to suggest that such

learning occurs in a vacuum. Far from it. Rather, emergent effects cannot be *made* to happen; they can only evolve spontaneously, are unique to the situation, and cannot be replicated. However, SL is not only the effect of interaction between people; it is also an effect of interaction between their different understandings of the situation and their experiences of concerted action. That has to be initiated and enabled – that is, designed and facilitated. There is therefore no *inherent* contradiction between design and emergence, although *in practice* there may be, so it is yet another factor that has to be kept in balance.

This relation between emergence and design is akin to Maturana and Varela's (1987) concept of 'structural coupling' between a living system and environment, whereby change within the system may be triggered by the environment but not causally determined by it. This chimes, too, with Churchman's (1971, 1979) view of an open system of inquiry as being one in which purpose is not determined from outside but emerges through the recursive 'unfolding' of different worldviews and boundary judgements.

Capra (2003) regards structural coupling between emergence and design as a feature of all organizations, and equates design with formal structures and systems, and emergence with informal networks and communities of practice. I think the relation is more subtle than that, more on the lines sketched by Reynolds (2004), who explores comparisons, previously untraced, between Churchman and Maturana, including the points of convergence mentioned above. Reynolds also re-works Ulrich's Churchman-based framework of critical system heuristics into a 'system of interest' (SoI) as if it were autopoietic in Maturana's terms. The problem remains that for Maturana a living system is dynamically closed, whereas Churchman argued for inquiry systems to be dynamically open. However, as

Reynolds suggests (ibid: 554), that can be resolved by treating the relation between factors internal/external to a SoI as being analogous to structural coupling between organism and environment.

Churchman (1966: 88) envisioned a society in which a critical approach to systems thinking would enable everyone to feel that they can 'do something' about the issues that matter. The same aspiration animates the notion of evolutionary learning and the idea that we can guide cultural evolution.

9. 2. 10. Evolutionary learning[4]

For Erlich (2002: 14), the proposition that we can consciously guide cultural evolution is "worth a try". It would need, he says:

> "widespread understanding of the evolutionary processes that have produced our natures, open discourse on what is desirable about them, and conscious collective efforts to steer the cultural evolution of the more troublesome features of our natures in ways that almost everyone would find [more] desirable" (ibid).

Banathy (1996, 2000, 2003) is one of leading advocates of guided evolution. He believes we are at the threshold between a disintegrating scientific/industrial system and a radically new era of cultural evolution, made possible by understanding evolutionary principles, attaining "evolutionary consciousness" and developing "evolutionary competence" by entering "the

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[4] This term refers to cultural evolution as distinct from social evolution.

design space of cultural evolution" and collectively engaging in "the self-guided purposeful design of our future" (Banathy, 2003: 313).

Banathy (2003) outlines some other thinking on similar lines, as follows. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) stresses the need to start 'on the right track' by understanding evolution itself, particularly the relation between harmony and disorder, and by developing a moral code to guide our choices. Hubbard (1996: 57) defines conscious evolution as a worldview which holds "that through our unprecedented scientific, social, and spiritual capabilities we can evolve consciously and co-creatively with nature and with the deeper patterns of creation". Salk (1983) regards contemporary humanity as stuck in a predicament resulting from disjunction between intuition and reasoning, which must be reconciled if we are to collectively guide our evolution. Elgin (1993) envisages an era of reconciliation – spiritual, social, generational, ecological, political and economic – arising from the development of global consciousness, re-connection with nature as trustees instead of exploiters, and becoming "self-directed agents of our own evolutions" (ibid: 119). Chaisson (1987) foresees an age of synthesis between science, philosophy and religion, and the development of a global culture, inspired by an ethic of planetary citizenship and evolutionary humanism. Banathy's own framework links an emerging capacity for evolutionary learning to the creation of "a truly democratic civil society", with "evolutionary design communities" acting as the *agoras* of sustainable development (Banathy, 2003: 319-320).

Laszlo (2004) treats evolutionary learning (EL) as the driving force of evolutionary systems design (ESD), but stresses that ESD is not about trying to predict or socially engineer the future. Rather, it aims to create, through disciplined action-inquiry, conditions for the

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emergence of adaptive strategies that align social change with sustainable development (ibid: 34-6). Figure 9.3 shows the conceptual influences on this.

Figure 9.3: conceptual influences on Evolutionary System Design (after Laszlo, 2004)

General Evolution Theory

Social Systems Design methodology

Emancipatory Systems Thinking

Critical Systems Thinking

Evolutionary Systems Design

Lifelong Evolutionary Learning
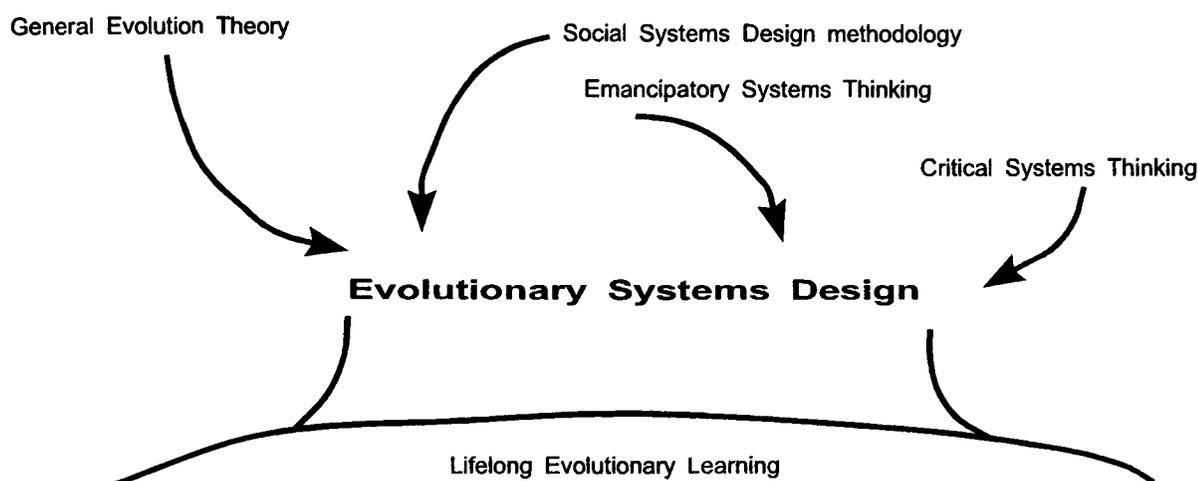
Laszlo describes four stages of learning to become evolutionary change agents, as shown in Box 9.1. (In regard to praxis, Laszlo makes it clear elsewhere that it entails concrete action.) Figure 9.4 illustrates how learning to combine the ecosystemic, societal, and personal aspects of sustainable evolutionary development, and developing a praxis for ESD, converges on the construct of an evolutionary learning community (ELC) founded on purposeful dialogue. Laszlo envisages the creation of local ecologies by ELCs, expanding networks of which could catalyze the advent of an evolutionary learning society.

1. Evolutionary consciousness: To create an awareness of the evolutionary history, of the changing conditions of change, and of the challenges that sustainable human cohabitation with life on Earth entails.

2. Evolutionary literacy: To develop a basic scientific understanding and an empathic appreciation of the challenges facing humanity that is both personally significant and societally attuned.

3. Evolutionary competence: To gain a sense of responsibility that is coupled with the change management competence of response-*ability* so that we can affect purposeful, positive, evolutionary change in the communities within which we work, play, and learn.

4. Evolutionary praxis: To learn how to become catalysts for change by learning what modes, methods, and means are best for clearly articulating and effectively commmunicating to others the need for change.

Figure 9.4: The learning framework of evolutionary systems design (after Laszlo, 2004)

Emergence of
Evolutionary Learning Ecosystems
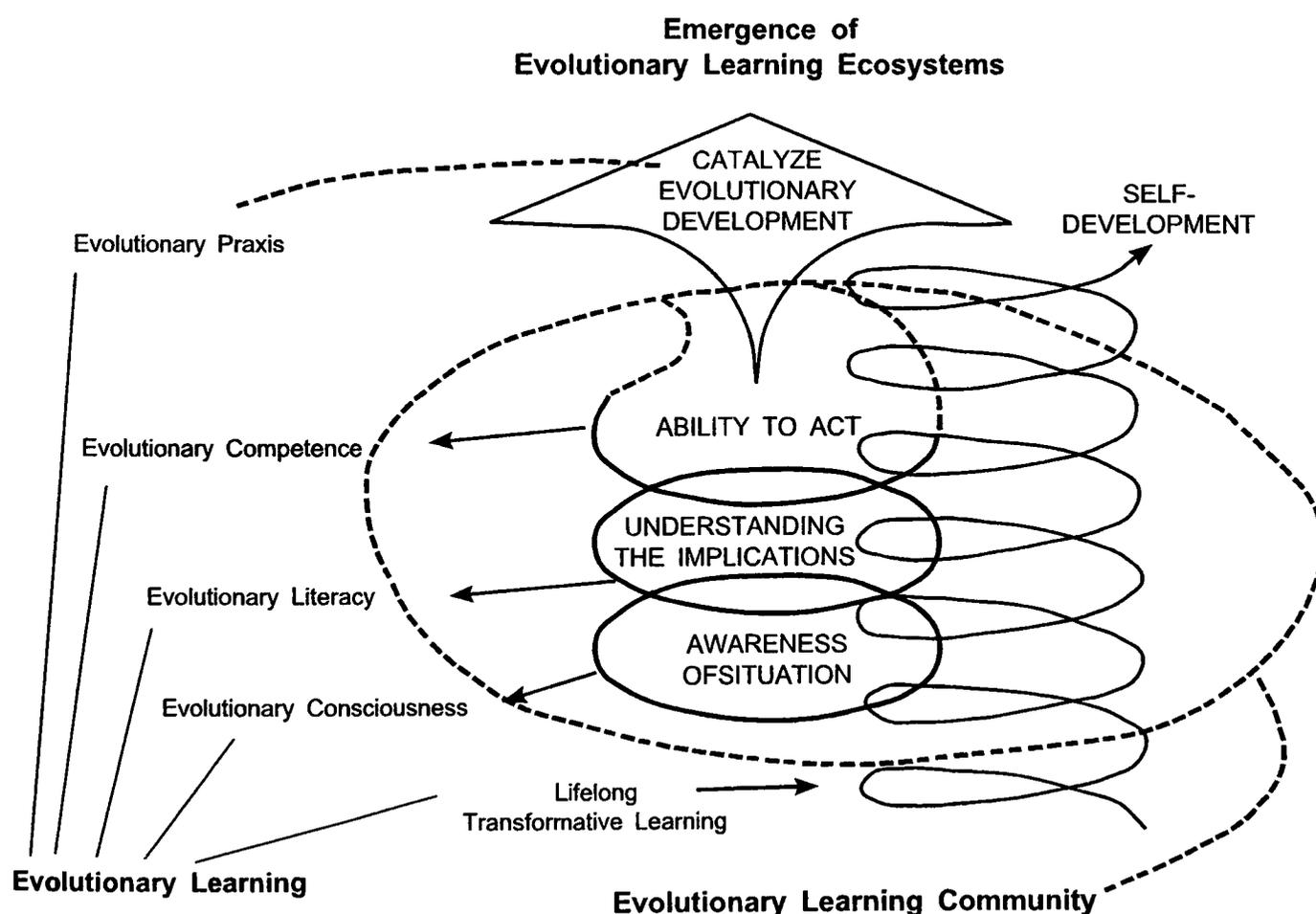
9. 2. 11. Reframing evolutionary learning

This concept of evolutionary learning has some affinities with my own conception of social learning, but I have reservations about the politics of the conscious evolution agenda. Banathy and Laszlo set great store by understanding evolution and nonlinear dynamics, but an understanding of systems of injustice and exploitation must also be required to explain how we have reached such a state of drastic inequity, both globally and in most national societies. "The most pressing, explosive, unavoidable issues that societies face today are questions of equity", as Anderson (1996: 186) says. Framing sustainable development in terms of inter-generational responsibility means putting the needs of future generations above those desperately trying to survive now, and sidesteps the problem that rampant inequity can block efforts to avoid socio-ecological catastrophes. It is disingenuous to suggest that such obstacles can be overcome by the spontaneous emergence of networks of bottom-up decision-making. Banathy (2000) and Jenlink (2002) stress the need for social and economic justice, and find solutions in evolutionary guidance systems. The fact is that – by improvements in sanitation, nutrition, inoculation, education and female literacy; by microfinancing; and by instituting socially-inclusive measures of progress – we can socially engineer significant improvements in life chances for whole populations much faster than is likely to happen by relying upon networks of bottom-up learning, and the same probably goes for environmental problems.

There is also the fact that, sooner or later, "most of the practical evolutionary issues of our time ... become questions of governance" (Anderson, 1996: 190). The self-organizing

capacities of social activism are not diminished by recognizing that we have entered an era

of governance consisting of a domain that mixes state-centred government with regional

inter-governmental institutions and (in the EU) some pooling of sovereignty; another

domain of global institutions; and a third domain of interplay between governments,

NGOs, multinational businesses, and information networks of many kinds, where decision-

making is diffuse. The self-organization concept may be more relevant to that third domain

of governance, or to all three combined, as Anderson (ibid: 193) suggests.

There is also the problem that civil society is a more problematic idea than is generally

recognized. As discussed previously, popular sovereignty can turn nastily oppressive, or be

hijacked by self-appointed elites. In regard to the latter, Banathy (2003) links the view that

only small groups of thoughtful and committed people can change the world with his vision

of ELCs emerging from family networks, neighbourhoods, workplaces and citizenship

groups of all kinds. Yet the level of evolutionary consciousness and competence he expects

ELCs to develop before engaging in ESD (ibid) is bound to deter the less intellectually-

minded.

Banathy's approach could perhaps be grounded more convincingly by relating it to Follett's

([1918] 1998) view of evolutionary democracy and action-in-community. Follett argues that

the crowd-image of democracy depicts society as a mass of individual agents with narrow

conceptions of self-interest and a short-term mentality. Against this she counterposes the

associational model of "neighborhood organization" (ibid: 195, 199) as the template for

social life and for extending the interplay of individual and collective action into other

spheres of association. She also extols creativity in diversity, believing it to be found

everywhere groups form genuine relationships. The contemporary relevance of Follett's

thinking could be enhanced by relating it to the loose associationalism of postmodernist

'lifestyle politics' and how that overlaps with support for new social movements (Maffesoli,

1995; Jansen et al, 1998).

Follett's (1998: 227-231) commitment to people joining together to take charge of their

lives, and to developing new modes of leadership, also chimes with the spirit of new social

movements underpinning Banathy's vision, and her commitment to social creativity would

counter-balance his overly-systematic leanings. In Follett's support, it is also worth noting

that Kauffman (1996: 28-9) suggests that complexity theory – particularly the dynamics of

coordination and adaptation in complex organisms at the edge of chaos – supports the case

for regarding pluralistic, democratic society as most likely to evolve collective solutions to

difficult problems. For that potential to be realized, we must give up the pretence to long-

term prediction and global knowledge. Instead, we must do our best to be wise locally, and

"just get on with it".

Banathy and Laszlo regard evolutionary learning as both preparation for, and an emergent

effect of, deliberate efforts to develop new dimensions of consciousness and action-inquiry.

As process, this equates with the kind of *deliberate* social learning described by Wildemeersch

et al and in the SLIM framework. As I see it, we need the concept of deliberate social

learning, but also need to recognize it as just one mode of enacting a deeper capacity that is

more sub-consciously intentional than consciously deliberate. Rather than being a product

of episodes of focused cogitation, that deeper capacity is grounded in the continuous

dynamic of active being in the world. As such, it arises from the present, rather than being

future-directed, whereas the dimension of active being which I call agency amidst

complexity is both present- and future-oriented.[5] This is the experiential core of

individuality and sociality that connects social learning with the capacity for agency. Without

that connectivity, 'social learning' is an abstraction or a misnomer.

Thinking back to Zadek's model of civil learning and civil organization, which is about the

internalizing of learning from broader society, it too has affinities with Banathy's and

Laszlo's thinking. However, Zadek's thinking also reflects the need for systems of

governance for tackling issues of injustice and sustainability. Indeed, he is at the forefront

of efforts to develop a global architecture of frameworks and systems to underpin

sustainable development and corporate responsibility (Ligteringen & Zadek, 2005). On that

note, I will now re-state my own concept of social learning, and pave the way for the

synthesis which integrates the main themes of the thesis.

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[5] The Oxford Reference Dictionary (1996) equates intention with purpose, whereas some philosophers recognize the distinction I am making between act-related and future-directed intentionality (Honderich, ed., 1995: 411). Reynolds (2004: 545) follows Churchman in drawing a distinction between systems-of-interest that are *purposeful*, where purposes are mainly generated within, and *purposive* SoI, whose purposes are mainly determined from the outside. In those terms, *purposeful* equates with the enacted cognition of the present, and *purposive* equates with cognition that is future-directed and more deliberate.

9. 3. RE-FRAMING SOCIAL LEARNING

Here I re-state my concept of social learning, compare it with the different conceptions that have been reviewed.

9. 3. 1. Social learning reformulated as agentive social learning

As outlined at the start of the chapter, social learning as I see it is an emergent effect of the facet of active being in the world that I call agency amidst complexity. Active being in the world means having an embodied and emergent presence that develops through relation with the socio-natural world and exists by continually being re-formed by and in turn re-constituting that inter-relation, with an indissoluble connection between acting, thinking and feeling. Agency amidst complexity is the dimension of active being that involves awareness of socio-natural complexity and action in response to it. In particular, it is the capacity, albeit modest, to act as whole beings in response to practical uncertainty, conflicting motives and dilemmas of practical reason. Agency in this sense is both uniquely personal and thoroughly relational. Hence, the learning associated with it is both social and agentive. So I will label this conception as *agentive social learning* (ASL).

It follows from its grounding in active being and agency amidst complexity that ASL reflects the interplay of different levels of consciousness, and is as much pre-consciously intentional as it is consciously deliberate. Even where people deliberately engage in jointly exercising their capacities for agency, social learning remains an emergent effect of agency grounded in active being in the world.

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In a nutshell, then, ASL is an emergent effect of our agentive response to experiencing the complexities of socio-natural relations, and how we adapt to them. However, "learning is one thing, evolution is something else", as Eder (1999: 210) puts it in a view of SL that focuses more on knowledge development than I do, but concurs on the radical uncertainty of evolutionary processes and the independence of SL and social evolution. Social learning is not the same as social evolution, which is about systemic change in society. It is a general feature of evolution that *adaptive behaviour* occurs at the level of individuals and groups, but *evolutionary change* happens at the level of populations. Moreover, there is a fundamental chanciness to the whole thing – in terms of what prompts adaptive behaviour, whether/ how it is passed on or taken up by others, and what turns out in the long run to be adaptively beneficial. Nevertheless, evolution works through adaptation, and – in relation to human social evolution – that means the exercise of agency.

As I see it, the relationship between ASL and social evolution is that agency generates the variety needed to keep social change going, primarily *through cultural evolution*, while the processes of ASL sustain capacity for it. This is what I call *adaptive capacitation:* the continual recharging of capacity for social learning and change through the exercise of agency. This aspect of ASL is also latently political, in that it gives rise to forms of collective action that are proto-political.

All told, these features of ASL distinguish it sharply from conventional notions of social and organizational learning, while ASL augments the views of SL that come much closer to my own by placing social learning in evolutionary context, by clarifying the agentive basis of

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social learning, and by clarifying what, conceptually, makes such learning distinctly *social* in *character*.

9. 3. 2. Comparison with other views of social learning

Psychological SLT is more about personality development through identification with others than it is about learning that is social in a rounded sense, so in that case *social* learning is a misnomer. That also holds for the economic conception of SL, which is tied to rational-choice theory and ignores the complexity of social relations.

The term 'social learning' is more applicable in the context of political policy-making. While never free of political manoeuvering, such debates *can be* arenas of ASL as I have defined it, particularly if policy-makers themselves appreciate the need to build capacity for it. Likewise, the engagement of NGOs in policy-making, both public and corporate, is premised on building capacity for agency and social learning, and that is part of the compact with their own constituencies.

In the corporate sphere, the field of organizational learning (OL) is dominated by ideas about adapting to environmental change, particularly through engaging with stakeholders and 'double-loop' learning. Conventionally, the organization is viewed as interacting with its environment, and forming part of the environment of other organizations, but as being fundamentally autonomous in relation to society. That puts OL in a different category to social learning, and few conceptions of OL cross that boundary. The rare exceptions

include Pedler et al's (1997) concept of a sustainable organization as one that links individual and organizational learning with contributing to wider social learning, and Ackoff's (1994, 1999) concept of the socially-systemic enterprise as one with the prime objective of developing a diversity of means and ends in order to serve its own integrating purpose, the varied purposes of its members and other stakeholders, and the purposes of the wider environment. In my own terms, OL that is not grounded in the embodied and relational complexity of active being in the world can only be based on an abstraction of learning and a decoupling of agency from organizational membership. On the other hand, the ASL perspective reframes the notion of OL by grounding it in agency, and the synthesis in chapter 10 reframes this further again.

The notion of double-loop learning is also vitiated if it is abstracted from the exercise of agency. Moreover, unless the agentive factor is taken into account, the idea of a 'knowledge society' or 'learning society' is likely to be a programme for wasting human potential. Hopes of a just learning society depend upon building individual and collective capacity for agency (Welton, 2005). Genuine engagement with stakeholders can help to do that.

Zadek's (2000) model of civil learning reflects the idea that stakeholder dialogue can generate progressive change in organizational behaviour and convergence between interests. Similar ideas are at work in the SLIM (2004a, b) concept of learning, but whereas agency is vaguely presumed in Zadek's model, the SLIM framework (2004a: 19) clearly associates SL with agency by defining it as "a feature of knowing and doing and at the same time an emergent property of the process to transform a situation". Obviously that is very close to

how I define ASL, but there is an underlying difference. It is that SLIM regards the learning

as an emergent effect of interactive processes that are artificially created and facilitated,

whereas I associate the learning with an agentive response to socio-natural complexity, a

response that is inherently relational without necessarily being an effect of group processes.

Nor (as I see it) does ASL necessarily come about by design, although it can spring from

deliberate social learning, providing (as discussed) design does not overwhelm the emergent

potential.

On that proviso, the SLIM approach and the Wildemeersch et al (1998) model of SL are

both compatible with ASL, and a combination of the three ideas could provide a model of

ASL in 'deliberate' or 'considered' mode, with ASL providing agentive 'ballast' and serving

to explain what makes such learning distinctly *social* in *character* apart from the situational

context.

More fundamentally, integration of ASL with Systemic Intervention and with the concept

of citizenship developed earlier forms a synthesis that transforms the 'practical bearings' of

social learning. Moreover, it is this transformation of those practical bearings that effects

the reconstruction of social auditing as social learning. Relating this to the model of social

auditing in Figure 2.2 (page 36), what I am proposing provides a framework for rethinking

the nature of the learning that needs to happen for the embedding of accountability processes

through stakeholder engagement to be more effective.

9. 4. CONCLUSIONS

Several different notions of social learning have been reviewed and a concept of it has been developed which, as will be shown in chapter 10, augments the integrated conception of agency, citizenship and Systemic Intervention which has been put together, thereby fulfilling the fifth objective of the thesis.

In terms of the scheme of the thesis in Figure 1.1, all the elements which contribute to the synthesis that I have been driving at are now in place, so we now finally turn to formulating that synthesis and reframing social auditing on that basis.

CHAPTER 10:

SOCIAL AUDITING AS SOCIAL LEARNING

10. 1. Introduction

This chapter will develop a synthesis of agentive social learning with key ideas from chapters 4-9, and then reconstruct the conceptual basis of social auditing and corporate citizenship in line with that synthesis. I will approach this by first describing a partial alignment of the ideas with Pragmatism, and explain why a synthesis on that basis is unworkable. Having set that aside, I will then work towards a complete synthesis of the core ideas by setting out three versions that become progressively more integrated.

The first version of the synthesis brings the core ideas together, and therefore lays the basis for the final version, but it lacks the political connotations that I want to incorporate, and further integration of the concepts is possible. The second version is an intermediate reconstruction of the four concepts in version 1 that reduces them to three by coupling citizenship with agency. The third version involves a further reconstruction, and finally achieves what I want by fully integrating the core ideas, including the political dimension, and highlighting the point that the three concepts in the final synthesis are mutually capacitating. The rationale for working through the three versions, therefore, is to demonstrate the strength of my preferred version in the light of other possibilities.

I will then describe how the third version of the synthesis reconstructs the conceptual basis of social auditing. I will *not*, however, get down to the level of methods; that will require

further research that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

10. 2. PARTIAL ALIGNMENT OF THE KEY IDEAS WITH PRAGMATISM

Figure 10.1 represents the partial alignment of Pragmatism with the four key ideas of

Systemic Intervention (SI), embodied agency (incorporating active being in the world and

agency amidst complexity), citizenship, and social learning. In other words, it represents a

prospective synthesis on the lines implicit in chapter 5, where I drew out the Pragmatist

legacy of CST and SI, and identified some significant deficits in Pragmatism.

Figure 10.1: Partial alignment of Pragmatism with Systemic Intervention, embodied agency, citizenship, and social learning
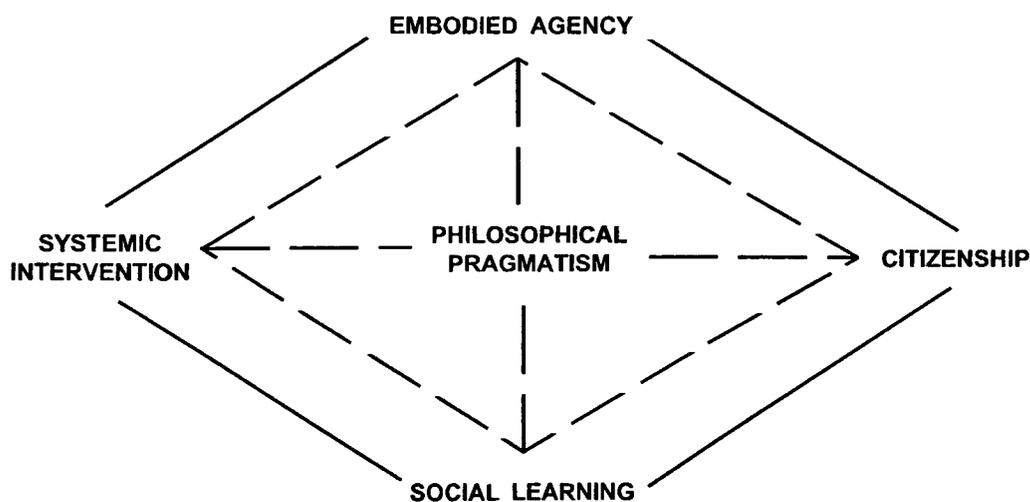
The main affinities between SI and Pragmatism can be summarized as: a shared

appreciation of socio-natural complexity, and of radical uncertainty as the well-spring

of inquiry; recognition of 'truth' as a matter of judgement; a shared commitment to

critical thinking and action; rejection of the 'spectator' theory of knowledge and the notion

of detached objectivity; opposition to any dichotomy between self and society, regarding

them instead as being co-constituting; the concept of inquiry as an inherently social process; and belief that "philosophy should have a practical face in a morally challenging world" (Midgley, 2000: 109). Moreover, there are affinities between Haack's (1995) epistemology and Midgley's, and his concept of boundary critique (Midgley et al, 1998; Midgley, 2000) is a development of Churchman's (1970) and Ulrich's (1983) approaches to integrating Pragmatism and systems thinking.

Beyond these significant affinities, the degree of synergy between SI and Pragmatism depends upon the extent to which it is possible to reconstruct SI in Pragmatist terms, or to doubly reconstruct both SI and Pragmatism. Reconstructing SI in Pragmatist terms would have two main effects. First, it would resolve the abstraction of self in SI by integrating it with Mead's concept of the self of embodied social action. Among other things, that would mean revising Midgley's (2000) process philosophy to make the social actor the agent of boundary critique, instead of suspending judgement on the nature of the agent. Secondly, through Dewey's and Mead's linking of inquiry, the development of sociality, and democratic engagement (Dewey [1910] 1997a, [1920] 1950, 1929, [1935] 1963, 1946; Mead, 1932, [1934] 1967), a Pragmatist reconstruction of SI would connect it with debates about civil society on a more challenging basis than Ulrich (1996b, 2000) has yet developed. This would be more challenging because the reconstruction would have to take account of the critiques of Pragmatist socio-political theory discussed in chapter 5, and the more problematic view of civil society I explored in chapter 7.

At this point the potential for synergy between Pragmatism and SI begins to run out of steam. One of the Pragmatist deficits identified earlier is that, while Dewey and Mead

champion democratic engagement, they take citizenship for granted and have very little to

say about rights, not to mention the problem of competing rights. They scorn the dogma of

utilitarian individualism, and lay great store by associating human flourishing with a

generalized notion of the common good, but they fail to unpack these commitments or

explain how individual freedom and flourishing actually squares with social development.

They simply do not tackle the problem of constructing a view of citizenship and rights that

takes account of the complexities and conflicts without tying the conceptions to any

particular system of socio-political morality.

A synthesis of SI and Pragmatism as it stands would, therefore, lack the thorough-going

affinities between SI and Freeden's (1991) theory of rights, unless Pragmatist political

theory is reconstructed on those lines – which is partly what I mean by doubly

reconstructing both sets of ideas. Otherwise, SI would be aligned with citizenship only at a

level of generality, without the grounding in rights that is necessary to give concrete

meaning to citizenship and connect it with agency, that grounding also being needed to

integrate the rights dimension of citizenship with the arguments for SI (as, for example, in

the relation between rights and boundary critique). This is made even more problematic by

the fact that Dewey and Mead tend to be vague about social contradictions and divisions,

and about how these affect the concrete exercise of agency. Among other things, these

shortcomings leave the notion of civil society up in the air, only vaguely connected to

concrete citizen-agency. Moreover, Dewey (1946, 1963; Morris and Shapiro, eds., 1993),

Habermas (1984a, b, 1992, 1998) and Ulrich (1996b, 2000) all rely upon a circular argument

for their claim that there is a normative commitment to civil discourse: participative

citizenship being both the end to be desired and the means of realizing that end.

All told, then, a synthesis of SI and Pragmatism would yield an unconvincing account of citizenship unless Pragmatist political theory is thoroughly reconstructed. And the Habermasian perspective adds further complications, given Midgley's (1992a, 1997a, 2000) opposition to Habermas's universalism and his privileging of language – not to mention my own scepticism regarding Habermas's (1984a, b) splitting of 'communicative' and 'strategic' action, his distinction between 'system' and 'lifeworld', and his tendency to place agentive *action* within a *communicative interaction* paradigm.

In regard to social learning (SL), in the context of a synthesis of SI and Pragmatism, the task would be to produce a satisfactory concept of SL from them. All that Midgley (2000: 243-268) offers is a model of learning in relation to methodological pluralism which relies mainly on critical reflexivity and double-loop learning, so its relation to *social learning* comes down to the argument for methodological pluralism to be seen as part of systemic intervention, and the point that that individual and group learning can contribute to learning at organizational and community levels. Extrapolating beyond that, it is not hard to see how boundary critique could contribute to the more deliberate forms of SL outlined in chapter 9. Nevertheless, SI would remain poorly grounded in relation to social learning.

Pragmatism, on the other hand, abounds with ideas relating to SL – the basic orientation towards inquiry and learning, the insistence that knowledge is inherently social, Mead's (1932) concept of action and emergent consciousness, Dewey's ([1910] 1997a, [1922] 2002, 1929) concept of freed intelligence as a social force, their joint emphasis on experimental methods, and the political model of deliberative democracy – yet a Pragmatist theory of SL

remains to be extrapolated from those ideas. Although differently grounded in some respects, my own concept of agentive social learning fills that lacuna in Pragmatism, but sits awkwardly with Systemic Intervention unless SI is reconstructed to align with my conception of embodied agency, and with how that relates to citizenship.

The conclusion, therefore, is that, notwithstanding the affinities, alignment of the key ideas with Pragmatism is inherently unstable because the parts keep shifting in relation to each other, making it unclear what is being synthesized with what. There is also another reason why a synthesis on those lines is unworkable. It is that Pragmatism itself is too broad and unsettled to align completely with a narrower set of ideas that chime only with certain aspects of Pragmatism – with Haack's epistemology but not with some of Peirce's thinking or some of James's, with Mead's concept of emergence and social action but not with some aspects of Pragmatist political theory, and so on. Between the narrower set of ideas a complete synthesis can be formed, as I will show, whereas with Pragmatism only an incomplete alignment is possible. Hence the dotted lines in Figure 10.1.

I will now move on to develop, independent of Pragmatism, a synthesis of the core ideas that have been developed in the thesis, using (for the reasons given earlier) three versions of the synthesis that become progressively more integrated.

10. 3. FIRST VERSION OF THE SYNTHESIS

Figure 10.2 represents the first version of the synthesis. For reasons that will become apparent, it reinstates my own concepts of active being in the world and agency amidst

complexity. It also replaces the general concept of social learning with my own concept of agentive social learning (ASL).

Figure 10.2: First version of the synthesis being developed

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              ACTIVE BEING IN THE WORLD &
              AGENCY AMIDST COMPLEXITY
                    /          |          \
                   /           |           \
                  /            |            \
                 /             |             \
SYSTEMIC ————————————————————————————————————— CITIZENSHIP
INTERVENTION    \             |             /
                 \            |            /
                  \           |           /
                   \          |          /
                    AGENTIVE  |
                    SOCIAL LEARNING
```
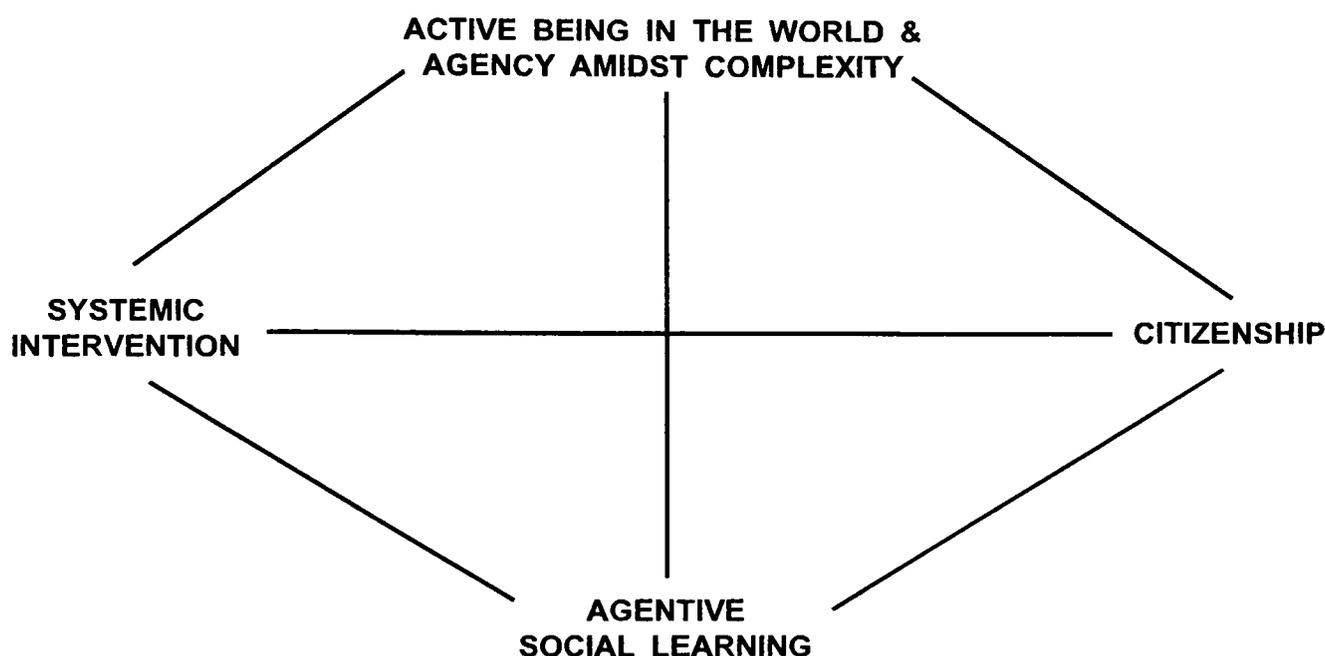
What makes ASL distinctly *social* in character is its grounding in our agentive response to experiencing the complexities of socio-natural relations, and what I call 'adaptive capacitation' — the continual recharging of capacity for social learning and change through the exercise of agency, both individually and collectively. Since (in chapter 9) I have already formulated ASL on the basis of active being and agency amidst complexity, and described how ASL stands in relation to SL generally, I will set out the other features of this version in four stages: (A) the reconstruction of Systemic Intervention through the concepts of active being in the world and agency amidst complexity; (B) the integration of reconstructed SI with citizenship; (C) the development of the concept of citizenship through ASL; and (D) the integration of SI with ASL.

(A) Reconstructing Systemic Intervention

I see the reconstruction of SI in terms of active being in the world and agency amidst complexity as having three main dimensions. The first relates to active being in the world. As SI stands (Midgley, 2000), it effectively disregards the actuality and complexity of our embodied relation to the world. Moreover, the issue of selfhood is dealt with as a theoretical problem concerning *reflection* on self-identity (ibid: 87-8) rather than as the self of existential experience. The concept of active being in the world overcomes these problems by: (a) defining what it is to be a person as having an embodied and emergent presence that develops through relations with the socio-natural world, and exists by imperceptibly and continually being reformed and in turn reconstituting that inter-relation, with an indissoluble connection between acting, thinking and feeling; (b) defining consciousness as an emergent effect of being of this embodied and relational nature; and (c) recognizing that this embodied and emergent presence is the primary (but not the only) form of our personal and ecological relation to the world. It sums up the uniquely personal and deeply relational nature of our existence.

This aspect of the reconstruction of SI is thoroughly in keeping with Midgley's concern to avoid the dualisms of mind and matter, self and society, observer and observed, yet overcomes the kind of abstraction of self that potentially undermines belief in our capacity for agency.

The second aspect of reconstruction relates to agency amidst complexity, the notion of which chimes with the moral orientation of SI and grounds it on terms that I regard as

more meaningful for the concrete exercise of agency. SI's moral orientation can be gauged by the following:-

(i) that Midgley (2000: 151-2) opposes the principle of moral universalization, but also rejects moral relativism; he argues instead for a critically selective approach to moral ideas;

(ii) that he rejects the kind of philosophical purism that turns its back on practical questions with serious life-consequences, his own commitment being to applied philosophy – i.e. concerned with both discourse *about* change and action *for* change (ibid: 108); and

(iii) that in relation to human concerns his concept of boundary critique treats boundary and value judgements as intimately connected, and tied in with moral reflection on the purposes of intervention itself (ibid: 108 and 135), and therefore also with reflection on *approaches* to intervention.

Agency amidst complexity grounds this orientation more meaningfully, not because it is more explicitly agentive but because it grounds moral agency in the evolution of human nature and our capacity, albeit modest, to act as whole beings in response to the uncertainty of life and the dilemmas of practical reason. Moreover, from this perspective, human freedom is enacted through the making of value judgements amidst the complexity of socio-natural relations and our highly-evolved sociality. This helps to explain, in a way that SI does not, how the exercise of agency through value judgements has become so important for us, why it is difficult, and why the big issues of life cannot be settled once and for all. By doing so – and in particular by drawing upon the moral philosophy of Mary

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Midgley (1996, 2003), who argues that morality springs from the combination of our highly-evolved sociality and the inevitability of practical dilemmas – this perspective turns what otherwise would be the contradictions of agency into the well-springs of reason and its integration with active being in the world, reframing perplexity as life-enhancing rather than life-defeating. As it stands, boundary critique is an intellectual construct; agency amidst complexity makes it an existential one too.

In the third of these reconstructions of SI, I wish to introduce an evolutionary perspective that is currently missing from SI, primarily because Midgley (2000) does not want to privilege what he describes as 'content theory' over the *process* of theory production itself. The evolutionary perspective makes it possible to relate SI – by means of ASL – to cultural and social evolution, while steering clear of associating either with any 'march of progress' (Midgley, 2000: 240), because the radical uncertainty of evolution is inimical to programmatic interpretation. Therefore the introduction of evolutionary theory does not need to bring with it the ideological baggage that Midgley is concerned to avoid.

What is missing so far from this version of the synthesis is any consideration of citizenship.

(B) Integrating citizenship

In chapter 6 I defined citizenship as *both a range of rights and a status entailed in belonging to a political community.*

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Freeden's (1991) theory of rights unblocks the dichotomies that be-devil rights-theory and replaces the natural-rights paradigm with a model of rights as "incorporating the equal weighting and indivisibility of fundamental human attributes, the communal nature of human beings and their inherent developmentalism" (ibid: 101). Apart from the commitment to breaking out of false dichotomies and ideological strait-jackets, the crucial points of affinity between SI and this approach to rights are as follows.

(1) The essence of human nature is simultaneously social and individual, with the need to address conflicting principles and priorities, requiring constant reflection on boundaries. It follows from the simultaneously social and individual nature of being human that communality gives purpose and meaning to individual freedom rather than fatally compromising it.

(2) That social life is inherently interventionist. Freeden (1991) defines rights in terms that require deliberate action to protect the human or societal attributes regarded as important, and regards intervention as inherently bound up with welfare rights. For Midgley (2000), all acts of judgement constitute interventions, and explicitly reflecting on this when acting is the essence of critical action.

(3) Midgley would concur with Freeden's view that rights are conceptual devices, not products of objective moral principles. The one serious drawback of Freeden's (1991) theory of rights is the ascription of knowledge-impartiality to intellectual, moral and scientific groups to whom he accords considerable authority in the formulation and recognition of rights, albeit along with culture-relative and political factors. For Midgley,

all claims to authoritative knowledge or objectivity can legitimately be subject to boundary critique. Given that Freeden is concerned with rights as political constructs, not with the logical or semantic 'truth' of arguments about rights, I think the problem can be overcome by recognizing that boundary critique applies to the formulation and recognition of rights in all contexts, without regarding the views of intellectuals as in principle any more objective or impartial than other perspectives.

Apart from that, the dynamic theory of rights also accords fully with the arguments for agency amidst complexity. They reflect similar views of human nature and society. In particular, the perspective on morality that underpins agency amidst complexity corresponds with the arguments that the attributes protected by rights cannot be settled once and for all; that while we all have an equal claim to bear rights, we have the *same* rights as others only inasmuch as our needs and attributes are the same; that the general nature of rights calls not only for specific action to uphold particular rights but also an attitude of general regard for rights-bearers; and that ultimately it is not rights that have special protection but the attributes and capacities that they are designed to protect. Moreover, recognition of communal interests and rights extends the rights dimension of citizenship to economic and environmental factors.

This agentive view of rights underpins the first part of my definition of citizenship (citizenship as a range of rights), while the second part (citizenship as a status entailed in belonging to a political community) connects citizenship to agency amidst complexity. Among other things, this second part of the definition is framed to avoid conflating citizenship-as-legal-standing with the notion of citizenship-as-desirable-activity. The reason

to avoid that conflation is so that ideas about what constitutes 'good' citizenship are distinguished analytically from the legal standing of citizenship, and citizenship rights are not subordinated to criteria of 'good' citizenship which may be merely expedient or (un)intentionally exclusive. Distinguishing the two modes of citizenship also brings out the connection between citizenship-as-desirable-activity and what I call 'citizen-agency', particularly in regard to the upholding of rights and the ethics of participation in civil society.

Thus, this dual concept of citizenship helps to ground the otherwise vague notion of civil society in citizenship-as-desirable-activity, but rather than associating it with the 'republican' ideal of 'high citizenship' (which elevates civic participation to the highest moral and political standing), my own approach relates it to the exercise of agency amidst complexity. This approach also recasts civil society more as an extension of, or precursor to, citizenship than as a rival concept. The agentive factor also links citizenship with social learning, and that provides further grounding for the notion of civil society (see below).

(C) ASL and citizenship

While I see learning in the normal, experiential sense as an emergent effect of active being in the world, *social learning*, as I describe it, is an emergent effect of the facet of active being that I call agency amidst complexity. In other words, social learning is an emergent effect of our response to uncertainty as we experience and adapt to the complexities of socio-natural relations. The exercise of agency is a concrete response to such complexity, with social learning as an emergent effect, but it is the agentive exercise that generates it. It is the social

equivalent of adaptive behaviour, and the term *agentive social learning* is meant to distinguish

this conception from notions of SL that do not relate it to agency – indeed, to distinguish it

from notions of learning that are not grounded in our embodied relation to the world.

ASL is, therefore, closely related to cultural evolution. As I see it, that relation is one of

adaptive capacitation, meaning that ASL sustains the capacity for adaptation by continually

recharging the dynamics of cultural evolution. Thus, while *social evolution* is neither a natural

progression nor something we can have much control over, we influence it by how we

adapt, and build capacity for adaptation by exercising agency.

Given its grounding in active being and agency amidst complexity, it follows that ASL

reflects the interplay of different levels of consciousness, and is as much pre-consciously

intentional as it is consciously deliberate. When people consciously engage in collectively

exercising their capacities for agency, that is what I would call deliberate social learning, yet

the learning remains an emergent effect of their agency.

ASL amplifies and sustains citizenship in several ways, of which two are prime. First, the

nature of rights calls, among other things, for an inquiring response to the contingencies of

interpreting and upholding rights. It is by applying practical reason to rights-issues that we

fulfil this aspect of citizen-agency, and it is by how we think and act in this regard that we

contribute to social learning in relation to rights, thereby building capacity for rights to be

understood as dynamic and developmental. Put the other way round, the paradigm of fixed

natural rights that Freeden (1991) opposes entails a denial of the social capacity that ASL

represents.

Secondly, in regard to citizenship as a status entailed in belonging to a political community, it is in the relational networks of civil society that learning in relation to community and civil action mainly occurs. Yet that is only one kind of context in which agency is exercised. It seems likely, however, that the degree to which we are able to exercise agency in associational contexts will significantly affect our sense of belonging to a polity and our recognition of ourselves as rights-bearers and rights-upholders. This reinforces the significance of ASL for underpinning and empowering citizenship.

(D) ASL and Systemic Intervention

The combination of ASL and SI works in both directions. For ASL, and the underlying concept of agency, SI provides grounding in a comprehensive systems theory that – reconstructed as described – is uniquely compatible with the other key ideas. For its part, ASL grounds boundary critique in the praxis of agentive social learning.

Moreover, the aspect of ASL that I call adaptive capacitation not only reinforces the relation of reconstructed SI to cultural and social evolution, but also brings out the fact that SI is itself a capacity-building conception. Together with the other facets of this synthesis, this considerably deepens the concept of SI, and this is taken further in versions 2 and 3 of the synthesis.

Nearly all the elements of the synthesis are at work in version 1, but the political

implications are muted, and further integration is also possible. Hence the intermediate and

final versions of the synthesis.

10. 4. INTERMEDIATE VERSION OF THE SYNTHESIS

The version in Figure 10.3, achieves some further integration by attaching the notion of

active being in the world to SI, producing the rather clumsy (but intermediate) concept of

embodied systemic intervention, and attaching agency amidst complexity to citizenship,

conceptualized as citizen-agency.

Figure 10.3: Intermediate version of the synthesis
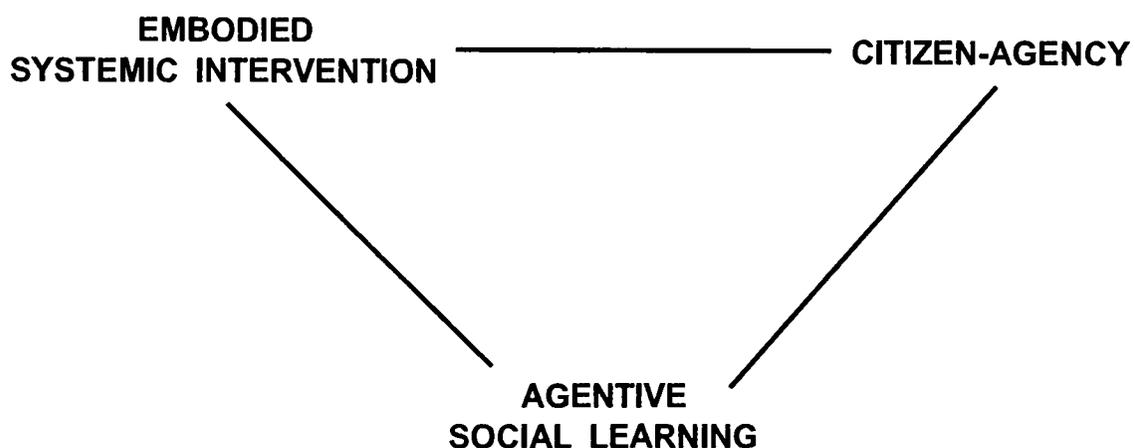
The first move represents the reconstruction of SI to ground its concept of self-agency in

the embodiment of socio-natural relations. However, the terminology is unwieldy and,

indeed, tautological once the reconstruction is granted. The final version of the synthesis

finds another way around this problem.

In contrast, the concept of citizen-agency rings true, partly because the unified term suggests both the capacity and its enaction. To be clear, this stands for more than what is usually meant by the term 'active citizenship', because this concept of citizen-agency incorporates the relationship between moral agency and citizenship described in version 1 of the synthesis.

This concept also brings in the relation of citizenship to governance, as distinct from other aspects of democracy, and the relation of governance to ASL. I am referring not only to the enforcement of standards to prevent outright injustice and exploitation, but also to the development of approaches to governance that are fit for purpose in meeting contemporary needs, particularly in regard to social auditing and corporate citizenship across the public and private sectors. Approaching it in terms of citizen-agency and social learning must be one of the surest ways of improving the quality of governance, because it recasts governance as an exercise of collective agency and capacity-building.

This perspective can also strengthen efforts to equalize relations between ordinary citizens, professional experts and corporate or political policy-makers (Ulrich, 1996b, 2000). Finally, the concept of citizen-agency has powerful implications for social auditing and, together with ASL, transforms the notion of organizational learning – points that will be developed when integrating the final version of the synthesis with social auditing in the last part of this chapter.

10. 5. FINAL VERSION OF THE SYNTHESIS

The third and final version, shown in Figure 10.4 below, produces a complete synthesis of citizen-agency, ASL and the concept of 'systemic praxis'. The latter resolves the problem of terminology in the intermediate version, and also achieves further integration of the concepts. Retaining the term 'systemic' is essential to maintain the grounding in systems thinking. The notion of 'praxis' entails intervention, but also accentuates two factors that are subdued in SI: the existential dimension which embodied agency brings to SI, and the political connotations of 'praxis', as defined by Castordiadis (1964: 109): "a constantly renewed theoretical search that sheds light on a world in constant change and as a practice that constantly transforms the world while also being transformed by it".

Figure 10.4: Synthesis of Systemic Praxis, Citizen-Agency and Agentive Social Learning

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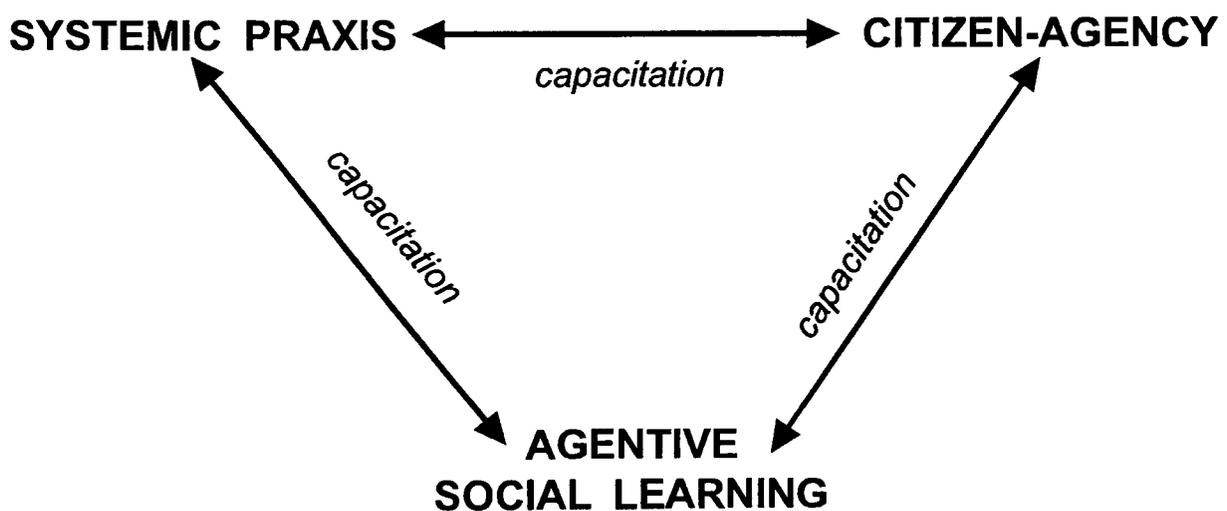
Castoriadis (ibid: 161-5) points out that whereas traditional philosophical theory aims at total truth and insists that 'truth' corresponds with actuality, for praxis "what is already constituted as [truth] is already dead once it has been constituted". There is, therefore, no contradiction between praxis understood in these terms and the philosophy of SI. Moreover, Castoriadis (ibid) describes the relation of praxis to systems thinking in terms that chime with Midgley's approach to boundary critique. It is interesting to note that in some of his earliest work, Midgley (1989) did use the term 'praxis', but it was dropped in subsequent developments of his thinking.

To avert any misunderstanding, this notion of systemic praxis is not meant in any way to reduce the importance of the concept of intervention in SI, but to ground it differently for my own purposes here. Furthermore, this reframing of SI is coherent only in relation to the synthesis with citizen-agency and ASL. Nor is this notion of 'systemic praxis' equivalent to Jackson's (2000, 2003) reframing of CST as 'critical systems practice', although his commitment to social awareness and applying critical thinking to solving real-world problems makes for some common ground.

Two other factors require explanation. One is that, as indicated in Figure 10.4, all three concepts in the synthesis are mutually capacitating. The unifying factor of agency also makes them to some degree 'holographic' in the sense that each can represent the whole idea; at the same time they have independent origins and remain analytically distinct. The whole point of a synthesis evaporates if the parts are equivalent. This also has a bearing on why further integration is not possible without doing violence to the independent concepts. Systemic praxis cannot be subsumed into citizen-agency or ASL, nor vice versa. On the

other hand, there is a powerful synergy between this synthesis and social auditing, and it elucidates what I have been driving at all along. The ways in which we 'account for ourselves', in the praxis of agency and as citizens, provide the real grounding for social auditing re-framed as social learning.

10. 6. SOCIAL AUDITING AS AGENTIVE SOCIAL LEARNING

As shown in chapter 2, the model of social and ethical accounting, auditing and reporting (SEAAR) which is promoted by the Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility (AccountAbility) is meant to generate learning through stakeholder dialogue, but there are doubts about the actual impact on corporate performance, and about the value of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in general. Zadek's (2001) theory of the civil corporation puts civil learning at the centre of a concept of corporate citizenship based on partnership within shifting alliances of businesses, organized civil society, governments and transnational institutions. However, the theory relies upon dubious assumptions about the political trajectory of the 'new economy'. Moreover, while expanding the notion of corporate citizenship, Zadek simply takes for granted the core concept of citizenship, leaving it abstractly implicit in membership of civil society, and perhaps in corporate membership of the partnerships mentioned. This is corporate citizenship without actual citizens.

My argument is that both models lack essential grounding in agency and linkage between agency and organizational or 'civil' learning. I am also proposing that the gap between the promise of social auditing and its impact on corporate performance can be better understood from a social perspective than an organizational one. I will now try to show

how ASL and the related synthesis develop and reconstruct social auditing, to help realize its social learning potential.

ASL provides a new perspective for addressing the problem of how to develop the personal and institutional capacities needed to enable stakeholders to engage meaningfully. Zadek and Raynard (2002: 13) associate that need with pressure from civil society organizations to empower previously marginalized voices. What I have been emphasizing is the pervasive marginalizing of the agentive nature of humanity, the grounding of agency in the complexity of socio-natural relations, and its role in the capacitation of social dynamics. ASL is part of a synthesis of ideas that are about rolling back the influences that abstract us from ourselves and militate against exercising that capacity for agency. That marginalization is comprehensively disempowering. Among other things, it hollows out the notion of social action, deprives citizenship of social traction, and splits organizational behaviour from social context. And it undermines the notion of accountability, by co-opting everyone into a culture of diminished responsibility.

In contrast, the synthesis which ASL represents helps to integrate the personal, social, associative, political, and organizational domains of life, and frames them as being fundamentally developmental, without simplifying the complexity or wishing it away. This has the potential to be deeply empowering. As for the suggestion that it is *disempowering* to describe social learning as *emergent* rather than a *direct* effect of individual agency, I would argue (a) that the effects of *any* learning that is experiential are primarily emergent; (b) that my concept of SL stresses the agentive grounding missing from most other concepts of it. And all the elements of this synthesis are capacity-building concepts.

SEAAR is also a capacity-building concept: it is about developing organizational accountability to stakeholders. ASL reconstructs the basis of capacitation by putting the exercise of individual and collective agency at the centre of social and organizational life. While not at all diminishing corporate responsibility, the agentive perspective brings into focus the concrete acts of agency that generate organizational impacts, good or bad, and this perspective highlights the fact that accountability to ourselves and to each other is an everyday matter. That may be implicit in SEAAR, but making it explicit connects social auditing with agency.

The emphasis on agency also reminds us that it is about capacity to act and how that capacity is exercised or not. Insofar as people in organizations are unable to exercise agency, it is not at all clear where accountability actually lies, so according to most models of governance it goes to the top, where 'the buck' supposedly stops. But that reinforces the top-down model of organization. So, little will change unless the exercise of agency is brought in from the margins, and organizational structures and processes are re-oriented towards building capacity for it.[1]

Re-centering agency reconstructs social auditing in another way too. So long as the top-down model of governance applies, unless directors are to be allowed to 'mark their own exam papers', as it were (Turnbull, 2002), social accounts must be verified/audited by people *outside* the organization. The agentive model brings social and ethical considerations

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[1] In Spanish, *capacitation* means development. Turnbull (2002) uses the term in advocating the concept of 'network governance' through democratized structures that facilitate stakeholder engagement and self-regulation.

explicitly to bear on decisions in the first place, thereby activating processes of practical

reason, boundary judgement, and so on, which serve the purposes of *internal* self-regulation

and help to align it with external perspectives.

Similarly, the idea of corporate citizenship is transformed by reframing it as the praxis of

citizen-agency, and ASL in this context is reframed as corporate social learning. Yet the

rights and status of citizenship remain the properties of citizen-agents, independent of

whatever corporate entity within which they are exercised.

To sum up, and doubly ground social auditing in relation to rights: from the perspective of

ASL, social auditing is about learning to understand and evaluate the social and environ-

mental impact of organizational activities *as matters of personal and collective agency* which people

should have a right to exercise by virtue of membership of society and by virtue of the

responsibilities to themselves and others that go with that right.

Figure 10.5 on page 382 represents the synergy between the synthesis I have developed and

the AccountAbility model of social auditing.[2] As described in chapter 2, this depicts a

central set of processes relating to the embedding of social and ethical accounting,

assurance and reporting taking place within the dynamics of organizational learning,

innovation and performance improvement by virtue of the development of accountability

through engagement with stakeholders. I believe that the synthesis developed here provides

a framework for rethinking what learning through engagement with stakeholders actually

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[2] As noted in chapter 2 (pages 35-6), the principles of the AccountAbility approach to social auditing were redefined in 2005, but I regard the earlier formulation incorporated in Figure 10.5 as being clearer for the purposes of the thesis, and fully consistent with the current formulation.

entails, and what needs to happen for that embedding of accountability to be more effective.

Adaptive capacitation, as I see it, is the continual recharging of capacity for social learning and change through the exercise of agency, individually and collectively. Figure 10.5 also shows how the synthesis I have developed builds capacity for the AccountAbility process, and that in turn builds further capacity for social learning. The arrows going between the two conceptual models represent the potential for capacity-building effects in both directions – treating both models as integrated wholes, so the capacity-building effects are systemic rather than tied to particular elements of either model. For instance, in one direction, there are the capacity-building effects of reframing social auditing on the agentive basis I have described above, particularly by grounding it in the praxis of citizen-agency. In the other direction, development of social auditing on this kind of basis would help build capacity for systemic praxis in organizations. And so it could go on, gradually reversing the dissociation of organizational life from social context that I described as a motivating concern right at the beginning of the thesis. This is the potential synergy created by grounding social auditing in agentive social learning. To my mind, it is the kind of synergy that makes sense of hope in these times – hope tempered by recognizing that, for most of us, it is an everyday struggle to sustain an authentic sense of agency, a difficulty I will come back to in chapter 11 when looking at possible developments of the thesis.

10. 7. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has developed a synthesis of systemic praxis, citizen-agency and agentive social learning. By doing so it fulfills the fifth objective of the thesis. It has also shown the capacity-building synergy between social auditing and the synthesis developed, and how this combination of ideas conceptually reframes social auditing as a form of agentive social learning. That fulfills the sixth and final objective, and also completes the development of ideas in the schematic meta-frame of Figure 1.1 (see pages 17 or 176).

Figure 10.5: Synergy between social auditing and the synthesis of systemic praxis, citizen-agency and agentive social learning
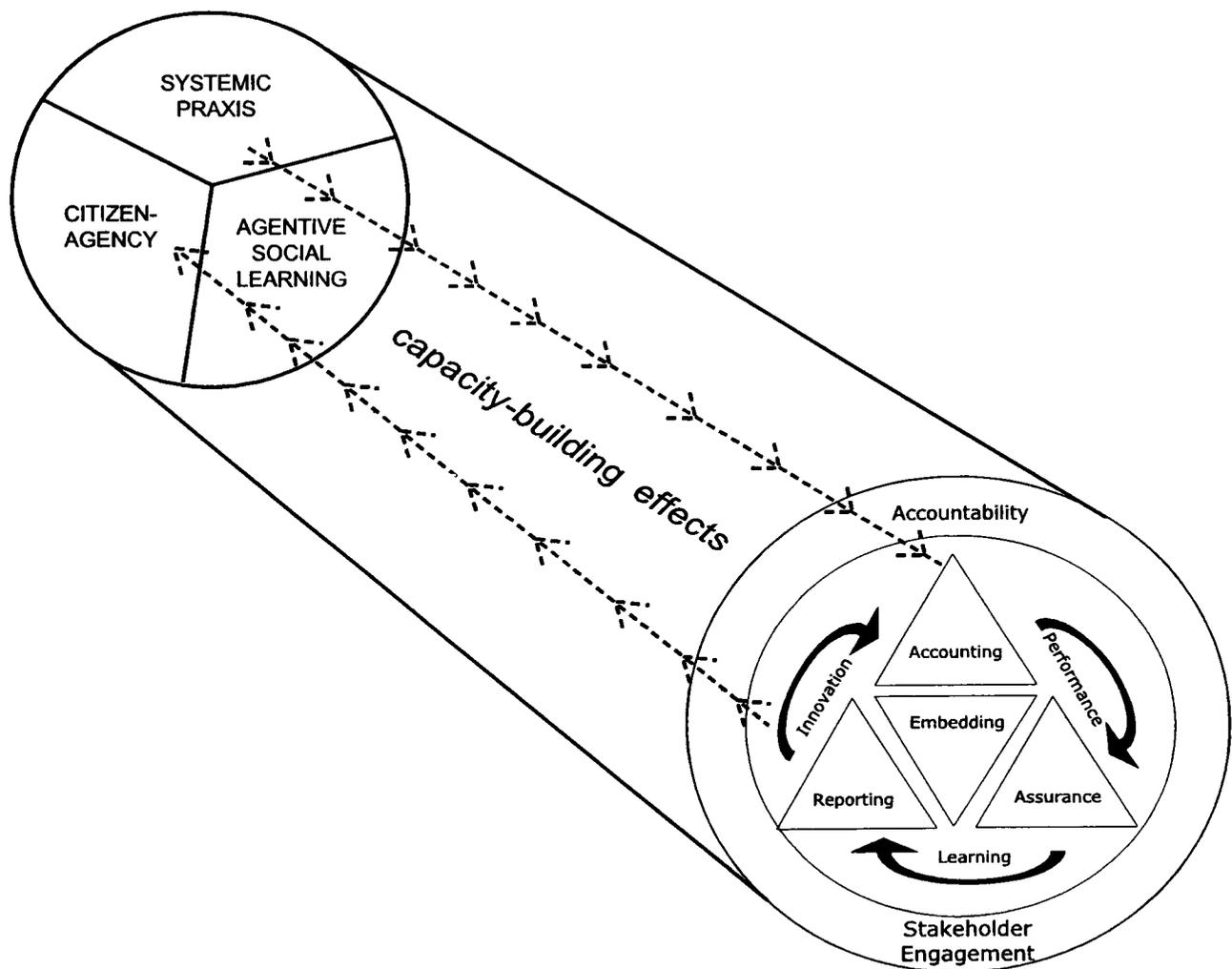
CHAPTER 11:

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

11. 1. Achievement of the overall aim

The overall aim of the thesis was to reformulate the conceptual basis of social auditing and its relation to corporate citizenship by rethinking social auditing as a form of social learning, grounded in a synthesis of Midgley's theory of Systemic Intervention coupled with an integrated conception of agency, citizenship and social learning.

That synthesis was completed in chapter 10, which also reconstructed the conceptual basis of social auditing as agentive social learning coupled with the concepts of citizen-agency and systemic praxis.

I will now review how the specific aims have been met.

11. 2. Resumé in relation to the specific objectives

The six specific objective set out in chapter 1 have been fulfilled as follows.

Objective 1: To review how the concept of social auditing and the related idea of corporate citizenship are being constructed

Chapter 2 traced the origins and development of social and ethical accounting, and its

consolidation in the AccountAbility model of social auditing, which centres on stakeholder

engagement and the embedding of social auditing into organizational learning. However,

there are problems in linking stakeholder engagement to organizational change, and the

approach fails to connect social auditing with the exercise of agency and with a concrete

notion of citizenship.

Chapter 3 examined the theory of a 'new economy' of corporate citizenship as proposed by

Zadek (2001), the chief architect of AccountAbility. That theory is undermined by doubts

about the political trajectory of the so-called 'new economy'. Moreover, the underlying

concept of citizenship is hardly considered, being partly equated with civil society and partly

subsumed into corporate citizenship. Drawing chapters 2 and 3 together, the conclusion

reached is that social auditing needs to be more critically grounded. Critical systems

thinking (CST) is then proposed as an approach to strengthening those underpinnings,

because of theoretical overlaps between the two fields and because the approaches of

Ulrich (1983, 1996b) and Midgley (2000) address some of social auditing's shortcomings.

Objective 2: To review CST, particularly the work of Ulrich and Midgley, and assess

its capacity for strengthening the conceptual basis of social auditing

Chapter 4 analyses the development of CST, particularly the approaches of Ulrich (1983)

and Midgley (2000). The concept of boundary critique to which both have contributed is

directly relevant to social auditing. Midgley's Systemic Intervention (SI) goes part of the way

towards furnishing an adequate concept of agency and critical action, but SI also tends

towards a disembodied abstraction of agency. Moreover, SI is crying out for integration

with an agentive view of citizenship and social learning. Ulrich brings in the issue of citizenship and civil society, but neglects domains of citizenship that go beyond the reach of critical heuristics. Furthermore, as a field CST has generally misinterpreted its relationship to philosophical pragmatism, and so has failed to draw on Pragmatist ideas that bear directly on the relation between inquiry, social action and civil society.

Objective 3: To explore the relationship between CST and philosophical pragmatism

Chapter 5 recovers the Pragmatist legacy and suggests how critical engagement with it might have enhanced CST's development. However, Pragmatism also has shortcomings, particularly in regard to theorizing citizenship and rights, taking account of social and moral contradictions, and justifying a normative commitment to deliberative democracy. Moreover, despite obvious leanings in that direction, Pragmatism lacks a theory of social learning to complement its view of inquiry and social action.

Objective 4: To develop an integrated conception of citizenship and agency that complements Systemic Intervention

Addressing this aim spans three chapters of the thesis. Chapter 6 probes the problematic nature of citizenship and offers a definition of it as both a range of rights and a status entailed in belonging to a political community. It sets out a critique of the natural rights paradigm, and adopts Freeden's (1991) dynamic theory of rights that complements SI (apart from the issue of Freeden's acceptance of the notion of knowledge-impartial expertise in

the formulation of rights, which can be resolved by recognizing that such expertise needs to be subject to boundary critique).

Chapter 7 explores contrasting views of civil society, which leads into a critique of Habermasian discourse ethics. Drawing the strands of chapters 6 and 7 together suggests a synergy between SI and the approach to citizenship and rights that has been developed, but the combination needs to be underpinned by a more rounded conception of agency than SI contains.

From an evolutionary perspective, chapter 8 develops the concepts of active being in the world and agency amidst complexity. Although analytically distinguishable, they are like two facets of a Mobius strip. Active being in the world means having an embodied and emergent presence that develops through, and continually reconstitutes, socio-natural relations, experienced at various levels of consciousness. Agency amidst complexity is the dimension of active being in the world that involves *awareness* of socio-natural complexity and *action* in response to it. In particular, it is our capacity, albeit modest, to act as whole beings in response to practical uncertainty and complexity, and as such it is how we constitute the reality of human freedom. Combined with my understanding of citizenship, agency amidst complexity underpins the citizen-agency part of the synthesis.

***Objective 5: To develop a concept of social learning that reflects and extends that
integrated conception***

Chapter 9 explores several different perspectives on social learning and formulates the

concept of agentive social learning (ASL), defined as an emergent effect of our agentive

response to the complexities of socio-natural relations. Its relation to cultural and social

evolution is that agency generates the variety needed to keep social change going, primarily

through cultural evolution, while the processes of ASL sustain capacity for it. In other

words, this is *adaptive capacitation:* the continual recharging of capacity for social learning and

change through the exercise of agency. This aspect of ASL is also latently political, in that it

gives rise to forms of collective action that are proto-political. These features distinguish

ASL from other concepts of social learning, and clarify what makes such learning

generically *social* in character, as distinct (conceptually) from individual learning in particular

social contexts.

***Objective 6. To formulate a synthesis of Systemic Intervention, agency, citizenship
and social learning, and on this basis to conceptually reframe social auditing as a
form of social learning.***

As explained when stating how the overall aim of the thesis has been met, chapter 10

completes the argument by formulating the synthesis of systemic praxis, citizen agency and

agentive social learning, and by re-conceptualizing social auditing on that basis.

11. 3. Contributions to knowledge

The thesis makes several contributions to knowledge, listed here in the order in which the thesis developed.

First, within the discourse of CST, it recovers the legacy of philosophical pragmatism which has been misinterpreted or neglected by most critical systems thinkers. Recovering it brings a new perspective to the development of CST and how it might engage with an approach to philosophy and social thinking that is increasingly seen as highly relevant to contemporary issues.

Second, the thesis develops Midgley's theory of Systemic Intervention (SI) by underpinning it with a conception of agency that is grounded in human embodiment and its relation to socio-natural complexity.

Third, the thesis augments SI by linking it with an integrated conception of agency, citizenship and rights that significantly extends the conceptual 'reach' of SI.

Fourth, the thesis develops a new concept of social learning, formulated as agentive social learning (ASL). This defines social learning as an emergent effect of our agentive response to experiencing the complexities of socio-natural relations, and this is what makes ASL both agentive and distinctly social in character.

Fifth, the thesis also originates the concept of citizen-agency. This connects citizenship –
defined as both a range of rights and a status entailed in belonging to a political community
– with the exercise of agency amidst complexity, which links the practice of citizenship with
the exercise of moral agency in response to complexity. The concept of citizen-agency also
connects citizenship with agentive social learning and with Systemic Intervention reframed
as systemic praxis.

Sixth, the synthesis of systemic praxis, citizen-agency and agentive social learning
reconstructs and reinforces social auditing from a new theoretical perspective. This also
presents a new perspective on organizational learning, and on citizenship and the
relationship between civil society and social learning.

11.4. Possible future developments

There is significant scope for further research here, and at this stage I envisage four main
lines of development. First, I would like to disseminate this perspective on social auditing
within that field, and work with practitioners to develop ways of integrating this approach
into social auditing practice. Second, I would like to introduce this perspective into the field
of organizational learning, and work towards combining the ideas developed here with
Pedler et al's (1997) concept of a sustainable organization. Thirdly, I want to continue to
develop the ideas represented by the synthesis of systemic praxis, citizen-agency and
agentive social learning, and to bring them to bear on other contemporary issues,
particularly in relation to debates about citizenship and social inclusion.

The fourth line of development overlaps with those three. At the end of the previous chapter, I described the potential synergy created by grounding social auditing in agentive social learning, and suggested that it is the kind of synergy that makes sense of hope in these times. Yet I am very conscious that achieving this kind of synergy will undoubtedly be difficult, and it is no good to pretend otherwise. In regard to my own synthesis, the primary challenges are to foster and sustain the capacity for agency amidst complexity – in oneself and others, and in all spheres of life – and to uphold the principle and praxis of citizen-agency.

From personal and professional experience I know that nurturing an authentic sense of agency is an everyday struggle for most of us, myself included. Yet I also believe that the struggle is made more worthwhile by framing the idea of agency as a matter of our response to experiencing the complexity of socio-natural relations, rather than (on the one hand) treating it as something that can be taken for granted, or (on the other hand) portraying it as necessitating a rarified quality of mind and moral sensibility.

The concept of agency amidst complexity, grounded in active being in the world, is part of my contribution to affirming the importance and the reality of this agentive capacity of ours. Like the elements of the synthesis itself, the ways in which I envisage continuing to work with putting that concept into practice are bound up with my ideas about systemic praxis and citizen-agency. This brings us to the fourth line of further developments.

The proto-politics of social learning as I have described it become expressly political through the praxis of citizen-agency. Alongside the further developments outlined above,

I now see the work myself and my partner have been doing under the banner of Developing Capacity for Challenge (which I mentioned in chapter1) as a relatively direct way of playing a part in promoting the principle and praxis of citizen-agency in the organizational settings in which we work. So, improving that framework of intervention, and integrating it more with other strands of our work – on relational and bottom-up leadership, on partnership working, on race relations – is a concrete and immediate way of putting the ideas in the synthesis into practice. Furthermore, another aspect of the synergy mentioned above is that the spirit and methods we have built into Developing Capacity for Challenge chime completely both with the practice of social auditing and with the capacity-building potential of approaching social auditing as agentive social learning.

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