Planning and Society

Assessing the Possibility of Institutional Design

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2022

Dennis Graemer

School of Social Sciences

Department of Philosophy

List of Contents

List of Figures 4
Abstract 5
Declaration 6
Copyright Statement 7
Acknowledgement 8
Introduction 9
Subject Matter 10
What is Political Rationalism? 12
Structure and Recurring Themes 15
Irrationalism, Lebensphilosophie, and Fascism 19
The Counter-Enlightenment 20
Wilhelm Dilthey: The Epistemology of the Human Sciences 24
Dilthey and the Counter-Enlightenment 32
Ludwig Klages: Intellect versus Life 37
Oswald Spengler: Culture and Decline 46
Spengler's Contradiction 51
Irrationalism and Fascism 54
Irrationalism as a Form of Anti-Prometheanism 61
Prometheanism and its Critics in the 18th Century 63
Thomas Paine: Republican Prometheanism 64
Republicanism versus Liberalism? 69
David Hume: Enlightenment and Skepticism 75
Radical and Reflective Enlightenment 87
Edmund Burke: Evolutionary Conservatism 93
The Debate of the 18th Century 100
Hayek and the Theory of Social Evolution 103
Rationalist Constructivism 104
The Origin of Rationalist Constructivism 106
Descriptive and Normative Constructivism 108

Methodological Arguments 112
Traditionalism and Social Evolution 117
The Theory of Social Evolution Assessed 122
Trial-and-Error Theory 130
Political Rationalism, Liberty, and Socialism 134
Hayek's Ideal of Liberty 135
The Neo-Roman Concept of Liberty 141
Rationalist Constructivism and Definite Purposes 148
Designing Freedom: Republicanism and Constructivism 158
Constructivism and Socialism 166
Republicanism and Socialism 172
Conclusion 179
Bibliography 182

Word Count: 72141 Words

List of Figures

Figure 1: Fitness Landscape. Image showing a two-dimensional fitness landscape to visualise the idea. It was created by myself. Page 127.

Abstract

The thesis is concerned with the idea of political rationalism or *Prometheanism.* Prometheanism claims that institutions and even whole societies can and should be consciously planned, rationally designed, or deliberately constructed. This idea shall be defended against its critics.

The thesis will explain what political rationalism is and how it has been attacked. It will explain, assess, and refute a number of anti-Promethean arguments that have been proposed by some of the most influential political thinkers of the modern age. Among the critics are the German irrationalists Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler, the British conservatives Edmund Burke and David Hume, and the Austrian economist F.A. Hayek.

By showing that the arguments leveraged against political rationalism are flawed, this thesis demonstrates that the conscious design of society still deserves serious consideration.

In addition, this thesis will illuminate the history of Prometheanism. It will highlight the role of political rationalism during the Enlightenment and its function as a legitimising principle of the American and French revolutions. It will also showcase how the critique of reason in politics motivated different political camps: conservatives, right-wing extremists, and liberals. Thereby, the thesis strives to establish the practical importance of its subject matter.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

(i) The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and he has given the University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

(ii) Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made **only** in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

(iii) The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

(iv) Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=2442 0), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, the University Library's regulations (see http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/) and in the University's policy on Presentation of Theses.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank Shervin MirzaeiGhazi for everything. Furthermore I thank Juta Pulijana for her personality, Anne-Marie McCallion for late talks, Suddhasatwa Guharoy for rebuttals, and Emile Chan for saving my skin.

I also want thank my supervisors John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel. Their guidance was instrumental for the development of this thesis and for my thought process in general.

Special thanks to "Sherry" for teaching me how to question.

I

Introduction

SUBJECT MATTER

The subject of this thesis is the idea that society as a whole can, and should, be consciously designed. According to this world view, political constitutions, economic systems, and other institutional arrangements should be subject to rational or scientific planning. This idea has been called "Rationalism in politics" by Michael Oakeshott (Oakeshott 1962: 1), "rationalist constructivism" by Friedrich August von Hayek (Hayek 1982: 17), and "Prometheanism" by Peter Wolfendale (Wolfendale 2016).

First and foremost, this thesis is an attempt to defend the viability Promethean project against its critics. Four important arguments are examined and assessed. Some authors embrace a general irrationalism, claiming that reason is untrustworthy, which implies that it should not be allowed to rule over society. Others dismiss political rationalism because they associate it with foundationalism, first principles, and natural rights, ideas with they reject on philosophical grounds. Furthermore, there is a criticism which leverages an evolutionary view of social development to craft an argument against Promethean ambitions. It has also been argued that political rationalism is antithetical to liberty. Over the course of the thesis, we will examine all four arguments. It will be argued that they fail.

In addition, this thesis strives to demonstrate that the different stances regarding the viability of political rationalism have had a great influence on questions of immediate practical relevance. Specifically, it will be argued that the American and French revolutions were – in the first case partially, in the second to a great degree – reliant upon Promethean commitments. It will also be suggested that the neoliberal turn in the late 70s and early 80s might be understood as a Promethean project from the right. At the same time, many of the most influential proponents of conservatism, reactionary politics[1] and Nazism can be shown to be motivated by their rejection of political rationalism.

---

[1] In contemporary discourse, "ractionary" is often used as a slur by the political left. In this dissertation, however, the term will be used in its original meaning, denoting a political camp that emerged as a reaction to the French Revolution. Reactionaries want to go back to the pre-revolutionary world.

The claim that Prometheanism can be defended is normative and systematic, the claim that debates around this topic were influential however is a descriptive one that pertains to the history of philosophy. Despite the fact that those are propositions of different kinds, they can only be argued for in conjunction. The arguments levied against conscious planning of social institutions are part of the history of philosophy. As they are embedded within larger philosophical systems, they can only be presented in the context of the works in which they appear. Therefore, any attempt to separate the historical from the systematic must fail. One cannot assess Prometheanism without dealing with its history, and it is equally impossible to understand this history if not through the analysis of the philosophical arguments that have been made to attack it.

The relevance of this analysis is likewise twofold. Firstly, political rationalism is undertheorised in contemporary academia. While it is an important topic for many of the authors we will be examining in this thesis, it is not a chief concern of academic literature today. When it is discussed, it is dealt with as a part of a single author's work (see Miller 2001 on Oakeshott), and even then, attention is focused on the specifics of the argument provided (see Rowland 1988, Kukathas 1990, Gray 1980 on Hayek). Discussions of political rationalism as such are, with some exceptions (Steinberger 2015), absent. This does not do the topic justice. The criticism of Prometheanism is a recurring theme in political philosophy. This warrants a treatment which views the arguments of individual authors such as Hume, Burke, and Hayek as contributions to a single debate.

Furthermore, there is almost no one who defends Prometheanism against its critics. As we will see, most authors and political movements who have historically embraced political rationalism did so almost unconsciously. They demanded that rational principles be applied to politics, they planned constitutions and designed institutions, but they did not actively defend the meta-level claim that such an approach is viable. The existence of political rationalism as a distinct world view has only been pointed out by its critics, which have formulated a range of rebuttals. Recently, Prometheanism has found an advocate in Peter Wolfendale (2016). However, while Wolfendale promotes the advantages of such a worldview, he does not actively engage with the case of its critics.

The mismatch between the importance of political rationalism for a wide range of influential historical movements and authors on the one hand and its neglect by contemporary political philosophy is one of the reasons that motivates this thesis.

But there is a second set of concerns which makes this investigation worthwhile. Our world is faced with an increasing number of societal problems: not only do issues such as poverty and class-based

inequality persist, in recent times we have also witnessed the deterioration of democracy (see Gilens, Page 2014), the rise of right-wing populism, and the return of large scale war in Europe. The emergence of new technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering poses questions for which there is no precedence. Perhaps most importantly, climate change threatens if not to destroy all life on earth, then at least to further destabilise our societies.

It might very well be possible that those problems cannot be solved within the existing economic and political framework. Preventing catastrophe might require institutional and societal change on an unprecedented scale. Such a radical re-design of our surroundings would amount to an act of global institutional planning. It would be an inherently Promethean project. However it is precisely such grand designs which the critics of political rationalism warn us not to attempt. Discussing Prometheanism is not only of theoretical interest, but also of political relevance.

WHAT IS POLITICAL RATIONALISM?

Before we can continue, it is necessary to make clear what Prometheanism entails. At its core, it is the belief that society as a whole, a complex system of institutions, can be planned or rationally designed – not only in a piecemeal manner, but also in a way which implies fundamental change. Any such design must, of course, be based on an understanding of the forces and laws that govern society. The possibility of political rationalism is therefore inherently linked to the possibility and the power of the social sciences. Just as the blueprint of a machine is based on the laws of physics, institutional designs rely on the insights into the mechanisms of society.

Every Promethean endeavour therefore begins with a process that we can call *social mapping*. It consists of the study of the processes, mechanisms, and laws that govern societies. Mainly, this means determining relationships of cause and effect, which allows the social scientist or political philosopher, among other things, to attribute social problems to specific, often institutional causes. Apart from this descriptive dimension, social mapping also often has a normative or ethical dimension. Moral norms are either derived from philosophical argument or simply presupposed, and then applied to society and politics.

Political critique normally requires a combination of both the descriptive and the ethical aspects of social mapping. Some forms of political critique may appear to be entirely moral, but this is a

deception. If we assume that all humans have a natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then this can be leveraged to argue against the institution of slavery. However, as "ought implies can", what also needs to be demonstrated is that the abolition of slavery is practically possible. This, of course, is a descriptive claim. In many cases, the importance of descriptive accounts of cause and effect are even more overt. The moral idea that poverty is undesirable alone does not imply political action. Only when this idea is combined with a theory about the causes of poverty does it become applicable.

Social mapping presupposes that the rational study of society is possible. Without the ability to study society in a scientific way we cannot develop a clear understanding of institutions and the problems or benefits they bring. To properly assess the viability of political rationalism, we must therefore arrive at an idea about the status of the social sciences. As we will see, the status of moral philosophy is, on a purely formal level, less important. Even if we reject the idea that ethical first principles can be deduced and that the values we espouse are therefore the result of choice, not rational necessity, we can still be Prometheans. Historically, foundationalism with regard to moral and political principles was deeply connected with political rationalism; but this connection is not philosophically necessary. One can be a Promethean without being a foundationalist. This will be elaborated upon in Chapter III.

After social mapping, there comes *institutional design*. In this step, the insights of social mapping are used to create a blueprint for a new and better order. Design or planning are processes which inherently presuppose a certain goal. We design a car in order to drive, and plan a stadium for people to watch football matches. Planning and design apply descriptive knowledge to fulfil a purpose. When it comes to institutional design, this goal consists of a set of values that have to be achieved, for example freedom, safety, or the maximisation of happiness. On the basis of the relationships of cause and effect that have been discovered, institutions are consciously planned in a way which satisfies those values, whether they are themselves rationally derived or arbitrarily chosen.

The possibility of institutional design depends on the power and completeness of social mapping. If we do not trust our theoretical analysis of society, we have no good reason to believe that our designs will work in practice. Furthermore, even assuming that the regularities and causal relationships we have discovered correspond to reality, the implementation of our grand plan might still cause "unintended and often unwanted by-products" (Popper 1966: 93). The credibility of a plan for institutional change therefore depends on our trust in our ability to provide a sufficiently complete theory of politics and social relations. At first glance, Prometheanism might seem to be a

trivial manner. Why not apply our knowledge to make the world better? But a closer look at the matter reveals that Prometheanism requires a great stock of epistemic confidence, a faith in the ability of political philosophy and the social sciences. This is why the question of political rationalism is a question of political epistemology, and why it is connected to the optimism of the Enlightenment project. It also means that it is threatened by currents which limit or even deny the power of reason and science.

The last step is implementation, or *social transformation*. It requires strategy and tactics. While we might concede to Michael Oakeshott that political craftsmanship might in some sense be more of a practical than a theoretical skill, strategy can still be greatly aided by a correct understanding of the ways in which societies function and change. Therefore, social transformation is again dependent on social mapping.

A mistake in implementation can threaten the whole project. During the French Revolution, the Girondins and the Montagnard Jacobins aimed for the same republican society, but they chose different tactics. The Girondins relied on more formal processes, the Montagnards on the other hand put their trust in the revolutionary force of the Parisian masses. While both movements greatly contributed to the development of European and even global democracy, they failed in their professed goals, leading to a counter-revolution and finally the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

Examples may serve to illustrate the three-step process outlined above. Classical republicans believe that government is destroyed by the force of *corruption*. Corruption is caused by a lack of political participation, by excessive luxuries, and by relationships of dependency among the citizens (Pocock 1975: 75). Corruption results in the decay of the republic (Pocock 1975: 80) and in tyranny. This analysis is an example of social mapping. It provides a base for institutional design. As we will see, authors such as Thomas Paine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau used it to develop new systems of government. In the third step, social transformation, republicanism had to be implemented through revolution. The same schema can be observed with regard to Marxism. In *Capital* Marx provides a detailed analysis of the mechanisms that govern capitalism (Marx 2004a). He also develops a theory of historical change and of the role of classes in history. From those theoretical ideas, he derives the demand for a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production. While this remains vague in Marx – some details are provided in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx 1972) – it is an institutional design based on the descriptive concepts and models he developed. And

again, actual social transformation is conceived as a revolutionary act. Institutional design depends on social mapping, and leads to social transformation.

It should be noted, that adherents of Prometheanism in fact subscribe to two different but interrelated positions: Firstly. they believe that the mapping, design and implementation demanded by political rationalism is *possible*. Moreover, they argue that it is *desirable*. That which is not possible can of course not be desirable; on the other hand, one could, in theory, accept the possibility of Promethean planning while denying its desirability. As we will see, however, most critics of Prometheanism focus on the possibility issue.

STRUCTURE AND RECURRING THEMES

Each chapter in this thesis has one historical and one systematic goal. These goals will be achieved by focusing on a specific discourse as it happened in the history of philosophy. This approach is necessitated by the intention to establish the practical significance of the debate around political rationalism. It is also relevant from a systematic perspective because it respects the philosophical obligation to do justice to the authors one is discussing, an obligation which prevents us from separating arguments from proper context.

The systematic goal of each chapter is to repudiate one of the four important arguments that have been leveraged against Prometheanism. Those arguments are the following:

Irrationalism: Reason itself is to be rejected, which means that its application to politics is harmful.
Anti-Foundationalism: It is impossible to provide first principles that justify moral claims, making the Promethean project untenable.
Social Evolution: Any attempt to consciously design society will destroy valuable customs and institutions which have developed over time.
Liberty: Prometheanism is inherently authoritarian and tyrannical.

In Chapter II we will deal with the irrationalist challenge. The most straightforward way to deny that society can be planned in accordance with reason is to attack reason itself. If rational thought is found to be a useless or even dangerous thing, then this serves as a rebuttal of the idea that it should be used as a guiding principle of society. The rejection of reason as such is commonly associated

with a phenomenon called the Counter-Enlightenment. Apart from the systematic goal of refuting the irrationalist case, the Chapter strives to point to their connection with the political phenomenon of fascism. In this way, the Chapter can contribute both to the refutation of anti-Prometheanism and to the understanding of its connection to politics in the more immediate sense. Both aims will be achieved through a discussion of two influential right-wing philosophers of Weimar Republic Germany: Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler. The chapter will also examine how those thinkers were influenced by ideas associated with Wilhelm Dilthey, a pioneer of the philosophy of the social sciences. It will be demonstrated that while Dilthey himself was committed to science and objectivity, his approach lent itself to be radicalised.

Chapter III will demonstrate why the anti-foundationalist argument fails to present a substantial challenge to Prometheanism. This systematic point results from and is embedded in an examination of the debates around political rationalism in the 18th century. It will be shown in which ways Promethean ideas were presupposed or criticised by a number of 18th century scholars belonging to different political camps. The chapter begins with an analysis of rationalism in the context of the American and French revolutions. This discussion will be focused on Thomas Paine's work and touch upon the hotly debated question regarding the ideological origins of the American Revolution. At a later point, Chapter III will illustrate that a simple equation of Prometheanism with the Enlightenment is untenable. Despite the deep connection between both phenomena, there are Enlightenment authors who embrace more conservative positions and reject political rationalism. One example is David Hume, whose criticism of contractarianism and first principles will present an opportunity to explain why the anti-foundationalist challenge does not imply a rejection of political rationalism as such. The chapter will conclude with a deeper look at Edmund Burke and his evolutionary argument.

Chapter IV is meant as a rebuttal of the evolutionary argument. It is concerned with F. A. Hayek's criticism of rationalist constructivism, which expands upon Burke. Hayek presents us with a clear formulation of the evolutionary argument against those who wish to deliberately design society. He argues that institutions and customs normally develop in an unplanned manner. This unplanned process, however, is not merely chaotic. Instead, it is conceptualised as an evolutionary process which functions in a manner similar to biological evolution. The chapter will present Hayek's description of rationalist constructivism, his elaborations on its origins, his epistemological critique, and finally his evolutionary argument. It will be shown that this argument is deficient, both in its original form as presented by Hayek and in another variant that has been proposed by David Steele. On the historical side, Chapter IV serves to establish that the debate around political rationalism

remains relevant to the 20th century. In the 18th century, Prometheanism was associated with the struggle for democracy and opposed by monarchists. But in the 20th century, the opposition to rationalist constructivism is used not to denigrate democracy, but to argue against socialism. This connection between neoliberalism and anti-Prometheanism is nowhere clearer than in Hayek.

Chapter V is a rebuttal of the idea that Prometheanism is incompatible with freedom. Again, Hayek's writings serve as the basis of discussion. His views on liberty and the rule of law will be presented and their debt to classical republicanism uncovered. It will be argued that Hayek does not succeed in his attempt to portray Prometheanism as inherently tyrannical. On the historical side, the chapter will illuminate the development of the doctrine of the rule of law.

Over the course of the thesis, a few recurring themes will appear. One of those refers to the *connection between Prometheanism and the Enlightenment*, or, more specifically, its connection to the epistemology of René Descartes and the scientific success of Isaac Newton. Cartesianism is associated with the idea of methodical doubt. It encourages people to doubt everything, to put their beliefs before the tribunal of reason. Any judgment that turns out to be insufficiently justified must be dismissed. Rational justification, therefore, becomes a requirement for warranted belief. This attitude, which asks us to critically examine even our most deeply held beliefs, is fundamentally opposed to *prejudice*, striving to replace it by knowledge. Prometheans transpose this idea to the political realm. Institutions or customs are only legitimate insofar as we can provide rational arguments for their existence. Just as beliefs, they are at the mercy of reason.

Prometheanism is also associated with the success of the natural sciences. Newton's achievements are taken to have provided further trust in the ability of the human mind to understand and shape the world. During the so-called *Scientific Revolution*, people came to believe that nature could be understood and that this knowledge could be applied in a beneficial way. This principle of rational analysis and conscious application was transposed to society, yielding a project of deliberate institutional design and large-scale constitutional planning. As we will see in the course of this thesis, the connection between Prometheanism, natural science, methodical doubt, and the Enlightenment is a constant concern of those who criticise its aspirations (Dilthey 2013: 15, Berlin 2002, Hayek 1952: 105, Hayek 1982: 10).

Another recurring theme is classical republicanism, which we have already encountered in this introduction. The term is commonly used to denote a tradition of political philosophy that goes back to Niccolò Machiavelli, who was in turn influenced by ancient sources such as Cicero and

Polybius (see Robbins 1968, Pocock 1975, Skinner 1998). Classical republicanism is concerned with questions of liberty, virtue, and corruption. It is opposed to relationships of dependence both in government and in civil society. As classical republicanism was very influential on early modern political thought, its history is in many interesting ways intertwined with that of political rationalism.

Discussion of those two recurring themes is scattered throughout the thesis. There is, for example, no chapter on "Prometheanism and Republicanism"; instead, the relationship between those ideas is discussed in Chapters III and V. This is necessary because everything else would mean separating ideas from their proper context. Republican tropes play a role both in the debate of the 18th century and in Hayek's critique of rationalist constructivism. But their function in both cases is different, and can only be understood as part of a broader debate.

II

Irrationalism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and Fascism

THE COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

Prometheanism is based on a certain trust in reason, in the human ability to understand and manipulate the world on the basis of theoretical knowledge. In order to find those whose worldview contradicts political rationalism one therefore has to search among irrationalists. Those who distrust the human intellect have little cause to task it with the reorganisation of society.

The Enlightenment has been called the *Age of Reason*. The philosophical movement that rebels against this rule of the intellect is therefore called the *Counter-Enlightenment*. Coined by Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1877: 478) the term describes an opposition to the rationalising and universalising tendencies of the Age of Reason. The term is hotly debated by scholars. As we will see, some reject it entirely. At the same time, there are different conceptions of what the Counter-Enlightenment is and who its most important representatives are (see McMahon 2002, Garrard 2004, Wolin 2004). Most of this literature can be traced back to the seminal essay "The Counter-Enlightenment" by Isaiah Berlin (Berlin 2001: 1-24). If one wants to find the critics of reason, this is a good place to start.

Isaiah Berlin describes the Enlightenment as a mainly French phenomenon that was highly confident in our intellectual abilities. This epistemic optimism saw the world as "a logically connected structure of laws and generalisations susceptible of demonstration and verification" (Berlin 2001: 1). Reason could discover truth, and truth was considered to be law-like. The same must hold for moral truth, implying "the ancient doctrine of natural law", which postulates that humans have inherent and unalienable rights. This attitude was coupled with moral universalism, according to which these rights are the same in everywhere, independent of time and culture. The Enlightenment was fundamentally opposed to "ignorance, mental laziness, guesswork, superstition, prejudice, dogma, fantasy" (ibid.).

Berlin's Enlightenment is an explicitly Promethean programme seeking to apply the principles of the natural sciences to the realm of the social. Traditional structures should be replaced with the constructs of reason:

> It was further believed that methods similar to those of Newtonian physics, which had achieved such triumphs in the realm of inanimate nature, could be applied with equal success to the fields of ethics, politics and human relationships in general, in which little progress had been made; with the corollary that once this had been effected, it would sweep away irrational and oppressive legal systems and

> economic policies the replacement of which by the rule of reason would rescue men from political and moral injustice and misery and set them on the path of wisdom, happiness and virtue. (Berlin 2001: 1-2)

The rationalism, universalism, and Prometheanism of the Enlightenment however were not accepted by all. The Age of Reason created a reaction that was diametrically opposed to its core tenets: the Counter-Enlightenment. One of its first prominent proponents was Giambattista Vico, an early social scientist and critic of Cartesianism. Berlin however focuses most of his attention on the rejection of universalism and his cultural relativism. Committed to "the notion of the uniqueness of cultures", Vico's ideas were incompatible with "the view that there was only one standard of truth or beauty or goodness" (Berlin 2001: 5).

Another important Counter-Enlightenment figure that Berlin identifies is Johann Georg Hamann. Hamann is described as a reactionary "in the strict sense of the term", as someone who stands for "the total reversal of the values of the Enlightenment" and a "return to an older tradition of the ages of faith" (Berlin 2001: 170). Interestingly, Berlin claims that Hamann "glories in the fact that Hume had successfully destroyed the rationalist claim that there is an a priori route to reality" (Berlin 2001: 7). In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at Hume and his complicated relationship towards the Enlightenment, Prometheanism, and conservatism. Apart from Vico and Hamann, other authors are discussed, for example Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Joseph de Maistre, and Edmund Burke. All of those are taken to represent a move against the presuppositions of the *philosophes*.

Berlin's thesis can be summarised as such: the "gloomy doctrines" of the Counter-Enlightenment are marked by irrationalism and cultural relativism. They are directly opposed to the "revolutionary reorganisation of society" which has been proposed by authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Berlin 2001: 20). The Counter-Enlightenment is the "inspiration for monarchist politics in France" and forms the foundation of the 20th century fascism and totalitarianism (Berlin 2001: 24). This narrative of an anti-Cartesian and anti-Promethean Counter-Enlightenment inherently connected to reactionary politics is in line with the ideas proposed in Chapter I.

But Berlin's description of the Counter-Enlightenment has been severely criticised. Jeremy Caradonna attacks it from a postmodern perspective, claiming that it relies on binary thinking and "tends to favour the Enlightenment as a progressive movement" while it views "the so-called Counter-Enlightenment as a retrograde, knee-jerk reaction to republicanism, secularism, rationality,

liberalism, equality and all that is deemed positive by contemporary historians" (Caradonna 2015: 54). It makes sense that such a criticism comes from a post-modern perspective. Post-modernism has often been viewed as a continuation of the intellectual project of the Counter-Enlightenment (see Lukács 1981, Wolin 2004).

Berlin's most prominent critic however is Robert Norton. By providing citations which run counter to Berlin's claims about Hamann and Herder, Norton strives to point out Berlin's "shoddy scholarship" (Norton 2007: 650). Specifically, he criticises the claim that both authors rejected the Enlightenment belief that all humans are similar and that they are adherents of cultural relativism. Norton argues that Berlin failed to put Hamann's claims into context, thereby changing their meaning (Norton 2007: 640-644). Furthermore, he contrasts Herders claim that "human nature always remains the same" with Berlin's description of him as someone who believes that "since human beings are culturally embedded, human nature was not uniform substratum" (Norton 2007: 648-649).

While Norton criticises Berlin's concept of the Counter-Enlightenment, he affirms that "the connection between the ideas we associate with the Counter-Enlightenment and the origins of fascism is real, but that the historical timeline connecting them is off by more than one hundred years" (Norton 2007: 652). In Norton's narrative, the idea of an 18th century Counter-Enlightenment is connected to the German ideas about Geistesgeschichte (history of thought) that emerged in the late 19th century. There was an actual German Counter-Enlightenment in this time, which wanted to establish a contrast between German traditionalism and French rationalism, and thereby had to invent a philosophical precursor which never existed in this form. Berlin, Norton argues, thereby unwillingly perpetuates a myth invented by German nationalists:

> The historicist attack on Enlightenment values was eminently political in its intention and effect, and it saw, or wanted to see, Herder as an authenticating precursor and ideological ally. That is, the depiction of Herder as the great original genius, as the advocate of feeling over reason, as the promoter of the value of particularity, especially of national particularity, over universal cosmopolitanism […] this tale, championed by Berlin as a historical fact, was wholly the invention of German nationalist historians who wanted to identify the roots of a specifically German modern culture, one that was absolutely different from […] the supposedly superficial, bloodless, soulless and mechanistic worldview those German historians attributed to the Enlightenment, and most particularly to the French *philosophes*. (Norton 2007: 651)

In contrast to Caradonna, Norton thinks that the notion of the Counter-Enlightenment originally served not to denigrate, but to elevate anti-Enlightenment ideas. The concept, he argues, does not describe the reality of 18th century thought, but a trait of late 19th and early 20th century German discourse which tried to find historical role models.

It has to be mentioned here that true Counter-Enlightenment figures of the 18th century do exist; the famous reactionary de Maistre, who was a proponent of the exact cultural relativism that Berlin ascribes to the current, is only the most prominent of those. As a French speaker, however, he does not fit the late 19th century idea of a battle between "German Kultur versus French Zivilisation" (Norton 2007: 652).

Norton credits the idea of a specifically German way of thinking to Wilhelm Dilthey[2], who intended to "found a view of life and the world in which the German spirit would find its fulfilment". However, the opposition between German thought and French Enlightenment came out in full force only in the works of one of Dilthey's students, Herman Nohl. In Nohls Work, "Dilthey's fairly benign emphasis on 'life' has become codified and radicalised". The Enlightenment is conceptualised as "a kind of despotic regime" of "abstract reason" which attacks "life" (Norton 2007: 653).

Solving the question whether Berlin or Norton are right about Hamann and Herder does not fit into the scope of this thesis. Instead, we will take a look at of the most extreme forms of anti-Promethean irrationalism: German *Lebensphilosophie*. This school of thought is diametrically opposed to the project of political rationalism and to Enlightenment ideas in general. In the next section, we will deal with the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey. This analysis will reveal how certain elements of Dilthey's theory paved the way for irrationalism. The main part of this chapter will analyse two influential German irrationalists of the interwar period: Oswald Spengler and Ludwig Klages. In the works of those two authors we can find many of the central elements of irrationalism. The assessment of these writings will yield two results. Firstly the systematic claim that irrationalism is an unwarranted reaction to the Enlightenment, and secondly the historical claim that it played an important role in the development of fascist ideas. The authoritarianism and anti-semitism of the Nazis is already implicit in the Counter-Enlightenment ideas that mark prominent currents of *Lebensphilosophie*.

---

[2] As we will see later in the chapter, Dilthey was not the first one. Instead, he took many of his ideas from the 19th century school of "historism".

WILHELM DILTHEY: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Wilhelm Dilthey is heavily influenced by an 19th century German intellectual current called the *historical school* or *historism*. In the English-speaking literature this movement is sometimes called "historicism", however this is misleading. German-speaking literature differentiates between "Historismus", which refers to the historists as a specific school, and "Historizismus", a phenomenon that has been criticised by Popper in his *Poverty of Historicism*. Hegelianism and Marxism, for example, can be called variants of historicism, but they are certainly not forms of historism.

In contrast to the universalism of the Enlightenment, the Historists believed that history cannot be grasped through the universalist narratives of human progress that were typical for the Enlightenment. Instead, individual peoples and states constitute themselves through history, a process in which their specific metaphysical identity unfolds itself (Faber 1979: 8). Leopold von Ranke, one of the leading intellectuals of the movement, believed that peoples were guided by God, which meant that the historical process was pre-ordained (Platinga 1980: 127). Similarly, Johann Gustav Droysen, another important member of the historical school, saw history as a "momentous ethical struggle" in which humanity realises certain ideas; these ideas, however, are not abstractly derived, but instead given historically (Maclean 1982: 350). Still, it should be noted that Droysen's political orientation was more or less centrist, contrasting with the conservative Ranke (ibid.).

One of the most important tenets of the historical school is the rejection of positivism, which was a consequence of the belief that the methods of the natural sciences are unsuitable for the study of history. Droysen differentiated between three methods: the philosophical-speculative, the mathematical-physical, and the historical. The first recognises or knows ("erkennen"), the second explains ("erklären"), and the third understands ("verstehen") (Droysen 1868: 11). Droysen believed in the superiority of understanding, arguing that we can know "the animal, the plant, the things that belong to the unorganic world" only partly and "not in their individual being" (Droysen 1868: 10). Humans and the ways they express themselves, on the other hand, can be fully understood. The method that has to be used to grasp human issues, however, is not a "logical mechanism", but instead "immediate intuition", a "creative act" which is described as similar to "conception in mating" (ibid.). In a similar vein, von Ranke wrote about the "process of life", which cannot be fully understood through rational means (Faber 1979: 8).

Generally, Historists believe that the task of the historian is to study specific moments from a genealogical perspective. Hence, they emphasise the study of primary sources. Similar to positivism, historism contributed to the development historical science, paving the way for our modern understanding of the discipline by practicing a thorough study of the source material. This *Quellenkritik* (source criticism) concerns itself, among other things, with the "motives, purposes, personal conditions" that might influence the sources (Droysen 1868: 17) and has since become a central method of historical science.

Wilhelm Dilthey's work relates to historism in a way that is both affirmative and critical at the same time. On the one hand, he praises Ranke, Droysen, and Schleimermacher for their contributions to the historical sciences (Dilthey 2013: 38). On the other, he criticises them for being unable to properly consider "the epistemological task posed by history" and therefore unwilling to study "the formation [Aufbau] of the historical world in the human sciences" and to derive "the possibility of objective knowledge in the human sciences" (Dilthey 2013: 39). Avoiding this epistemological task, historists have instead embraced idealist notions of necessary development that bear similarity to those proposed by Hegel. Dilthey laments that this "interference by religious beliefs and idealist metaphysics", which he calls the "backwards" element of historism, became so central to the current. Historists, he argues, have "uncritically combined" theories which do not belong together. They should have acknowledged the "incompatibility" between their own school and the "idealism from Kant to Hegel" (ibid.). In a certain sense, Dilthey wants to be more historist than the historists, who have not fully committed to their unique approach and instead assimilated Hegelian ideas which stand in a tense relationship to the rest of their system.

The teleological "philosophy of history" which marks the works of Ranke and Droysen is therefore rejected by Dilthey. The true task of philosophy with regard to history, he claims, is to provide an epistemological foundation for studying it (Dilthey 2013: 40). Comte and Mill have done so, but as we will see soon, their approach is repudiated because it relies on methods appropriate only for the natural sciences.

Despite his criticism of the teleological aspects of historism, Dilthey saw himself as an ally to the school, believing in the importance of their emphasis on cultural difference. This is based on his reading of intellectual history. While the historical studies of the "Enlightenment era" were dominated by "the idea of progress" and the Promethean belief that the state should serve a "rationally determined goal", Herder is praised for developing an alternative approach that recognises the "independent value that is realised by every nation and every of its eras" (Dilthey

2013: 20). This corresponds to Berlin's portrayal of Herder as a precursor of cultural relativism, but is equally compatible with Norton's description, according to which Dilthey seeks to appropriate him for his narrative of a uniquely German philosophical tradition that stands in contrast to the more rationalist philosophy of France. Indeed, Dilthey claims that the emphasis on culture, which he associates with romanticism, is a result of specifically German conditions (Dilthey 2013: 20-21). Ranke and the other historists are viewed as a continuation of this trend:

> The universal sympathy for historical values, the joy at the diversity of historical phenomena, the all-encompassing receptivity for all life as it filled Herder and as it was effective in Johannes Müller to the degree where the receptive intellect is rendered impotent in the face of historical forces – Ranke completely fulfils this most peculiar ability of the German spirit. (Dilthey 2013: 28)

The human sciences can only flourish in the "struggle against the conceptual systems of the 18th century", by pointing out the "historical character" of "economy, law, religion, and art", which are expressive of "the creative power of nations" (Dilthey 2013: 23). So despite his criticism of teleology, Dilthey was a supporter of the historical school. Attacking the "intellectualism" of positivist theorists, he sets out to provide an "epistemic justification" for it (Dilthey 2013: 41). This project strives to establish the independence of the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) and is based on the notions life ("Leben") and understanding ("Verstehen") (Dilthey 2013: 41).

Dilthey's aim can thus be summarised as such: He wants to develop an epistemological account of the human sciences which justifies the approach of the historical school. This requires him to differentiate the human sciences from the natural sciences in a way which guarantees the latter's methodological independence. At the same time, he wants to liberate historism from the vestiges of teleology and idealist metaphysics and satisfy the criterion of scientific objectivity. We will soon see that there exists a tension between those goals.

But before we will take a look the argumentation itself, a comment on the continuity in Dilthey's work is necessary. It has been argued that over the course of his career, some positions have changed (see Makreel 1975). The earlier *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, published in 1883, places a greater emphasis on what can be called direct understanding, while the later works, above all the 1910 *Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, are more interpretative and hermeneutic in their approach. At the same time Dilthey's basic ideas remained the same, and indeed the idea that Dilthey's work can be split into two phases has been questioned (see Rodi, Lessing 1984). Charles Bambach speaks of the "underlying unity within Dilthey's project" (Bambach 1995: 130) which is

centred around "the method of *Verstehen*", "the concept of *Erlebnis*" and the "problems of historical relativism" (Bambach 1995: 132-133. This sentiment is shared by the author himself, who in the *Formation* remarks that the work is a direct continuation and addendum to the project laid out in the 1883 *Introduction* (Dilthey 2013: 41). Our description of Dilthey's philosophy will focus on the *Formation*, however where appropriate other works will be cited, such as the *Introduction* or the unfinished manuscripts that were found after his death.

Central to Dilthey's philosophy is the difference between the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). This difference is based on the idea that the the methods employed by the natural sciences are unsuited to study human affairs. Dilthey must therefore develop a new and alternative method for the human sciences, one that satisfies the specific properties of their subject matter without sacrificing scientific objectivity. We will first deal with the differences Dilthey sees between both kinds of sciences, and then proceed to take a closer look at the new method he proposes.

We will begin with the natural sciences, the development of which Dilthey regards as a result of modernity. It was "only in the slaveless industrial and trade cities of modern nations" that "planned intervention into nature" could be conceived. Under such social conditions, the "combined efforts of Kepler, Galilei, Bacon, and Descartes" led to the creation of a method that aims to discover "the law-like order of nature" (Dilthey 2013: 15).

How does this method work? Dilthey accepts indirect realism, arguing that we can only become aware of natural phenomena through sense experience. However, raw experience is chaotic; it is influenced by many different factors, such as distance and lighting (Dilthey 2013: 15). In the view of this chaos, the first task of natural science is to create more permanent objects and thereby introduce permanence (Dilthey 2013: 15-16). These objects are not themselves given in experience, instead they are our inventions, which act as "auxiliary constructs" (ibid.). When we observe a dog moving from light to shadow, coming closer or running away, its visual appearance changes drastically. However, we still believe that it is the same object. The concept of the dog as a spacio-temporally extended, three dimensional object, for example, is already something that transcends pure experience. In order to explain sense experience from those assumed objects, science also needs to postulate abstract laws. "Auxiliary concepts" which go beyond experience and the "mathematical and mechanical constructions" used to describe the laws governing the world are "means to trace back sensual phenomena to their persistent carriers on the basis of persistent laws" (Dilthey 2013: 16). In short, nature is not directly given, but instead grasped through

theoretical models. Those models are corroborated by their ability to explain and predict empirical phenomena, but they are nevertheless abstract creations of our mind.

The necessity of "auxiliary constructions" is connected with the idea that nature is "foreign" to us (Dilthey 2013: 16). We have no direct access to it. But when it comes to human affairs, the object of study is not foreign. We are human ourselves and therefore do not need to create abstract theories to conceptualise what moves others. The humanities can approach their subject matter in another way. Here, we do not need "hypothetical assumptions which impose something onto the given". Instead, understanding (Verstehen) "penetrates foreign expressions of life through a transposition from the wealth of one's own experiences" (Dilthey 2013: 42). Because we have a more direct access to our own inner life, we are privileged to understand the inner life of others:

> In external nature, empirical phenomena gain context through the combination of abstract concepts. In the intellectual world [the world of the humanities], on the other hand, context is based on lived experience and understanding. The context of nature is abstract, but the intellectual and historical context is alive and saturated with life. (Dilthey 2013: 43)

This implies a "total disparity" between human and natural sciences and validates the approach of the historists (Dilthey 2013: 42).

The reasons for the claim that the methods of the human sciences must be different from that which are applied in the natural sciences are clear to us now. But what do these methods look like? According to Dilthey, any analysis of social and historical phenomena is based on the "relationship of lived experience, expression and understanding" (Dilthey 2013: 55). Those three concepts are crucial to the method that he proposes.

Lived experience (Erleben) is the inner experience that people have when they go through life (Leben). *Leben* is a central notion of what would later be called *Lebensphilosophie*, and refers to a primordial, non-conceptual reality which is, in Dilthey's words, "an insoluble enigma", a "never wholly knowable thing". While we can be affected by life, it is impossible to "dissect [it] it into its constituent parts" (Dilthey 1997: 346-347). Lived experience is what happens when we encounter the living world which "affects the subject and (in turn) receives effects by it" (Dilthey 2013, 83). Lived experience is at the same time the "primordial cell of historical world", the thing we strive to get at when we engage in the human sciences.

Expression (Ausdruck) is another important notion in Dilthey's theory. If we analyse humanity by applying the methods of the natural sciences, observation and knowledge (Erkennen), then we have access only to the "physical facts" it produces. The human sciences, however, can exist only insofar as they are connected to lived experience (Dilthey 2013: 11). But how can we access the lived experience of others? Specifically, how can historians get at the lived experience of past generations? Luckily, people express themselves through art, science, and institutions. These expressions are manifestations of certain feelings, values, and attitudes. Humans tend to objectivise their experience "in social configurations" ("Objektivierungen des Geistes in gesellschaftlichen Gebilden") which can then be contemplated by others (Dilthey 2013: 11, 12). Such a process of contemplation may serve to uncover what people in past ages thought and felt, how they experienced their world and why they acted in the ways they did. Lived experience is expressed in deeds and objects, and can thereby be communicated.

Understanding (Verstehen) is the basic method of the human sciences according to Dilthey. Therefore, his work is concerned with hermeneutics, a discipline which strives to shed light on the conditions and nature of this understanding. On the basis of the two notions explained above, we can sketch Dilthey's answer to the question how understanding is possible in the historical sciences. To understand is basically to experience what others have experienced. According to Dilthey, "not conceptual procedures form the basis of the human sciences, but becoming aware of a mental state in its totality and rediscovering it through reliving" (Dilthey 2013: 59, 60). Reliving implies having the same thoughts and emotions that someone else has had, it implies the ability to empathise. As we have no direct access to other people's inner world – we can't read minds – this empathetic process works on the things humans do and make. Humans *express* their *lived experience* in cultural products. This products can then be *understood* by others. Such a method of *Verstehen*, while central to Dilthey's theory, is not an invention of his. Indeed, it has already been formulated by Droysen, who argues that the historian "does not want to explain, that is to derive from that which is prior that which comes later, but to understand" (Droysen 1868: 19). Note that "priority" could refer to temporal priority, but also to logical priority.

Those who engage in the human sciences must examine the expressions or objectivisations (Objektivierungen) created by others and relate them to their own lived experience (Dilthey 2013: 43). They must make use of the fact that the object of their studies is not something foreign, but something that can be known through empathy. It is not "conceptual procedures" which allow understanding, but "becoming aware of a mental state in its wholeness and finding it again in the reliving of it" (Dilthey 2013: 59-60).

But while empathy plays an important role, it does not alone suffice if we want to understand a historical figure or a poet. The one who wants to understand is herself part of a specific historical life-world, and is therefore inclined to transpose her beliefs and wishes onto the object of her study (Dilthey 2013: 61). Therefore, understanding is always based on knowledge about the historical context in which a given expression has been created. To understand Bismarck, one needs to know about his age, his culture and his biography (Dilthey 2013: 65, 66). Dilthey's understanding is not only an act of empathy, it also relies on background knowledge. As this knowledge is itself created through understanding, we move in a fashion that could be described as circular. Understanding creates knowledge about context, which in turn aids in understanding. This is the famous "hermeneutic circle", an idea that has first been formulated by the romanticist philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose writings exerted a great influence on Dilthey (Nelson 2010).

What do we make of Dilthey's methodological approach as a whole? If we leave aside its mystical elements (life as "an insoluble enigma"), there are aspects to it which seem to be well founded. In a certain sense, it is true that the social sciences or humanities have methods which are specific to them. It would definitely be wrong to apply the methods of physics when dealing with matters of history or literature. The physicist can conduct controlled experiments within her laboratory, creating results which can be reproduced by other physicists. Her theories are based on mathematics, which allows her to provide clear and unambiguous predictions. Her instruments are equally precise, giving her access to precise measurements which can then be compared with the predictions of her theories. This kind of accuracy can never be achieved in the field of history, where theories are more vague and data seldom has quantitative form. This comparison between physics and history, two undoubtedly very different disciplines, renders Dilthey's theories rather plausible.

There is a strong case to be made that even today, the influence of the natural sciences on the humanities is still too great. Sociology, for example, nowadays highly depends on statistical methods ("quantitative methods") borrowed from the natural sciences. It could very well be argued that the one-sided focus on quantifiable data harms the overall effectiveness of the discipline by fading out important social phenomena that cannot be translated into statistics. Moreover, by applying the methods of the natural sciences to the humanities, the latter seem to be devalued. As they can't test their theories under laboratory conditions, and are often even unable to adhere to the standard of reproducibility, they can quickly come under the suspicion of being unscientific.

This seems to imply that Dilthey must be right, after all. If we want to save the humanities, we must surely accept that they have their own methods, distinct from the methods of science. Alas, it is not that simple. In order to solve the issue, we must be able to differentiate between concrete methods on the one hand and methodology on the other. All sciences use different methods, a different "handiwork" to uncover truths in their respective areas of study. The methods of a science have to be adapted to its subject matter. On this level, even the different natural sciences use different methods. Biology, which is a natural sciences, cannot use the methods of physics. It is simply impossible to reduce zoological theories to mathematical formulae, and furthermore zoological facts are often not simply quantifiable. A zoologist who studies the behaviour of wolves must use natural language to describe her observations, and compare them to theories which are formulated in the same language. Geology uses different methods than chemistry, and meteorologists cannot copy the handiwork of astronomers. If we consider the issue from this perspective, it is not the case that there is a fundamental difference between the natural sciences and the human sciences. Instead, *all sciences use different methods* because they study different parts of reality. There are not just two methods, but as many as there are special sciences, and even more – some sciences such as sociology use a variety of methods!

At the same time, there are similarities that unite the humanities and the natural sciences. We can concede to Dilthey that empathy plays an important role in formulating hypothesis in the social sciences. But how are those hypotheses tested and justified? They are only vindicated if they allow us to predict and explain observable phenomena. Theorising about the motives and reasons that drive people to act might sometimes (or even often) require us to put ourselves "in their shoes", that is, to use empathetic understanding. But in order to assess whether we were successful, we must subject our theory to empirical testing. The scientific method therefore treats assumptions about someones inner life just as it treats all other theoretical speculations.

Proponents of the unity of science (Einheitswissenschaft) argue that all the sciences follow the same underlying methodology. This claim is, contrary to our first intuition, perfectly compatible with the idea that the concrete methods of every science are different. Different concrete methods can *realise* the same requirements of theory-building and empirical testing, adapting them to the particularities of the respective field. At its most basic, science is the development of theories which must be able to predict and explain empirical phenomena while being as simple and elegant as possible. Because no discipline, not even physics, can simply derive truths from a set of simple observations, they all construct theoretical models which causally connect observable phenomena. Theories can be replaced if they conflict with our observations, or if we find better, more elegant, more explanatory

alternative. This approach is what constitutes the scientific method as we know it, and this is what unifies history and physics, sociology and biology.

To summarise: Every special science use different methods, but they all adhere to the same fundamental principles. This is the essence of the unity of science. Dilthey's argument for the differentiation between two distinct sets of sciences – natural sciences and human sciences – is therefore too rigid and too pluralistic at the same time. It is too rigid because it suggests that physics and biology share the same methods, that the methods of history are the ones of literary criticism. It is too pluralistic in that it denies the fundamental unity of science on the methodological level.

DILTHEY AND THE COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

In what sense is Dilthey a precursor of irrationalism? Has he just been misunderstood by those German nationalists who have used his ideas to ground their fascist world-view? Or are those conclusions inherently linked to the ideas he proposes? Is it true that, as has been argued by some, "*Verstehen* may have an ugly, specifically fascistic, face" (Cooper 2010: 96)? In this section, we will assess those questions.

For Isaiah Berlin, the Counter-Enlightenment is marked by cultural relativism. In his narrative, the Enlightenment is identified with a universalist position. The proponents of the Counter-Enlightenment reject this "conviction that the ultimate ends of all men at all times were, in effect, identical". Instead, they propose a relativistic position in which "the notion of the uniqueness of cultures" is central (Berlin 1997). According to Norton, this is a mischaracterisation of Hamann and Herder. However, Berlin's description of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers as cultural relativists nicely fits one of the most influential anti-Promethean and anti-Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century, Joseph de Maistre:

> The constitution of 1795, like its predecessors, has been drawn up for Man. Now, there is no such thing in the world as Man. In the course of my life, I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; I am even aware, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be a Persian. But, as for Man, I declare that I have never met him in my life. If he exists, I certainly have no knowledge of him. […] What is a constitution? Is it not merely the solution to the following problem: *Given the population, the mores, the religion, the geographic situation, the political circumstances, the wealth, the good and the bad qualities of a particular nation, to find the laws that suit it.* (de Maistre 1995: 53)

What about Dilthey? As a historist, he believes "that it is not the transcendental, transhistorical and transcultural 'self' that experiences historical life, but the vital, living, pulsating human being conditioned in its historical place and time" (Bambach 1995: 149). By placing great emphasis on the historicity of humans, his ideas can be differentiated from both Hegel's grand story of the realisation of absolute spirit in history and the positivist idea that we can infer the universal laws of sociology through empirical studies.

If we accept the methodological framework that Dilthey proposes, we commit to the idea that understanding society and history means understanding the lived experience of those involved. If we furthermore accept that this lived experience is mainly influenced by the cultural-historical environment, then it seems to follow that we can only scientifically study those whose culture we understand. This is what has been called Dilthey's "deep holism" by David Cooper (2010: 98). Understanding (*Verstehen*) of culture, however, is itself again impossible to arrive at from an outside perspective.

This train of thought creates a tension within Dilthey's intellectual project. If radicalised, the idea that understanding requires insight into cultural norms can lead to a relativistic position that is incompatible with the scientific status of the humanities. Dilthey did not consider himself a relativist; his project is animated by the quest for "objective knowledge" (Dilthey 2013: 14). The problem is that his own conception of the subject matter of the human sciences presents a challenge to this claim to objectivity. If the humanities strive to understand lived experience and this experience is inseparably linked to culture, how can we understand expressions which stem from a cultural context that is very different from our own?

Dilthey claims that we can use background knowledge to understand people who were raised within a different culture. The more we know about the values, ideas and customs of a specific people, the easier it is to understand those who are affected by them. In order to understand Machiavelli, we must understand Florentine society (Dilthey 2013: 66-67). But how can this cultural knowledge be obtained? Knowledge about culture is itself knowledge about human affairs, which means that in Dilthey's theoretical framework, it cannot be arrived at through the application of the methods of the natural sciences, i.e. empirical observation and concept formation. Instead, knowledge about culture must, again, be generated through understanding.

This is where the central role of the hermeneutic circle enters the picture. A better understanding of an individual or a source will allow us to improve our grasp on the cultural conditions that inform it. This will in turn improve our understanding of the individual or source, and so on. The hermeneutic circle is a back and forth movement between the understanding of particulars and the understanding of their context:

> The method thus moves in two directions. In the particular direction it goes from the part to the whole and from this backwards to the part, and in the general direction there is the same interaction between this [the general] and the individual. (Dilthey 2013: 69)

Such a view presupposes, however, that we can "break into" the circle in the first place. This necessity of an entry point is expressed by the notion of pre-understanding (Vorverständnis). In order to enter the hermeneutic circle, the historian needs some initial understanding of his object, which presupposes a basic similarity between lived experience:

> Such interpersonal re-enactment, which bridges the historical time-gap, is possible, claims Dilthey, because of the fundamental similarity between the present I and the past Thou. The interpreter is able to discover the I in the Thou and the Thou in the I, because every I and Thou have universally shared life and meaning which provide the basis for the possibility of an immanental pre-understanding. Such pre-understanding is foundational to the indispensable ability to interrogate the text. (Traina 1968: 10)

Dilthey knows that in the framework of his theory, similarity ("Verwandtschaft") is the precondition for understanding (Dilthey 2013: 70). Understanding is possible precisely because there is something common ("etwas Gemeinsames") between the historian and her object. Assuming enough "common humanity" or large enough similarities between cultures, we are always able to enter the hermeneutic circle somehow, allowing us to study even remote places and past ages. But what if we assume that similarities are few or none, and that common humanity is weak compared to the differences in culture? Such ideas are sometimes found in Dilthey himself, who emphasises the "individuality of the national spirit" (Dilthey 2013: 96). Once the differences become large enough, *Verwandtschaft* is no longer there, and understanding becomes impossible. This possibility is alluded to in the idea of the *horizon of life* ("Lebenshorizont"), which denotes the "limitations" affecting people’s "thinking, feeling, and will". Those limitations stem from their lived experience (Dilthey 2013: 98, 99). The metaphor of the horizon is telling; one cannot see beyond it.

By claiming that the limits of our social sciences are the limits of our empathetic understanding, Dilthey introduces if not the necessity, then at least the possibility of cultural incommensurability. His theory implies a fully developed relativistic position if combined with the empirical assumption that "common humanity" is insignificant and that there are substantial and fundamental cultural differences.

Note that this problem only arises because Dilthey commits the social sciences to an empathetic method. The "positivistic" method of the natural sciences is not dependent on any form of "prior understanding", it only needs observation and the ability to form abstract theoretical models. *Verstehen* has much higher epistemic requirements than the *Erklären* of the natural sciences.

Even those who follow Dilthey in his attack on "historical reason" concede that he "never really resolved the tension between the finitude of historical consciousness and the scientific demand for universality" (Bambach 1995: 176). Dilthey saw this problem himself, claiming that the "unmediated relationship between life and the human sciences" causes "a contest between the tendencies of life and their scientific goal" (Dilthey 2013: 61). In the notes for the unfinished second volume of the Foundation, he is even more candid about the "limits of understanding". Here, Dilthey admits that the hermeneutic approach can fail of we are unable to discern a purpose for the whole which explains all of the parts (Dilthey 1965: 226). In contrast to natural science, the subject matter of understanding is something that cannot be "clearly determined" (ibid.)

This tension would only resolve itself in the works of his successors, which simply abandoned the commitment to science, therefore allowing for the full expression of the principle of historicity. More or less unwillingly, Dilthey helped create the bridgehead from which the likes of Klages and Spengler could mount their attacks against reason.

So far, we have only assessed Dilthey's relation to Prometheanism indirectly. Political rationalism requires social mapping, which is dependent on a strong and reliable social science. By partially undermining the possibility of such a science, Dilthey's work casts doubt upon the viability of the Promethean project. However, we can also find more overt statements. While Dilthey is certainly not comparable to the hardcore irrationalists such as Klages and Spengler, he himself recognised that his ideas were directed against the Enlightenment and against the emancipatory project of the French revolution. This is expressed in a passage from the *Introduction*:

> When in the France of the seventeenth and eighteenth century the system of social ideas as natural law, natural religion, abstract political theory, and abstract political economy was developed, which drew its practical conclusions in the Revolution, as the armies of that Revolution occupied and destroyed the German Reich, weathered by the breath of a thousand years of history, our fatherland had formed a view of social growth as the process in which all spiritual/intellectual facts are created, proving the falsity of the whole [French] system of social ideas. (Dilthey 2017: 7)

Here, Dilthey claims a) *that there has been an intellectual revolution in France, which relied on abstract ideas of rationality*, b) *that the French revolution was the realisation of that project*, and c) *that Germany had developed an intellectual counter-revolution*. He describes the romantics, Edmund Burke, François Guizot and Tocqueville as prominent examples for this counter-movement, and places himself within that tradition (Dilthey 2017: 7-8). The whole program of Geisteswissenschaften implies "reclaiming the thousand-year tradition of German history which had been undermined by French philosophers and their ideas of social systems" (Bambach 1995: 140). Our initial suspicion – that Dilthey as a founder or at least precursor of Lebensphilosophie aided in the destruction of the modernist program that had inspired the French revolution – appears to be confirmed by the author himself.

Another direct mention of Prometheanism can be fond in the Foundation. Here, Dilthey is not directly hostile to the project; he simply portrays it in the context of his theory of the horizon of life and paints it as the expression of the mindset typical for the Enlightenment era:

> Science had been constituted in the 17th century. The discovery of the order of nature according to laws and the application of this causal knowledge to the mastery of nature had given rise to the intellect's confidence in the steady progress of knowledge. In this conceptual labour, the cultural nations were bound together. Thus arose the idea of a humanity united in progress. The ideal of the rule of reason over society was formed; this filled the best forces; they were thus united for a common purpose; they worked according to the same method; they expected the progress of knowledge to further the entire social order. The old building, in the construction of which ecclesiastical rule, feudal relations, unlimited despotism, princely whims, priestly deceit had worked together, which the times were always changing, which always needed new work, was now to be transformed into a purposeful, cheerful, symmetrical construction. (Dilthey 2013: 99)

This almost sympathetic description contrasts with his earlier opposition to French ideas and the revolution. Dilthey cannot be said to have deliberately intended to prepare the ground for irrationalism. That his philosophy was directly responsible for Heidegger-style fascism as has been argued by Cooper (2010) is probably too strong of a claim. What can be said, however, is that many

of Dilthey's ideas were apt to be used for such purposes. This is true both for his notion of life as a mystical process or "an insoluble enigma" (Dilthey 1997: 346-347) and for his open flank with regard to cultural relativism. As we will see in the next sections, both of those ideas would soon be used as the staging area for a much more sweeping attack on reason.

LUDWIG KLAGES: INTELLECT VERSUS LIFE

Lebensphilosophie has been described as "a sweeping counterattack against the conventions of scientific and historical thinking, against industrialisation and positivism" (Lebovic 2006: 26). In its most extreme form, it is at the same time a philosophical attack on the Enlightenment and a political critique of modern society. While Dilthey's relationship to modernity remained complex, certain proponents of the early 20th century German philosophy pushed anti-rationalism to its limit. They were aligned with a movement which called itself "völkisch" (ethnocentric). This movement, from which Nazism emerged, has been described as "a pathological response to modernity" which rejected "rationalism, cosmopolitanism, and urban civilization" (Biehl, Staudenmaier 1995: 7). One of its more influential thinkers is Ludwig Klages. According to György Lukács, "his significance lies in the fact that never before had reason been challenged so openly and radically" (Lukács 1981: 524). Therefore, an analysis of Klages will provide us with important insights with regard to the anatomy of irrationalism and its implications for political epistemology.

Klages was born in 1878. He became known to German intellectual circles through his studies in characterology and graphology. After the First World War, during the time of the Weimar Republic, Klages' influence as a philosopher and a critic of modernity grew steadily. His articles enjoyed such popularity that they were printed not only in reactionary newspapers such as *Die Tat* (the deed), but also in moderate (*Vössische Zeitung*) and even liberal (*Frankfurter Zeitung*) ones (Lebovic 2006: 28). Klages opposed socialism and liberalism alike, a typical position for a member of the influential, proto-fascist right of Weimar Republic Germany. Klages "was throughout his life politically archconservative and a venomous antisemite" (Biehl, Staudenmaier 1995: 11), and has been described by historian Walter Laqueur as someone who "paved the way for fascist philosophy in many important respects" (Laqueur 1962: 34). No wonder, then, that he acquired a considerable following among like-minded individuals on the extreme right. When the Nazi party of Adolf Hitler rose to power, Klages unreservedly supported their cause. While other philosophers, above all Alfred Rosenberg and Alfred Baeumler, became the "official" thinkers of the National Socialist regime,

Klages continued to cooperate with the Nazis until the end of the war. His writings were widely circulated during that time. The rise of the murderous "Third Reich" thus brought him a previously unknown level of prominence.

Klages' Lebensphilosophie is inextricably linked with his anti-Semitic and right-wing extremist attitudes. We can hardly find a better candidate for studying the connection between irrationalism and political reaction, between the denial that society can be rationally understood and the unreserved support for traditionalism and authoritarianism. The central idea that Klages proposes is that reason is a force of evil that will destroy humanity through its malign effect on society and individual:

> Never has a religious creed been proclaimed in a more doctrinaire way, never has a superstition been defended more stubbornly than the belief of the mechanists in the reality of their object, in the merit of ruthless questioning, in the boundlessness acquisition of knowledge through the accumulation and review of empirical findings. (Klages 1931: 779)

Klages' opposition to modernity is based on philosophy and, to a lesser extent, psychology. His most influential work, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* ("The Intellect as Antagonist of the Soul"), deals with epistemology, ontology, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language. Ironically, this means that Klages' case against the the intellect is marked by the very abstraction he condemns, relying on long chains of philosophical reasoning about the nature of reality, consciousness, and experience.

Klages is intent on drawing attention to the inner contradictions of Enlightenment philosophy. By demonstrating that reason cannot grasp reality, he wants us to turn against the teachings of rationalism and empiricism alike, to embrace an organicist view of the world. Before dealing with Klages' description of "Geist" (intellect) and its corrosive effects on the soul and life itself, we must therefore deal with his criticism of philosophy. Klages is a precursor of later postmodernist philosophers, stressing the gap between conceptualisation and reality, insisting that "the map is not the territory" and thereby developing a critique of abstraction and conceptual knowledge. While this idea itself is not particularly new and indeed a common presupposition of Lebensphilosophie, Klages develops it in a particularly radical way.

Klages' thought revolves around a series of interrelated dichotomies. The first of these is the difference between being (*Sein*) and reality (*Wirklichkeit*). Being is grasped (*erfasst*) or apprehended by

conception. If we see a tree, we are not only faced with the "impression of a tree-appearance", we also think about the "presence of a being thing" (Klages 1931: 18). We believe that there is something we call a *thing* with carries certain *properties* and which is distinct from the multitude of its appearances. We can watch the tree from different angles and under different conditions – a foggy morning, a bright day, a rainy night – but we insist that it is *the same thing*. We create in our head an abstract representation of the tree, believing that it is *real*. Any judgment (*Urteil*, a Kantian term) we might pass on the tree does not refer to its appearances, but to this conceptual tree-thing; propositional knowledge always pertains to the abstracted world of things and properties. Grasping something intellectually means violently wresting the object from the phenomenal world, thereby enabling us to recognise it under a variety of different conditions (Klages 1931: 19, 41). Being, therefore, refers to the world of thought-things (*Gedankendinge*) created by the act of conceptualisation.

Reality (*Wirklichkeit*), on the other hand, is inherently temporal (Klages 1931: 16, 20,). Reality is a "flow of happening" (*Strom des Geschehens*, Klages 16), a "continuous happening" (*stetiges Geschehen*, Klages 1931: 55). It is associated with impermanence and change, with life and lived experience (Klages 1931: 67). Humans participate in this reality, they are affected by the "heartbeat of the universal happening" (Klages 1931: 209) in the form of direct impressions (Klages 1931: 174). Klages follows a vitalist conception of reality, claiming that happening is "alive" (Klages 1931: 181, 203). He portrays reality as a primordial process which is in eternal flux, shaped by living "powers" (*Mächte*, Klages 1931: 201, 250, 291).

The gap between reality and being lies at the center of Klages' philosophy. This tension has different facets. As we have already seen, the sphere of being is composed of different *things* which carry *properties*. The thing can be compared to a "point" (*Punkt*), a determinate, atomistic object of our mind (Klages 1931: 19, 89). But it is not only the thing which is point-like. In order to "'project' itself into the stream of happening" (Klages 1931: 13), rational conception needs the notion of the present, the now. It must create the idea of a "point in time" (*Zeitpunkt*) which has a temporal position, but no temporal extension; the present has no duration and therefore exists outside of time (Klages 1931: 10-14). Moreover, conceptual knowledge relies on the similar concept of a "point in space" (*Raumpunkt*), which has a position in space without possessing any spatial extension (Klages 21, 45). The act of conception (*Auffassungsakt*), the object of conception (thing), the point in time, and the point in space all lack a real presence in the spatiotemporal realm (Klages 1931: 14, 31, 68). Reality, on the other hand, is always spatiotemporal (Klages 1931: 203). By establishing the

"autocracy" of the mathematical point, Enlightenment philosophy has caused "the complete objectification of happening" (Klages 1931: 54). Note that the critique of the non-spatiotemporal character of the subject and object has been originally developed by Henri Bergson in his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will* (Bergson 1910). Bergson criticised Kant for his supposed inability to account for the plurality and motion of reality (Bergson 1910: 232-240). Klages line of reasoning is therefore more of a typical talking point of Lebensphilosophie than an original contribution to philosophy.

Klages has another argument, one that is equally typical for irrationalists. He points out that rational thinking necessarily implies abstraction and simplification since it necessitates the application of a concept to a much more complex world of experience. The "uniform character of the object of thought" (*Einheitscharakter des Denkgegenstandes*) therefore cannot capture the "phenomenal world in its boundless variety" (Klages 1931: 82, 83). The problem is precisely that the concept assimilates parts of reality to something entirely abstract. By subsuming everything under the concept, the universal erases the particular and thereby violates life. Reality is reduced to conceptual being.

Klages believes that the deficiencies of most philosophical systems of the West can be traced to their inability to take notice of the fundamental divide between being and reality. Many philosophers don't recognise the gap at all, and those who do tend to draw the wrong conclusions. From the thesis that motion is incapable to be, proclaimed by Parmenides and Zenon, the Eleatics infer that we must discard it (Klages 1931: 40 - 55). Faced with the radical difference between the simplicity of the concept and the variety of experience, the Megaric school found that the latter must be an illusion (Klages 1931: 82, 83). Philosophy has taken the side of being and asserts that the constant happening we experience must be of illusory nature. According to Klages, this mistake is repeated by rationalism, empiricism (Klages 1931: 67) and by Kant's transcendental philosophy (Klages 1931: 59).

The different schools of Enlightenment philosophy are for Klages just expressions of the same *logocentrism*. Most students of philosophy know this term from the works of Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1997: 3); Derrida however borrowed it from Klages. Logocentrism, for Klages, is the "direction of human intellectual history" (Klages 1931: 242) and denotes a belief in the intellect, in the adequacy of the concept ("Begriff"). The logocentrist denies the gap between being (conceptualisation) and happening (true reality). Logocentrism is the arch-enemy of Klages' philosophy, fixated on abstraction and committed to the subject/object division, according to which there is a subject of knowledge which wants to understand and dominate the object (Klages 1931: 64, 88, 204). Under

the weight of this "logocentric misinterpretation of reality" (Klages 1931: 121), we begin to view the world as a purely mechanical relation:

> Movement and change alone had to be denied not once, but dozens of times, and the conviction of the "higher" reality of a being without happening had to be fixed in consciousness with a hundred hammer blows before mankind was ready and willing to accept the belief in a "mechanical world"! For this is now the peculiar thing about a mechanistic conception of the world, that it [...] sees the whole world as the figure of the ever-raging machine, because it simply lost all relation to the real happening within it. (Klages 1931: 57, 58).

Above, we have seen that conceptual knowledge and reality are incompatible. The standard philosophical reply to this gap was to discard the reality of happening in favour of the being of concepts. But there is another way to interpret the incapacity-to-be of reality. We can take the side of reality and conclude that there must be something wrong with being! From this perspective "the proven incapacity-to-be of movement would be nothing but the supporting pillar for the knowledge about the *unrealness of being*" (*Unwirklichkeit des Seins*, Klages 1931: 55). If we cannot get a grip on reality, if the flow of happening cannot be represented, then this does not indicate against reality, but against conception. Contra logocentrism, Klages wants us to embrace a world view which is not based on the supremacy of the concept, but on the premise that happening is indeed real, just as we supposedly experience it to be.

If reality cannot be conceptually grasped, how then can be talk about it? One could certainly raise the objection that it makes no sense to talk about something which eludes our intellect. Klages rejects that argument, since language may well allude to things which the intellect is not fully capable of grasping. Words give us a "direction of reflection", they actually refer to a point-like object-thing, but can allude to the canvas of happening (Klages 1931: 80 – 86). Even if we follow Klages in his claim that the notion of an ungraspable reality of happenings does not lead to a performative self-contradiction, how do we know that such a reality exists? The capability by which we become acquainted with happening can surely not be linked to conceptual knowledge.

At this point, we must take a look at the most important dichotomy in Klages' work, the dichotomy between *Geist* and *Leben* (life). "Geist" can be translated with "ghost", "spirit", "mind" or "intellect". We will use "intellect" because it best captures what Klages means when he employs the term, which, according to the text, in roughly synonymous with the capability to pass judgments (*Urteilsvermögen*), understanding (*Verstand*), or reason (*Vernunft*, Klages 1931: 61). The intellect compels

every subject to accept the same notions of unity, number, and scale and therefore implies the "strict objectivity or general applicability of the truth" (Klages 1931: 62). It is a force which makes us grasp the world conceptually, thereby pushing away the reality of happening in favour of the being of things.

But the person is not only a carrier of intellect, but also a carrier of life. The phenomenal world is full of change, and we become aware of that not through intellect, but through lived experience (*Erleben*). It is here that Klages' debt to Dilthey becomes apparent. In virtue of their "participation in happening", people as carriers of life are able to be directly affected by the forces of life.

What do we make of Klages' wholesale attack on rational thought, which lies at the core of Enlightenment philosophy and Prometheanism? How do we assess the arguments he employs to convince us of his irrationalist world view? In order to answer this question, we must reconstruct the basic structure of his argument. Klages derives his assertion that the intellect is a dangerous power from three premises. The first premise, on which the other two rely, is the claim that there exists an alternative approach to the world besides rational thinking. This approach, which for Klages is *Erleben*, is passive and intuitive. It is described as a kind of pre-cognitive source of "deep insight" that is fundamentally different from conceptual-rational thinking.

Klages second premise is the belief that this kind of relation to the world is superior to conceptualisation. While conceptualisation always implies abstraction and therefore tends to simplify and schematise reality, to subsume it under a unifying concept, lived experience is an immediate relation to reality, which allows us to be directly affected by its forces. Beyond all phrases about "happening", the "reality of the pictures", the "soul" and so on, we have so far summarised Klages' belief system as follows: There is an alternative path to insight, another way of relating to the world, which is fundamentally different from and superior to conceptual thinking. Its superiority rests on the fact that it is more direct, that it does not displace particularities.

Klages third premise is the belief that conceptual thinking is supplanting lived experience. The "intellect" is pushing away "the soul", rationality is destroying the alternative. By employing concepts, we are thus weakening our direct link to reality. Using the inferior method of insight prevents us from accessing the better one.

The conclusion that the intellect is a harmful force can only be derived if all three of those premises remain unchallenged[3]. This means that by refuting one of them, we can refute the whole argument. Furthermore, the falsity of the first premise implies that the other two must also be rejected. Premise two and three deal with the relationship between conceptualisation and its supposed alternative; if such an alternative does not exist, they are void. If, however, only the second premise is false, that is, if the non-conceptual method (lived experience) is not better than the conceptual one, then we cannot justify the claim that its displacement by the intellect is bad. Finally, if the third premise is wrong – if there is no displacement – then intellect and lived experience can coexist, which renders the argument void. As we can see, Klages' whole line of argument can be safely discarded if only one premise turns out to be wrong.

The first premise is the most fundamental one, so any criticism of Klages must deal with his concept of life and lived experience. Already in Dilthey's work, *Leben* is described as "an insoluble enigma". We can "pursue its tone, rhythm, and stirring melody" but never rationally understand it (Dilthey 1997: 346-347). Lived experience is the way we are affected by this "primordial cell of the historical world" (Dilthey 2013, 83). Klages' first premise already refers to an object that is unknowable and thereby not open to argument and debate. This is what allows him to immunise his theory against all rational criticism.

There are good reasons to believe that there is no alternative to conceptualisation. Our relationship to the world inherently depends in the application of theories to our experience. Even the most simple acts and most profane truths depend on conceptualisation. Any declarative statement, no matter how obvious it might seem, expresses a judgment or proposition. Let us consider, for example, the statement that "the sun will rise tomorrow". It utilises the concepts "sun", "tomorrow", and "rise". The abstract concept "sun" is applied to experience, subsuming the particular under the universal. Even the most innocent statements employ the very abstraction and simplification that Klages believes to be the root of evil. He can very well claim that the application of the concept always simplifies things somewhat. He can not, however, pretend as if we had an alternative, as if there was another path to take. Klages' own writings make use of language, and therefore subjugate their subject matter to the tyranny of concepts. Might the German irrationalists themselves have fallen prey to the malign influences of the intellect?

[3] Without premise two, we have no reason to protect "lived experience". Without premise three, coexistence is possible, which means that the intellect is not harmful to the soul.

Klages' would answer this challenge by pointing out that he does not reject all thinking. Apart from *conceptual thinking* ("begriffliches Denken"), there is also *symbolic thinking* ("symbolisches Denken") which is "connected to life" because it depends on the "viewing of the soul". Unfortunately, Klages' whole account of "viewing" ("Schauen") as a genuine function of the "soul" is untenable. It is based on the speculative idee fixe that there are ominous "forces" in "happening" which can somehow affect the soul directly, confronting it with "pictures". This tale is propped up by a form of essentialism according to which the supposed living forces have "essences" which they can communicate to the receiving "soul". Klages' whole account of the soul and its supposed powers of direct contact with the outside is extremely speculative. It is impossible to test it empirically, because any scientific study would, in the eyes of Klages, already create reified knowledge, which is incompatible with the idea that the "soul" supposedly "views". In Klages, there is no attempt to provide a logical chain of reasoning which could prove that this "viewing of the soul" in indeed a real phenomenon.

If lived experience or "Erleben" is to be considered as a serious alternative to conceptual thinking, it must give us access to some form of knowledge, or at least allow any kind of goal-oriented action. But the reality is that humans cannot orient themselves in this world without using cognitive processes which are representational and conceptional. Of course, there have been some philosophers who claim that not all knowledge exists in the form of judgments or propositions. According to their view, there is not only "knowledge-that", but also the non-theoretical "knowledge-how", which is supposed to denote a more practical form of knowledge (see Ryle 1949). Whether "knowledge-how" can be reduced to "knowledge-that" is debated among scholars; the position that favours reduction is called "intellectualism". Even if we accept the falsity of intellectualism, that does only imply that not all knowledge is theoretical. However, it would still be impossible to lead a halfway normal life without employing any theoretical knowledge. So while Klages assumes that *Erleben* and "symbolic thinking" are better than conceptual thinking, contemporary philosophers who believe in the independent nature of "knowledge-how" would never claim that it could supplant propositional or judgment-based knowledge.

If we accept that conscious action and propositional knowledge both depend on conceptual thought, then we have shown that direct "Erleben" cannot be a real alternative to what Klages calls intellect or *Geist*. We are epistemically dependent on the formation of concepts and everything that this entails. Our goal should not, therefore, be to abolish this kind of thinking, but to analyse it in order to critically assess our judgments about the world. By acknowledging that we cannot just circumvent the rational, we divert our attention to the real questions: What are the correct methods

of science? How do we prevent drawing wrong conclusions? How can we distinguish between good and bad theories? The real philosophical challenge begins only after we have repudiated the irrationalist myth that we have at our disposal a better tool than our critical mind if it comes to understanding and changing the world.

But what about the deficiencies of conceptual thinking? Does it not "cut away" parts of reality? Isn't the application of abstract concepts to a concrete reality, to individual particulars some form of "violence" against the object? Such themes were taken up by many influential philosophers of the 20th century. One prominent example is the reception of Klages by postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida. Previously, we have seen that Derrida borrowed and popularised Klages' term "logocentrism". In his work, he applies it to describe the primacy of spoken language over written language, which for Derrida expresses the primacy of thought over language. Just as Klages (Klages 1165), he rejects that language is just an expression of thought and decries the subjugation of the world by the concept, the obliteration of the particular by the universal, and the totalitarian claim to truth ascribed to modern science (see Derrida 1997: 3, 10, 11, 43).

Another important postmodernist who was inspired by Klages is Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard famously demanded to "activate the differences and save the honour of the name" (Lyotard 1984: 82). The grand universalising narratives of modernity are to be rejected in favour of the particular. This particularity however is threatened by conceptual thinking. Lyotard's emphasis on the name being distinct from the definition bears resemblance to Klages' philosophy of language, according to which the true meaning of the name is overshadowed by the concept, which enters language as foreign force (Klages 1931: 1153).

Interestingly, not only post-structuralists, but also Frankfurt School theoreticians such as Adorno and Horkheimer agree with Klages on many accounts. Their idea of "the nonidentical" ("das Nichtidentische") is basically a remake of Klages' denouncement of the abstracting influence of the concept (Adorno 1966: 124, 138). Furthermore, the thesis of the "priority of the object" bears structural resemblance to Klages' talk of "the reality of happening" and "living forces". The influences of Klages on the Frankfurt School are well documented. According to one author, "the Frankfurt school was closer to the tradition of Nietzsche and Lebensphilosophie in their cultural critique than to Marxism" (Stauth, Turner 1992: 45). A similar assessment can even be found in Lukács, who claims that the Frankfurt School represents a mixture of "left ethics" and "right epistemology" (Snedeker 1985: 445). Klages's influence can be discerned not only in Adorno and

Horkheimer, but also in Walter Benjamin, another famous Frankfurt school intellectual (Lebovic 2006: 28).

The limitations of conceptual thought are clearly a popular trope of 20th century philosophy. While Klages' concrete ideas about the "soul", "viewing" and "pictures" are now largely forgotten, the general critique of conceptualisation is associated with profound philosophy. Is Klages right in this regard?

Klages and his disciples paint a picture where the adherents of the Enlightenment, of "scientism" and "positivism" rely on a blind trust in the perfection of conceptualisation. This is simply a straw man. Believing that science and rational thinking are our best (and only) way to orient ourselves in this world does not imply believing that they are infallible.

The insight that the notion/idea/concept fails to fully represent all aspects of reality does not serve as an argument against thinking. As soon as we acknowledge that there is no way around the labour of conceptualisation, the charge against the imperfection of the concept reveals itself to be misguided. Proponents of rationality are well aware of the fact that our concepts are *not perfect*. They do not think that their abstractions are a flawless representation of reality in all of its aspects. However, they allow us to predict and control the future. So while simplification is clearly an element in all thinking and all science, this does not mean that it is fundamentally flawed. What is flawed are precisely the standards of those who expect absolute certainty and precision from theoretical concepts and epistemic methods.

OSWALD SPENGLER: CULTURE AND DECLINE

Oswald Spengler is another reactionary thinker influenced by Dilthey's Lebensphilosophie. His renown rests on his major work *The Decline of the West*, in which he embarked on an ambitious project that would establish his status as a leading right-wing cultural theorist and philosopher of history of the Weimar Republic: Spengler wanted to write a "morphology of world history". This term was borrowed from biology, where "morphology" refers to the study of the structural features of living organisms. The transfer of the morphological principle onto human history in order to determine its principles of form and disclose its inner being is already present in Droysen, who had

claimed that "the method of historical research is determined by the morphological character of its material" (Droysen 1868: 9).

In contrast to Ludwig Klages, Spengler's work does not put emphasis on the notion of life. Its adherence to the central ideas of Lebensphilosophie are therefore less overt. However, a closer look reveals that Dilthey's influence on Spengler is very pronounced. One central idea that both authors share is the rejection of positivism. Just as Dilthey, Spengler accuses the historians of his time of adopting the methods of physics uncritically, and contests that such an approach is not appropriate to the subject of history. Spengler criticises those who pursue historical sciences as a "covert natural science", (Spengler 8) i.e. who examine historical events only with regard to causal relationships and thereby supposedly follow Immanuel Kant's teachings. Such a purely empirical approach, Spengler argues, fails to recognise the substantial content of history; a historical science that only takes the measurable into account is bound to fail in capturing the actual driving forces of the historical process:

> There is knowledge of nature and knowledge of man. There is scientific experience and lived experience. (Spengler 2014: 134)

Here, we can identify another trope from Dilthey's thought: The idea that *Geisteswissenschaften* have to rely on "lived experience", which contrasts with the empirical and theoretical approach of the natural sciences. For Spengler, the empirically recognisable history is nothing more than "expression, sign, soul that has taken shape" (Spengler 2014: 8) a reference to Dilthey's notion of *Expression* (*Ausdruck*). The empirical historical process is therefore not the actual object of historical research, but rather a mere superficial phenomenon that requires careful interpretation. History can only be correctly interpreted if it is viewed in the right context, i.e. in the context of the system of symbolic references specific to each culture, which are related to its respective mentality, its "soul" (*Seelentum*). This soul has to be regarded as some kind of primordial psyche or basic mindset which determines how we perceive and interact with the world. According to Spengler, it is inaccessible to the methods of empirical science (Spengler 2014: 381-383).

A real historian, therefore, would have to examine not only the causal relationships, the "logic of space", but also "the organic necessity of fate - the logic of time" (Spengler 2014: 9). In Spengler's theory of history, the "idea of fate" as a teleological principle (Spengler 2014: 154) represents the antithesis of the mechanical idea of causality in the natural sciences. Positivist science and Cartesian-Kantian epistemology are completely unsuitable for grasping destiny, for "the idea of

destiny requires lived experience, not scientific experience" (Spengler 2014: 153). If the morphology of history is to shed light on the "soul" that is the hidden cause of the visible historical process, then it must resort to methods that are fundamentally different from those of natural science:

> Wanting to treat history scientifically is in the end always contradictory and therefore any pragmatic historiography, being as ambitious as it may, must be a compromise. One should treat nature scientifically, but one should write poetry about history. (Spengler 2014: 129)

Interestingly, Dilthey also compares the historian to the poet, proposing that both groups heavily rely on their "relation to life" (*Lebensbezug*) (Dilthey 2013: 56). And just as Dilthey, Spengler believes that the adequate method to identify the hidden forces that cause the visible historical process is *lived experience* (Spengler 2014: 127). This notion is contrasted with knowing or cognising (*Erkennen*)[4]. Only those who consult lived experience can see "shapes" (*Gestalten*) instead of "laws" (*Gesetze*), "image and symbol" instead of "formula and [...] system", and thus gain insights into the actual causes of historical events (Spengler 2014: 137). Spengler's anti-scientific thinking, which places intuition, symbolism and feeling above the use of reason, is unmistakably a direct continuation of the classically reactionary project of the Counter-Enlightenment:

> The mind, the system, the concept kill by knowing ["Erkennen"]. They turn the object of knowledge ["das Erkannte"] into a rigid thing that can be measured and divided. The contemplative view animates and allows for contact with the soul ["Das Anschauen beseelt"]. It dissolves the individual into a living, internally felt unity. (Spengler 2014: 137)

As we have seen, Spengler's methodological critique of positivism is closely related to the idea that the "soul" of cultures must be regarded as the driving force of history. The rejection of the empirical method results from its alleged inability to capture and represent cultural specifics. For Spengler, Modernism and the Enlightenment fatally fail to recognise that human beings are always "organised as ethnic collectives" (*völkerhaft gruppiert*, Spengler 2014: 140). The subject of history is not humanity as a whole, nor the individual, but the people or ethnicity (Volk). Cultures, according to Spengler, "are organisms. World history is their biography" (ibid.).

Here we encounter the cultural relativism that for Isaiah Berlin forms the central tenet of the Counter-Enlightenment. In the *Decline of the West*, it comes to full fruition. Spengler's "morphology" is based on a cyclical understanding of history. Each culture, guided by its own "soul" (*Seelentum*),

---

[4] In Dilthey, lived experience is contrasted with explaining (Erklären).

goes through the same pattern of rise, climax and fall (Spengler 2014: 144 – 145). Spengler believes that it always takes approximately a thousand years from the rise of a culture to its final demise.

In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler assumes that Western culture has reached the stage of civilisation, the last stage in which all cultural energies have been spent. A symptom of this was the prevalence of the "great systems of liberalism and socialism" (this formulation reminds us of Lyotard's grand narratives / metanarratives) which, however, like the belief in "Rousseau's human rights", would quickly lose their credibility due to their shortcomings (Spengler 2014: 1129 – 1130).

The Decline of the West radicalises Dilthey's historism. It paints a picture where cultures appear to be a hermetically sealed entities. There is no entry point into the hermeneutic circle. People can only perceive the world in accordance with the respective "soul" of their culture. They are therefore unable to understand traditions, ideas, works of art and deeds of other cultures. When people try to make sense of those things, they will only ever misunderstand their true meaning. The Greeks, for example, identified foreign gods with their own. Projecting their own ideals onto other peoples, they could not do justice to their particularities. Western culture must necessarily repeat this mistake:

> But we too fail when we translate the words of foreign philosophers such as ἀρχή, *atman*, *tao* with familiar phrases, when we translate the foreign soul expression from the perspective of our own world feeling [Weltgefühl], from which the meaning of our words originates. We also interpret the features of ancient Egyptian and Chinese portraits in accordance with Western lived experience. (Spengler 2014: 213)

Spengler is not only interested in drawing attention to culturally caused misunderstandings that could be cleared up by further explanations. Rather, he takes the view that the products of a culture are, in principle, incomprehensible to anyone who has not grown up in it. Culture thus appears as a closed discourse.

In Spengler's work, symbols play an important role; they carry meaning, and at the same time necessarily express a certain "soul" (*Seelentum*) and "world feeling" (*Weltgefühl*). For they are created within a specific culture and bear its marks, symbols can only disclose their meaning to those who share the unspoken assumptions and foundations inscribed in it. Symbols for Spengler are not only letters and works of art, but also historical events, peoples, and ideas. The most important symbol is the primal symbol (Ursymbol), also called "arch-symbol" by some translators.

Typical for the "Apollonian" mindset of classical antiquity are "mechanical statics, the sensual cults of the Olympic gods, the politically isolated Greek city-states, the doom of Oedipus and the symbol of the Phallus" (Spengler 2014: 234). For the Greeks, the self is represented by the idea of *soma* (body), which doesn't allow for inner development. The Apollonian "soul" is inherently focused on the eternal, the unchanging. This is supposed to explain why the Greeks liked columns and statues, and why they believed that the gods live on Mount Olympus (Spengler 2014: 236 - 240). In contrast, the magical "soul" of the Middle East is described as thoroughly dualistic. The opposites body – soul, good – evil, heaven – earth play a decisive role. Magical people and not individuals, but "part of a pneumatic *we*" (Spengler 2014: 840 – 843), believing in the "impossibility of the I" (Spengler 2014: 850). Their world is "filled with the atmosphere of a fairy tale" (Spengler 2014: 845).

According to Spengler, Western culture, which traces its ancestry to the German tribes, is "Faustian" in nature. It is characterised by the emphasis on space, which has no boundaries and yet must be conquered (Spengler 2014: 239). This is why Valhalla is supposed to be nowhere. Faustian people are described as discoverers and conquerors for whom "living means fighting, overcoming, asserting dominance" (Spengler 2014: 436). Furthermore, the West is inherently socialist and totalitarian (Spengler 2014: 435-436).

Even though certain aspects of modern scientific thinking are rooted in the Faustian "soul", according to Spengler Modernism was not always part of Western culture. Instead, it only develops when Faustian man is gripped by *rationalism*, a historical phenomenon that always occurs when the life cycle of a culture is drawing to a close.

Each culture produces its own rationalism when in decline. Faustian rationalism is thus by no means the only one of its kind. All kinds of rationalism, whether they are socialism, Buddhism, or Stoicism, are expressions of the urban attitude to life, which erases any connection with the values of authentic cultural life:

> What makes the cosmopolitan city dweller incapable of living on anything other than this artificial ground is the regression of the cosmic tact in his existence, while the tensions of awakeness become more and more dangerous. (Spengler 2014: 677)

For Spengler, rationalism "means belief in the results of critical understanding *alone*, that is, in the 'intellect'". Under its influence, philosophy changes from a "servant of otherworldly religiosity into epistemology [Erkenntniskritik]" and seeks a secure foundation of knowledge. Spengler identifies

Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Voltaire and Rousseau as prominent representatives of this style of thinking (Spengler 2014: 935 - 938).

It follows that rationalism is not universally valid. Instead, it is the expression of cultural decline. Enlightenment modernism is the rationalism of the Faustian "soul". It combines the idiosyncratic Faustian drive to conquer and explore with the decadence typical for the decline of a culture.

While the specifics of Spengler's theory of cultures may seem strange, even ridiculous to the contemporary reader, the general direction of his thought is oddly familiar. The cultural relativism that he espouses stands in direct contrast to the universalism of the Enlightenment. Spengler was well aware of the stark contrast between his relativism and the universalism of reason that has shaped western philosophy since the 17th century. The *Decline of the West* is indeed written as a direct rebuttal to all aspects of the enlightened world view. Clearly, modernism and Spenglerism are fundamentally incompatible. Therefore, the latter must discredit the former in order to boost its attractiveness. This is to be achieved by presenting the Enlightenment as a historically contingent phenomenon. Western intellectuals, Spengler says, are oblivious with regard to the "historically relative character" of their ideas (Spengler 2014: 31).

SPENGLER'S CONTRADICTION

The most obvious way to criticise Spengler is on the grounds of the numerous inconsistencies that plague *The Decline of the West*. For example, in his "Anti-Spengler", Neurath attacks Spengler's idea that every culture goes through the same phases and experiences similar events (morphological equality). Such a view can only be upheld if one employs a selective approach to history, cherry-picking events and historical personalities that suit the theory (Neurath 1973: 169 – 171). One could also concentrate on the many historical inaccuracies that can be found in Spengler's work. Lastly, there is the possibility to attack Spengler by pointing out that many aspects of his theory are just assumed, never explained. The best example is the sudden appearance of cultures, for which there is no consistent explanation (Neurath 1973: 189 – 190).

To criticise Spengler in one of the above mentioned points is not enough, however. One can easily imagine an "improved" version of *The Decline of the West*, one that is more cautious with regard to the idea of morphological equality while preserving the most fundamental assertions of the work. Such

a "Spengler 2.0" would ditch the far-fetched idea that every culture goes through exactly the same stages of development in favour of a more flexible approach. Even the basic structure of awakening, climax and fall could be preserved if the intervals between events were allowed to fluctuate. A good critique of Spengler, however, must not just attack the weakest aspects of his thought, it must instead be equally applicable to a more consistent "Spengler 2.0".

Indeed, Spengler's relativism does not only claim that cultures can only be understood from the perspective of an insider. More than that, he in fact believes that *all* theories are expressions of culture, and that therefore no theory can claim universal validity, not even the theories of physics:

> Each culture has created its own group of images of the processes, which is true for it alone and only remains so as long as the culture is alive and in the realisation of its inner possibilities. [...] And that is why there is no absolute physics, only individual, emerging and floating physics [Physiken] within individual cultures. (Spengler 488-489)

Such ideas foreshadow the talk about "Jewish physics" that was so popular during the time of Hitler's reign, where the phrase often referred to the theory of relativity put forward by Einstein (Walker 1989: 75 – 79). If one accepts such an anti-scientism, one is bound to reject Prometheanism.

Can such a general relativism be refuted? Certainly, few people would deny that ideas are causally influenced by the many different objective conditions that bring rise to them. Take, for example, Marx' famous statement from the Preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1904: 11, 12)

Marx believed that ideas are the expression of the current *mode of production*, consisting of the state of technology (*productive forces*) and the property relations (*relations of production*). Such a view could explain, for example, why the humanism of the renaissance was strongest in northern Italy and later the Netherlands; both places were important trade hubs dominated by capitalism, while in the rest of Europe, feudalism held sway. Others research how our thinking is influenced by our evolutionary past, explaining prevalent biases as evolutionarily ancient heuristics (Santos, Rosati 2015). Cultural relativism similarly relies on the idea that thought is influenced or even determined by the outside

world. Here, it is not the mode of production or the evolutionary past, but the mindset of a culture which is identified as the cause of thought. Let us concede to the relativist that there is indeed some social phenomenon which could be called the "mindset" of a culture and that this mindset really does influence how we think. Does the belief that all thoughts, and in consequence all scientific theories, are (at least partly) products of culture, entail that their validity must be limited to that very culture?

Affirming such a doctrine would be self-defeating. If all ideas created under capitalism are valid only under capitalism, then the Marxist idea that ideas are shaped by the mode of production is itself only valid with regard to capitalism. If ideas can't be objectively true because they are products of our evolutionary past, it follows that the belief that evolution influences our thinking cannot claim objective validity. In the same vein, if all ideas are relative to the culture which has created them, then cultural relativism itself is nothing but a cultural fad. As we can see, the the relativisation of ideas with reference to the conditions of their genesis destroys the very knowledge that it must rely on. The relativist argues that because any proposition *p* is caused by some objective condition *C*, any *p* must be valid only with regard to the *C* that caused it. Ergo, no *p* can be universally valid. But the proposition that propositions have objective (economic, evolutionary, cultural) causes is itself a *p*. Relativism refers to the causal dependence of thought in order to destroy the very foundation of judgment, thereby depriving itself of the means to judge that thought is causally dependent. The argument of the relativist is self-defeating. The validity of thinking cannot be attacked by referring to its causal constitutional conditions.

The adherent of a general relativism believes that she can prove that there are no universally valid propositions by pointing out the contingent genesis of beliefs. Her fatal mistake is that she does not distinguish between the *context of origin* and the *context of justification* as described by the theoretical philosopher Hans Reichenbach (Reichenbach 1938). Or, to put it in other words, that they conflate genesis and validity (Leibniz speaks of "Genese und Geltung"). The causal background (genesis) of an idea does not determine its epistemic status. The theory of displacement in fluid mechanics may be causally related to the fact that Archimedes owned a bathtub, but this does not tell us anything about its *truth*. Therefore, however strong the causal influence exerted by the mode of production, the evolutionary past, or the cultural mindset may be, this cannot change the validity of the ideas they bring about. A belief can be true and justified even when it is reliably brought about by some objective condition.

We clearly have sufficient reasons to reject the doctrine of general relativism. Not only does it rely on a faulty inference from genesis to validity, moreover it contradicts itself. And apart from the logical-epistemic contradiction, there is also a performative contradiction at work here. Spengler wants us to accept his point of view and reject the ideas of the rationalists he so despises. He thinks that their ideas about the human psyche and their moral values are somehow *wrong*. According to Spengler, dealing with history by employing the methods of science is *worse* than considering the role of the "soul". The decadence of civilisation is *morally inferior* to a life lived in accordance to the "tact" of one's culture. Spengler wants us to accept those claims, but if his own theory is to be accepted, then they can't be objectively true. Spengler's theory would itself simply be an expression of the "Faustian" mindset of the West.

IRRATIONALISM AND FASCISM

In the previous sections, we have discussed and assessed the inner logic of the works of both Klages and Spengler. This analysis has shown that both authors make heavy use of ideas that were developed by Dilthey. At the same time, they attack the modernist worldview from different angles. Klages operates on the level of theoretical philosophy. He strives to establish that Enlightenment philosophy is contradictory and bound to fail. As an alternative to both empiricism and rationalism, he proposes an account of human understanding that favours lived experience and the "viewing" of the "soul". Spengler, on the other hand, does not deal with questions of theoretical philosophy. Instead, he focuses on history, employing cultural relativism and a theory of decadence to discredit the role of reason in science and society.

But despite these different approaches, Spengler and Klages share a common world view. There is much more to this than just their common rejection of reason and their radicalisation of Dilthey's ideas. In this section, we will devote our attention to three important tropes of 20th century German irrationalism, which directly lead to a fundamental rejection of every form of Prometheanism.

Firstly, the irrationalists argue that reason has detrimental effects on the human mind, or the perspective we take with regard to the world. Secondly, they claim that reason necessarily destroys nature. Thirdly, and for us most importantly, they denounce the effects reason has when applied to society and politics.

Klages views on the negative effects that reason has on the human mind have already been extensively discussed. The intellect is believed to cause a spiritual impoverishment of humanity through the destruction of the "soul" and the displacement of "viewing" and "symbolic thought". Geist creates a "cold and chilly brightness" which suffocates "the life melody of colours" and "turns into stone" the "elemental essences" (Klages 1931: 814). The "naked cult of reason" causes the "wicked destruction of life" (Klages 1931: 1102) and substitutes "mythical gazing" (*mythische[s] Schauen*) with empty conceptualisation (Klages 1931: 851). These destructive instincts of the intellect are most clearly expressed in Enlightenment philosophy, which Klages describes as "the early modern cult of reason", which is in an analogy to Spengler attributed to the later stages of human history (Klages 1931: 757). The world is no longer seen with a primordial innocence. Our perspective is tainted by the will, which strives to establish dominance through the scientific dissection of everything.

The same equation of Enlightenment rationalism is espoused by Spengler, who attributes it to the "Faustian" thinking of the West. The intention to reveal the causal structure of nature and society and thus to open it up to conscious human intervention is said to be a result of Faustian cultural specifics. Since the soul of the Westerner embraces conquest and subjugation, he is geared towards mastering nature from the beginning:

> Natural laws are forms of the known in which a collection of individual cases merges into a higher degree of unity. [...] But in the conviction that no power in the world can shake this calculation lies our will to rule over nature. That is Faustian. Only from this perspective does the miracle appear to contradict the laws of nature. Magical man sees in the miracle only the possession of a power that not everyone has, he does not see something which contradicts "nature". And ancient man, according to Protagoras, was only the measure, not the creator of things. Thus he unconsciously renounced the overpowering of nature by discovering and applying laws. (Spengler 2014: 503)

The quest to discover and apply scientific laws is therefore the attempt to overpower nature, to turn it into an "inorganic, recognised, dissected environment" and "a sphere of functional numbers" (Spengler 2014: 552). Another irrationalist and contemporary of Klages and Spengler, Martin Heidegger, expressed similar views. In his *The Question Concerning Technology*, he argues that modern science expresses a will to control and dominate (Heidegger 2000: 21-22). For the rationalist, the world is to be "unlocked, transformed, stored, distributed and rearranged" (Heidegger 2000: 17). This reifying approach is dangerous above all not because of the

adverse material consequences it has – even though Heidegger believes that those are massive – but because it displaces a specific way approach to life:

> The threat to man does not first come from the potentially lethal machines and apparatuses of technology. The real threat has already struck the human being in his essence. The reign of the Gestell [instrumental reason] threatens with the possibility that man may be denied the ability to enter into a more primal unconcealment and thus experience access to a more primal truth. (Heidegger 2000: 29)

The importance all three authors place on the spiritual threat that reason poses does not mean, however, that they do not concern themselves with what they believe to be the material results of political rationalism in and the Enlightenment. Reason is credited not only with the destruction of the soul, but also with the destruction of nature.

In Klages, the intellect emerges to assist the will. This will aims to overcome resistance, which is an expression of life. The will to conquer inherent in reason soon turns against nature, using concepts and scientific laws to destroy it:

> It is not nature that clears forests, channels rivers, draws telegraph wires, lays railway lines, builds factory chimneys. Against nature, dividing it in itself, human will forced all this, and so it speaks incomparably less about the life of the earth than about the rapes that happened to earthly life by an intelligence whose ultimate goal would be to realise nothingness. (Klages 1931: 673)

Because it cannot totally control nature, the "rule of the intellect" (*Geistesherrschaft*) must necessarily strive to annihilate it. From the "hostility of the will towards reality" emerges "mechanics" and then "technology", which has only one goal, the "extermination of entire animal kingdoms" and finally of all life forms on earth (Klages 1931: 725). Through the "mechanisation of nature" the intellect prepares the total "shattering of nature" (Klages 1931: 744). The destruction of the environment, which was already highly visible in Klages' time, appears to be the work of conceptualisation itself.

> By breaking outwards as will, the intellect […] clogs [Earth's] pores, robs her of the air she breathes, stops her exchange with the cosmos. Clearing of the forests, extermination of wild animal species, drainage of the land, regulation and poisoning of the streams, exploitation and consumption of all the treasures of the soil are some of the widely visible signs of this. (Klages 1931: 1140, 1141)

The reactionary nature of this perspective does not lie in the mere fact that Klages decries the destruction of our natural habitat. What is specifically anti-modernist and irrationalist about his account is the identification of the intellect as the real cause of environmental problems. It is logocentrism which drives annihilation, so we must convert to "biocentrism" (Klages 1931: 130), which requires abandoning conceptual thought and passively surrendering oneself to happening. The fusion of ecology and irrationalism that Klages espouses is a prime example for *ecofascism*. Concerns about the destruction of nature were not foreign to the Nazis, whose interest in ecological questions was "linked with traditional agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban civilisation" (Biehl, Staudenmaier 1996: 7).

Klages' environmentalism has been rather influential, not only on the Nazi party, but also on the German Youth Movement, which was known for "neo-Romanticism, Eastern philosophies, nature mysticism, hostility to reason, and a strong communal impulse" and "played a decisive but highly ambivalent role in shaping German popular culture" (Biehl, Staudenmaier 1996: 8-9). The Youth Movement was, however, not a right-wing movement per se. It incorporated a range of ideas, which were often anti-modernist, but at the same time anti-militarist. There was also considerable support for ideas such as free love among the members of the Youth Movement. Be that as it may, Klages presented the influential speech *Human and Earth* for the First Free-German Day of Youth, a large festival in 1913. There already he ascribes the destruction of the nature, the "poisonous waste of factories" to the intellect, the "religion of success", and the "man of progress".

Spengler shares this ecological perspective. In a work devoted to the critique of modern technology, *Human and Technology*, he claims that reason wants nature to "obey the slightest push of a button or lever" (Spengler 1931: 71). It causes the "mechanisation of the world", the destruction of forests, climate change, the erosion of the soil, the extinction "of countless animal species" and "whole human races" (Spengler 1931: 77). In the end, nothing remains:

> Everything organic succumbs to the sprawling organisation. An artificial world intersperses and poisons the natural one. Civilisation has itself become a machine. (Spengler 1931: 77-78)

All of this seems to be very relevant to our age, even prophetic. However, those who point out the most relevant problems are not necessarily correct about its causes. Challenging the irrationalist on the ground of ecology does not mean denying the ecological catastrophe we are facing, but the analysis of this catastrophe that they provide. According to Klages and Spengler, the destruction of nature is a necessary result of the application of reason, and therefore, reason must be fought. A

progressive alternative to this view on ecology has been presented by Leigh Phillips in his essay "Planning the Earth System"[5] (Phillips 2019).

Klages and Spengler not only misuse the allusion to ecological catastrophe to convince us of their irrationalist ideas, they also take away the only tool we have to save the planet: reason. In the end, this assault on reason serves to discredit modern society, democracy, and Prometheanism. For the remainder of the chapter, we will discuss the political ideas that Klages and Spengler propose.

Just as the machine is the material apotheosis of the intellect (Klages 1931: 125), the modern world, which is exemplified by the metropolis with its "multi-storey houses" and "nocturnal fireworks of light", and by "industrialised landscapes" (Klages 1931: 915), appears as its social-historical embodiment. It is the concrete form that *Geist* assumes after its final victory, which Klages dates back to 1830, when culture, which was still "under the spell of earth", had been replaced by civilisation (Klages 1931: 1140). The same anti-urbanism can be found in Spengler, who views the metropolis as an expression of cultural decline. When those cities (Alexandria for classical antiquity, Baghdad for the Middle East) have become stronger than the peasantry and knighthood, the rural world is pushed into "a hopeless defence against the sole rule of the city", "spiritually against rationalism, politically against democracy, economically against money" (Spengler 2014: 670-671). As soon as the "metropolitan intelligence" asserts itself against "rural and small-town cunning", any "relationship to the soil" (*Beziehung zum Boden*) disappears and makes way for "economic thinking" (ibid.).

This outright rejection of the achievements of modernity also extends to the political freedoms obtained by the great revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. The idea of political freedom as such is condemned as a manifestation of the intellect (Klages 1931: 757). The same is true with regard to "public opinion", the press and modern economics (Klages 1931: 767, 1235). "Enlightened doom" and the "craze of progress" (*Aufklärungsunheil und Fortschrittswahn*) culminate in the idea of utopia, in the Promethean dream of a coming empire under the colours of the modern age (Klages 1931: 887). In their quest to bring about the new, the modernists must destroy the old traditions. For Klages, this tendency can most clearly be observed in Russia, where the Bolsheviks destroyed churches and thereby robbed the people of their past (Klages 1931: 1216, 1217).

---

[5] "The Earth before humanity was directionless, a ship without a captain. It didn't care whether it extinguished itself. Today, the market left to its own devices, and a planet without a democratic government, likewise leaves our world without a hand on the tiller [...] we must come to terms with the fact that what is required of us is nothing short of global democratic governance: ruling the Earth system in the interest of maximizing human flourishing, of expanding our freedom without bound." (Phillips 2019)

The motive of the struggle between past and future is prominent in Klages. He laments the abolition of the old nobility (*Zerstörung herrschende Stände*) which stood in the way of the "triumph of technological phantoms" because its lifestyle connected it to the world of pictures (*urbildnähere Lebenshaltung*, Klages 1235). Spengler in turn associated "the traditional estates" with the symbols of culture and the soil, and claimed that this explains the resistance of the nobility against the rationalism of the cities (Spengler 2014: 1002). The motive for taking the side of the nobility is thus the same with both authors – nobles and, to a lesser degree, the rural population in general, represent the old order and act as resistance fighters against the modern world.

Klages reactionary political attitude makes him celebrate the "symbiotic" bond inherent in the "patriarchal relations" of the past, romanticising the relationship between rulers and ruled:

> The "patriarchal" relationship of the big landowner and his serfs, the Nordic or Greek chieftains to their menials (Odysseus and Eumaios!), the loyalty of the Germanic tribes and the Germanic Middle Ages, sometimes even the connection between Caesar and the people, between the "little father" Tsar and Russian Muschik: these and innumerable reciprocities of a similar kind cannot be understood without the assumption that Eros resonates between the acting centres and the receiving members of those interconnected groups. (Klages 1931: 1204)

Thus, Tsarist autocracy, feudal rule and Germanic "Treue" represent a "participation in life" (*Lebensteilhaberschaft*) which is opposed to the aspirations of the intellect and the will. Klages sees a "deathly contrast" between "communist programs of the contemporary age", which strive to "turn people into rods, pins and straps", and the "communal Eros" of the village. Communists and the rural population must be considered "mortal enemies" (Klages 1931: 1204). But Klages does not only reject the project of the radical left, but also democracy, which is credited with the creation of a "rationalised state" ruled by "the purse". Money and competition rule, which leads to "party contests, class struggles, crime, revolutions, wars between peoples" (ibid). Klages considers the USA and the Soviet Union to be particularly extreme examples. But if even the Soviet Union is considered to be under the spell of money, this "money" cannot be actual money, actual capitalism. It has to be something else. When discussing urban civilisation, Spengler writes:

> With the end of the late period of every culture, the history of the traditional estates also comes to a more or less violent conclusion. It is the victory of the mere will to live in rootless freedom over the great binding cultural symbols, which humanity, now completely dominated by the city, neither

> understands nor endures. From the monetary system every sense of down-to-earth, immovable values disappears, from scientific criticism every remnant of piety. (Spengler 2014: 1002)

"Rootlessness", a lust for money and power, and urbanism are typical tropes of anti-semitism. Because of their supposed calculating nature and disdain for tradition, Jews were also identified with Prometheanism, that is with "utopian ideals of dreamers and enthusiasts [...] in which any kind of abstraction is to be realised" (Spengler 2014: 1014). In the figure of the scheming and "wandering" Jew, the supposed nihilism of a materialistic society is personified.

The antisemitic tropes are even more pronounced in *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*. At first, we must note that the way Geist is characterised is structurally antisemitic. It is portrayed as a cunning force linked to calculation and "flat insight". At the same time, it has no connection to the blood and the soil. Those are the traits that antisemites consider to be typical attributes of "the Jew". Klages even talks about "the parasite called intellect" ("Parasit mit Namen Geist", Klages 1931: 767), thereby evoking the widespread idea of the Jewish "parasite" that later formed an essential part of Nazi propaganda. Furthermore, Klages frequently uses the term "Entartung" (degeneration) to describe the workings of the intellect (Klages 1931: 126, 995, 1128, 1242, 1276), a right-wing catchphrase that refers to supposed symptoms of decadence and cultural demise. The Nazis notoriously employed the term "entartete Kunst" (degenerate art) to describe modern art, which they rejected because of its presumed role in a Jewish "world conspiracy" against German culture.

Apart from the more or less "covert" use of anti-semitic tropes, we also find direct and open antisemitism in *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*. Klages praises the Indo-Germanic peoples, above all the Indians, Persians, Greeks, and Germans for their "sparkling acts of heroic self-sacrifice" and the "brilliance" of their "everlasting poetry" (Klages 1931: 1243). And while he sees some similarities between Germans and Arabs, he condemns the Jews for their supposed role in bringing about the rule of the intellect. Christianity is described as the "infiltration of all oppressed strata of the Roman empire" with the Jewish belief system. Under the influence of the intellect, Judaism has turned into the "claim to power of a minority that is no longer localised and that realises its goals preferably through personal and political cunning" (ibid). Thereby, Klages evokes the image of the "Wandering Jew", the rootless nomad, and at the same time affirms the delusional idea that Jewish people are insidious and deceitful. In the same passage, he comments on the "intellect of high finance" ("Geistigkeit der Hochfinanz", ibid), the term "high finance" being a political buzzword of those who believe in the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Jews control the banks – and the world. What sets anti-semitism apart from other forms of racism is the fact that the Jew is imagined not as

an inferior being ("Untermensch"), but as the arch-enemy of mankind, the one who is "behind" everything that is wrong with the world. By associating the intellect with Judaism, Klages is doing exactly that.

IRRATIONALISM AS A FORM OF ANTI-PROMETHEANISM

Critics of Prometheanism deny that society can be rationally understood in a way that allows us to consciously plan the social order. In order for Prometheanism to work, we must be able to acquire an understanding of political, economic, and cultural processes that is complete enough to allow for institutional design. The most straightforward way to attack this position is to deny the very foundation on which it rests: reason.

This trajectory has been explored by German nationalists in the late 19th and early 20th century. Taking elements from the writings of Dilthey, this current soon radicalised into a wholesale rejection of the Enlightenment and all that it stands for. But as we have seen, such a project is self-defeating. Leveraging thought against itself, irrationalism creates a performative contradiction. The rejection of rational thinking cannot be thought of, at least not rationally.

So far, it seems that the "binary opposition" that Caradonna rejects is rooted in fact. On the one hand, we have Prometheanism, which is linked with the Enlightenment, critical thinking, and an optimistic historical outlook. It appears to be responsible for all social progress since the beginning of the early modern period. On the other hand, there are the "gloomy doctrines" (Berlin 2001: 24) of the irrationalists, indeed "a retrograde, knee-jerk reaction to republicanism, secularism, rationality, liberalism, equality and all that is deemed positive by contemporary historians" (Caradonna 2015: 54), a intellectual force which was consistently on the wrong side of history and can reasonably be held responsible for the biggest crimes in human history: the Nazi death camps.

This narrative of the irrationalist threat, which unites liberals such as Berlin and communists such as the late György Lucács, affirms at least one of the ideas proposed by the irrationalist themselves: that the history of ideas is a Manichean struggle between precisely *two* currents, modernism (reason, science, design, republicanism) and anti-modernism (feeling, tradition, custom, life). Prometheanism, then, would simply be one aspect of a broader modernist project, which can be traced back to the

Enlightenment and which is embroiled in a mortal struggle with the likes of Klages and Spengler, who together with their contemporary heirs from the postmodern left and the extreme right strive to undermine the accomplishments of the Age of Reason.

In the next chapter, we will take a look at the debate around Prometheanism that happened in the 18th century, focusing on the English-speaking world. This analysis will reveal that the Manichean story presented above is an oversimplification. Irrationalism is just one form of anti-Prometheanism. Political rationalism has also been criticised from within the Enlightenment itself. Furthermore, the perhaps strongest argument against Prometheanism does not rely on portraying reason as a force of evil which threatens life itself. Instead, it refers to the limitations of reason and cautions us not to overestimate its abilities. This line of thought, which we might call "social caution", has famously been put forward by Edmund Burke and was further developed by Friedrich Hayek. It presents a formidable challenge to Prometheanism and will therefore be our chief concern in the remainder of this thesis.

III

Prometheanism and its Critics in the 18th Century

THOMAS PAINE: REPUBLICAN PROMETHEANISM

One of the foundational ideas of this thesis is that there exists a connection between political rationalism and the emancipatory projects in the modern era. In this chapter, we will assess how the Enlightenment created – and criticised – political rationalism and in what sense those developments were linked to the revolutions in America and France. We will take a look at the 18th century debates about the role of reason in politics, focusing on three of its most important contributors: The American revolutionary Thomas Paine, the Scottish intellectual David Hume, and the Irish politician Edmund Burke. Every one of those three philosophers has reflected upon reason in politics, not only abstractly, but also with regard to the concrete political events of their age. We will begin with Paine, who serves as a perfect example for a Promethean world view as outlined in Chapter I. The picture will then be complicated by David Hume's ideas, which cast doubt upon the simplistic claim that the Enlightenment as a whole was inherently Promethean. Hume will also serve to assess a conservative argument which relies on the identification of political rationalism with foundationalism and natural law. After Hume, we take a look at Burke, perhaps the most prominent proponent of late 18th century conservatism and an avowed antagonist of political rationalism.

Beginning with Paine, it has to be stated that his presuppositions are in themselves not particularly innovative. Instead they mirror views which were ubiquitous during the Enlightenment. This, however, only makes them more interesting for those who wish to understand the intellectual climate of the age. What makes Paine stand out is his uncompromising application of widespread philosophical ideas to the political questions of his age. In this, he is far from ordinary. Instead of employing ad hoc constructions in order to reconcile the theoretical outlook of the Enlightenment with the existing social order, he simply dismissed the latter and argued that the former be put into practice. Openly denying the legitimacy of the monarchy, of hereditary succession, of slavery and British rule over America, Paine radically challenged the status quo.

In this section, we will first take a look at Paine's political ideas and then assess in which sense they express a commitment to political rationalism. Then we will determine whether the American and French revolutions embody similar principles. This analysis will establish a) that political rationalism was historically inspired by certain Enlightenment ideas, and b) that political rationalism justified and permeated the revolutions of 1776 and 1789.

Paine's most influential writing *Common Sense* doesn't simply present an argument for American independence, it is also a repudiation of both the English constitution and the institution of monarchy as such. Paine's goal was not to amend or improve the British system, instead, he believed it to be inherently flawed and argued for its complete abolition. In the 18th century, this was a strikingly radical position, one that few dared to express and that would lead to Paine being sentenced to death *in absentia*. As we will see later, other intellectuals such as Richard Price, who held similar theoretical beliefs, tried to at least make exceptions for the monarchies of their own countries.

Paine describes the English constitution as a mix of two autocratic elements and one republican one. Firstly, there is "monarchical tyranny in the person of the king". Then, an aristocratic element based on hereditary titles and represented in the House of Lords. Lastly, there is the republican House of Commons "on whose virtue depends the freedom of England" (Paine 2014: 10). The conception that this tripartite division might produce favourable results by allowing every element to control and thereby temper the others is for Paine meaningless or contradictory. If the Commons shall be able to "check" the powers of the king, this supposes two things:

> First – That the King is not to be trusted without being looked after, or in other words, that a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy.
> Secondly – That the Commons, by being appointed for that purpose, are either wiser or more worthy of confidence than the Crown. (Paine 2014: 11)

But the English constitution also allows the king to limit the powers of the Commons. According to Paine, this directly contradicts the aforementioned premises. If the king is truly untrustworthy and if we can rely on the wisdom of the Commons, why then let the king be able to interfere with the work of the people's representatives (Paine 2014: 11, 12)? It would be more coherent to follow the logic to its end and get rid of the king and the aristocracy altogether. Once all "constitutional errors" (ibid.) are amended, only the democratic element shall remain.

Paine's criticism however is not limited to the specifics of English constitutional monarchy. The primary target of his political writings is the old order as such. Particularly, he criticises hereditary succession, which underlies both aristocratic and monarchical rule. His arguments are typical for radicals of his time; they are based on the idea of natural rights and reference contractarian ideas such as those proposed by Locke.

Paine believes in the Enlightenment idea of natural equality[6] and views the hereditary system as something which fundamentally contradicts this principle. At the same time he argues that even if some people "deserve some decent degree of honours" for their deeds, that does not give them the right to lay claim to "perpetual preference" for their descendants (Paine 2014: 16). When entering the social contract, people might voluntarily choose someone as their leader, but they cannot bind future generations to obey the descendants of that individual. If we generalise this argument, Paine seems to claim that no social contract can bind future generations. This idea is also expressed in his opposition to an immutable constitution upheld by the courts. In contrast to this view, which is now enshrined in the Constitution of the United States of America, he argued that every generation should be ruled by its own representatives, not by those of the past (West 2008: 1415).

Paine also proposes a more pragmatic argument against hereditary rule: there is simply no guarantee that a wise person's children will display the same aptitude. The "unwise, unjust, unnatural compact" of hereditary monarchy will often put "a rogue or a fool" in power. (Paine 2014: 16).

Lastly, Paine criticises the assumption that even the first kings and aristocrats were chosen because of their worth as rulers. In contrast to this view, he argues that they have more often than not acquired their power through brute force or through cunning. The ruler of the past was in many cases "the principal ruffian of some restless gang" owing his influence to "savage manners or pre-eminence in subtilty". William the Conqueror, for example, is described as a "French bastard landing with an armed Banditti" (Paine 2014: 17).

As an alternative to the monarchy, Paine advocates for universal male suffrage. Voting rights should not depend on income or heritage:

> The true and only true basis of representative government is equality of Rights. Every man has a right to one vote and no more in the choice of representatives. The rich have no more right to exclude the poor from the right of voting, or of electing and being elected, than the poor have to exclude the rich; and whereever it is attempted, or proposed, on either side, it is a question of force and not of right.

[6] Natural equality in Paine's sense does not imply that people are equal in skills. "In a state of nature", he writes, all men are equal in rights, but they are not equal in power". Paine's equality is normative rather than descriptive. Inequalities in aptitude and power however are not taken as something that legitimises inegalitarian systems; on the contrary, society has a "purpose of making and equalization of powers (Paine 516).

> Who is he that would exclude another? That other has the same right to exclude him. (Paine 2014: 511)

Note that both the early French and the American revolutionaries only granted the right to vote to men of property. Paine, on the other hand, uncompromisingly argued for universal male suffrage and later, under the influence of philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, demanded women's suffrage (Paine 2014: 632).

Paine held practically every progressive political belief that existed in his time. These concrete ideas are deeply connected to his commitment to political rationalism. This attitude is expressed in many passages in *Common Sense*. Specifically, there are three tropes in Paine that are typical of 18th century Prometheanism: a) the idea that existing institutions must be assessed through reason, b) an opposition to habit and prejudice, and c) a moral universalism that contradicts cultural relativism.

With regard to a), Paine argues that we should assess which institutional arrangement will fulfil the "design and end of government", which is "freedom and security" (Paine 2014: 10), with "the least expence and greatest benefit" (Paine 2014: 8). This implies a calculating view of existing institutions. They shall not be accepted as a given, but be put before the tribunal of reason. The idea that institutions are only viable if they can be rationally justified is most clearly expressed in the *Dissertation on First Principles*, where Paine claims that "hereditary government has not a right to exist" precisely because "it cannot be established on any principle of right" (Paine 2014: 516). Just like Descartes puts a burden of rational justification on all opinions, Paine demands such justification from every institution he encounters. Strikingly, his attachment to the idea of methodic doubt and his desire to accept nothing without sufficient reason led him to attack even the Christian religion. Stating that the reason of the Christian "revolts against his creed" (Paine 2014: 573), he argues for the abandonment of Christianity in favour of Deism (Paine 2014: 569).

This rationalist attitude implies a rejection of prejudice and habit. There is plenty of textual evidence for Paine's anti-traditionalism; prejudice and heritage are constantly disparaged in favour of critical thinking. In *Common Sense*, he demands that "however prejudice may warp our wills, or interest darken our understanding", we shall obey only "the simple voice of nature and reason" (Paine 2014: 10). In *The Rights of Man* we find the claim that "education and habit" are untrustworthy, that "prejudices are nothing". Men should "think for themselves" and rely on "reason and reflection" (Paine 2014: 267). This view parallels that of Kant, who in his famous pamphlet *What is Enlightenment* proclaimed the motto of this Enlightenment: "Habe Mut, dich deines *eigenen*

Verstandes zu bedienen" (be bold enough to rely on your *own* reason). Such a focus on the individual's ability to reason is inspired by Cartesian methodical doubt – nothing shall be accepted as given – and a high opinion of the human faculties.

Equally clear is Paine's attitude regarding moral universalism. He characterises the American subjugation to Britain not a violation of the specific "rights of Englishmen" as has been argued by previous generations of revolutionaries and even Alexander Hamilton (Hamilton 1999: 55). Instead, British rule is "repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things" (Paine 2014: 25). In his attempt to motivate the American troops in his pamphlet series *The Crisis*, he reminds them of the "universality of their cause" (Paine 2014: 101). About the task of the political theorist, he remarks:

> Universal empire is the prerogative of the writer. His concerns are with all mankind, and though he cannot command their obedience, he can assign them their duty. (Paine 2014: 60)

Paine did not only hold the central tenets of political rationalism, he also openly acknowledged it as a distinct world view opposed to traditionalism by conceptualising the political conflicts of his age as direct expressions of a philosophical struggle between "Reason and Ignorance". These two forces correspond to two forms of government, on the one hand the republic, on the other "monarchy and aristocracy" (Paine 2014: 256). Hereditary systems are based on ignorance and can only be accepted if we "shut our eyes against reason" and "degrade our understanding" (Paine 2014: 287). This is so because they will immediately be recognised as irrational as soon as we begin investigating them consciously (Paine 2014: 505).

The republic is different. Because it "meets the reason of man in every part" (ibid.), it "requires no belief from man beyond what his reason can give". It is most effective when people consciously understand the usefulness and moral legitimacy of its institutional framework, when they know "its origin and its operation". The free society therefore implies that "the human faculties act with boldness" (Paine 2014: 256). All of this is the opposite of epistemic pessimism.

But what about explicit institutional design? Paine talks about "changes in government", the nature of which shall be determined through rational discussion (Paine 2014: 355). Considering "reason and common interest" (ibd.), laws can be "properly constructed" so that they lead to "an equalization of powers" (Paine 2014: 516). Paine openly advocates for institutional design in order

to achieve a goal of classical civic republicanism, the establishment of a free and balanced constitution.[7]

*Common Sens*e provides us with thoughts about an ideal constitution. According to this design, there will be annual assemblies which shall solve domestic matters and be subordinated to a Continental Congress. This congress shall be composed of elected delegates from the Thirteen Colonies. The colonies are supposed to be "divided into six, eight, or ten, convenient districts", each of which shall "send a proper number of delegates" to Congress (Paine 2014: 29-30). Paine proposes a specific method for choosing the President. A ballot shall determine one of the colonies, after which the delegates from the other colonies may elect a President from it (ibid.).

Some of the practices proposed by Paine made it into the Constitution while others did not. What matters for our purposes is the fact that we have in *Common Sense* not only a rational assessment of the existing British monarchy, but als a clear institutional design. At the same time, this design is open for revision (Paine 2014: 39).

Overall, we can conclude that Thomas Paine's writings were archetypically Promethean. They encompass social mapping, mainly on the basis of a comparison of existing institutions to natural rights and contractarianism, ideas typical for the 18th century. They also incorporate institutional design and social transformation, the latter of which was carried out through military force (Paine assisted the revolutionary effort as a propagandist). Paine held fiercely anti-traditionalist opinions and professed a strong belief in the powers of human reason.

REPUBLICANISM VERSUS LIBERALISM?

Thomas Paine might have been a political rationalist, but that does not tell us much about the 18th century in general. Are the Promethean ideas contained in works such as *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man* just the idiosyncracies of one author, or do they represent a wider trend of the age? And what exactly is the influence that such thoughts exerted upon the two great revolutions of the century?

---

[7] The classical Aristotelian "balance" implied a balance between three forces: the one (monarchy), the few (aristocracy), and the many (democracy). As we have seen, Paine rejected this idea. The balance he envisaged is the balance between different powers of government, which all derive their legitimacy from the people. (Pocock 1972: 124, 125)

In this section, we will assess the influence of Paine style political rationalism on the American and French revolutions. Of course, Paine was active in both, and *Common Sense* is perhaps the most important pamphlet urging the Americans to rise up and fight. At the same time, we will see that there are complexities which complicate the picture. At least when it comes to the American revolution, there are multiple influences we can discern, and not all of them can be described as Promethean.

We will begin however with the French revolution, which is the easier and more straightforward example. Promethean views are unmistakenly present in the *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, one of its principal documents. Aiming to safeguard "the natural, unalienable and sacred rights of man", the Declaration claims to be founded on "simple and incontestable principles" which are "directed toward […] the happiness of all" (France 1789). Just as Thomas Paine, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* relies on a natural law-based conception of human rights.

The most significant intellectual influence on the French Revolution was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose concept of the general will is referenced in the *Declaration* and who was revered by Robespierre. Rousseau shared many of Paine's sentiments. On example is the commitment to natural rights. The "abuses of the feudal government" are described as "contrary to the principles of natural right" (Rousseau 2002: 160). Rousseau and Paine also share a critical attitude with regard to existing governments, and both propose radical institutional designs. While Paine advocates for a representative form of government, Rousseau proposes that the citizens vote directly on laws. Despite this, both authors share an appetite for devising ideal systems of government and criticising existing governments, which do not satisfy the high standards their theories impose on them.

The Promethean character of the French Revolution is obvious not only when we look at its most prominent theorist. It is even more apparent when it comes to political practice. The French took the idea of rational construction very seriously. Several new constitutions were designed on the basis of Enlightenment principles (the constitutions of 1791, 1793, Year III, and finally Year VIII, which cemented Napoleon's Consulate). But the revolutionaries did not stop at constitution-building. Instead, they strove to rationally design all aspects of life. One prominent example is the introduction of the metric system, a deliberate construct based on a decimal system and thought of as a rational alternative to the traditional weights and measurements. Another example is the

Republican Calendar, which was equally based on the decimal system and which regarded 22 September 1792, the founding of the first republic, as Year I (see Shaw 2011).

But what about the American Revolution? Here, things become more complicated. On the one hand, we have textual evidence for a political rationalism inspired by Paine. At the same time, however, different schools of thought have exerted their influence on the American revolutionaries. Every one of the so-called Founding Fathers had their own specific blend of philosophical ideas, and books have been filled debating the different currents that influenced America's revolution. Here, only a brief overview can be provided. It will showcase that while Paine's Prometheanism was highly influential, it was not the only ingredient of the revolution of 1776.

While the American revolution has classically been seen as expressive of Lockean contractarianism and Enlightenment rationalism – Carl Becker claims that the works of Locke were "a kind of political gospel" for "most Americans" in revolutionary times (Becker 1942: 27) – this has been challenged in the second half of the 20th century. Three publications are especially influential: Caroline Robbins' *Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman* (1968), Gordon Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (1969), and J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975). Striving to revise the traditional narrative, these authors claim that the American revolution should be viewed "less as the first political act of revolutionary enlightenment than as the last great act of the Renaissance" (Pocock 1972: 120). Instead of contractarianism, liberalism, and Enlightenment modernism, the revolution received its intellectual impulses from the political worldview of certain Old Whigs in England representing a current which has been dubbed the "Commonwealth" or "Country"-ideology. This current is in turn based on "a tradition of classical republicanism and civic humanism" exemplified by the works of authors such as Machiavelli and marked by an opposition to all forms of dependence (Pocock 1972: 120).

According to Pocock, this classical republicanism emerged in early fifteenth century Florence, where authors such as Coluccio Salurati and Leonardo Bruni proposed a reading of ancient history and philosophy that was at odds with the prevailing "Caesarean" perspective. Instead of praising hierarchical order and imperial rule, they admired the Roman republic and were committed to ideas of citizenship (Pocock 1975: 52-55). Drawing from "Aristotelian analysis and Athenian history", the Florentine republicans were deeply concerned with the idea of "political health" (Pocock 1975: 75), which is connected to the notion of virtue. Virtue here designates, on an institutional level, the healthy autonomy of the different parts of a constitution, and on a personal level, the independence of individuals "from governmental or social superiors" (Pocock 1972: 121).

Political health is not a given; the classical republican view of history emphasises the rise and fall of republics, recognising that political health can degrade over time (Pocock 1975: 54-55). Moral and institutional decay is possible, and it is called "corruption" in many classical republican writings. This antithesis of virtue is caused by unchecked power, by the capture of the body politic by special interest, and by relations of dependency among the citizens. It is also connected to luxury (Robbins 1968: 49) and to professional armies, which are believed to be tools of oppression (Robbins 1968: 104). When corruption has reached a certain degree, it can hardly be revised; once corrupted, the republic is believed to have fallen (Pocock 1972: 121). Many republican authors believed that the eventual fall of the republic cannot be prevented. Rousseau, for example, argues that decay is a "natural and inevitable tendency", and that we can only hope to "prolong the life of the State" by designing "the best constitution possible" (Rousseau 2002: 217).

In England, the first "Commonwealthmen" emerged shortly after the Glorious Revolution (Robbins 1968: 5, 6). Their ideas were especially powerful during the great Court-versus-Country debate that was caused by the actions of Robert Walpole, who greatly strengthened the royal court and the Bank of England (Robbins 1968: 274, 278). These actions created significant opposition by the Country Whigs, for example in the form of *Cato's Letters*. The Country faction generally opposed measures which empowered the central government and financial interests. Their rejection of the introduction of a modern banking system and a regular army was inspired by the civic humanist idea that luxury undermines the virtue of the citizens while military service increases it. Furthermore, the republican antipathy of relations of domination and dependence made them suspect of the centralisation of power and wealth implied by large banks and professional armies. The postrevolutionary controversy between Hamilton's Federalists and Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans is seen as "a Court-Country replay" (Pocock 1972: 133), however one where the Country part is much more egalitarian than its English predecessor.

According to the narrative proposed by Robbins, Wood, and Pocock, the liberal contractarianism epitomised by Locke "played little part" in the debates that preceded the revolution, which were instead dominated by "concepts of virtue, patriotism, and corruption" (Pocock 1972: 127). In this sense, the revisionists directly oppose the received view, according to which Anglo-American political thought was wholly dominated by Lockian ideas.

The revisionist perspective has been challenged by authors such as John Diggins (1984), Thomas Pangle (1988), and Steven Dworetz (1990), who provide strong arguments for the Lockian character

of both *Cato's Letters* and the American Revolution. Another counter-revisionist, Isaac Kramnick, has studied the strong influence that Locke's contractarianism exerted on the political philosophy of Paine and Price (Kramnick 1990: 35-40, 172-185).

The debate assumes a dichotomy of "Lockean liberalism" on the one hand and "classical republicanism" on the other. The former is supposed to be modern, is linked to the Enlightenment, and identified with contractarianism and natural rights. The latter, on the other hand, is based on ancient Greek and Roman ideas, belongs to the Renaissance, and leans more on inherited than natural rights. The debate started by revisionists such as Robbins, Wood, and Pocock depends on the acceptance of this dichotomy. The thesis that classical republicanism was more influential on English politics and on the American revolution than Lockean liberalism only makes sense under the assumption that these are mutually contradictory positions.

This has been challenged by authors such as Jerome Huyler, who argues that we should "discard altogether the essentially misleading Lockean/republican dichotomy" (Huyler 1995: xi. see also Ward 2004: 10, 11). Locke was much more republican than the dichotomy suggests, while typical Commonwealthmen such as Algernon Sidney displayed a strong commitment to natural rights and contractarianism.

The claims made by Huyler are corroborated when we take a look at the two authors discussed above, Paine and Rousseau. In Rousseau, the prime philosopher of the clearly Promethean French Revolution, classical republican tropes of virtue and corruption are ubiquitous. The classical republican belief that luxury threatens the political health of a commonwealth, for example, is shared by Rousseau, who claims that it "corrupts simultaneously the rich and the poor", and thereby "deprives the state of all its citizens in order to enslave them to one to another, and all to opinion" (Rousseau 2002: 201). But it is not only excessive riches, but also the existence of "private interests in public affairs" which corrupt. Rousseau furthermore claims that "when the State is changed in its substance, all reform becomes impossible". At the same time, he affirms virtue as "founding principle of the republic" (ibid.). Quoting Machiavelli, Rousseau states that for a republic, "the virtues of its citizens, their manners, their independence" are of utmost importance (Rousseau 2002: 214). There are the precise ideas that Pocock, Wood and Robbins speak about, expressed by an Enlightenment author who is not commonly viewed as a "Commonwealthman".

Likewise, Paine argues that solidarity with the cause of revolutionary France is felt by everyone whose heart had not been "corrupted by dependance" (Paine 2014: 186), implying a close

connection between personal dependence, corruption, and a loss of virtue. The aristocracy is described as "a kind of fungus growing out of the corruption of society" (Paine 2014: 228). And when debating the English constitution, Paine remarks that "the corrupt influence of the crown", which has "swallowed up the power, and eaten out the virtue of the House of Commons" (Paine 2014: 19). What we find in Paine is the same opposition between virtue and corruption that concerned the Country Whigs, and furthermore the idea that the latter is caused by dependence and arbitrary power.

We must conclude that there is no dichotomy between a venerable classical republicanism on the one hand and a formalistic Enlightenment liberalism on the other. Instead, Enlightenment theorists such as Paine and Rousseau were themselves deeply committed to the core ideas of classical republicanism. The central tropes of Pocock's "Country ideology" were an essential and indispensable part of both French and American Prometheanism in the 18th century.

The duality of the American revolution is found not in a disagreement about the content of liberty – civic republicanism versus negative liberty in the Lockean sense – but in disagreements about its source. It is here that we can see a substantially anti-Promethean and even traditionalist element in the American revolution, one which was never properly reconciled with its rationalist side.

This dichotomy is not one between Lockean liberals and classical republicans, but one between two different kinds of republicanism: One world view which connects republican precepts to reason and nature, and demands in a Promethean fashion that the existing order is torn down and replaced by a new, rationally planned society. And another one which emphasises common law instead of natural law, basing its republican demands not on abstract philosophy, but on a more "grounded" perspective that elevates "the Rights of Englishmen".

The former, that is the natural rights based view was already present during the English revolution, and reached intellectual maturity during the so-called Exclusion crisis (1679-1679), in which the exclusion of the Catholic James, Duke of York from the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland was debated. Lee Ward calls the major theoreticians of that age (James Tyrell, Algernon Sidney, and John Locke) Exclusionists or Exclusion Whigs (Ward 2004: 7). Of those, Sidney is significant because he combines "Hobbesian natural rights theory", popular sovereignty, and "Machiavellian republicanism" into a powerful and decidedly Whiggish political philosophy (Ward 2004: 9, 15), thereby serving as another reminder of the flaws of the Lockean/republican distinction. The Exclusion Whigs struggled mainly against the idea of divine right, which was still popular in 17th

century England. Indeed, the debates between Royalists and their more liberal enemies were essentially debates between "the doctrine of the natural liberty of humankind", according to which "all human beings are naturally free and equal" on the one hand, and divine right on the other (Ward 2004: 21).

Only after the Glorious Revolution, a more conservative reading of classical republican principles became dominant. The post-revolutionary settlement was one that dispensed with both the reactionary doctrine of divine right and the radical natural-rights based accounts proposed by many of the Exclusion Whigs. The Court-Country debate that transpired during the age of Walpole was shaped by the more cautious ideas of that time.

In America, however, the Promethean natural-law tradition was again very popular, as can be seen in the Declaration of Independence, which states in unambiguous terms the existence of natural rights which are "self-evident" – that means rationally accessible – and "unalienable" – independent of history and culture. Note that the author of these words, Thomas Jefferson, was an avid classical republican who played the "Country" part in the debate with Hamilton's Federalists. This is not to say that the natural rights tradition was not the only influence on America's revolutionaries. Many were also influenced by the more cautious and pessimistic approach represented by Scottish authors such as David Hume and Adam Ferguson. Among those who were influenced by this current, we can name John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison.

DAVID HUME: ENLIGHTENMENT AND SKEPTICISM

The ideas of the American revolution were not of one breed. The divide, however, was not one between classical republicans and modern liberals, but one between a specific 18th century brand of Promethean republicanism – committed to methodical doubt, contractarianism, and natural rights – and a more conservative form of republican thought. The latter was heavily influenced by the writings of the Scottish Enlightenment.

To better understand this worldview and its connection to the Enlightenment and the debates on political rationalism, we will take a look at Hume's political philosophy. In many ways, this philosophy of epistemic caution is a direct answer to the optimistic "French ideas" which build upon the radicalism of the Cartesian project. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume criticised the very core of this worldview, methodical doubt and epistemic foundationalism. Claiming that pure reason can

only ever create logical tautologies, never real knowledge (in Kant's terminology, that it cannot ground synthetic judgments), Hume denied the central claim of the rationalists. At the same time, contra Bacon and Locke, he maintains that empirical data alone will never suffice to provide knowledge of the laws of nature. We might be able to observe singular events, but never causal links, which as "necessary connections" transcend what can be directly experienced. Hume's critique of causal and inductive reasoning disproves classical empiricism, while his repudiation of pure reason contradicts Cartesian rationalism. Therefore, Hume believes to have refuted the two forms of foundationalism popular in the 17th and 18th century.

This was a serious blow to the ambitions of a certain brand of the Enlightenment. It expresses the pessimism with regard to reason that is inherent in Hume's works, an attitude which extends to his political philosophy. Studying this philosophy will engender a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between the Enlightenment and political rationalism. Such an analysis is a necessary addendum to the section on Paine and serves to counter the view that the Enlightenment was a unified Promethean phenomenon. It will instead become clear that what has been dubbed the Enlightenment can be divided into two broad currents which in many ways directly oppose each other. On the one hand there is the radical Enlightenment according to which existing institutions must be rationally justified with reference to first principles. On the other hand, there is a more conservative strain of the Enlightenment which emphasises the limits of reason and strives to repudiate the first principles-approach of the radicals. These currents correspond to two different forms of scepticism: the Promethean *radical Enlightenment* displays scepticism with regard to prejudice, the more conservative *reflective Enlightenment* scepticism with regard to reason. And while the French revolution can be firmly situated in the first camp, the American one was an amalgamation of both traditions.

Hume's political thought is partly a reaction to and a critique of contractarianism, which in the 17th and 18th centuries dominated debates on politics. In Britain, these debates had a considerable practical significance. In general, contractarianism was associated with the more radical supporters of the Whigs, especially of the Exclusion variant. In the wake of the bloody English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution and in light of the fact that Britain was a constitutional monarchy, philosophical opinions could have at least some impact on practical politics, which were marked by a constant, albeit latent, power struggles between crown and parliament, court and country, nobility and commoners.

For the contractarianist camp, organised government derives its legitimacy from a contract signed among the people; individuals band together and voluntarily agree to submit to a single authority because they expect a certain advantage, be it security, private property, or a higher form of political freedom. Whether the contract is viewed as real or merely hypothetical, its function as the normative foundation of all authority implies that governments may rule only in virtue of popular consent. The aim of Hume's political writings is to attack this position, which is associated with thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and later, Rousseau. Hume himself describes the contractarianist doctrine as follows:

> They assert, not only that government in its earliest infancy arose from consent or rather voluntary acquiescence of the people; but also, that, even at present, when it has attained full maturity, it rests on no other foundation. They affirm, that all men are still born equal, and owe allegiance to no prince or government, unless bound by the obligation and sanction of a promise. (Hume 1985: 469)

Such a position is abhorrent to Hume for many reasons, one of them being that it seems to imply a general right to resist a government that doesn't have the people's approval (Hume 1985: 466). In his bid to criticise the notion of popular consent, Hume employs three different arguments. Firstly, he argues that no existing government of his time could be considered as legitimate were we to subscribe to the doctrine of popular consent. Secondly, he presents us with an appeal to *common opinion*, based on meta-ethical ideas about the capacity of reason and experience to discover normative truths. Thirdly, he invokes a principle of utility, claiming that radical political thought serves only to create great harm to society. We will deal with those arguments in turn, showing how they emerge rather naturally from Hume's more abstract philosophical ideas, and how they express epistemic caution, that is, a general mistrust in the usefulness of reason.

It is important to note that epistemic caution is very different from irrationalism. It does not consider reason to be dangerous or useless. Instead, it strives to establish that reason has limits. What is dangerous, therefore, is not reason itself, but those who demand from it that which it can not deliver.

Let us begin with the first argument. Hume observes that in the real world, neither those in power nor those who obey them adhere to the principles presented by contractarianism. Actual princes simply "claim their subjects as their property", seeing no need to justify their role by reference to the supposed agreement of their subjects. Their sentiment is shared by those very subjects, who "acknowledge this right in their prince". Submission to relations of domination and hierarchy is so

common "that most men never make any enquiry about its origin or cause". And in the rare case that someone does ask whether their subordination is legitimate, they are convinced by the fact that it has existed "for several ages, or from time immemorial" (Hume 1985: 469-470).

Hume even concedes that all governments might be traced back to a contract originally – there had to be some point in time where people "voluntarily, for the sake of peace and order, abandoned their native liberty" (Hume 1985: 468). However, after that initial moment, the growth of "regular administration" (ibid.) was a gradual process not based on popular consent, but on practical necessity, on "the present exigencies of the case" (Hume 1985: 496). A very long and winded route of historical contingencies lies between the original contract and the governments of Hume's time. All the kingdoms of his age, Hume openly admits, can be traced back to "usurpation or conquest, or both". In this brutal game of power, there was never "any pretence of a fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people" (Hume 1985: 471). In this sense, Hume agrees with Paine that every country's history is full of deceit and war. The sole reason why this territory belongs to that kingdom, why this family rules and not the other, is a combination of ruthlessness and luck. The most peaceful way for political change that Hume can imagine, royal marriage, is also "not extremely honourable for the people", which has no say in the arrangements of the high nobility (Hume 1985: 471-472). The claim that governments as they really exist derive their power from consent is simply false. Even the most democratic government of the past, ancient Athens, excluded "the women, the slaves, and the strangers" (ibid.).

The defenders of contractarianism could now argue that consent does not have to be given directly. Instead, consent can also be *tacit*. Such a doctrine has been proposed by John Locke, according to whom "every man that hath any possession or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of any government doth hereby give his tacit consent" (Locke 1823: 157). By living in a certain country, people consent to its ruler. This consent may not be directly stated, but it is implied by the act of holding property in said commonwealth. In order to withdraw consent, people simply have to leave the country:

> […] whenever the owner, who has given nothing but such a tacit consent to the government will, by donation, sale or otherwise, quit the said possession, he is at liberty to go and incorporate himself into any other commonwealth, or agree with others to begin a new one in vacuis locis, in any part of the world they can find free and unpossessed […] (Locke 1823: 158)

It seems that as long as there is the possibility to leave, governments derive legitimacy through people's decision to stay. If I choose to live in Britain, I consent to the rule of the British government. Locke develops this doctrine in order to render contractarianism compatible with the legitimacy of the governments of his time.

Hume argues against this idea of tacit consent. His point is simple, but rather persuasive. Staying in a certain place can only be considered tacit consent if we have another option. If it is the act of staying that conveys our satisfaction with the ruling powers, there must at least be the possibility of performing an alternative act. This, however, is not the case. Moving to another country is in fact very difficult, especially in Hume's time. It requires wealth, language skills, and the consent of the new host country. Many people simply lack the means to actually go through with it. Staying in their place of residence is for them not a choice, but a necessity, and can therefore not be viewed as an expression of tacit consent:

> Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artizan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert, that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean, and perish, the moment he leaves her. (Hume 1985: 475)

Another point Hume makes is the simple observation that according to "the common ideals of mankind", princes can lay claim to the loyalty of those who leave their homeland (Hume 1985: 476). This line of reasoning relies on the supreme authority of common opinion, which we will discuss shortly.

With tacit consent ruled out, it becomes clear that contractarianism implies the illegitimacy of all governments that existed in Hume's time. No real country is in fact ruled in accordance with popular consent, so contract theory must surely be wrong! Such a line of argument, however, only works if we accept the additional premise that *some existing governments are legitimate*.

P1: *Contractarianism states that any government that is not based on consent is illegitimate.*
P2: *No really existing government is based on consent.*
P3: *(Some) really existing governments are legitimate.*
C1 (from P1 and P2): *Contractarianism states that all really existing governments are illegitimate.*
C3 (from C1 and P3): *Contractarianism is false.*

Premise **P3** seems to be obvious to Hume. And as we have seen, one of the leading proponents of contractarianism, John Locke, has similar intuitions, motivating him to develop a theory of tacit consent intended to prevent the conclusion **C1**. But still, why can't we simply reject **P3**? Despite Hume's intuitions, there is no logical reason that could prevent us from asserting that contractarianism is indeed true, and that its consequence – that all existing governments (of Hume's time) are tyrannical – is simply to be accepted. Such a view would certainly be espoused not only by Thomas Paine and the revolutionaries of America and France, but also by the vast majority of progressives in the 19th and 20th century. On what grounds can Hume dismiss it? How can he be so sure of the legitimacy of the monarchies of his time that he rejects any argument that yields the contrary result out of hand?

This leads us to Hume's second argument against contractarianism, with is a necessary extension of the first (Brownsey 1978: 136). Having demonstrated that contractarianism threatens all existing governments, Hume now states *that common opinion accepts these governments as perfectly legitimate*. The doctrine of consent, therefore, contradicts a belief that is held by the vast majority of people. But again, this alone does not seem to imply that the doctrine must be flawed. Why should it be impossible for us to conclude that the majority is wrong? Isn't it true that the majority of people have once believed that the sun revolves around the earth?

But for Hume, while "an appeal to general opinion" might be unsuited to questions of "metaphysics, natural philosophy, or astronomy", where reason can provide us with clear answers, it is the only possible standard for moral questions, which include questions of political nature. A theory that leads to conclusions that are "repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind" must therefore be rejected. Since people in fact do believe that they ought to obey (or command) irrespective of any consent given, contractarianist ideas of popular consent are deeply flawed (Hume 1985: 486-487).

Taking a look at Hume's general meta-ethical outlook can shed some light at the reasons that motivate the prominent role that Hume ascribes to common opinion. In the third book of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume asks the question "whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil" (Hume 2003: 239) . Swiftly, he provides us with an answer:

> Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly

> impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (Hume 2003: 239)

As morality pertains to actions, and since actions can only be caused by passions, morality can only function if it can create such passions. Reason, however, can only provide us with what Kant would later call hypothetical imperatives of the form *if you want* **x**, *you should do* **a**. It can reveal matters of fact, and thereby the causal structure of the world (interestingly, Hume denies even this when he talks about the famous problem of induction), but it is unable to set the aims themselves. Those are essentially arational.

The influence of reason can therefore only be indirect. It can show that a certain means we employ is unsuited to fulfil the goals we have set, but it is unable to evaluate the goals in themselves:

> A person may be affected with passion, by supposing a pain or pleasure to lie in an object, which has no tendency to produce either of these sensations, or which produces the contrary to what is imagin'd. A person may also take false measures for the attaining his end, and may retard, by his foolish conduct, instead of forwarding the execution of any project. These false judgments may be thought to affect the passions and actions, which are connected with them, and may be said to render them unreasonable, in a figurative and improper way of speaking. (Hume 2003: 240)

More specifically, moral truths can neither be discovered a priori ("comparing of ideas", "by demonstration"), nor a posteriori ("inferring of matters of fact"). Hume, who believes that a priori reasoning can only establish the four relations of "resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number" (Hume 2003: 242), which seem to be totally unrelated to moral questions, dismisses the idea that we can prove derive moral truths a priori. Regarding the discovery of moral truths a posteriori, Hume claims that they cannot be found in any object. If we perceive a murder, we can describe all of its different physical aspects, but the fact of its wrongness is not revealed to us (Hume 2003: 244). Hume observes that "every system of morality" he has ever met has derived a normative conclusions from descriptive premises. According to the mainstream reading of this passage, Hume views this deduction of an ought from an is as a grave mistake; no observation about matters of fact can imply any moral judgment. This is due to simple logics. If the premises of an argument are purely descriptive, that is if they don't already incorporate a moral claim, then the conclusion must be nonmoral either. Logical inferences can only ever conserve the content of the premises, never increase them. It would violate the very rules of logical reasoning if we were to derive a normative judgment from a set of purely descriptive premises.

The view that Hume points out an irreconcilable is-ought gap is accepted by the majority of scholars. However, it has been disputed by some, among them Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1959), who claims that Hume does *not* reject the deduction of moral claims from descriptive claims. Instead, MacIntyre proposes that "the notion of 'ought' is for Hume only explicable in terms of the notion of a consensus of interest" (MacIntyre 1959 : 457).

Having pointed out that there are opposing views, we will assume for the rest of the discussion the received view, according to which Hume is an ethical *anti-naturalist*, denying the idea that we can derive moral truths from factual observation. Such anti-naturalist views are shared by many other moral philosophers, among them Immanuel Kant. However, as we have seen, Hume is also an *anti-rationalist*, denying that there is any possibility to derive moral claims from demonstrative reason alone.

It is the combination of ethical anti-naturalism and ethical anti-rationalism that yields an ethical anti-foundationalism. Given that all knowledge is derived from experience, and that experience can never justify moral knowledge, there is no moral knowledge in the proper sense. If "the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason" (Hume 1985: 245), then this seems to leave only common opinion as a possible foundation of politics. This view stands in stark contrast to Paine's insistence on natural rights and the idea that certain standards of government are "self-evident" as expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

While Hume's meta-ethical assumptions definitely *motivate* his moral conventionalism, they do not strictly *imply* such a position. If no ought can be derived from an is, then the fact that most (or all) people believe in a certain moral judgment – which is a purely descriptive proposition – can not ground the claim that this judgment is morally justified. Is is understandable why Hume, who has no way to actually *derive* the principles that ground politics, seeks refuge in common opinion. But this approach is not philosophically sound. The most consistent conclusion to be drawn from moral scepticism is simply to refrain from presenting any moral judgment. If reason is unable to discover moral truth, this suggests that ethical quietism might be appropriate.

In fact, many authors have interpreted Hume's ethics as a form of emotivism. Moral claims are not true or false, justified or unjustified, they simply express the passions of whoever utters them. Such a reading is supported by the following passage:

> So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind (Hume 2003: 244)

Emotivism would fit the combination of anti-naturalism and anti-rationalism very nicely, however, it does not allow Hume to *condemn* political radicals because they diverge from common opinion, at least not in any meaningful way. The Scotsman's condemnation would be nothing but an expression of how he *feels* about them.

One could argue that Hume's claim that there are neither rational nor natural foundations for morality contradicts his apparent condemnation of radicalism. If morality itself is unfounded, hw can one argue for the immoral character of radicalism? However we should not forget that this notion of an inconsistency results from the application of a foundationalist standard to an anti-foundationalist theory. Paine, who believes in first principles, employs a "modus ponens" style of thinking, developing abstract truths first and applying them to concrete instances in a way that critics might describe as "mechanical". We cannot expect this style of reasoning from Hume, the anti-foundationalist. He works the other way around, in a "modus tollens" style; theories that bring about counter-intuitive conclusions are faulty. In a clash between an abstract theory and a widely-held belief, Paine would ditch the belief in favour of the theory. Hume however would choose the opposite approach.

Before we continue with the details of Hume's argument, a few more general remarks are necessary. These will serve to put the ideas we have been discussing so far into the context of this thesis. As we have seen, Hume's rejection of contractarianism is based on his assertion that moral values and political principles cannot be derived rationally. The flaws of radical political ideas becomes apparent when we come to understand the limitations of reason. Here, we can see that Hume's political philosophy is based on questions of political epistemology. His criticism of contractarianism is a critique of political rationalism precisely because he attacks the contractarians *as political rationalists*. Conservatism is embraced because it is believed to better correspond the knowledge that we cannot derive moral truths.

Hume's third reason for rejecting contractarianism is more empirical than philosophical. He simply states that a conservative attitude which accepts the ruler's right to rule is empirically beneficial. Similar remarks about the utility of submission are made by Burke. Indeed, the arguments proposed

by all social pessimists can be sorted into two distinct arguments, one moral, the other empirical. Both arguments are based on a cautious view of our epistemic capabilities, but they differ with regard to their nature. As we have seen, the moral argument relies on meta-ethical scepticism. The empirical argument, on the other hand, basically says that any attempt to put into practice the utopian visions of political rationalists would lead to practical failure, to great suffering and social decay.

The differences between republicans and monarchists in the 18th century were not only differences of normative assessment, they also had a descriptive element. While republicans believed that republics would create more wealth, more stability, more opportunity than traditional forms of government, monarchists disagreed. They argued that any attempt to force a republican government onto a formerly monarchist state would lead to disaster – not just moral disaster, but practical disaster.

It is here that we have to deal with Hume's notion of "utility". He does not subscribe to a utilitarian ethics as developed by Bentham and Mill. He never expresses that he believes in consequentialism as the only right way to do ethics, and pleasure as the only goal worth pursuing in its own right. Instead, Hume uses "utility" in a more vague, everyday sense of the word. What has utility is simply that which is good in a pre-philosophical way, that which is, in fact, accepted as good even by the enemies of conservatism.

Regardless of all meta-ethical debates, there clearly is a common ground between most, if not all, adherents of political radicalism and political conservatism. Mass death and starvation are an evil to be avoided. The same is true for war and civil strife. People should live free from corruption. The economy should flourish. Whether we think that these basic requirements stem from our sentiments or our reason might be an interesting theoretical question, but it has no direct practical impact. With regard to a lot of things, monarchists, liberals and socialists want the same things. But they have very different opinions about how to achieve them. In this sense, politics has a strong empirical aspect.

In Hume's political writings, the legitimacy of princely governments is partially derived from the *principle of allegiance*, which is in turn justified with reference to its utility:

> A small degree of experience and observation suffices to teach us, that society cannot possibly be maintained without the authority of magistrates, and that this authority must soon fall into contempt,

> where exact obedience is not payed to it. The observation of these general and obvious interests is the source of all allegiance, and of that moral obligation, which we attribute to it. (Hume 1985: 480)

But even if we accept that some authority is needed for society to function, the question remains "to whom is allegiance due? And who is our lawful sovereign?" (Hume 1985: 481). Hume acknowledges that all inheritance goes back to usurpation, which means that allegiance cannot simply be derived from fair inheritance going back to just acquisition (Hume 1985: 481-482). We should obey simply because everything else would create chaos. Where a monarchy is the established system of government, there is no alternative to it. Switching is simply too costly.

The duty to obey is not unlimited, however. In another essay, called "Of Passive Obedience", Hume deals with the limits of the principle of allegiance. As the principle of obedience is itself introduced to guarantee "public utility", it has its limit where it conflicts with this utility. He argues his point by pointing towards different war crimes, which he views as perfectly justified in view of their pragmatic utility to the warring party. This apparently shows how "Salus populi suprema Lex" (the safety of the people is the supreme law):

> What governor of a town makes any scruple of burning the suburbs, when they facilitate the approaches of the enemy? Or what general abstains from plundering a neutral country, when the necessities of war require it, and he cannot otherwise subsist his army? (Hume 1985: 489)

Therefore, even the principle of allegiance has its limits. If tyranny becomes unbearable, it might be necessary to overthrow the government if no other more peaceful remedy can be found. However, Hume clearly states "that I shall always incline their side, who draw the bond of allegiance very close, and consider an infringement of it, as the last refuge in desperate cases, when the public is in the highest danger, from violence and tyranny" (Hume 1985: 490).

Furthermore, Hume defends this conservative position by pointing towards "the mischiefs of a civil war". Any attempt to topple the government can lead to a brutal conflict which would take many lives. Lastly, Hume is convinced that a rebellious populace will make the government tyrannical in an attempt to stamp out opposition by its own people (Hume 1985: 490). Apparently, it is the duty of the masses to display such submissiveness that the ruling class doesn't even feel the need to build a repressive apparatus.

The result of Hume's deliberations: It would generally be good for everyone if there was general obedience. As this obedience is derived from utility and does not constitute an unbreakable moral duty, it can be waived under conditions of great distress. We should, however, be very cautious.

The challenge we are presented with here is that Hume's reasoning heavily draws upon empirical claims which he doesn't explicitly state. Even most radicals would agree that *ceteris paribus*, a state where the laws are obeyed will create more utility than one where disorder reigns. At the same time, they maintain that a democratic republic where the laws are obeyed will advance the welfare of its citizens much more than an aristocratic monarchy with the same feature, or that a stable socialist state would be better than a stable capitalist one. According to such a logic, a revolution (or reform) that creates some disorder might simply be the necessary path to a better world. The logic of the political radical does not state that order has no value, (or even that revolution and disorder are good *in themselves*), but that they are a *necessary*, albeit *temporary* price one has to pay to secure and advance the very utility that Hume refers to in his argument.

Hume has to assume that the price of civil strife does not justify the gains of revolution. This view can only be based on an assessment of *empirical*, that is *non-moral* facts. Hume must therefore assume that new forms of government such as democracy simply don't work in practice. And indeed, such an attitude is clearly expressed in his opinion of democracy. Any attempt to implement a democratic government would lead to massive failure, to a situation where "wise men" would prefer a strong dictator over the new state of affairs:

> In reality, there is not a more terrible event, than a total dissolution of government, which gives liberty to the multitude, and makes the determination or choice of a new establishment depend upon a number, which nearly approaches to that of the body of the people: For it never comes entirely to the whole body of them. Every wise man, then, wishes to see, at the head of a powerful and obedient army, a general, who may speedily seize the prize, and give to the people a master, which they are so unfit to choose for themselves. (Hume 1985: 472)

Hume does not argue for the specific *advantages* of the present, instead concentrating on the *dangers* of change. And his analysis is not based on a set of concrete arguments about the precise nature of a democratic society, pointing out its flaws in detail. Instead, he assumes that the new form of government would not work. Such an assumption can only be read as the expression of a deeply seated pessimistic attitude about social planning and political epistemology.

In view of Hume's rejection of violent revolution, how is it possible that he inspired American revolutionaries? In England, his influence clearly favoured the enemies of republicanism. Humean Toryism, while being "more superficial than that of a Burke and Bolingbroke", nevertheless "strengthened Tory sentiments about English history for a long time to come" (Robbins 218). But scholars have also discerned that Hume heavily influenced American revolutionaries such as Hamilton, Madison, and Adams. Most of the time, this influence served to support conservative sentiments among the revolutionaries. A Humean study of human nature for example strengthened Adams's and Hamilton's belief that because of the size of the United States, "the American people would have to return to a system of mixed or limited monarchy" (Adair 1957: 348). Because of its moderate nature, Human epistemic caution gave powerful anti-Promethean (and, one could argue, anti-republican) arguments to the Federalist party, who opposed the more Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans in a remake of the English Court-Country debate. The Hamilton-Jefferson debate was therefore expressive of a division between the more left-leaning Prometheans against more conservative epistemic pessimists.

An interesting outlier is James Madison. Madison combined Lockean ideas with a Harrington-style republicanism (Niemer 1954: 47). At the same time, however, he was also influenced by Hume, from whom he took an argument against the Hamilton's and Adams's claim that large states cannot survive as republics (Adair 1957: 348-350). Hume's influence, therefore, was not only beneficial to conservatives.

RADICAL AND REFLECTIVE ENLIGHTENMENT

So what is the connection between the Enlightenment and political rationalism? How does Hume's anti-rationalist criticism of the natural rights based Prometheanism that his contemporaries espoused fit into the narrative of the Enlightenment as the source of revolutionary political rationalism? According to Jonathan Israel, the Enlightenment "attacked and severed the roots of traditional European culture" and "demolished all legitimation of monarchy, aristocracy, women's subordination to men, ecclesiastical authority, and slavery" (Israel 2001: vi). It introduced an attitude of radical doubt with regard to traditional opinion:

> During the later Middle Ages and the early modern age down to around 1650, western civilization was based on a largely shared core of faith, tradition, and authority. By contrast, after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophical reason and

> frequently challenged or replaced by startingly different concepts generated by the New Philosophy and what may still usefully be termed the Scientific Revolution. (Israel 2001: 3-4)

Such an approach, which is "totally incompatible with the fundamentals of traditional authority, thought, and belief" (Israel 2001: 3), sounds very much like the mindset of Paine and the Exclusion Whigs, but not at all like the attitude espoused by Hume. However, Hume is regarded to be an Enlightenment philosopher. This calls into question the idea that "the Enlightenment" is inherently Promethean.

Hume criticises what we have previously identified as the two pillars of Enlightenment political thought; contractarianism and foundationalism. One way one could deal with this problem is to simply exclude him from the Enlightenment. This, however, would be a mistake. Hume is universally accepted as an important member of the Scottish Enlightenment. The questions he asks and the way he deals with them show that he is firmly rooted in the Enlightenment debate. Hume references, discusses, develops, and attacks the ideas of Bacon, Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz.

On the other hand, there is something that those authors have in common, and that differentiates them from Hume: They propose that the ordinary opinions we hold must be doubted, and that they shall only be accepted if a sufficiently strong justification is found. This is what leads them to espouse foundationalism. Bacon and Locke identify the senses as the first source of knowledge, Descartes and Leibnitz on the other hand claim that reliable first principles can be found in pure reason. Hume denies both of those claims, which leads him to the conclusion that our knowledge has no clear foundation, empirical or rational.

From the foundationalist perspective, accepting this would imply that knowledge is impossible. This is why Kant, who accepts Hume's criticism of inductivist empiricism and rationalist dogmatism, nevertheless tried to establish in his transcendental philosophy a new, refined foundationalist system.

However Hume did not want to claim that knowledge is impossible. In a certain sense it is true that "Hume the sceptic, as still depicted in some textbooks, is a myth" (Mossner 1967: 393). To understand why, we have to differentiate between three kinds of scepticism:

Firstly, there is *scepticism with regard to opinion* or methodic doubt. This is the aforementioned attitude of the classical epistemologists of the Enlightenment, whose starting point is radical or methodic doubt. All ordinary beliefs – even such trivial ones such as that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that

there is an external world – require epistemic justification. Any belief for which we cannot provide sufficient reasons must be dismissed. Classically, scepticism with regard to opinion is internalist, allowing only such justifications which are directly accessible to the epistemic subject: sense data and principles of pure reason.

Secondly, there is *scepticism with regard to reason*. It consists of the claim that epistemic justifications of the type demanded by methodic doubt do not exist. Neither sense data nor pure reason, nor any combination of those, are sufficient to justify our beliefs.

Lastly, there is *total scepticism.* The total sceptic denies the possibility of knowledge as such. Accepting both scepticism with regard to opinion and scepticism with regard to reason at the same time implies total scepticism: if we are to dismiss opinions which are not justifiable by sense data and pure reason, and if at the same time nothing is justifiable by those things, then we have to dismiss all opinions.

In other words, one has to reject at least one of the following propositions:

(1) Our substantial beliefs are only warranted if they are derived from basic beliefs
(2) Our substantial beliefs cannot be derived from pure reason, sense data, or any combination of both
(3) Our substantial beliefs are warranted

Those who accept (1) are committed to scepticism with regard to opinion. Those who accept (2) are committed to scepticism with regard to reason. Accepting (1) and (2) at the same time implies the rejection of (3) and thereby total scepticism.

While some (see Garfield 2019, Popkin 1980: 103) have argued that Hume is a total or Pyrrhonian sceptic, this is not the case if we apply the definitions provided. Hume himself states that such a position has never been espoused by anyone:

> Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist. (Hume 2003: 180)

Hume however is a sceptic with regard to reason. In his Treatise, there is a chapter with the same name in which he strives to disprove rationalism. The next chapter, titled *Scepticism With Regard to the*

Senses offers a criticism of empiricism. Together, these chapters amount to a denial of the possibility to justify knowledge rationally.

Combined with scepticism with regard to opinion, such ideas would imply total scepticism. But Hume does not believe that our confidence in our knowledge is unwarranted. The cause of this confidence however is not reason, but custom. This has been noted by Jay Garfield, who explains:

> Here Hume explains why reason itself cannot be the cause of our confidence in reason and also tells what the actual cause of that confidence is – custom […] And this means […] that our confidence in the correctness of even demonstrative reasoning can only be an effect of our previous experience with such reasoning, just as legal arguments acquire weight from precedent, ad just as custom acquires normative force from long use. Therefore, the degree of evidence of the conclusion depends on prior cognitive causes and the customary associations they establish, not on valid argument itself (Garfield 2019: 159).

One should not misread this as meaning that we justify our faith in our ability to reason in an empirical, inductive way. Instead, we form a habit. Contra the sceptics with regard to opinion, habits are for Hume valid causes that can make a belief warranted.

Descartes, Bacon, Locke, and Leibnitz on the other hand are sceptics about opinion and optimists when it comes to reason. Thomas Paine and the authors of both the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* must be added to this list; their talk about natural rights, which are taken to be "self-evident", are incompatible with scepticism with regard to reason.

This analysis of the different kinds of scepticism in the Enlightenment implies that we can differentiate between two schools of thought. These schools cannot be defined as a "French" and a "British" school, for both Bacon and Locke are Englishmen who espouse a view that is much closer to Descartes than to Hume. Instead, we shall call their position the radical Enlightenment. This term shall not be used to denote simply those who went farther, who were most uncompromising in the application of their theories than the more "moderate" Enlightenment thinkers[8]. Neither shall it refer to an "underground Enlightenment" (Israel 2001: v) that stood in contrast to a mainstream

---

[8] According to Israel the most famous Enlightenment philosophers of the later 17th and earlier 18th centuries were "moderates". This is so because they "sought to substantiate and and defend the truth of revealed religion and the principle of a divinely created and ordered universe" (Israel 2001: 15). However this is not a statement about the philosophy itself, but about the personal aims and goals of those who practiced it.

Enlightenment (see Blom 2011). What marks the radical Enlightenment is a mistrust of habit and prejudice, and a high opinion about the powers of reason. It implies scepticism of the first, but not the second type.

Hume's variant of Enlightenment thought has been called the "Sceptical Enlightenment" by Ryu Susato (2015). However, this name obfuscates the fact that both strains of the Enlightenment are sceptical, only the object of their scepticism is different. A more fitting name might be *reflective Enlightenment*. While the radical Enlightenment uses reason to attack prejudice and common opinion, the reflective Enlightenment turns it back on itself. Reason is employed not to disprove ordinary beliefs, but its own ambitions. So while the radical Enlightenment sees reason as the final arbiter of knowledge and morality, the reflective Enlightenment is focused on its limitations.

Viewed from this perspective, it makes sense that the radical Enlightenment is much more predisposed to accept political rationalism. Equally, we can see how those which are sceptical with regard to reason take a more cautious approach.

At the same time it is important to note that the anti-foundationalist reflective Enlightenment is not logically incompatible with political rationalism. While the debate of the 18th century is set up in a way where Promethean foudationalists oppose anti-foundationalist conservatives, this is not directly implied by the concepts themselves. In the rest of the section, we will see that one can be an anti-foundationalist rationalist constructivist. The idea of institutional design is not necessarily dependent on Cartesian-style rationalism. Therefore, a Hume-style attack on foundationalism can not itself suffice to reject Prometheanism.

Max Weber introduced the term purposive rationality (Zweckrationalität). Purposive rationality, which is called functional rationality by Mannheim (Mannheim 1940: 53, 54) and instrumental rationality by Adorno and Horkheimer (see Adorno, Horkheimer 2010 and Horkheimer 1974), is concerned with the correct choice of means to achieve a given end. The suitability of a certain means to achieve a specified end is a descriptive question.

Purposive rationality denotes what Kant calls hypothetical imperatives, which take the form *if you want x, do y*. As we have seen, Hume claimed that this is the only form of rationality available. We can find the correct means to an end, however the ends themselves can never be determined by reason. Only the passions can provide them. As a proponent of the radical Enlightenment, Kant disagrees, claiming that it is possible for categorical imperatives to be discovered by reason.

But contrary to what the debate of the 18th century suggests, those who reject foundationalism, categorical imperatives, and natural rights can still be political rationalists. Rational design requires a certain design goal, but it does not require that this goal is itself derived from first principles. The deep connection between natural rights and institutional design is simply a feature of the intellectual front lines of the 18th century, but not a formally binding philosophical necessity.

In contrast to foundationalist Prometheans such as Paine, who believe that the substantial aims of institutional design are given by reason and nature, the non-foundationalist Promethean would have to argue that while our aims have to be posited by us in a more or less arbitrary fashion, we can still rationally evaluate whether existing institutions fulfil those goals. If they do not, institutional design and social transformation become necessary. Such an approach was taken by Otto Neurath who, who did not believe in first principles, but nevertheless engaged in ambitious projects of institutional design (Neurath 1973: 422-440).

It is important to make this clear, because a full identification of Prometheanism with the doctrine of natural rights and foundationalism would be beneficial neither to Prometheans nor to their critics. The political rationalists themselves would feel compelled to defend a doctrine that is not directly linked to the position that institutional design is possible. The critics of political rationalism would focus their attacks on a trait that is connected to Prometheanism only historically, but not systematically or logically.

What does all of this mean? Hume's first two conservative arguments against the contractarian rationalism of the radical Enlightenment do not attack Prometheanism as such, only a specific version of it. The adherents of popular sovereignty could simply abandon the claim that they realise first principles, and instead argue that their designs provide instrumental solutions to widely-accepted social problems.

The true question is: would the plans of the Prometheans yield the expected results? This leads us to our next section, which will deal with Edmund Burke, the most powerful critic of 18th century political rationalism. Burke is significant because his critique of the revolution is not overly reliant on the identification of political rationalism with first principles and natural rights (even though these tropes appear in his work). His theory of social evolution, which is the core of his anti-revolutionary argument, attacks the core of Prometheanism directly.

EDMUND BURKE: EVOLUTIONARY CONSERVATISM

The French Revolution was widely viewed as a direct expression of radical Enlightenment ideas and Promethean ambitions. It was directly linked to the project of philosophy (Adair 1957: 345). One's position with regard to this event thereby communicated a lot about the philosophical and political views one holds. No wonder, then, that Burke's famous attack against political rationalism can be found in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. When this work was published in 1790, the turbulent times of the *Terreur* were still to come. France was not yet a democratic republic, but a constitutional monarchy. The head of Louis Capet was still firmly attached to his body, and he still wore the crown of France as Louis XVI. Universal suffrage, a central demand of the Jacobins, was not implemented. Only men of property could cast their vote in the elections. France was ruled not by radical democrats and Sans-culottes, but by progressive nobles and moderate liberals.

Burke's criticism of the revolution was therefore not motivated by the wave of moral disgust in the face of the revolutionary violence that swept France in 1793 and 1794. It was not a sudden outburst of emotion, but a deliberate philosophical attack upon the philosophical foundations of the French revolutionary project. Attacking the revolution, Burke attacked Prometheanism and the radical Enlightenment from which it stemmed. The arguments he used differ from those employed by Hume and others insofar as they attack not only the doctrine of natural rights, but also the very idea that institutional design is possible. Reading the *Reflections* is therefore not only essential to understand the debate of the 18th century, it can also tell us a lot about the attitudes and presuppositions that ground conservative beliefs in general and illuminate its relation to epistemic pessimism or caution.

The Reflections begin with a critique of the *London Revolution Society*, a radical group of British intellectuals that had been founded to commemorate the 1688 ("Glorious") revolution. Its members advocated for popular sovereignty and democratic rights, opposed the slave trade, and spread progressive literature. On the 4th of November 1789, the society celebrated its founding and the 101st anniversary of the Glorious Revolution with a great dinner. The keynote speaker was the moral philosopher Richard Price, who delivered a speech titled *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*. Price was famous for his support for the American Revolution and was friends with Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine (Graham 2000: 131). He was a typical proponent of the radical Enlightenment, combining republican tropes with a commitment to contractarianism,

natural rights, and Prometheanism. In his speech, Price defended the principles of the French Revolution, linking them to the events of 1688. Furthermore, he praised the British king as the only rightful monarch in the world, as he is the only one appointed through the will of his people:

> Had I been to address the King on a late occasion, I should have been inclined to […] use some such language as the following: „I rejoice, Sir, in your recovery. I thank God for his goodness to you. I honour you not only as my King, but as almost the only lawful King in the world, because the only one who owes his crown to the choice of his people. […] May you be led to such a just sense of the nature of your situation, and endowed with such wisdom, as shall render your restoration to the government of these kingdoms a blessing to it, and engage you to consider yourself as more properly the Servant than the Sovereign of your people." (Price in Butler 1984: 28)

While the passage appears to be praising the British king, Burke finds that it actually undermines the institution of monarchy. For if Price's argument were to be taken seriously, the legitimacy of hereditary rule would be seriously eroded. The claim that the the king is legitimate because he has been chosen by the people tacitly implies that a king not so chosen does not have legitimate power.

Even if we accept the coronation of William III of Orange during the Glorious Revolution as some sort of legitimation by *the people*, Burke argues, this does not legitimate his successors, who owe their kingship to the hereditary principle, and thus cannot be said to have been chosen. If the grace of the people can't be inherited, Burke argues, then the current British king must be considered an usurper, just as the monarchs of other kingdoms (Burke 2015: 435, 436):

> According to this spiritual doctor of politics, if his Majesty does not owe his crown to the choice of his people, he is no lawful king. Now nothing can be more untrue than that the crown of this kingdom is so held by his Majesty. Therefore, if you follow their rule, the king of Great Britain, who most certainly does not owe his high office to any form of popular election, is in no respect better than the rest of the gang of usurpers […]. (Burke 2015: 435)

This argument mirrors the one that Paine proposed against the idea of hereditary rule. Burke, however, proposes such a line of reasoning not to discredit hereditary rule, but to disprove the very premises of that argument by showing that it leads to a counter-intuitive result. Just as in Hume, we witness the use of a modus tollens-style argument. Burke wants to expose the radical kernel of Price's argument, the purpose of which is to introduce a philosophical principle incompatible with hereditary rule under the guise of loyalty to the British king. Thereby, Price could evade the fury of the monarchists and spread the ideas of the French Revolution at the same time. Once his

"speculative principle" of popular sovereignty had been generally accepted by the public, the radicals could weaponise it against the British monarchy:

> The propagators of this political gospel are in hopes that their abstract principle […] would be overlooked, whilst the king of Great Britain was not affected by it. In the meantime the ears of their congregations would be gradually habituated to it, as if it were a first principle admitted without dispute. For the present it would only operate as a theory, pickled in the preserving juices of pulpit eloquence, and laid by for future use. (Burke 2015: 435)

Burke's defence of the monarch's right to rule does not rely on theological arguments. He does not appeal to a divine right of kings, granted by god himself. Instead, he invokes the authority of *history*. To do this, he provides an interpretation of the Glorious Revolution very different from that of the *London Revolution Society*. For Price and his fellows, the 1688 revolution was justified because it realised a set of universal rights: the right of the people to chose their own governors, to recall them if they behave improperly, and to live under a government by the people (Burke 2015: 436).

Burke vehemently denies that these were the true ideas behind the events of 1688. The deposition of James the II. and VII. and the subsequent coronation of William of Orange was indeed "a small and temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession" (Burke 2015: 438). This deviation, however, was in Burke's eyes just an exception, and should not be misinterpreted as relying on some general principle of politics such as popular sovereignty. Parliament was intent to make the whole affair seem legitimate, choosing someone not too far removed from the bloodline of the English monarchs. Never did they justify their actions through the reference to popular sovereignty, on the contrary, they sweared eternal loyalty to the heirs of William (Burke 2015: 439-440). For Burke, the way the political elites proceeded during the Glorious Revolution demonstrates not a veneration of abstract political rights, but instead the utmost respect for the traditional status quo. Wherever they could, they relied on established customs, trying to deviate as little as possible from what has been considered proper by past generations.

Be that as it may, the coronation of William of Orange clearly breaks the rule of hereditary succession. Isn't that proof enough that the ancient principles of hereditary rule have been set aside? But as Burke argues, breaking the rule in one occasion can be justified *by the wish to preserve that very rule*. James tried to "subvert the Protestant church and state, and their fundamental, unquestionable laws and liberties" (Burke 2015: 447), and therefore, he had to be removed from power. Here, according to Burke, we observe not a principle that allows the ruled to remove their rulers at will or

for minor misconduct, but an act that serves to preserve the social order as such. The exception is just that, an exception, and it should therefore not give rise to a new norm. It does not break the constitution, it is justified precisely because it serves to *preserve* that constitution (Burke 2015: 442). 1688, Burke therefore suggests, was not a progressive revolution, but a conservative one, aimed at the protection of hereditary monarchy and the "healthy habit of the British constitution" (Burke 2015: 444):

> The Revolution was made to preserve our *ancient*, indisputable laws and liberties, and that *ancient* constitution of government, which is our only security for law and liberty. (Burke 2015: 450)

One of Burke's central ideas is that the legitimacy of governments cannot be derived from philosophical principles, be they the divine right of kings or popular sovereignty (Burke 2015: 446). Instead, all the rights that we have, "we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers*" (Burke 2015: 450). It is the venerable age of institutions and customs that makes them legitimate, not their conformity to this or that principle of political philosophy.

This insistence on the role of custom means that Burke opposes the universalism of the Enlightenment. For him, there are no general rights of men, only "the rights of Englishmen", which the English enjoy "as a patrimony derived from their forefathers" (Burke 2015: 451). As different cultures and nations have their own respective history, their members likewise have different rights and obligations. Laws that are universally accepted in one kingdom might be foreign to another. If we want to know what is just in England, we have to consult English history and English traditions, not political theory and moral philosophy:

> You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate especially belonging to the people of this kingdom, without any reference whatsoever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves a unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors. (Burke 2015: 452)

There is no philosophical standard for that which is historical. Rejecting the idea that institutional arrangements have to be measured against a standard set by reason, Burke threatens the bridgehead

from which radical Enlightenment thinkers mount their assault against the old order. This absolves him from having to critique the substance of their arguments, to prove them wrong in detail.

How does Burke justify this rejection of general principles in favour of history? Why, when judging institutions, should we not employ our own ability to think, but defer to age, to habit and precedent? Why are the "rights of Englishmen" valuable, but not the more general "rights of men"? This question leads us to the most important aspect of Burke's work, his political epistemology. It will provide us with a powerful anti-Promethean argument, one that goes beyond the criticism of the foundationalism and first principles approach of the radical Enlightenment and attacks the very core of political rationalism.

Generally, when one wants to argue against one thing and for the other, it is necessary to demonstrate two things. Firstly, one must establish the deficits of the position one wants to attack. Secondly, one has to provide some kind of argument why the option one prefers is superior. Burke, who strives to establish that we should rely on historical precedent instead of rational design, must therefore first devalue political rationalism. Then, he must demonstrate why his own traditionalist heuristic might lead to success. Attacking political rationalism without providing any positive argument for traditionalism would only imply some sort of total political scepticism. On the other hand, good arguments for traditionalism alone cannot convince the proponents of Prometheanism, who could insist that their method is *even better* than Burke's veneration of time-honoured mores. Only by combining an attack on the political rationalism with an argument for the reliability of the traditionalist approach, Burke can provide a death-blow to the political ideas of the French revolution.

We begin by dealing with Burke's argument against the viability of political rationalism. His opposition to it derives from the belief that it presupposes *that we can trust our own thinking*. According to Burke, we can not. The way most Enlightenment philosophers approach politics expresses a speculative hubris which massively overestimates the epistemic resources available to us. Burke's thought is therefore marked by a pronounced mistrust in our abilities to reason that stands in contrast with the Promethean's confidence in their ability to design a new society. In light of our epistemic poverty, we should delegate our decisions about political matters to past generations. We should not trust in "the fallible and feeble contrivances of our reason", but instead strive for "conformity to nature in our artificial institutions" (Burke 2015: 453). Epistemic caution lies at the core of his political philosophy, it is the decisive element that glues his whole intellectual project together:

> We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. (Burke 2015: 500)

Burke denies that the epistemic capabilities of individual human subjects can ever grasp the complexity of the social realm. How much trust we place on our "private stock of reason" in the end determines whether we should embrace or reject the project of radical socio-political reconstruction. If Burke is right and our minds can't be trusted, then it might be a bad idea to change the whole structure of society just because theory suggests so.

Burke expresses his contempt for individual rationality in many creative ways. He complains about the "shallow speculations of the petulant, assuming, short-sighted coxcombs of philosophy" (Burke 469) and decries the "mechanistic philosophy" (Burke 2015: 492) of his age. He condemns the "dogmatism of philosophers" (Burke 2015: 501) who "have no respect for the wisdom of others" and instead lean on "a very full measure of confidence in their own" (Burke 2015: 502). Burke's opposition to the French Revolution is motivated by the belief that it represents the purest expression of political rationalism seen so far, that it is a child of metaphysical speculation. In his opposition to (individualised) rational inquiry and philosophical thinking, Burke even goes so far as to say that intellectual progress in political matters is impossible:

> We know that we made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality; nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law on our part loquacity. (Burke 2015: 499)

So far, we have only dealt with the first half of Burke's argument. In order to derive his final conservative conclusion, Burke must, in addition, defend another thesis. His opposition to the "spirit of innovation" (Burke 452) is accompanied by a firm belief in the inherent goodness of most, if not all, traditional institutions. How can one defend this deep faith in time-honoured mores? Burke believes that traditions and customary institutions embody "wisdom without reflection" (Burke 2015: 452), that is, some form of objective reasonableness which is not derived by individual judgment. He assumes that traditions do not develop randomly, instead following a directed logic, which is conformity to nature. Ancient institutions are "placed in a just correspondence and

symmetry with the order of the world" (Burke 2015: 452), which makes them just and good. Everything "moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression" (Burke 453). This directed historical process creates a reliable social order, and should not be consciously meddled with:

> All your sophisters cannot produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course that we have pursued, who have chosen our nature rather than our speculations, our breasts rather than our innovations, for the great conservatories and magazines of our rights and privileges (Burke 2015: 453).

The defence of the old order does not only rely on the denigration of critical reflection, but equally so on the defence of tradition. This world view assumes that customs and institutions develop through a slow *evolutionary* process, which guarantees gradual improvement over time. It would be futile to try to reconstruct the experience that has, over the ages, calcified into rules and values, customs and institutions. We might not be able to deduce why hereditary monarchy is an appropriate system of government, but it has proven to be such through its success in history. A reliable evolutionary process has provided us with the status quo, so it must be just. The rights and customs we have now express the experience of hundreds of years, and should not be discarded.

The Burkian idea that institutions have to be regarded as the manifestation of past generations' experience is borrowed from the British common law tradition. Burke owes much to the medieval lawyer John Fortescue and to his early modern successor Edward Coke. Those two great jurists of England and proponents of common law espoused a traditionalist world-view based on the idea that custom is perfected by "constantly being subjected to the test of experience" (Pocock 1960: 132). The law originates not from theoretical principles, but from practice. Reducing it to any set of general or first principles is considered to be futile. The only reason we can give for a certain law is that it has survived the test of time, all the while being perfected by the experience of generations. This outlook was the essence of a debate between Thomas Hobbes and Matthew Hale. While the former argued for the use of "natural reason", the latter rejected this proposition, pointing to the complexity of moral and political questions. Only practice can decide how laws shall be written. As we cannot reconstruct which practical concerns inspired the introduction of a certain law, we should not criticise it on the grounds of reason. The fact that the law still exists shows that it has been successful in the past (Pocock 1960: 133-135).

Burke adopts the argumentation style of the common law tradition and expands its scope. Not only laws, but *all* social conditions must be regarded as the result of an evolutionary development. All the institutions that radical Enlightenment thinkers such as Paine and Price criticise have been subjected to a centuries-long process of trial and error. How can those "sophisters" believe that their philosophical analysis is more trustworthy than the verdict of history? Why should we believe in the arguments proposed by a few learned men, and not in the cumulative experience of past generations?

Burke's traditionalism is enforced by a pincer movement. On the one hand, he attacks the faculties of reason, casting doubt on our ability to properly understand the status quo and devise workable alternatives. On the other hand, he tries to feed our reverence for ancient institutions by providing us with an evolutionary account of their emergence. Together, those arguments imply a strong case against political rationalism.

Burke's argument can be employed against any kind of proposal that strives to change the status quo in a significant way. Whether progressives want to abolish gender roles, allow for increased immigration, or implement more direct forms of democracy, the conservative has precedent on her side. No matter how elaborate the argument for change might be, it is still based on *theory*, on the contents of our minds, on our abilities to conceptualise the world. Therefore, the progressive is always subject to the charge of speculative hubris. Better keep things as they are, tried and tested.

THE DEBATE OF THE 18TH CENTURY

The 18th century debate on political rationalism is a child of both the philosophy and the revolutionary movements of the age. In this chapter, we have seen how the idea of a rationally planned society came into existence and how it influenced practical politics.

Intellectually, Prometheanism resulted from the critical ideas of what we have dubbed the radical Enlightenment. This current of thought is marked by a scepticism with regard to opinion that was introduced to European philosophy by the empiricist Francis Bacon and the rationalist René Descartes. In his *Novum Organon*, Bacon claims to have developed a "new and certain pathway" to knowledge, which accepts sense experience as the foundation on which all knowledge rests. His work is directed against all received knowledge and prejudice, which can be traced back to "idols" or

wrongful ways of thinking. In the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes develops a similar world view. Just as Bacon, he proposes radical doubt and a foundationalist epistemic method that aims at the justification of certain knowledge. In contrast to his predecessor, however, Descartes was a rationalist. Cartesianism became extremely influential on France, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Italy. It was perceived as an attack on all preconceived opinions of the age and was often espoused by bourgeois elements struggling with the conservative nobility and the Church (Israel : 21-58).

Scepticism with regard to opinion thus created a universal need for justification which soon began to sap the legitimacy of existing political and social institutions. This became especially apparent during and shortly after the English Civil War, when so-called Exclusion Whigs such as John Locke and Algernon Sidney proposed a world view based on radical Enlightenment ideas, classical republicanism, and the idea of natural right. This liberal-republican synthesis, which we have studied more closely in the works of Thomas Paine, soon became the standard world view of those who opposed the old order.

At the same time, the Enlightenment created a reflective branch, which opposed both the natural rights based approach of the radicals and the divine rights ideology of the reactionaries, instead focusing on the limitations of reason. While this perspective often remained faithful to many of the republican commitments that were so popular during the Enlightenment, it aimed to moderate the Promethean ambitions of the Exclusion Whigs. As we have seen with David Hume, the proponents of the reflective Enlightenment inspired both the enemies and the partisans of the revolution.

Lastly, there was a current which was deeply conservative and which opposed revolutionary movements in favour of the established order. The most prominent member of this school is Edmund Burke, who developed a powerful critique of political rationalism.

Apart from these insights into the history of philosophy and the complex connection between the Enlightenment and political rationalism, a certain anti-Promethean argument has been rebutted. Hume points to our supposed inability to derive first principles of moral philosophy, which are taken to invalidate the assumption that society can be rationally constructed. As we have seen, it does not matter whether we agree with the notion that ethics can provide rational justifications. First principles of moral philosophy are not a necessary requirement for political rationalism, which can simply opt to formulate hypothetical instead of categorical imperatives.

Burke's evolutionary argument, on the other hand, still stands. In the next chapter, we will further analyse this point, examining it in a more modern form, the one proposed by one of the 20th century's most influential political thinkers: F. A. Hayek.

IV

Hayek and the Theory of Social Evolution

RATIONALIST CONSTRUCTIVISM

Friedrich August von Hayek is one of the most important theorists of economic liberalism and a prominent critic of socialism and Keynesianism alike. His polemics against economic planning and his staunch defence of the market have inspired the right to take up the fight against government interventionism. However, his critique of socialism was never restricted to economic arguments. Instead, Hayek proposed a potent and multi-faceted critique of political rationalism. In view of his significant theoretical and practical impact, any analysis of political epistemology that does not deal with Hayek must be considered incomplete.

One of the most striking things about Hayek's works is how clearly he opposes Prometheanism. A hostile attitude towards those who strive to plan society in accordance with scientific reason underlies every aspect of his thought, and determines the conclusions that he draws when discussing the practical questions that a political philosopher is bound to deal with. In this sense, epistemic caution as the foundation for Hayek's political thought. Far more than any observation pertaining the specifics of the economy, the legal system, or constitutional theory, Hayekian opposition to political rationalism is informed and shaped by a general attitude that closely resembles the world view proposed by Edmund Burke one and a half century earlier.

According to Hayek, our time is marked by the antagonism of two distinct worldviews, based on two different philosophical systems, each of which corresponds to a specific approach to politics, economy, and society. On the one hand, there is "constructivist rationalism", claiming that we can and should deliberately "design the institutions of society and culture" in accordance with our interests (Hayek 1982: 17). Hayek views this "French" perspective, which he associates with Cartesian philosophy, scientism, and socialism, as a danger to liberty which can critically undermine the achievements of the "Great Society" if left unchecked. Opposing constructivist rationalism, there is another world view, a perspective on society that Hayek himself espouses, described variably as "true individualism" (Hayek 1948 : 6), "the evolutionary approach" (Hayek 1982: 21), or simply the "British tradition" – an attitude that is deeply skeptical with regard to our ability to consciously intervene in our social environment, instead trusting in the virtues of tradition and habit. The rejection of conscious intervention stems from the insight that institutions and customs develop in an evolutionary manner:

> The other view, which has slowly and gradually advanced since antiquity but for a time was almost entirely overwhelmed by the more glamorous constructivist view, was that that orderliness of society

> which greatly increased the effectiveness of individual action was not due solely to institutions and practices which had been invented or designed for that purpose, but was largely due to a process described at first as 'growth' and later as 'evolution', a process in which practices which had first been adopted for other reasons, or even purely accidentally, were preserved because they enabled the group in which they had arisen to prevail over others. (Hayek 1978: 56)

Hayek devotes a considerable amount of space to defending this world view against rationalist constructivism. To a certain extent, concrete political and economic questions are pushed to the background; again and again, the supreme importance of the fundamental contrast between "French" rationalism and British liberalism, which "permeates all social thought" (Hayek 1948 : 11), is emphasised.

In Hayek's work, there is no unified terminology when it comes to the description of both positions. Sometimes, he speaks of two forms of individualism, the "true, antirationalistic" variant and the "false, rationalistic" one (Hayek 1948 : 11). In another passage, he writes about two traditions in the theory of liberty, one of which is "speculative and rationalistic", "aiming at the construction of a utopia", while the other one, the one that Hayek prefers, is "empirical and unsystematic" and trusts in "traditions and institutions which had spontaneously grown up" (Hayek 1978: 54). Even though the terminology and the angle from which the phenomenon is approached changes, the idea of two mutually opposed world views, one of which is Promethean and the other one Social Pessimist, is a constant in Hayek's work.

Firstly, we will deal with Hayek's description of the origins of the "rationalistic" perspective. Then, we will for the sake of conceptual clarity differentiate between a descriptive and normative form of constructivism. Afterwards, we will discuss Hayek's methodological arguments against political rationalism. The next section will describe the anti-rationalist view that Hayek proposes as an alternative. In this context, the focus will be on the notion of *cultural group selection*. We will critically assess the question whether cultural group selection can provide us with good reasons for rejecting political rationalism. Finally, we will discuss an alternative view about the nature of social evolution, David Steele's concept of trial-and-error theory.

THE ORIGIN OF RATIONALIST CONSTRUCTIVISM

Hayek is opposed to a position that he variably describes as "false individualism" (IEO 4), "super-rationalism" (Hayek 1952: 90), "rationalist constructivism" (Hayek 1982: 17), or "design theory" (Hayek 1978: 59). All of these different terms refer to the same phenomenon, which is described as a coherent, albeit false, world view. This world view is marked by a set of interrelated ideas, and results in a certain kind of politics. The core tenet of such a rationalist constructivism is the idea that humankind can and must consciously design the social environment, planning and constructing all aspects of life in a deliberate manner guided by science. Institutions can be improved in accordance with reason, by applying the latest insights to the proper construction of the social. In Hayek's own words, the design theorist "holds that human institutions will serve human purposes only if they have been deliberately designed for these purposes" and that we "should so re-design society and its institutions that all our actions will be wholly guided by known purposes" (Hayek 1982: 8, 9).

Rationalist constructivism is described as the intellectual foundation of the French Revolution (Hayek 1982: 53, Hayek 1982 vol. II: 151) and socialism (Hayek 1982: 6, 108). Just as it was in the 18th century, the philosophical debate on political epistemology is mapped onto the more concrete political opposition between left and right. For Hayek, political rationalism is at the very core of socialism, which aims for "the organisation of society as a whole" (Hayek 1982: 53). From being an obscure theoretical position, design theory is therefore credited with having informed the most influential radical political movement of the modern era.

When it comes to the causes of rationalist constructivism, Hayek reiterates many of the staple claims we have already discussed in the last two chapters. For Hayek, political rationalism is a direct result of both the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the practical success of the natural sciences. The theoretical premises of the *Age of Reason* and the scientism that emerged out of the scientific revolution had created the epistemological groundwork for super-rationalist Prometheanism, and thereby paved the "road to serfdom".

Cartesian rationalism, which casts doubt upon all customary arrangements and asks us to put everything before the tribunal of reason is viewed by Hayek as a direct cause of rationalist constructivism. "The 'radical doubt' which made [Descartes] refuse to accept anything as true which could not be logically derived from explicit premises" served to invalidate "all those rules of conduct

which could not be justified in this manner, thereby undermining people's belief in the institutions and customs that were formed by social evolution" (Hayek 1982: 10). The belief that institutions should be consciously planned, that it is expedient to re-model our social environment is a consequence of the Cartesian world view, which likewise presupposes a clear and known purpose (truth) and then proceeds to eliminate everything that does not correspond to this goal.

The philosophical idea of radical doubt alone did not cause the rise of rationalist constructivism, for the "super-rationalist" world view also depends on a great deal of confidence in the practical abilities of reason. The purely abstract demand to cast doubt upon everything that cannot be justified needs to be augmented by a strong belief in the human ability to control and shape the social environment. Depending on such a Promethean boldness, the radical political aspirations of the Cartesian Enlightenment have been aided by the successes of the natural sciences. The scientific discoveries and technological advances of the modern period, allowing humans to do things which were previously thought to be impossible, are credited with a profound impact on the mindset of the general public. With every new victory of science over nature, the belief in the power of reason was strengthened. Nature could be predicted and analysed, and the resulting knowledge could be used to control it. These practical successes further legitimised the Cartesian project of the "French Enlightenment", which "was characterised by a general enthusiasm for the natural sciences" (Hayek 1952: 105).

It would not take long for this confidence in the powers of reason to spill over to the social sciences. The "extraordinary fascination" that the victories of the natural sciences exercised on social scientists in turn changed their mindset and approach. If we follow Hayek, this had two important effects. On the one hand, it created in social scientists a desire to emulate the "special rigorousness and certainty" of the natural sciences, and thereby led to the "tyranny" of their positivistic methods over all other sciences (Hayek 1952: 13, 14). Secondly, by observing the successes of the natural scientists, those who studied society came to believe that they could be equally successful. They developed a Promethean belief in their ability to understand and purposefully re-engineer institutions. Thus, the supposed limitations of reason were forgotten:

> The chief reason why modern man has become so unwilling to admit that the constitutional limitations on his knowledge form a permanent barrier to the possibility of a rational construction of the whole of society is his unbounded confidence in the powers of science. (Hayek 1982: 15)

The "Cartesian or rationalistic" world view of the constructivist, the "cult of Newton" (Hayek 1952: 105) is inherently linked to such an "exaggerated belief in the powers of individual reason" (Hayek 1948 : 8-9). Considering themselves to be "engineers to social problems", the adherents of such "'design' theories of social institutions" believe that social problems can be easily solved if the methods of science are applied to them. Subscribing to "flattering assumptions about the unlimited powers of human reason" they created a project "aiming at the construction of a utopia" (Hayek 1978: 54, 55). It is of such supposed over-confidence that Hayek warns us, insisting that we should renounce pure reason and recover some of our lost trust in tradition:

> If the Enlightenment has discovered that the role assigned to human reason in intelligent construction had been too small in the past, we are discovering that the task which our age is assigning to the rational construction of new institutions is far too big. What the age of rationalism - and modern positivism - has taught us to regard as senseless and meaningless formations due to accident or human caprice, turn out in many instances to be the foundations on which our capacity for rational thought rests. Man is not and never will be the master of his fate: his very reason always progresses by leading him into the unknown and unforeseen where he learns new things. (Hayek 1982 vol III: 176)

As we can see, Hayek's anti-Prometheanism is expressive of the general narrative that we have encountered multiple times so far. "Left-wing" or "progressive" political projects – the French Revolution, atheism, the socialist movement – are viewed as the practical consequence of a more general "rationalist constructivist" or Promethean attitude, which is itself a result of Cartesian doubt and scientific success. It is rejected as an expression of the "hubris of reason" (Hayek 1982: 33). The conservative critique is an exercise in a pessimistic political epistemology. It is therefore, in its essence, a critique of reason's ability to understand and shape the social world.

DESCRIPTIVE AND NORMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to Hayek, the rationalist constructivist believes "that the fact that an institution exists is evidence for it having been created for a purpose" (Hayek 1982: 8), that "everything which man achieves is the direct result of, and therefore subject to, the control of individual reason" (Hayek 1948: 8). I will call this position *descriptive constructivism*. The descriptive constructivist is committed to the view that all institutions are, in fact, products of deliberate design. This means that if something exists, it has been created by someone to do something. In the world of the descriptive constructivist, undesigned institutions do not exist.

But Hayek ascribes to the rationalist constructivists not only this belief, but also "contempt for anything which has not been consciously designed by [reason] or is not fully intelligible by it" (Hayek 1948 : 8). Political rationalists aim to create a world in which all institutions are the products of deliberate design. This is what I call *normative constructivism*. It does not refer to the status of existing institutions, but to the nature of optimal institutions. Good institutions are planned institutions.

Hayek does not differentiate between descriptive and normative constructivism. He describes rationalist constructivism as a "conception which assumes that all social institutions are, and ought to be, the product of deliberate design" (Hayek 1982: 5). This means that it incorporates both the descriptive claim that institutions *are* designed and the normative claim that they *ought to* be designed.

The idea that descriptive and normative constructivism go hand in hand has some initial plausibility because both views presuppose that *planning is possible*, something Hayek wants to deny. However a closer look reveals they are actually incompatible. Normative constructivism is by its very nature a project to be realised, a demand to be fulfilled. Demanding something does only make sense if that which is demanded is not yet realised. One can only advocate for the abolition of all unplanned institutions if such institutions exist. But descriptive constructivism claims that this is not the case. Hayek's political rationalist opposes unplanned institutions while at the same time believing that no such institutions exist.

One can only be one of the two. Being a normative constructivist who advocates for the replacement of unplanned institutions by deliberately designed ones only makes sense if one believes that the former exist. Being a descriptive constructivist, on the other hand, makes normative constructivism superfluous.

In *Individualism: True and False* Hayek quotes Descartes as an example for rationalist constructivism. Descartes claims that "the past pre-eminence of Sparta was due […] to the circumstance that, originated by a single individual, they all tended to a single end" (Hayek 1948 : 10), showcasing that he believed that some societies are more thoroughly planned than other. His point is precisely that the more planned ones tend to be better. Sparta is used as a contrast to less well-designed social orders. Descartes, the archetypical rationalist constructivist, did therefore not believe in descriptive constructivism.

What about Marxism, which Hayek regards as the most radical expression of rationalist constructivism? According to historical materialism, the theory of history that Marx proposes, the development of society is driven by advances in productive technology. As the so-called *productive forces* develop and manufacturing becomes more efficient, the relations of production (property relations, classes and so on) change accordingly:

> Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist. (Marx 2009: Chapter 2)

More efficient production methods bring about appropriate property relations and classes, which in turn leads to different political structures and ideas. Capitalism developed because of advances that were made during the feudal period. Within this framework, it is neither the feudal nobles nor the capitalists who have designed the capitalist order. Instead, this order has developed organically. Those who fought for it in the revolutions of the 18th and 19th had no idea about the consequences of their deeds. They did not design a new order, instead they identified with the characters of long lost ages:

> And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language. (Marx 2006: Chapter 1)

Marxism does not subscribe to descriptive constructivism. It does not claim that the society we inhabit is the product of design. Even the overcoming of this society is, at least partly, a spontaneous process. The Marxist theory of class struggle postulates that a conflict between those who have to sell their labour power (proletarians) and those who own the means of production (bourgeois) emerges naturally out of the objective conditions of the capitalist economy:

> The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. (Marx 2004b)

Disputes over wages and working hours lead to localised resistance. This resistance is at first "carried on by individual labourers", but soon people unite, and the whole "workpeople of a factory" strike

together. If this class struggle reaches a certain stage, "the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois". If the unions are successful, they can improve the standard of living, which will compel more workers to join them. According to Marx, the main result of successful strikes lies "not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers" (Marx 2004b).

By developing technology and increasing the numbers of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie has at the same time "forged the weapons that bring death to itself", and "called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons — the modern working class — the proletarians" (Marx 2004b). In Classical Marxism, the revolution does not result from planning, it is more or less spontaneous effect. This is clearly expressed by Rosa Luxemburg, who, when commenting the Russian mass strikes of 1905, said that "there was no predetermined plan, no organised action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep pace with the spontaneous risings of the masses" (Luxemburg 2022: Chapter 3). The "sudden general rising of the proletariat" was caused not by party slogans or organising committees, but by the objective conditions in Russia (ibid.).

While the revolution itself is unplanned, the society that Marxists want to establish is itself a rational construction. A recurring thought in Marxism is the opposition between blind forces (spontaneous forces) and rational planning in human history, where the victory of reason/consciousness is viewed as progress. For Marx, the first requirement of freedom "can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature" (Marx 2010: Chapter 48). However, after this victory over nature, society itself must become an object of planning. Trotsky, who likewise believed that human history "may be summarised as a succession of victories of consciousness over blind forces", states that bourgeois democracy "leaves the blind play of forces in the social relations of men untouched" (Trotsky 1932: 871-872). He praises the Russian Revolution precisely because it intended to "bring aim and plan into the very basis of society, where up to now only accumulated consequences have reigned" (ibid.).

Descriptive constructivism is espoused by neither Descartes nor Marx, which are, according to Hayek, super-rationalists par excellence. The core of Prometheanism is *normative* constructivism, the idea that society *ought to be* rationally planned, not descriptive rationalism, which denies the existence of undesigned institutions and thereby the necessity of normative constructivism. Whatever we can say about the super-rationalist camp, its strongest proponents are not those who deny the existence

of unplanned and spontaneous processes in history, but those who assert that humanity can do better by designing institutions in a deliberate manner.

METHODOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Hayek ascribes to political rationalists the descriptive thesis that all institutions are in fact the product of deliberate design (Hayek 1982: 5). We can see that this claim is wrong. Rationalist constructivists do not in fact subscribe to such a doctrine because it would render their professed aims irrelevant. However, this is rather peripheral to Hayek's critique of rationalist constructivism. In the next two sections, we will deal with two of the stronger arguments he leverages against large-scale institutional planning. One of them is the methodological challenges that constructivism poses. The other one is the observation that a rationalist mindset tends to undermine tradition, which is in Hayek's view valuable. This argument paves the way for a discussion of the central conservative idea in Hayek: that of social evolution. This concept of society as a spontaneously growing entity which develops in an evolutionary fashion will be discussed in the next section.

We begin with the argument from limited knowledge. That Hayek employs such an argument again shows that anti-Promethean attitudes are grounded in what Popper calls "epistemological pessimism" (Popper 1962: 6). Hayek is a perfect example for this line of thought. Constructivists believe that "man's reason alone should enable him to construct society anew" (Hayek 1982: 10), but they ignore the epistemic challenges that such a view entails. Large-scale institutional planning as demanded by the project of political rationalism simply overstretches our cognitive abilities. The social world is too complex to be deliberately designed. The limitations of our knowledge form a "permanent barrier to the possibility of a rational construction of the whole of society" (Hayek 1982: 15).

Science, according to Hayek, might discover the laws of nature, but it can never know particular facts. Physicists may know how gravity works, but they do not know the location and mass of every particular object that is affected by gravity. So even if it were possible to know "the general character of some phenomena" in society, we do not have access to "the particular facts" needed in order to acquire "the power of predicting specific events" (Hayek 1982: 15). "Neither science nor any known technique" is capable to "overcome the fact that no mind, and therefore also no deliberately directed action, can take account of all the particular facts". Science therefore always "encounters the same

barrier of factual ignorance when it comes to apply its theories to very complex phenomena" (Hayek 1982: 16).

This argument against rationalist constructivism assumes that institutional design requires the prediction of particular events. This is not the case. The French revolutionaries believed that they had to replace the monarchy with a more democratic system. Their belief in democracy was justified with reference to a set of general ideas about the nature of power. Rousseau assumed, for example, that people will only deliver good decisions when they think about abstract laws instead of particular applications – an idea incidentally shared by Hayek – and designed his ideal constitution in view of this assumption. The justification of democracy was likewise derived from general theories about the nature of politics and society. It did not need to take particular facts into account. The political rationalist can therefore concede to Hayek that it is impossible to know all or even "most" (whatever that means) particular facts about society. Rational design is still possible on the basis of general theories, which are provided by disciplines such as sociology, political science and economics. As a simple example, the general idea that corruption is, in part, caused by low freedom of press can give us insights on how to design a system that minimises corrupt behaviour.

But Hayek provides a more far-reaching methodological argument against "super-rationalism", one that severely restricts the possibility of those general theories of the social on which the rationalist must rely. This argument is most coherently formulated in Hayek's essay *Scientism and the Study of Society*. Scientism is here defined as the idea that the study of society shall emulate the methods of the natural sciences (Hayek 1952: 13, 14). It is important to note that in contrast to irrationalists like Ludwig Klages, Hayek does not reject the methods of natural science. These methods are very useful "in their proper sphere" (Hayek 1952: 15). They only become problematic when copied by those who strive to explain social or political phenomena.

Hayek's critique of scientism reminds us of Dilthey's ideas. Both authors describe the method of the natural sciences as one which seeks to invent abstract theoretical models in order to explain empirical observations. Science tries to "revise and reconstruct the concepts formed from ordinary experience on the basis of a systematic testing of the phenomena, so as to be better able to recognise the particular as an instance of a general rule" (Hayek 1952: 18). This external view on the object implies a "tendency to abandon all anthropomorphic elements" of explanation (ibid.). In Dilthey's words, science is not trying to *understand*, only to *predict* and *explain*. Over time, the "innate classification of external stimuli" is replaced by "a new classification based on consciously established relations between classes of events" (Hayek 1952: 20). Science is interested not in "our

given concepts", instead it wants to "remodel" and "replace" those by more abstract ideas (Hayek 1952: 23).

> The new world which man thus creates in his mind, and which consists entirely of entities which cannot be perceived by our senses, is yet in a definite way related to the world of our senses. It serves, indeed, to explain the world of our senses. The world of Science might in fact be described as no more than a set of rules which enables us to trace the connections between different complexes of sense perceptions. (Hayek 1952: 20)

To summarise, natural science is characterised by three things. Firstly, the scientist approaches the world from an *outside perspective*. Secondly, the scientists creates *abstract theoretical model*s (Dilthey's "auxiliary constructs"). Thirdly, the scientists strives to *explain and predict empirical phenomena*.

Such a method, Hayek claims, is unsuited to the study of society. The social sciences deal not with inanimate objects, but with people and their relations to each other and their environment. Therefore, they can't simply copy the methods of the natural sciences (Hayek 1952: 25). To be a social scientist means to be "concerned with man's conscious or reflected action", to make use of a "subjective" approach that differs considerably from the "objective" one espoused by the natural sciences (Hayek 1952: 28). This is the case because it is "impossible to explain or understand human action" without applying our knowledge of the thoughts and reasons that drive people. One is forced to take people's thoughts and intentions seriously, which is incompatible with the view from the outside demanded by scientism (Hayek 1952: 26).

Both Dilthey and Hayek argue that when it comes to humans, we do not deal with objects that are fundamentally *foreign* to us. Human thoughts are accessible in a way natural phenomena are not. Scientism assumes that we have no direct connection with the object, that it it is accessible to us only indirectly, through sense experience. This suggests that we are forced to generate speculative or abstract models which simulate what is behind our experience. But when it comes to humans we are able to empathetically understand the ideas and thoughts which motivate them, rendering the positivistic approach obsolete (Hayek 1952: 34).

Hayek portrays the positivist as an eliminativist who strives to rid their language from all subjective terms. He argues that this is impossible to fulfil because even the most basic concepts of the social sciences transcend the physical and talk about people's subjective attitudes:

> That the objects of economic activity cannot be defined in objective terms, but only with reference to a human purpose goes without saying. Neither a "commodity" or an "economic good," nor "food" or "money," can be defined in physical terms but only in terms of views people hold about things. (Hayek 1952: 31)

It should firstly be noted that some social phenomena are indeed objective in nature, which means that we do not need subjective terms to describe and analyse them. There are patterns in human and institutional behaviour discernible even for a hypothetical alien observer who doesn't understand the most basic facts about our psychology. Examples could be the observation that droughts tend to engender violence, or the idea that certain nodes of transportation (the harbour of Rotterdam, the strait of Hormuz) are of vital economic importance. These are facts about society, and they can be arrived at through observation from the outside. Hayek would argue that even recognising and describing something as a "harbour" presupposes reference to people's belief (see Hayek 1952: 27). However, this is not the case. We can identify a so-called "ant highway" without any understanding of the subjective beliefs that ants hold. It is equally possible to grasp that arteries act as transport ways for blood, even though blood cells lack anything me might call beliefs. Under some circumstances, it might be beneficial to ignore the subjective side and focus on objective facts only. Subjective interpretation might mask what is actually happening.

But Hayek is of course right to assume that assumptions about the contents of other people's beliefs are vital to a large proportion of our knowledge about social processes. Pure subjectivism is unable to identify certain aspects of the social world, but the same is of course true for eliminativism. To exclude all references to subjective belief from the social sciences would mean to severely limit the scope of what we can know. However, as John O'Neill (2006) argues, Hayek mischaracterises the position of the "positivists" he wants to attack. Neurath did not want to "reduce 'social' or 'mental' vocabulary to that of physics" (O'Neill 2006: 60). Instead, he claims that it must be possible to translate such vocabulary to particular, observable events (ibid.). Translation is not reduction. The subjective theory language of the social sciences is not replaced by a purely physical one, but simply tested against observable reality.

As we have already seen in the discussion of Dilthey, the empathetic methods that need to be used to arrive at knowledge of subjective opinion will only provide us with hypotheses. In order to validate those, we must test them empirically, which requires translation. Assumptions about the subjective are only vindicated if they allow us to predict and explain objective or inter-subjective facts.

The scientific method must treat assumptions about inner life just as it treats all other theoretical speculations. Therefore, we can claim that the basic methodology is similar across all domains. Specific methods, on the other hand, do differ; and not just between "the social sciences" and "the natural sciences", but even between different disciplines within one of those categories. The concrete methods of physics are not those of evolutionary biology. The methods of historians do not correspond to those used by sociologists. All, however, must provide models which are in some way corroborated by experience. While every science is different, there is a shared methodological basis. The fundamental differences between natural science and social science are smaller than Hayek and Dilthey make them appear while the similarities are more significant than they admit. The existence of methods which are specific to certain sciences does not threaten the general unity of science.

Lastly, none of Hayek's assertions about the supposed differences between objective natural sciences and subjective social sciences renders the project of rationalist constructivism untenable. Social scientists who consider subjective phenomena might still produce viable theories which can be used to predict the behaviour of institutions, and thereby serve as a basis for the construction of good institutions.

The reply we can give to Hayek's argument about the subjective character of the social sciences is therefore threefold. Firstly, we can deny that social phenomena can only be understood through acknowledging subjective facts. Some social phenomena could be explained through a purely objective approach, that is one which does not speak about attitudes and intentions. Secondly, theories which speak about subjective facts remain ordinary theories and still require empirical corroboration. This is possible through translation. Lastly, even if subjective and objective science were fundamentally different on a methodological level, this does not imply that Prometheanism is impossible. If the subjective sciences generate any kind of knowledge, then this knowledge can be used for institutional design.

We can conclude, then, that both of Hayek's arguments for the impossibility of rationalist constructivism fail. It is neither the case that political rationalism requires knowledge of particular facts, nor is it true that the social sciences cannot produce the kind of knowledge that is used to design institutions. Hayek's methodological arguments do not prove the impossibility of rationalist design in the social order.

Prometheanism still poses significant epistemic challenges. In Chapter I, we have have seen that institutional design requires us to engage in *social mapping*, *institutional design*, and then *social transformation*. All of those present us with hard tasks. In the first phase, we need to develop a sufficiently powerful model of the workings of society, a theory of the social order. In the second phase, institutional design, this knowledge is used to devise an alternative to the present. Lastly, the design has to be implemented, and the strategy of implementation is again dependent on our ability to develop coherent theoretical tools.

So while Hayek's two arguments for the impossibility of rationalist constructivism fail, the difficulties of such an ambitious project remain in place. What remains of Hayek's epistemological pessimism is just that, a generally pessimistic intuition about the powers of human reason vis-a-vis the complexity of the social world. But even if the powers of reason are indeed limited, we would have no choice but to rely on them if it there is no alternative force that could lead to good institutions. As we will see in the next section, Hayek thinks that such a force exists: tradition.

TRADITIONALISM AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Hayek claims that rationalist constructivism causes a dangerous "contempt for tradition, custom, and history in general" (Hayek 1982: 10). This tendency threatens to undermine the foundations upon which society rests. Essentially, the abandonment of tradition would lead to the destruction of the most valuable institutions we have. Hayek therefore does not only undermine our faith in reason, he also claims that there is a more trustworthy source of good social practices.

In order to counter the destructive effects of a "speculative and rationalistic" (Hayek 1978: 54) philosophy, Hayek claims, we must embrace an "antirationalist, evolutionary" (Hayek 1978: 63) world view. Its core component is the belief that we should trust in "traditions and institutions which had spontaneously grown up" (Hayek 1978: 54). This is nothing new. As we have seen, Burke argued for very similar ideas. Hayek is fully conscious his reliance on an established current of political ideas. He portrays anti-rationalism as an old philosophical tradition and names David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, John Dalberg-Acton and Alexis de Tocqueville as some of its most famous representatives (Hayek 1948 : 4).

In this section, the anti-rationalist world view shall be reconstructed as presented by Hayek. It relies on three claims: Firstly, that traditions greatly contribute to the well-being of society and its members. Secondly, that it is practically impossible to assess their merits rationally. Thirdly, that they are systematically created by a process of social evolution.

For Hayek, the principal mistake of rationalist constructivism is that it cannot properly account for the value of traditions. Overestimating the role of reason with regard to historical development, it fails to grasp that only a "tradition-bound society" can actually be successful and free (Hayek 1978: 61). Most human progress can be traced back not to acts of social engineering, but to tradition:

> What has made men good is neither nature nor reason but tradition. There is not much common humanity in the biological endowment of the species. (Hayek 1982 vol III: 160)

But if traditions are indeed good and useful, why should the demand to put them before the tribunal of reason trouble us? Provided that Hayek is right about the value of traditions, the rationalist constructivist should see no reason to replace them. This line of thought however assumes that the value of traditions can be accurately determined, which Hayek emphatically denies. Traditions are immensely useful, but they are not well-understood by those who adhere to them. Since "we understand only partially why the values we hold or the ethical rules we observe are conductive to the continued existence of our society" (Hayek 1982: 11), we cannot provide an assessment of their value. Traditions are useful, but we don't know *how* exactly. Weighing their pros and cons is futile. The rationalist constructivist will therefore always underestimate the value of traditions. This idea bears some resemblance to *Chesterton's fence*:

> In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, "I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away." To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: "If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it." (Chesterton 1946: 29)

Chesterton's point is that the usefulness of customs or institutions might not be easily discernible. The rationalist reformer will not be able to see the use in a certain tradition and demand to abolish it. This, however, might cause a lot of unintended damage. The fence might have had an important

function that the reformer was simply unaware of. Hayek has similar worries, but he is in a certain sense more radical than Chesterton. While Chesterton believes that, given enough time and good will, we might come to understand the use of traditions, Hayek is much more pessimistic. It is not just that the rationalist constructivist acts too swiftly. It is more that the complexity of society makes it futile to even think that one could grasp the consequences of any custom or institution.

Furthermore, Chesterton's fence is still a product of deliberate design:

> The gate or fence did not grow there. It was not set up by somnambulists who built it in their sleep. It is highly improbable that it was put there by escaped lunatics who were for some reason loose in the street. Some person had some reason for thinking it would be a good thing for somebody. (Chesterton 1946: 29)

The idea that the fence "grew there" however is exactly what Hayek subscribes to. For him, traditions are not deliberately created. They are "the result of human action but not of human design" (Hayek 1982: 20). Contrary to what Chesterton assumes, a tradition does not exist because someone had once believed that it was useful for this or that purpose. Instead, the true value of many important institutions and rules was never and will never be known to anyone:

> Many of the institutions of society which are indispensable conditions for the successful pursuit of our conscious aims are in fact the result of customs, habits or practices which have been neither invented nor are observed with any such purpose in view. (Hayek 1982: 11)

It is practically impossible for the political rationalist to fully understand all the ways in which a tradition contributes to the well-being of society. The idea that we can remake society according to rational principles therefore threatens to deprive us of the most vital elements of the social order.

If traditions are not created deliberately, then what causes them to exist? And why are they so useful if not because they have been designed for a purpose? Here, the concept of social evolution enters the picture. Social evolution is a vital ingredient of Hayek's anti-rationalism for two reasons. Firstly, it renders the thesis that it is impossible to assess the value of institutions more plausible. Secondly, it provides Hayek with a mechanism that explains why traditions are valuable and useful.

Just as Matthew Hale and Edmund Burke, Hayek believes that institutions and customs are slowly but steadily improved by the passing of time. They are subject to a permanent process of trial and

error. This process is "something greater than man's individual mind" (Hayek 1978: 59), creating much more favourable results than any act of social engineering could. A good tradition is thus the result not of one stroke of individual genius, but of many small cumulative adjustments.

The concrete mechanism that underlies this development has been called *cultural group selection* (Steele 1987). It is a process that is structurally similar to biological evolution. Humans create different institutions and customs, which are then affected by the forces of natural selection. The better a custom or habit, the higher are its chances of survival. This evolutionary process explains how valuable traditions emerge over time. These traditions are not "the product of a designing human intelligence". The "emergence of order" is instead a "result of adaptive evolution" (Hayek 1978: 59).

> The cultural heritage into which man is born consists of a complex of practices or rules of conduct which have prevailed because they made a group of men successful but which were not adopted because it was known that they would bring about desired effects. (Hayek 1982: 17)

As we can see, Hayek conceptualises the evolutionary process that shapes culture as a case of selection between *groups*. Within different groups, many different social practices emerge, similar to the random mutations that create variability in the context of biological evolution. When groups interact and compete, some will be more successful than others. The unlucky groups, having developed practices which are unsuitable for survival, will quickly fade away. But those which have adopted good rules of conduct will survive and spread their ideas. This mechanism explains and justifies the assumption that institutions and customs improve over time.

There are many passages in Hayek's work which explicitly reference this idea. He claims that practices have spread among humans "not because they conferred any recognisable benefit on the acting individual but because they increased the chances of survival of the group to which he belonged" (Hayek 1982: 18). They "were preserved because they enabled the group in which they had arisen to prevail over others" (Hayek 1978: 56). Tradition, therefore, is "the product of a process of selection guided not by reason but by success" (Hayek 1982 vol III: 166).

While this evolutionary theory is already hinted at in the works of Hale and Burke, Hayek is able to give it a clear expression through the use of a Darwinian language. In Burke and Hale we have the idea that good laws and traditions are refined over time, that they are the result of a long process of trial and error. With cultural group selection, Hayek provides us with a very clear and easy to understand mechanism by which this refinement is realised.

It is important to note that while Hayek agrees with Burke on the importance of evolution, there is a difference between his version of anti-rationalism and traditional conservatism. In *Why I am Not A Conservative*, Hayek praises reactionaries such as Joseph de Maistre, Justus Möser, and Donoso Cortés for their "understanding of the meaning of spontaneously grown institutions" (Hayek 1978: 400). However, the problem of the reactionary conservative according to Hayek is their inability to project the idea of spontaneous order into the future:

> But the admiration of the conservatives for free growth generally applies only to the past. They typically lack the courage to welcome the same undesigned change from which new tools of human endeavours will emerge. (Hayek 1978: 400)

Hayek applies the evolutionary argument to both the future and the past. The reactionary anti-rationalist distrusts reason and therefore wants to rely on old traditions alone. The Hayekian anti-rationalist, on the other hand, extends the conservative argument to past *and* future, resisting any attempt to once and for all determine the fate of society:

> There would not be much to object to if the conservatives merely disliked too rapid change in institutions and public policy; here the case for caution and slow process is indeed strong. But the conservatives are inclined to use the powers of government to prevent change or to limit its rate to whatever appeals to the more timid mind. In looking forward, they lack the faith in the spontaneous forces of adjustment which makes the liberal accept changes without apprehension, even though he does not know how the necessary adaptations will be brought about. (Hayek 1978: 400)

Hayek shares with the classical conservative the anti-rationalist opposition to "the crude rationalism of the socialist, who wants to reconstruct all social institutions according to a pattern prescribed by his individual reason". He is conservative insofar as he is guided by a profound "distrust of reason" (Hayek 1978: 406). What sets him apart is his unwillingness to use coercive means to impose old traditions on society as a whole. While these traditions were shaped by evolution and should therefore not be abolished, Hayek believes that evolution must go on. The reactionary drive to "freeze" social development is incompatible with the continued existence of refinement over time.

The same is true, of course, for the Promethean ambition to deliberately design institutions. Cultural group selection is a crucial element of the "anti-rationalist" world view precisely because it allows Hayek to formulate a potent rebuttal of rationalist constructivism. He argues that it is

impossible to rationally calculate the usefulness of traditions; the advantages and disadvantages of any given custom or institution are too many and too complex to be discovered by reason. This means that many of the most valuable practices will appear as useless to the investigating mind. In order to reap the benefits of tradition, people must therefore be willing to accept customs and institutions that appear useless or even harmful. Society depends on a "readiness to submit to the products of a social process which nobody has designed and the reasons for which nobody may understand" (Hayek 1948 : 23). Somewhat ironically, Hayek's "true individualism" relies on "the individual submitting to the anonymous and seemingly irrational forces of society" (Hayek 1948 : 24).

But rationalist constructivism would not only abolish the useful customs and institutions we already have, it would also abolish social evolution itself. It would destroy the process of discovery that is cultural group selection. Social evolution depends on a specific set of conditions. Firstly, there must be experimentation, a constant stream of random mutations. New variants of existing institutions and customs must be permanently created. Will a society controlled by political rationalists allow the emergence of practices that are viewed as irrational? Secondly, the random mutations created by experimentation must be subject to selection. This requires conditions of competition that can't exist in a pre-planned environment. Rationalist constructivism, striving to achieve complete mastery over the social process, would stifle the creative energies unleashed by experimentation and competition. The result is "civilisation coming to a standstill" (Hayek 1978: 38).

The possibility to actually implement political rationalism has increased with the development of technology. Hayek therefore thinks that the process of social evolution is more threatened than ever. Our "greatest successes in the past" are due to the fact that we have "not been able to control social life" and that "the spontaneous forces of growth" could "assert themselves against the organised coercion of the state". With the development of more sophisticated "technological means of control", the "deliberately organised forces of society" could, for the first time, destroy tradition and the evolutionary process which makes it possible (Hayek 1978: 38).

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION ASSESSED

Hayek's chief argument against rationalist constructivism rests on the concept of cultural group selection, an open and never ending process that gradually refines social practices. In the

competition between groups, those which have the best practices will survive. Thereby, good institutions spread while dysfunctional ones become extinct. Trusting in this mechanism, Hayek claims, is more prudent than to attempt to consciously plan the creation of a rational society from scratch. Rationalist constructivism is dangerous precisely because it tells us to cast away practices that were refined through the reliable process of social evolution, a process that is not restricted by the limitations of the human mind. This section will assess whether this argument succeeds as a rebuttal of rationalist constructivism. Three different counterarguments will be proposed:

Evolution is not benevolent: Hayek tacitly assumes that social evolution systematically favours those practices which are in some sense normatively desirable. This is a very strong assumption, and we have good reasons to reject it.

Evolution is too slow: Social evolution needs time and a relatively stable environment. In the current age, such conditions are not given. Technological progress is too swift to allow for gradual evolutionary change.

Path Dependency: All evolutionary processes have a tendency to get "stuck" on local optima, which makes it impossible to reach a global optimum. This will often create arrangements where a suboptimal state of affairs cannot be corrected.

Before we deal with those arguments, we will discuss some other objections which have been raised against Hayek's concept of social evolution. Some authors have pointed out that this concept contradicts his methodological individualism (Ullman-Margalit 1978: 282, 283, Gray 1984: 52, 55, Steele 1987: 192) and his constitutional thought. The latter point, the tensions between Hayek's conservatism on the one hand and his ideas on liberty, the rule of law, and the "ideal constitution" on the other, will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, it suffices to note that any possible inconsistencies that arise between Hayek ideas on social evolution and other aspects of his work do not imply that the former are wrong.

Another critique that has been proposed is based on the fact that Hayek's account of social evolution relies on a mechanism of group selection. The argument refers to a debate within biology about the explanation of altruistic behaviour within the framework of Darwinian evolution. How does sacrificing resources for others fit in with the survival of the fittest? For example, why should an animal issue a warning cry when a predator is detected? Such behaviour might be helpful to other members of the group, but it will also draw the predator's attention and thereby pose a significant

threat to the alarm-caller. One early attempt to solve this problem refers to selective pressure at the group level. According to this view, groups of altruistic animals have an evolutionary advantage over groups of non-cooperating animals, and therefore, evolution can foster cooperation.

The counterargument points out that within any given group, the less altruistic individuals would always have an advantage. Within a group of altruists, being non-altruistic, i.e. a free-rider, would confer considerable benefits. In any given group, there exists a selective pressure that rewards free-riding. The free-rider population would increase over time, rendering the idea of group selection moot. This criticism has led scientists to explore other routes to explain altruistic behaviours, referring for example to mechanisms such as kin selection (see Smith 1964). Today, experts are divided between those who support the gene-centered view of evolution (see Dawkins 1972) and those who subscribe to multi-level selection (see Wilson 2015). While the former deny the existence of group selection, the latter support it.

Some authors have suggested that the supposed flaws of biological group selection might also apply to cultural group selection. Viktor Vanberg, for example, states that "despite the between-group advantage from practicing appropriate rules, there would be a within-group disadvantage for those who actually practice them" (Vanberg 1986: 87). Similar views have been expressed by David Steele (Steele 1987: 185, 186) and G.F. Gaus, who asks whether Hayek's account "raises the familiar problems of collective action and the rationality of free riding" and points to the game-theoretical insight that "it might be rational for each person not to do that which is good for the group" (Gaus 2006: 241).

However, Gaus provides a counter-argument: In biology, group selection is criticised "because it refers to selection among groups that leads to the selection of individual traits", that "individual characteristics are explained by group membership". This doesn't work because "it is even better to be a non-altruistic member of an altruistic group". According to Gaus, Hayek can evade this problem because he views reason as a product of culture. If culture instills in individuals a way of reasoning that does not allow them to contemplate "advantageous but uncooperative" behaviour, the problem is alleviated (Gaus 2006: 241-242).

This makes it appear as if Hayek's account of group selection was dependent on his idea that reason is a social product. However this is not the case. The idea that *cultural* group selection is to be rejected simply because of *biological* group selection's problems does not hold up to scrutiny. As Gaus has pointed out, group selection is only controversial insofar as it tries to explain *individual* traits

through *group* competition. But the theory of cultural group selection as proposed by Hayek does not depend on such a move. In biology, the property of carrying genes can be attributed to individual organisms. Customs and institutions on the other hand are not individual traits. In the majority of cases, they can only reasonably be attributed to groups or societies. Individuals are neither oligarchic nor democratic, they don't instantiate the rule of law and they can't have a standing army. Cultural group selection is primarily a mechanism that explains the selection of *group traits*, not of individual traits. Therefore it does not commit the (supposed) mistake of group selection in biology.

There might of course be some cultural practices which exist on an individual level. It is not clear, however, why "more successful" individuals should necessarily be more prone to transmit their practices. In biological evolution, the individual organism is an important level of selection because successful individuals tend to have more offspring, which inherit their genes. But the spread of cultural practices is much less dependent on individual success. Indeed it is plausible that people would find those who contribute to society more worthy of emulation than criminals and other kinds of free-riders.

There are a lot of other arguments that have been proposed to cast doubt upon the idea of cultural group selection (see Steele 1987). However we will for now ignore these often empirical issues, and assume that the mechanism as described by Hayek can and does exist. In the rest of this section, three arguments are proposed which show that even if there is such a thing as cultural group selection, Hayek's conservative conclusion is not supported. Firstly, it will be argued that, contrary to Hayek's implicit assumption, *evolution is not benevolent*. Secondly, that *evolution is too slow* to be able to deal with the challenges posed by contemporary society, which is marked by rapid technological change. Thirdly, *path dependency* linked to the existence of peaks and valleys on fitness landscapes implies that evolution will regularly lead to a situation where society gets stuck on local optima, preventing further improvement.

Let us begin with the first argument. In the following, we will see that Hayek's case for traditionalism relies on the idea that evolution is benevolent; he assumes that cultural group selection systematically produces results which align with human interests. It will be argued that this assumption is implausible. Evolution is not benevolent, and therefore we have no reason to wager our social existence on its blessings.

Biological evolution exists because two different processes work in conjunction. The process of variation constantly produces differences within a population. The mechanisms through which this

happens are mutation (replication errors create changes in the DNA sequence) and recombination (exchange of genetic material creates offspring with new combinations of alleles). The variability thus created is subjected to the second process, selection. Some organisms are more adapted to their environment than others, leading to more reproductive success. Genes that are conductive to fitness thereby spread throughout a population.

In terms of cybernetics, evolution can be viewed as a form of closed-loop control system, that is as an auto-regulative system which tends to approach a certain state of affairs. Through negative feedback, variability (the *process variable*) is regulated to match a certain *desired value* or *setpoint*. This can be illustrated by an example. Imagine an ecological niche inhabited by giraffes. Physical laws and the nature of plant life dictate an optimal neck length, one that is perfectly suited for survival. Now, mutation and recombination (the first subsystem) create a variety of different neck lengths, however individuals with necks that are too short or too long will face difficulties. The process variable, actual neck length, therefore more and more closely approaches the setpoint, which is the optimal neck length in the given environment. Similar to a centrifugal governor, which controls the speed of an engine through negative feedback, natural selection creates an attractor for the entities subject to its influences. When it cones to social evolution, we have to take a look at its desired value/setpoint. What does cultural group selection control *for*? Which kinds of social practices will be suppressed by selection, and which will have good chances for survival? For Hayek to be right to draw his traditionalist conclusion, this setpoint should coincide with that which is desirable.

To put it in another way, there are certain traits that increase the *fitness* of a practice. According to the theory of cultural group selection, this fitness is determined by the contribution a custom or institution makes to the survival of groups that espouse it. At the same time, not all practices are equally conductive to human success, happiness, well-being, freedom, or any other normative standard we might employ to judge what is desirable. Some practices are more desirable than others. Hayek tacitly assumes that those two things are systematically correlated.

But why should this be the case? Entities affected by selection pressures will gradually adapt to that pressure, but there is no reason to assume that this pressure will be "benevolent", that the state towards which the system is attracted is in any way desirable. Fitness and desirableness are different properties. To illustrate why, we can imagine a continent filled with different independent city states. Half of those are "pacifist cities", meaning that all the resources are used to create consumer goods for the population. The Pacifists create democratic societies, use resources in a sustainable way, and safeguard the liberties of their citizens. However, the Pacifist cities have to compete with

"warmongering cities", which severely restrict their people's access to wealth. Bent on destruction, they strive to conquer as much land as possible. While the Pacifists produce consumer goods, the Warmongers concentrate on producing arms, training soldiers, and sustaining their armies in the field. Their citizens are poor, but social cohesion is guaranteed through jingoistic narratives and violent nationalist (or religious) myths. In such a scenario, the Warmongers clearly have an evolutionary advantage over the Pacifists. They will crush the Pacifist city-states one after the other. After a while, only Warmongers will remain. But does this mean that a world of Warmongers is better than one where everyone lives under the customs of the Pacifists? Certainly not.

The traits that make groups effective under conditions of competition are not inherently desirable. Hayek's basic mistake is to conflate success in a normative sense – the creation of a desirable state of affairs – with success under competition. Evolution promotes the second, but not the first. The pressures that exist in history do not favour the most humane practices, but simply those which are effective at the game of survival and reproduction.

Biological evolution has created deadly viruses and bacteria. Nature does not care for human flourishing, it is a chaotic process marked by an antagonistic struggle for survival. Similarly, social evolution does not necessarily reward that which is humane. Many things which Hayek would consider to be objectionable, such as the ruthless destruction of one's enemies, stultifying propaganda towards the own populace, and blatant corruption to secure the loyalty of officials, can increase the survivability of a government. If we keep this in mind, there seems to be no reason to put trust into the "natural" development of political institutions. Instead, their conscious design on the basis of human needs appears as a normative necessity.

The second argument that can be leveraged against Hayek is that *evolution is too slow*. It can only do its work under sufficiently stable conditions. If the rate of change that the environment undergoes is faster than the rate of adaptation that selective pressures create, then evolution loses its ability to guarantee fitness. We can illustrate this with an easy example. According to Allen's rule, animals adapted to warm climates have longer extremities. This is the case because when it is warm, a high surface-area-to-volume ratio is beneficial, allowing for heat dissipation. When it is cold, however, animals with shorter extremities have an advantage. If we now imagine a hot biotope which suddenly turns cold, all of the animals living there would suddenly be ill-adapted. The very same evolutionary process that has made them well-suited to hot climates has lead to them being unprepared for the cold. Sudden changes in the environment can make ages of gradual adaptation obsolete. They can create mass extinction events. When we think about evolutionary adaptation, we

should never forget that it is strictly speaking only the adaptation to the conditions of the past. If the future is sufficiently different from the past, the mechanism stops to work.

Since the dawn of the industrial revolution, the environment in which human institutions operate is not stable at all. The rapid acceleration of technological, economic, and social change is the hallmark of modern society. Under capitalism, private companies must constantly compete with each other to develop new technologies, machines, and consumer products. Every innovation so created has the potential to radically change the most basic coordinates of our everyday life. Some examples for inventions that had a revolutionary impact on society in the last 200 years are the steam engine, the railroad, the airplane, the automobile, the computer, the cargo container, the internet, and the smartphone. Every few decades, our world changes radically. As Marx put it:

> Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (Marx 2004b)

In the face of "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions", the idea of a slow and gradual evolutionary adaptation of institutions does not make sense. Many of the evolutionary pressures that might have led to the creation of this or that institution are long gone. Every norm is swiftly made obsolete by the progress of technology. Under conditions of permanent change, the slow workings of gradual adaptation cannot keep pace.

Another weakness of traditionalism as proposed by Hayek is connected to the *path dependence of evolution*. To better understand this problem, we must take a look at the concept of the fitness landscape and the "peaks and valleys" that exist on it. The fitness landscape has first been proposed by the geneticist Sewall Wright (Wright 1932) and is since being used by evolutionary biologists to visualise important aspects of natural selection. It explains the existence of flawed forms, that is organisms which display traits that are obviously suboptimal when it comes to survival.

Fitness landscapes are usually visualised as a field consisting of "hills" and "mountains". Height here serves as an indication for fitness. Owing to natural selection, populations will always move upwards (see Figure 1). This means that they will stop to move once they have reached a local peak, that is a

position where any further movement would lead to a decrease in fitness. Local peaks, however, might still be significantly worse than the global peak. Evolutionary processes can therefore be "stuck" on a local optimum without ever being able to reach the global one.

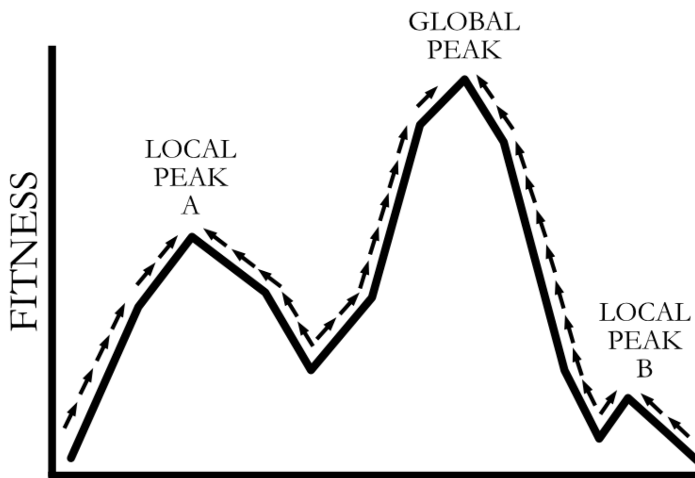

FIGURE 1

Let us imagine, for example, a population of one meter high herbivores inhabiting a biome full of bushes and trees. They feed on the bushes, which are rather poor in nutrients. The leaves of the local trees on the other hand are much more nutritious, but they are only accessible to animals at least three meters high. Even though it would be very beneficial for an animal to be three meters high, such a specimen will never develop. This is the case because a height of just two meters would only confer disadvantages due to increased energy consumption. The animals in our example are therefore forever stuck with the bushes. On the fitness map, they sit on a local peak, separated from the global optimum of three meters height by a valley of low fitness.

There can be a similar mechanism with regard to social change. A group might be in a position where any gradual change of its practices would lead to a decrease in its overall fitness. However, it might at the same time sit on a local peak which is far inferior to the global one. For example, a civilisation might have been committed to the use of the automobile for many decades. All existing infrastructure would therefore be geared towards individual vehicles. If such a society were to begin transitioning to public transportation, building railroads instead of additional freeways, this would initially create friction. It would pose a serious evolutionary disadvantage. However, it might very well be the case that once a certain threshold is overcome, the new transportation infrastructure would prove to be much superior.

That a society might be stuck on a local optimum is not just a hypothetical possibility; there are good reasons to believe that such a situation is the norm rather than the exception. Institutional arrangements and customs form interrelated systems owing to "the co-evolution of technological, social and institutional systems" (Cecere et al. 2014: 1038). In order to unleash their full potential,

practices have to be fine-tuned to each other, creating synergies. Attempts to diverge from the previously established system of institutions and moving to a different state of affairs will create so-called switching costs. Even though the change of practices might be a good idea in the long run, it will be punished in the short term. Thus, getting to the global optimum more often than not requires crossing a valley of lower fitness.

This problem has been discussed under the term *path dependence* (see Page 2006, Rixen 2015). Path dependence is the idea that initial conditions of a system can exert a significant influence on its further development, sometimes causing it to get stuck in a suboptimal state. Evolutionary economists, for example, use the theory of path dependence to "explain why and how certain technologies may dominate markets, despite potential inefficiencies" (Cecere et al. 2014: 1038). Systems can be "locked in" to certain practices, even though better alternatives exist (for a discussion of how switching costs cause lock-in by disincentivising change see Arthur 1989).

Rationalist constructivism allows us to make a decision when it comes to changing our path. Social engineers can weigh the costs of crossing the evolutionary valley against the benefits of reaching a higher peak. The process of cultural group selection, on the other hand, would (just as biological evolution) always prevent such a move. The costs of crossing the valley would send the "signal" to return. Effectively, embracing Hayekian traditionalism means that path change is impossible and that one must accept being stuck on a local peak / optimum.

We have so far discussed three arguments against Hayek's theory of cultural group selection. Contrary to what Hayek must assume to make his point, *evolution is not benevolent*. Furthermore there are good reasons to believe that *evolution is too slow* to deal with the dynamic nature of modern society and technology. And lastly, the existence of *path dependency* means that a process of gradual social evolution can never overcome local optima and path dependencies, thereby preventing humanity from reaching its full potential. All of those points provide good reasons to reject the gradualist traditionalism embraced by Hayek and consider the advantages of rationalist constructivism.

TRIAL-AND-ERROR THEORY

Before we can conclude this chapter, there is an alternative account of social evolution that deserves our attention. David Steele has argued that Hayek misunderstood the "mode of social evolution envisaged by social theorists such as Hume, Ferguson, and Carl Menger" (Steele 1987: 171). For Hayek, those theorists (and one should add Edmund Burke to this list) subscribe to the idea of cultural group selection. Steele however argues that they embrace a different notion of social evolution, which he calls "the Liberal trial-and-error theory" (Steele 1987). In this last part of the chapter, we will take a look at trial-and-error theory and assess whether it can provide a viable alternative to cultural group selection.

Trial-and-error theory proposes "that evolution proceeds by a process in which design and insight play an indispensable role, though the process as a whole is undesigned" (Steele 1987: 188). It is still the case that different practices emerge and that they evolve over time. However the selection does not work because groups with better practices survive those with inferior customs, but because humans evaluate the results of those practices. Feedback is not automatic, as in Hayek's theory, but instead consciously injected by human actors. We are not able to design new institutions from scratch, and instead make small changes to existing ones. When these changes have been made, their results are observed. If they are being liked by people, they are retained. This account still relies on gradual evolution, but selection is something that humans do consciously.

To illustrate this idea, Steele asks us to think about the evolution of the bicycle. Each bicycle is "produced consciously by a designer, guided by a traditional pattern the designer did not invent" (Steele 1987: 188). Slowly, modifications are being made. Often there is no way to know beforehand which of those will be successful. However as soon as a new model of the bicycle exists, people can assess it, which will decide whether it will be retained or discarded:

> Many proposed modifications are stillborn, others have their vogue and are then abandoned, whilst a few endure for a considerable period, perhaps becoming permanent features–like the bicycle chain or zero in mathematics. What determines the fate of an innovation is a "community judgment" (i.e., the judgments of numerous individuals) on whether the innovation works. People have common standards they can use to settle this question, at least provisionally. (Steele 1987: 188)

This model of social evolution "shares some qualities with Hayekian evolution" insofar as "the development is spontaneous, and it would obviously be unwise to direct it along a predetermined path" (Steele 1987: 188). At the same time, crucially, it relies on humans consciously judging

whether a variant of a tradition is successful or not. According to Steele, this model of social evolution more closely resembles what liberal-conservative authors of the past have had in mind.

Trial-and-error theory has some obvious advantages over cultural group selection. It evades the argument that *evolution is not benevolent*. While the idea that evolution tracks human interests is implausible in the context of Hayek's theory, it is a valid assumption in the context of Steele's theory. When feedback is created not by the impersonal struggle between groups, but by human input, it seems that we can assume that there is a sufficiently strong tendency for social evolution track human desires. These desires might still over-represent the interests of political or economic elites, but they are at least dependent on people's assessments and not just on success in a struggle for survival and domination. Trial-and-error theory thereby avoids the first counter-argument to the Hayekian account.

The second argument however still holds. Evolution might still be *too slow*. Just as cultural group selection, trial-and-error based evolution needs time to work. This means that it is only viable in a relatively stable environment. In an age marked by rapid technological developments, where human societies have to respond swiftly to all kinds of new threats and challenges, a slow and gradual process of social evolution might simply be too sluggish to guarantee human flourishing. Faced with climate change, the disruptive effects of digital technology, the threat of nuclear war, and volatile markets, trial and error could prove insufficient to prevent large-scale suffering or even social collapse. The fast-paced rate of change and the existential nature of the threats faced by humanity today might necessitate a return to the drawing board, a radical re-evaluation of even those practices which have so far proven themselves.

What about *path dependency*? Just as cultural group selection, trial-and-error theory depends on gradual change over time. Institutions are taken to develop one step after the other so that people might judge every new iteration of the social order and inject their feedback. Therefore, Steele's preferred form of social evolution is equally prone to settle for local optima.

So far, trial-and-error theory has only been able to block one of the three arguments that can be leveraged against cultural group selection. However, it also possesses a problem of its own, one that does not trouble Hayek's account of social evolution. In order for the process to function as envisaged by Steele, people must be able to identify which effects are attributable to which practices. Without a clear theoretical mapping of the causal mechanisms at hand, this can be impossible. Steele's bicycle-example only works because three different factors some together. Firstly, the bicycle

is a rather simple construction. Secondly, only singular changes are being made and then evaluated. Thirdly, there are no external forces which could affect the result. When it comes to human societies, none of those conditions hold. Societies are complex, they change all the time, and they are affected by more or less random factors beyond our control. Let us assume, for example, that a country transitions from neoliberal to Keynesian economics. A few years later, an economic crisis hits. Can this crisis be attributed to the change in economic policy? Maybe. But other causes might also be responsible. The crisis might be traced back to external factors such as lower availability of food or energy. It might also have been caused by other, maybe smaller decisions that have been taken and that have escaped public attention. It is even possible that the crisis is a late result of the previous economic regime. If people are expected to act in the way envisaged by Steele, they must be able to correctly identify which of many different possible changes (or random events) is to be held responsible for a specific negative or positive result.

The epistemic burden imposed by trial-and-error theory is therefore much higher than initially assumed. People must not just be able to differentiate between desirable and undesirable results, they must also know by which mechanism these results are produced. While Hayek's theory of cultural group selection can allow the workings of society to remain opaque to human intellects, Steele's trial-and-error theory can not. Instead, it assumes the availability of epistemic resources that are similarly powerful to those required by the rationalist constructivist.

It is plausible that both cultural group selection and trial and error have guided social evolution for millennia. Certainly, this has had some positive effects. However, since the dawn of the modern age, Enlightenment philosophy, science and political philosophy have provided us with a way to steer the fate of our society in a conscious manner. Rationalist constructivism doesn't have the blindspots that mark gradual processes such as those favoured by Hayek and Steele. It allows us to overcome path dependencies and it has realistic prospects to be swift enough to keep pace with technological and social dynamism unleashed by the industrial revolution. In view of the many problems inherent to gradual mechanisms of societal improvement, we have good reasons to conclude that the rash dismissal of political rationalism proposed by Hayek is unwarranted.

V

Political Rationalism, Liberty, and Socialism

HAYEK'S IDEAL OF LIBERTY

In the last chapter, we have dealt with the more epistemic aspects of Hayek's anti-constructivist argument. This is a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, Hayek undermines the credibility of political rationalism by pointing out its supposed methodological problems. It relies, he claims, on a flawed view of society as something that can be studied scientifically. On the other hand, Hayek presents us with an alternative process of discovery, which relies on social evolution and is taken to be more trustworthy than the rationalist reliance on our own understanding. To give this process room to do its work, we must refrain from planning and renounce political rationalism. However we have seen that there are significant flaws with both of Hayek's claims. Neither do the methodological problems he points out exist, nor do we have conclusive evidence for the claim that social evolution will systematically bring about sufficiently desirable results.

In this chapter, we will deal with another, perhaps more specific grievance that Hayek expresses: the incompatibility of freedom and rational constructivism. According to Hayek, "those who believe that all useful institutions are deliberate contrivances and who cannot conceive of anything serving a human purpose that has not been consciously designed are almost of necessity enemies of freedom" (Hayek 1978: 61). This, of course, is a hyperbole. The belief that *all* useful institutions are the product of design is not a widely held belief, even by rationalist constructivists. To defend their basic position, rationalist constructivists do not have to argue that useful institutions can arise *only* by design. It is sufficient for them to claim that design will *improve* the quality of institutions, that spontaneously grown institutions can only *accidentally* serve human goals while constructed ones tend to *systematically* track our interests; provided that the design goal is to further those interests instead of, for example, improving the power of some political or economic elite. But if we remove the hyperbolic aspects of Hayek's statement, its content is clear. Rationalist constructivism is antithetical to liberty. If there is indeed an inherent link between the pretensions of political rationalism and the horrors of totalitarianism, that would give a valid reason to reject Prometheanism.

Discussing this point will also provide us with the resources necessary to disentangle a variety of Hayek's ideas, many of which do not directly pertain to our topic. In his work, Hayek proposes three different claims and elaborates on their relation to one another. Firstly, as we have already seen, Hayek argues that *rationalist constructivism is wrong*, defending an evolutionary approach to politics. Secondly, he proposes that *we should support capitalism*, not socialism or a so-called mixed economy. Thirdly, he claims that *the rule of law is fundamental to freedom*, and warns us of the dangers of administrative discretion. This is where Hayek presents us with a comprehensive ideal of political

liberty. All three claims – anti-constructivism, pro-capitalism, advocacy for the rule of law – are treated as parts of a coherent whole, as a comprehensive world view. When discussing any of those points, Hayek reiterates a set of similar claims about the impossibility of planning and the desirableness of spontaneous order. Furthermore, any one of the three theses is defended with reference to the others. For example, Hayek claims that rationalist constructivism begets socialism, and that socialism is incompatible with the rule of law. This apparent interconnectedness makes it seem as if all three claims are instances of a single basic idea. They are all arrived at, it seems, by applying the same insight to different questions. Over the course of this section, however, we will see that not only is this not the case, but that there are considerable tensions between the three claims. Specifically, it will be shown that a commitment to rationalist constructivism is not only compatible with the rule of law, but even implied by it. Furthermore, it will be argued that Hayek's pro-capitalism relies on politically rationalist presuppositions and that his opposition to socialism is not logically implied by his partisanship for liberal principles with regard to the law.

We will begin with an analysis of freedom, which for Hayek is inherently linked to the rule of law. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek begins his discussion of the rule of law with a quotation ascribed to a certain G.H. von Berg:

> How can there be a definite limit to the supreme power if an indefinite general happiness, left to its judgment, is to be its aim? Are the princes to be the fathers of the people, however great be the danger that they will also become its despots? (Hayek 1978: 193).

Government is necessary to protect individuals from "coercion and violence from others". In order to do this, it "claims the monopoly of coercion and violence". Thereby, it "becomes also the chief threat to individual freedom" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 128). In view of this problem, Hayek asserts that limitations of the power of government are necessary. Above all, he champions the rule of law, claiming that we should be ruled through "these abstract rules we call 'laws'", and not through "specific and particular commands" (Hayek 1978: 149). Obeying the law, "we are not subject to another man's will and are therefore free" (Hayek 1978: 153). The rule of law as commonly understood implies the primacy of laws over actions, especially the primacy of laws over governmental actions. The government must not infringe on laws. There must be a set of "legal codes" which are binding to all and which must be publicly disclosed, for the general public can only be expected to follow rules they know (Hayek 1978: 208). This also implies that the laws, whatever they may be, need to be determined in advance – one cannot disclose rules which do not exist. So

far, the rule of law seems to be a straightforward idea: everyone must abide by the rules, which means that even the government shall not perform acts which are illegal according to the law.

But for Hayek, the rule of law is more than just the primacy of laws over actions, more than "the requirement of mere legality in all government action" (Hayek 1978: 205). Order can be created through general and abstract laws, which apply equally to all. It can also be enforced by the "power of the administrative machine" (Hayek 1978: 195), which can in turn appear either as "administrative law", or as "administrative discretion". The former consists of "rules regulating the activities of the various governmental agencies" (Hayek 1982: 137). In his later work *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Hayek argues that this law, which always constitutes the majority of statute, is the older form of written law, emerging when lords and kings had to lay down rules to regulate the behaviour of their bureaucrats and soldiers. Insofar as administrative law only pertains to the internal workings of the state apparatus, it is unproblematic and even necessary. However, when administrative law describes "administrative powers over persons and property", that is, once it gives rise to administrative discretion over civil society, it becomes incompatible with the rule of law (Hayek 1982: 138).

Administrative discretion refers to the delegation of decision-making powers to specific people or agencies. As it "is evident that not all acts of government can be bound by fixed rules", different parts of the government must be allowed to decide matters on an ad hoc basis. Hayek thinks that this is not problematic "so long as the government administers its own resources" (Hayek 1978: 213):

> Nobody disputes the fact that, in order to make efficient use of the means at its disposal, the government must exercise a great deal of discretion. But, to repeat, under the rule of the law the private citizen and his property are not an object of administration by the government, not a means to be used for its purposes. It is only when the administration interferes with the private sphere of the citizen that the problem of discretion becomes relevant to us; and the principle of the rule of law, in effect, means that the administrative authorities should have no discretionary powers in this respect. (Hayek 1978: 213)

According to Hayek, "in all instances where administrative action interferes with the private sphere of the individual" we should have the right to contest such an action through an appeal to court. It is normally held that when such an appeal has been made, the judges shall simply determine whether the action of the administration is compatible with the law. But Hayek wants to go further, claiming that "the courts must have the power to decide not only whether a particular action was

infra vires or ultra vires but whether the substance of the administrative decision was such as the law demanded" (Hayek 1978: 214).

This limitation on the power of the state is the first essential condition of liberty, and it is a much more substantive requirement than the criterion of mere legality. In any case where the law neither necessitates nor disallows the use of coercion by government agencies, coercion may not be used. Under mere legality, the government may coerce members of civil society however it likes, as long as this does not violate a law. Under Hayek's rule of law, however, the inverse is the case. The government may only interfere if the law *forces* it to do so. This leaves little room for administrative discretion and arbitrariness. Government, Hayek maintains, "must never coerce an individual except in the enforcement of a known rule" (Hayek 1978: 205). This, of course, is a much stronger requirement, meant to prevent any meddling of the administrative branch (Hayek 1978: 214). At the core lies his belief that "under a reign of freedom the free sphere of the individual includes all action not explicitly restricted by a general law" (Hayek 1978: 216). Coercion is only ever acceptable when it "conforms to general laws", it is illegitimate when it is used as a "means of achieving particular objects of current policy" (Hayek 1978: 214, 215).

The rule of law also implies *equality before the law*. This means that only "general, abstract rules" can be "laws in the substantive sense". Such rules must contain "no references to particular persons, places, or objects" (Hayek 1978: 208). A law that states that the speed limit applies to everyone but the president's son, or that the inhabitants of San Francisco shall pay double taxes, is incompatible with the rule of law because it violates this equality requirement.

While he states that the principle of equality before the law cannot be exhaustively defined, that "no entirely satisfactory criterion has been found that would always tell us what kind of classification is compatible with equality for the law", Hayek nevertheless regards it as an important foundation of liberty (Hayek 1978: 209). We will discuss the equality requirement at a later point, as it plays an important role in his attacks against socialism. Here, it suffices to say that legitimate coercion must "serve general and timeless purposes, not specific ends", and that it "must not make any distinctions between different people" (Hayek 1978: 226).

Lastly, the rule of law requires "independent judges who are not concerned with any temporary ends of government". As the law acts as a safeguard against the power of the executive, the executive cannot be allowed to exert direct influence over the courts. The government must "in its coercive action be bound by rules which prescribe when and where it may use coercion and in what

manner it may do so", it must be "subject to judicial review" (Hayek 1978: 210-211). Judicial review is of course nothing but a farce if the courts take orders from the very government they are supposed to control.

Hayek states that "particular cases" must never "be decided in the light of anything but the general rule". At the same time, he praises the British common law tradition. There seems to be an inherent conflict here, a fact that Hayek is aware of (Hayek 1978: 197). If the law should rule, how can we accept a system that relies on the discretion of judges? Under the "continental" system of statute law, the laws are to be applied as they stand. The common law system, on the other hand, seems to provide judges with a great deal of discretion, which would contradict Hayek's anti-discretionary stance.

We find the answer to this question in his later work *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, which expands upon Hayek's theory of law. The core idea here is that *law* is distinct from *legislation*, which is "the deliberate making of law". This claim contradicts the prevalent modern view, which traced back law to the power to legislate. While "the invention of law came relatively late in the history of mankind", the law itself "in the sense of enforced rules of conduct" is just as old as society (Hayek 1982: 72). Rules have existed long before humans invented and legitimised formal processes of law-making. Early laws were a set of customary rules which exist "independently of human will" (Hayek 1982: 73), which were not designed by anyone. To defend this claim, Hayek refers to ethology and cultural anthropology, which "confirm the evolutionary teaching" of Hume and Burke, and stand in contrast to "the rationalist constructivism of Francis Bacon or Thomas Hobbes" (Hayek 1982: 74).

Here, Hayek applies his evolutionary anti-rationalism to the law itself. Laws are not deliberately designed, they are instead a set of unconsciously practiced practices or customs which have developed through group selection:

> The chief points on which the comparative study of behaviour has thrown such important light on the evolution of law are, first, that it has made clear that individuals had learned to observe (and enforce) rules of conduct long before such rules could be expressed in words; and second, that these rules had evolved because they led to the formation of an order of the activities of the group as a whole which, although they are the results of the regularities of the actions of the individuals, must be clearly distinguished from them, since it is the efficiency of the resulting order of actions which will determine whether groups whose members observe certain rules of conduct will prevail. (Hayek 1982: 74)

Hayek even links these rules to the "highly ritualised forms of behaviour" that animals display. Similar to the social evolution that has created laws, biological evolution has equipped animals with behavioural patterns that have proven useful in the long run (Hayek 1982: 75).

In an allusion to Gilbert Ryle, Hayek states that adherence to laws is first and foremost "a 'knowledge how' to act", not "knowledge that" (Hayek 1982: 76). It is only where people's intuitive knowledge is insufficient to clarify the implications of the internalised set of rules in relation to a specific case that it is necessary to articulate the law. Where the rules are indeed inherently unclear, articulation can lead to the production of new rules (Hayek 1982: 78). However, this is only done in order to harmonise and clarify the pre-existing set of customs, it does not imply a will to deliberately construct a new set of laws:

> While the process of articulation of pre-existing rules will often lead to alterations in the body of such rules, this will have little effect on the belief that those formulating the rules do no more, and have no power to do more, than to find and express already existing rules, a task in which fallible humans will often go wrong, but in the performance of which they have no free choice. The task will be regarded as one of discovering something which exists, not as one of creating something new, even though the result of such efforts may be the creation of something that has not existed before (Hayek 1982: 78).

The law in the strict sense is the unwritten rules that have developed in an evolutionary manner. These rules are called the *nomos* by Hayek (Hayek 1982: 85). Statute is derivative, simply an attempt to express the *nomos*. Hayek therefore rejects the pretensions of the modern legislature, which believes that it can *make*, not reproduce, the law. In light of this perspective, it becomes clear why the later Hayek does not equate statute with the law.

The powers of the judge are not discretionary powers because the judge "is not concerned with any ulterior purpose which somebody may have intended the rules to serve", she simply states "what is demanded by general principles upon which the going order of society is based" (Hayek 1982: 87). The nomos forms a set of expectations, and these expectations will often somewhat diverge from the statute, the laws which are explicitly stated. As it is the nomos which really counts, the judge must take an active role. At any moment, problems can arise. The explicitly stated rules can always turn out to be unclear or inadequate to safeguard those expectations. Therefore, "the task of preventing conflict and enhancing the compatibility of actions […] is necessarily a neverending one" (Hayek 1982: 119).

In some ways, this later account contradicts Hayek's earlier views from *The Constitution of Liberty*, where law and custom are kept apart, and where it is stated that the "compulsion of custom" has become an "obstacle" under modern society. According to this less conservative view, "the growth of individual intelligence" has made it "necessary to state explicitly or reformulate the rules" that govern human society. Law is here still conceptualised as written law. So while the earlier Hayek spoke of a "transition from specific custom to law" which was the precondition for truly abstract rules (Hayek 151, 152), the later Hayek regards all law as custom and sees such a transition not as inherently necessary, but as a dangerous expression of rationalist constructivism.

The later view, however, does not lend itself to an attack against rationalist constructivism, because it already presupposes the falsity of political rationalism. Defending the primacy of general rules because the *nomos* is custom, and attacking rationalist constructivism for disparaging this *nomos* is a clear case of circular reasoning. If the argument from the rule of law has any validity, then it has to provide us with a good reason against rationalist constructivism irrespective of the precise character of the law (written or customary).

THE NEO-ROMAN CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

It is important to note that Hayek does not argue that all interventions (by government or someone else) are to be viewed as antithetical to liberty. His insistence on the rule of law and the importance of nomos implies that some forms of intervention – those which are based on proper law – are conductive to freedom. It is only discretionary or otherwise *arbitrary* power that threatens our freedom. In fact, the Hayek of *The Constitution of Liberty* even allows for the "alteration of those rules or the passing of a new rule by the legislature", provided that the rule is applied "equally to all people for an indefinite period of time". Freedom is compromised only by "the exercise of coercive power of government which was not regular enforcement of the general law and which was designed to achieve a specific purpose". According to Hayek, the "habitual appeal to the principle of non-interference in the fight against all ill-considered or harmful measures" only serves to blur "the fundamental distinction between the kinds of measures which are and those which are not compatible with a free system" (Hayek 1978: 221). Opposing the "old formulae of laissez faire or non-intervention", he insists that the deciding factor shall not be whether intervention takes place or not, but whether it is based on general rules or arbitrary will (Hayek 1978: 231).

As Sean Irving (2020) has pointed out, Hayek employs a so-called neo-Roman concept of liberty. This concept differs in many respects from the more well-known concept of negative liberty. Take a closer look at neo-Roman liberty will therefore be useful to assess Hayek's claims and the underlying logic they are based on.

In his 1958 essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Isaiah Berlin provides an opposition between "negative liberty" (or: "negative freedom") and "positive liberty". The negative liberty view claims that we are "free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes" with our activities. Liberty is here conceptualised as the absence of interference. To be interfered with means being constricted by the active intervention conscious agents, that is, by individuals or groups. In Berlin's words, it "implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act". From this it follows that limitations such as poverty, illness and the like do not count as constraints of freedom, at least not if they have not been deliberately created by some human agent. Those who are "too poor to afford something on which there is no legal ban" are limited in their practical freedom of action, but they are not unfree in the sense of negative liberty (Berlin 1958: 3). Here, we could imagine a concept of *effective liberty* which counts all limitations on the ability to act as compromising freedom, not just those which are interferences by conscious actors. Berlin, however, more or less ignores this possibility. In this sense, he agrees with Hayek, according to whom "'freedom' refers solely to a relation of men to other men, and the only infringement on it is coercion by men". If liberty is equated with "the range of physical possibilities from which a person can choose at a given moment" (Hayek 1978: 12), Hayek argues, this would engender the "identification of liberty with wealth" and thereby provide an argument for socialism (Hayek 1978: 17).

In Berlin's essay, negative liberty as non-interference is juxtaposed not with effective liberty as outlined above, but with something called positive liberty. Positive liberty, which, on a side note, is called "inner", "subjective", or "metaphysical" freedom by Hayek (Hayek 1978: 15), essentially refers to a condition where a subject's decisions are their own, meaning that they are not manipulated by external forces:

> The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. (Berlin 1958: 8)

While negative liberty is only compromised by active interference against one's will, positive liberty requires this will to be independent from outside influences. This leads Berlin to argue that positive liberty tends to split the individual. On the one hand, there is the "heteronomous" self (Berlin 1958: 9), a "empirical bundle of desires and passions" (Berlin 1958: 10), which is susceptible to any kind of manipulative influence (by the media, by propaganda, by advertising). On the other hand, there is a "real" or "true" self, an "transcendent, dominant controller" that is often considered to be inherently rational. Positive freedom, in essence, requires the transcendent part to be in charge.

Berlin argues that positive liberty is problematic because it can be used to justify the coercion of real individuals – an attack on their negative liberty – in the name of their true selves. For example, one could force people to behave in a more healthy way, arguing that they are only making unhealthy choices because they have been tricked by the tobacco companies or their Facebook feeds.

If we follow Berlin, programs to realise positive liberty come in two forms, individualised and socialised. The individualised path to positive liberty is the path of personal renunciation, of which the most prominent example can be fond in "the traditional self-emancipation of ascetics and quietists, of stoics and Buddhist sages" (Berlin 1958: 10, 11). Today, one could refer to "New Age" spiritualism and self-help literature. Berlin claims that such beliefs in the necessity of an "inner castle", according to which freedom means freedom from want and desire, arise under conditions of general socio-cultural decline (Berlin 1958: 12).

Apart from this individualised path to positive liberty, there is a socialised counterpart. It is connected to the idea of establishing a society guided by reason. The inhabitants of such a rational society would necessarily live in accordance with their own will, as they cannot reject what they themselves can clearly see to be rational. As they are only obeying their "true" (rational) self, they would be free. Berlin argues that this view "lies at the heart of many of the nationalist, communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day" (Berlin 1958: 15).

Faced with the inherent problems of positive liberty, Isaiah Berlin's essay has convinced many philosophers that negative liberty is the only correct way to conceptualise what freedom means in the realm of politics. Therefore, the idea that freedom equals non-intervention has become in essence hegemonic.

In recent times, a third concept of liberty has been proposed. Its most prominent proponents are the so-called neo-republicans Philipp Pettit (1997a) and Quentin Skinner (1998). Drawing inspiration from the classical republicanism we have already encountered in Chapter III, they argue that liberty should be conceptualised as *non-domination*. Pettit speaks about the "republican" concept of liberty, while Skinner uses the term "neo-Roman". We will use the latter term in order not to confuse non-domination with classical republicanism as a world-view, which as we have seen goes far beyond the rejection of relations of domination. In classical republicanism, non-domination is embedded in a more expansive concept of political health, virtue, and corruption. This broader context is often neglected in the works of Skinner and especially Pettit.

Despite this, understanding the neo-Roman concept of liberty as conceptualised by Skinner and Pettit will allow us to better understand what Hayek means when he talks about arbitrary power and the rule of law. It will also illuminate his the debt to the classical republican ideas developed by early modern philosophers such as Machiavelli and Harrington.

What does the neo-Roman concept of liberty entail? Domination, in the words of Pettit, "is exemplified by the relationship of master to slave or master to servant". It implies "that the dominating party can interfere on an arbitrary basis with the choices of the dominated" (Petit 1997a: 31). Ancient Roman literature stresses the importance of the distinction between liber (free person) and servus (slave), which was based on the belief that to be free means not to be a slave, and not in a situation that is structurally similar to slavery. Liberty is "the status of someone who, unlike the slave, is not subject to the arbitrary power of another" (ibid.). Domination therefore does not require interference; a slave that is not actually interfered with because they are subject to a benevolent master is nevertheless unfree (Pettit 1997a: 22, 23).

Being dominated is antithetical to freedom because it will always create dependence. Even if the master does not actually interfere with the slave, the mere possibility of interference will engender submissive behaviour, a kind of anticipatory obedience to the supposed wishes of the dominator. Those who are dominated know that they are "at the mercy of the powerful and not on equal terms" (Pettit 1997a: 61). Under an authoritarian regime, for example, journalists will not dare to criticise the government, even if actual interference is sparse. They know what is expected from them and behave accordingly.

Dependence on the whim of some person, group, or institution constitutes an evil in itself, irrespective of whether actual intervention is frequent or not. Hayek expresses precisely this

opposition to arbitrary power when he claims that liberty is "the state in which man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others" (Hayek 1978: 11). He is deeply concerned about the "arbitrary power of the executive" (Hayek 1978: 196), and believes that only a strict adherence to abstract laws can prevent it from becoming "a self-willed and uncontrollable apparatus before which the individual is helpless" (Hayek 1978: 262). The belief that coercion does not require intervention actually taking place, that arbitrary power alone is enough to compromise freedom is an important element of the Hayekian perspective (Irving 2020: 557).

Hayek, Skinner and Pettit all agree that liberty as non-domination was the original European idea of liberty, only to be later displaced by liberty as non-interference. Furthermore, Hayek agrees with the claim that liberty is precisely that which the slave does not possess:

> It so happens that the meaning of freedom that we have adopted seems to be the original meaning of the word. Man, or at least European man, enters history divided into free and unfree; and this distinction had a very definite meaning. The freedom of the free may have differed widely, but only in the degree of an independence which the slave did not possess at all. It meant always the possibility of a person's acting according to his own decisions and plans, in contrast to the position of one who was irrevocably subject to the will of another, who by arbitrary decision could coerce him to act or not to act in specific ways. The time-honored phrase by which this freedom has often been described is therefore "independence of the arbitrary will of another". (Hayek 1978: 12)

Administrative discretion unchecked by the law, the evil which Hayek opposes so ardently, is clearly a form of arbitrary power. This is recognised by neo-Romans. According to Skinner, the tradition claims that "if you live under any form of government that allows for the exercise of prerogative or discretionary powers outside of the law, you will already be living as a slave" (Skinner 1998: 70). Under such conditions, a benevolent government might "choose not to exercise these powers" or to use them to the public benefit. Still, "the very fact […] that those rulers possess such arbitrary powers means that the continued enjoyment of your civil liberty remains at all times dependent on their goodwill" (ibid.).

In the sense that domination can exist without interference, the neo-Roman concept of liberty is more demanding than negative liberty. At the same time, however, it is also more permissive. Just as there can be non-interfering dominators (Pettit 1997a: 24), there can also be non-dominating interferers. Those non-dominating interferers wield non-arbitrary power. The best example here are interferences which result from the application of a proper law.

Laws are only meaningful when they are enforced, and thereby necessitate intervention against those who break them. It follows that viewed from the perspective of the negative liberty tradition, laws compromise liberty. They can be justified with regard to other goods, which have to be balanced with liberty. Neo-Romans, however, disagree here. They claim that laws can create and increase freedom as long as they "respect people's common interests and ideas and conform to the image of an ideal law". The laws shall not be "the instruments of any one individual's, or any one group's, arbitrary will" (Pettit 1997a: 36). This perfectly mirrors Hayek's views. As we have seen, Hayek does not oppose interference as such, but only interference which is based on administrative discretion (Hayek 1978: 221, 231). The nomos, epitome of non-arbitrary power, can require significant interventions without compromising freedom. Hayek insists that "we are not subject to another man's will and are therefore free" when we obey proper laws (Hayek 1978: 153). He regards "coercion according to known rules" as not oppressive, because it can be "an instrument assisting individuals in the pursuit of their own ends and not a means to be used for the ends of others" (Hayek 1978: 21).

While both Hayek and neo-republicans such as Pettit and Skinner espouse a neo-Roman ideal of liberty as non-domination, there are significant differences when it comes to the concrete implications of such a concept. To understand those, we have to differentiate between two forms of domination, which have been called *imperium* and *dominium* by Blandine Kriegel (Kriegel 1995). Imperium here refers to the domination caused by the state. It denotes the arbitrary power held by government officials and agencies over individuals and groups. To be subject to imperium means to be subject to the arbitrary will of the state and its functionaries. Hayek's opposition to administrative discretion is motivated by the concern for imperium, and his demand for the rule of law is best understood as a provision against it. By insisting that there shall be an "empire of laws not men" (Harrington), Hayek constricts the arbitrary power of government officials. Demanding that proper laws shall not express particular aims, that they should apply equally to everyone and discriminate against no one, he erects a strong barrier that serves to prevent particular groups from exercising imperium through formally legal (non-discretionary) means.

Dominium, on the other hand, refers to the domination exercised by members of civil society over other members of civil society. According to Pettit, dominium can exist between employer and employee, husband and wife, or landlord and tenant (Pettit 1997a: 138-143). In all of those cases, a dominator (employer, husband, landlord) can exercise considerable and arbitrary power over their respective counterpart (employee, wife, tenant). The idea of dominium fits the neo-Roman idea that

the slave is the perfect example of unfreedom. Slaves, more often than not, were dominated not by the government, but by their masters.

Contemporary neo-republicans such as Pettit and Skinner believe that both imperium and dominium compromise liberty, and that we should consequently strive to reduce both (Pettit 1997a: 36). They would even agree that some measure of imperium might be necessary to combat dominium. Hayek, on the other hand, seems to solely be concerned with imperium without giving much thought to dominium. He views only the state as a potential dominator of groups and individuals, while ignoring the possibility of domination through other members of civil society.

Everything seems to depend on the respective weight given to dominium vis-a-vis imperium. According to Skinner, classical republicans were only concerned with imperium, which would make Hayek's reading more closely aligned with the historical one:

> When the neo-roman theorists discuss the meaning of civil liberty, they generally make it clear that they are thinking of the concept in a strictly political sense. They are innocent of the modern notion of civil society as a moral space between rulers and ruled, and have little to say about the dimensions of freedom and oppression inherent in such institutions such as the family or the labour market. They concern themselves almost exclusively with the relationship between the freedom of subjects and the powers of the state. (Skinner 17)

This, however, is an overly simplistic description. The historical tradition of classical republicanism did indeed care about dominium, as it was seen as a force that could corrupt the commmonwealth and thereby cause the downfall of the republic. Rousseau, for example, talks about the corruption of the citizens of Rome and Sparta, whose votes were bought by the rich (Rousseau 2002: 239). Even more dangerous was excessive wealth, which combined with the introduction of a professional army would allow the powerful to "enslave their country" (Rousseau 2002: 220-221). Similar concerns moved the Country faction during the Court-Country controversy in England, and the Jeffersonians when they opposed Hamilton's plans. Wage workers, Jefferson argued, would be dependent upon their masters and therefore be unable to act as independent citizens (Jenkinson 2004: 26-27). This way the republic would be corrupted. Under the classical republican framework from which the neo-Roman concept of liberty is derived, one cannot separate imperium and dominium, as both were opposed precisely because they are believed to cause corruption:

> To become the dependent of another was as great a crime as to reduce another to dependence on oneself. The dereliction of one citizen, therefore, reduced the others' chances if attaining and maintaining virtue, since virtue was now politicised; it consisted in a partnership of ruling and being ruled by others who must be as morally autonomous as oneself. In embracing the civic ideal, therefore, the humanist staked his future as a moral person on the political health of his city. (Pocock 1975: 75)

Hayek however implies that true domination among citizens does not exist under capitalism. When discussing the question whether members of civil society can in meaningful way be said to coerce other members of civil society, he claims that this is normally not the case – except in the case where physical violence is used. For example, if someone who hosts a party chooses to issue invitations only to those who "conform to certain standards of conduct or dress" (Hayek 1978: 135-136), this does not constitute a case of coercion. Equally, a business that refuses to supply us with certain goods on arbitrary basis does not constitute a dominator, as we can "turn to somebody else". Only in the case of a monopolist who withholds something that is "crucial to my existence or the preservation of what I most value" can we meaningfully speak of being coerced and thereby deprived of liberty (Hayek 1978: 136). Employers or providers of services, however, cannot be said to compromise our freedom because they each provide "only one opportunity among many" (ibid.).

One could argue that this does not accurately describe the relations of domination we encounter in the real word. In many cases, people might to a considerable degree depend on specific employer or landlord, whose arbitrary will is "crucial to [their] existence or the preservation of what [they] most value" (Hayek 1978: 137). At the same time, the focus on imperium rather than dominium can be defended on the grounds that the government wields especially strong tools of domination, that is, the tools of physical coercion through direct violence. And the alternative to the capitalist dependence on individual employers and service providers, socialism, would according to Hayek lead to an even higher degree of dependence. Once production and distribution have been socialised, the state would have "a complete monopoly of employment" and thereby "unlimited powers of coercion" (ibid.). Domination by arbitrary power, therefore, would be maximised under socialism. We will deal with this argument in the last part of this chapter.

RATIONALIST CONSTRUCTIVISM AND DEFINITE PURPOSES

Now that we have characterised Hayek as an adherent of the neo-Roman view of liberty, we can shed light upon his claim that society should not have "definite purposes". We will see that this

claim, which is rather odd and even self-defeating when interpreted in a crude way, begins to make sense when viewed in the light of liberty as non-domination. An analysis of the "no purposes"-rule in Hayek will allow us to better understand in what ways neo-Roman ideas influenced his political thought.

According to Hayek, rationalist constructivists are committed to the belief that "an order means something aiming at concrete purposes" (Hayek 1982: 38). Therefore, an ordered society can only be imagined as a "systematic arrangement for a definite purpose" (Hayek 1982: 54). While different rational constructivists might have different purposes in mind, they all accept that definite goals have to be set. Belief in a rationally plannable society implies the existence of specific goals. Conscious design is conceptually connected to the instrumental use of available means; a means, however, exists only in relation to an end. One cannot consciously design anything without a clear design goal. If the rationalist constructivists seek to consciously design society, they must already know what to design *for*.

Hayek explains our propensity to ascribe "definite purposes" to society as a relic from earlier times. The demand for "'solidarity' in the true sense of unitedness in the pursuit of known common goals" expresses primitive instincts that stem "from tribal society" (Hayek 1982: 111). People simply retain many of the instincts that were useful to their ancestors. In a tribal society, common causes were indeed readily available. Everyone knows everyone else, and the struggle for survival provides clear goals to pursue. This allows the tribe to act as an organisation, which for Hayek is a group of people acting "under a central direction for common purposes" (Hayek 1982: 47). This stage of human history is described as a *teleocracy*, a society with definite aims (Hayek 1982: 38). However as society becomes more and more complex, the unity of the tribe can not – and should not – be expected. The modern "Great Society" or *catallaxy* (market order, market society) is a *nomocratic* (ibid.) one, ruled by general rules but not committed to specific aims.

Organisations which act "under a central direction for common purposes" do exist in complex societies. They are "the family, the farm, the plant, the firm, the corporation and the various associations" (Hayek 1982: 46). But under a catallaxy, those various organisations are part of a larger order which is not itself an organisation. While in every society, there are "organised smaller groups … whose members will … act under a central direction for common purposes", Hayek points out that the Great Society as a whole does not have such specific goals (Hayek 1982: 47). People might sometimes agree on this or that particular aim, but the great plurality of different purposes implies that "agreement on particular ends will never suffice for forming that lasting order

which we call a society" (Hayek 1982: 95). Private enterprises, non-profit organisations, think tanks, hobby clubs, and sororities all have their own purposes: A private company like Apple wants to increase profits, an organisation such as PETA seeks to promote animal rights, the American Red Cross exists to provide disaster relief, and the Catholic Church is intent on spreading the Catholic faith. Aims and purposes do exist in Hayek's view of society, but they belong to individuals and groups *within* society, not to society *as such*. The Great Society simply creates circumstances where "individuals can make feasible plans" for themselves (Hayek 1982: 86).

Hayek provides us with several reasons why a complex modern society can not have concrete aims. One of those arguments is epistemic in nature. Tribal society is small enough so that a single individual might know all the relevant facts about the interests of the people which constitute it. Teleocratic orders can only work if they are "relatively simple", displaying at most "moderate degrees of complexity" (Hayek 1982: 38). Modern society, however, is so large and complex that no one might know what people want and which means they could effectively employ to fulfil their desires. The concrete goals of the diverse individuals that make up society are necessarily "unknown to those who lay down or enforce the rules" (Hayek 1982 vol II: 2). This lack of information means that those who make the rules cannot account for the multitude of aims that exist in society, and neither can they know how to fulfil them. Under such conditions, the solution is to let individuals and groups decide for themselves. If they are granted autonomy and allowed to do as they like, they will be in the best possible position to use their knowledge effectively. Therefore, nomocratic societies that lack definite purposes can "achieve any degree of complexity" (Hayek 1982: 38).

Furthermore, there is an argument regarding social peace to be found in Hayek's writings. People have different opinions, values and lifestyles. They would be unhappy or even angry if society forced upon them values which are foreign to them. A society geared towards spreading Christianity would be unacceptable to atheists, Muslims and Jews, one that aims at the promotion of fine art would run counter the interests of those who prefer pop culture. And few of those who live in rural areas would like to live in a society that promotes urban interests above their own. For a liberal society, granting autonomy to its members therefore not only allows them to use information effectively, it also contributes to "the order of peace". The lack of predetermined goals creates conditions where individuals who do not agree on much may still live together and pursue their respective interests:

> It is often made a reproach to the Great Society and its market order that it lacks an agreed ranking of ends. This, however, is in fact its great merit which makes individual freedom and all it values possible. The Great Society arose though the discovery that men can live together in peace and mutually

> benefiting each other without agreeing on the particular aims which they severally pursue. The discovery that by substituting abstract rules of conduct for obligatory concrete ends made it possible to extend the order of peace beyond the small groups pursuing the same ends, because it enabled each individual to gain from the skill and knowledge of others whom he need not even know and whose aims could be wholly different from his own (Hayek 1982: 109)

It is precisely this neutrality with regard to particular aims, this lack of openly stated common goals that creates the conditions of cooperation under a catallaxy. When "collaboration presupposes common purposes", Hayek argues, "people with different aims are necessarily enemies who may fight each other" (Hayek 1982: 110). But where no common purpose is required, individuals may simply pursue their own interests, cooperating where this is beneficial without having to agree on a "common scale of particular values". People can more easily agree on a general set of just rules of conduct than on specific aims (Hayek 1982 vol II: 15-16). Instead of being a battleground for different world views, the Great Society allows everyone to live side by side in peace.

Now that we have seen two important reasons for the idea that society does not have definite aims, we can ask what exactly this is supposed to mean. The demand for neutrality with regard to purposes can be interpreted in two different ways. The radical interpretation would state that there are truly no aims and purposes that we could ascribe to society. This would, in turn, mean that there is nothing we can expect of society, that there are no criteria we could use to assess whether it is a "good" society.

However, such a radical interpretation of the "no purposes"-idea seems to contradict Hayek's own statements. For example, he states that society must, through the actions of government coercion, ensure "the prevention of violence and fraud, the protection of property and the enforcement of contracts" (Hayek 1978: 229) as well as "provide a number of services which for various reasons cannot be provided […] by the market" (Hayek 1982 vol III: 41). Doesn't Hayek endow society with an *aim* here, that of protecting citizens? Protection from violence and the prevention of fraud are clearly *goals* that society must fulfil. And wouldn't it be true that a society that is market by violence and crime would be a bad society, implying that it has failed with regard to one of its *purposes*? Furthermore, isn't the idea that social pacification, one of the reasons why the "no purposes"-idea is put forward, itself a purpose?

It could even be argued that the total absence of purposes or criteria renders the whole enterprise of (normative) political philosophy void. Those who don't accept that society has purposes simply

don't have the criteria needed to critically assess different forms of society. In order to criticise an institution or a constitution, one must have at least a minimal understanding of what a good society looks like. A dictatorship might be antithetical to freedom, but this can only be criticised if one accepts freedom as a worthwhile goal to pursue. Hayek claims that communism is undesirable, but how can he defend such a claim if nothing is inherently desirable or undesirable? Even Hayek's claim that rationalist constructivism is to be rejected would not be sustainable when evaluative criteria are fully absent. The radical interpretation of the "no purposes"-idea contradicts both Hayek own claims and the premises of political philosophy.

Applying the principle of charity, we must assume that Hayek did not subscribe to the radical version of the "no purposes"-idea. Phrases such as "known purpose", "definite purpose", "concrete aim" and "particular goal" do not refer to just any normative demand we place on society. Hayek differentiates between teleocracy and nomocracy, the latter being ruled through laws, not commands. Laws, however, also have purposes. Every law strives to do something, such as preventing murder or reducing traffic accidents. The "definite purposes" Hayek is opposed must refer to a subclass of purposes, not to all purposes. A definite purpose must be a purpose with some additional qualification.

As we will see, this additional qualification is related to liberty as non-domination. As we will see soon, his criticism of definite purposes is not an abstract opposition to goals as such, but a decidedly *liberal* (understood in the old, that is republican sense) defence of people's right not to be dominated by the state. One way to render this plausible is to read Hayek's "no purposes" clause in the context of the debate between perfectionism, anti-perfectionism, and liberal neutrality. Perfectionism here refers to the view that there exists a morally "good life" which we should strive to realise irrespective of our "contingent desires or inclinations" (Dorsey 2010 : 60). The perfectionist believes that certain wishes and preferences are better than others and "identifies the good ends which we should pursue" (Buckley 2005: 134). Anti-perfectionism denotes the opposing view according to which there is no way to objectively assess which conceptions of the "good life" are better than others. Anti-perfectionists insist that individuals should be able to choose for themselves what is good and what is not. This position is commonly associated with liberalism (MacLeod 1997: 529-530).

Perfectionism is not necessarily monist. Firstly, even if there is only one correct conception of the good life, it might involve the pursuit of more than one good. This position, according to which "there are several distinct, intrinsically valuable elements that can be combined in a single, reasonably unified picture of a good human life" (Nussbaum 2011: 9), has been called *internal*

pluralism. Secondly, pluralism can mean that there is more than one conception of the good life worth pursuing. The assumption that there exist a number of different (and maybe mutually exclusive) forms of the good life does not run counter to perfectionism. In fact, it has been proposed by Aristotle that the good life is dependent on the existence of different ways of life in the *polis* (O'Neill 1995: 421, 422). However, all perfectionists agree that at least *some* ways of life are better or worse than others. Pluralist variants of perfectionism therefore encourage people to choose between the different valuable forms of life, but discourage them from choosing one of the objectively worse lifestyles. In the words of Raz, the government shall "create morally valuable opportunities and eliminate repugnant ones" (Raz 1986: 417).

Politically, anti-perfectionism is connected to the idea of liberal neutrality, according to which the state should not subscribe to any particular conception of what constitutes a good life. Particularly, it shall not use coercion to promote the any vision of the good (Kymlicka 1989: 883). According to Ronald Dworkin, governmental decisions need to be "independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life" (Dworkin 1985: 191). Liberal neutrality does not imply that the state be totally inactive. Laws can still be passed and coercion can be used in accordance with John Stuart Mill's harm principle, that is to prevent anyone from injuring others (Sadurski 1990: 122). Apart from that, people should be allowed to pursue their own goals on their own terms. Liberal neutrality contrasts with the view that the state should actively promote the good life.

However it is important to note here that one can believe in the existence of the good life without believing that it should be enforced through coercive action or even "nudging" by the state. Ethical perfectionism, which is the claim that some ways of life are better than others, does not entail political perfectionism, which rejects liberal neutrality and argues that the state should actively promote the good life.

Indeed one could make an ethically perfectionist argument for liberal neutrality and against political perfectionism: The good life exists, however determining its content requires a free and open debate and a large degree of practical experimentation. A state that strives to actively promote what the current majority believes is the good life would effectively prevent if not open debate, then at least practical experimentation. Such a "competitive-evolutionary" defence of liberal neutrality has for example been put forward by Kymlicka 1991: 219).

Contemporary literature points out that the doctrine of liberal neutrality can be understood in two different ways. The term either refers to *neutrality of effect* or to *neutrality of justification* (O`Neill 1995:

414). The criterion of neutrality of effect states that the government should not do anything that will have consequences which promote or hinder any particular way of life. Neutrality of justification, on the other hand, only requires that the government shall not intend to do so (See also Kymlicka 1989: 883-884, Raz 1986: 111-162). It can, however, perform actions or pass laws which would favour this or that way of life as a side effect. For example, by passing a law which increases fuel prices one could promote urban life at the expense of rural life (which is more dependent on automotive transportation). From the perspective of justificatory neutrality this is unproblematic because the government did not intend to advance the cause of urban life. Its intention was only to protect the climate. Any adverse effects for rural people that this decision might have is simply a concomitant phenomenon. While neutrality of justification is relatively easy to put into practice, neutrality of effect is almost impossible to implement. Even relatively innocent government actions such as promoting freedom of speech can favour some ways of life over others (Kymlicka 1989 : 884). It might even be argued that practically every possible law, no matter how general in its nature, will somehow change the viability of at least some ways of life (MacIntyre 1988 : 345, Perry 1988 : 67). Generally, neutrality of effect is no longer a popular position among liberals. Most philosophers who defend the neutrality thesis espouse justificatory neutrality (Caney 1991 : 458).

This sentiment is shared by Hayek. In a catallaxy or market society, he states that there will be "winners and losers", and that it "would be nonsensical to demand that the results for different players will be just" (Hayek 1982 vol II: 71). The "ideal type of law" can provide "additional information to be taken into account" by people, thereby changing their individual behaviour (Hayek 1978: 150). This implies that even an ideal law can and will have an impact on the way of life, making some lifestyles easier and others more difficult. Coercion by the government may very well "serve general and timeless purposes"; the only thing that it cannot do is to pursue "specific ends" (Hayek 1982 vol II: 226).

It is clear that the pursuit of *general* purposes will have specific *consequences*; what is prohibited is only *specific purposes*. A general purpose is not specific, and a specific consequence is not intended. Only the combination of being specific and being intended creates a problem for Hayek. What the government can not do is *deliberately* enforce a *certain way of life*. It is perfectly fine if a law aimed at a permissible, that is sufficiently neutral and general purpose, makes some ways of life more or less viable as an *unintended* consequence.

Liberal neutrality has been criticised for its "elusive theoretical foundations" (MacLeod 1997 : 530) and its supposed tensions with other liberal commitments. Other authors have defended the idea

(see Rawls 1993). For our purposes we will assume that liberal neutrality is in principle tenable. Hayek's opposition to the tendency to ascribe "definite purposes" to society can be viewed as an expression of liberal neutrality and therefore as a non-contradictory and, among liberals, widely popular position. In contrast to the maximalist position, a commitment to liberal neutrality is robust enough to be taken seriously. And indeed, Hayek explicitly states that "a nation may destroy itself by following the teaching of […] saintly figures unquestionably guided by the most unselfish ideals". People should be "free to choose their way of practical life", which means that ideals about the nature of the good life, no matter how noble, should never be "enforced on all" (Hayek 1978: 67). This is an explicit espousal of liberal neutrality that can be traced back to neo-Roman ideas: If freedom is the absence of arbitrary power, people cannot be expected to live under imperium. A government that is able to enforce a specific conception of the good might be said to dominate those who live under it in an arbitrary fashion. Under such a regime, citizens would be wholly dependent on the will of others. At any moment, the majority might decide to act against one's way of life, leveraging the government to destroy it. It could very well be argued that this is incompatible with liberty conceived as non-domination.

Hayek claims that the idea of "deliberate purposes" is inherent to rationalist constructivism, thereby implying that liberal neutrality and rationalist constructivism are incompatible. If he is right, then there exists a way to criticise political rationalism from a neo-Roman perspective, giving neo-Romans good reasons to reject it.

However if the rejection of definite causes is viewed not as a general rejection of aims in politics but as an argument against political perfectionism, then it is not necessarily at odds with rationalist constructivism. The radical interpretation of the "no purposes" clause does indeed contradict political rationalism; if there are no ends at all, then it is impossible to design appropriate means. Means without ends cannot be assessed. The liberal interpretation of "no purposes" on the other hand is perfectly compatible with rationalist constructivism. Indeed, the Promethean social engineer can aim to design a society in which individuals are empowered to pursue their own goals. A successful design would be one that allows people to do this as effectively as possible. Liberal neutrality, therefore, can serve as a design goal for rationalist constructivism.

Of course, there are still open questions. Proponents of free-market capitalism might say that providing healthcare and shelter for all is a definite aim, while for the socialist, those things empower the individual to freely pursue their own aims. But such open questions do not alter the basic fact that liberal neutrality is in principle compatible with rationalist constructivism. Irrespective of our

stance on the specific delimitation between rules which enforce a particular way of life and rules which allow people to freely pursue their own ends, political rationalism does not *necessarily* imply that the state must propagate a specific vision of the good life.

Before we leave the "no purposes"-idea behind, there is one more comparison which might render its indented, that is non-radical meaning more transparent: Rousseau's opposition to the influence of particular interests on the state. For some readers, this proposal might appear as odd. Rousseau has been interpreted as a totalitarian by many, among them Hayek himself (Hayek 1978: 58). The *general will*, a central idea of Rousseau's political philosophy, is viewed as a dangerous metaphysical construct which stands over and above individual interests. According to such a reading, real people are expected to submit to "the will of the political organism, an entity which has a life of its own quite apart from that of the individual members of which it is built" (Nisbet 1943: 100, 101). Rousseau appears as an advocate for total state control and the obliteration of individual freedom, as a precursor to Bolshevism and National Socialism (Nisbet 1943: 97).

However, more recent approaches strive to provide a different reading. Philip J. Kain (1990) argues that Rousseau was indeed a proponent of individual liberty. Far from being a "disembodied abstraction unconnected to the individual and instead issuing from some mystical entity", the general will is a specific form of "the will of the individual" (Kain 1990: 317). It is the expression of the collective self-interest of the individuals which constitute society (Kain 1990: 320).

The general will can only arise if four different conditions are met. Firstly, all citizens must be directly involved in the legislature (Kain 1990: 317). This precludes indirect democracy, under which laws are being voted on by elected representatives. Secondly, the general will must be "applicable to all" in the same manner, upholding the "equality of rights" by not being directed toward "some individual and specific object" (Rousseau 2002: 174). This means that the sovereign may only deal with "abstract and universal questions" (Kain 1990: 318). Clearly, this is a formulation of the idea of equality before the law that is, as we have seen, espoused by Hayek. Thirdly, the questions that the sovereign deals with must be formulated in a way which aims not at the disclosure of their particular goals, but at their opinion about what would be beneficial for society as a whole:

> The citizens, in being asked to cast a vote, are not being asked to express their particular interests; they are being asked to engage in a reflective, intellectual inquiry. […] In other words, the question must be put so as to ask the citizen to reflect on an intellectual matter – the citizen must give an opinion on what is right. (Kain 1990: 318)

While some might claim that such a focus on the good of society alone is illiberal due to its exclusion of individual interests, Hayek interestingly expresses precisely the same sentiment:

> Legislation proper […] should not be governed by interests but by opinion, i.e. by views about what kind of action is right or wrong – not as an instrument for the achievement of particular ends but as a permanent rule and irrespective of the effect on particular individuals or groups. (Hayek 1982 vol II: 112)

Both authors differentiate between the particular interests of specific groups and individuals on the one hand and people's opinion about which general rules are right for everyone on the other. Both authors furthermore claim that only the latter shall influence lawmaking. Rousseau's fourth and last condition is that all laws are to be "rigorously and equally enforced" (Kain 1990: 319). Here again, Hayek agrees. The "evil nature of coercion" is removed when general rules are generally enforced and therefore predictable (Hayek 1978: 143).

Again it is important to understand that Rousseau does not want to abolish people's self interest in favour of some metaphysical good. Indeed, the good of society is nothing more than the fulfilment of individual interests. However, the state shall only concern itself with those interests which are more than just particular preferences. The body politic concerns itself just with those interests which take on a general form:

> Self-interest must be present – each must think of themselves – but they must consider their self-interest in the abstract sense where laws will be rigorously and equally enforced for all. Self-interest must not be eliminated; it must be transformed. If one's self interest is considered rationally only in the long-term, abstract case, then self-interest becomes, or at least comes to agree with, the general interest. (Kain 1990: 321)

Rousseau's goal is the exclusion of particular interest from the state. Particular goals might still be pursued privately; they can just not be enforced through governmental coercion. No one has the right to use the powers of the state in order to force others to comply with their particular goals. The conception of the general will is therefore not, as has often been claimed, a totalitarian device by which Rousseau seeks to justify tyranny. On the contrary, Rousseau formulates a criterion that severely limits the use of state power. For Rousseau as for Hayek, the state shall not be an instrument

of special interests. Instead, it can only lay down abstract rules aiming at the general interest of society.

This line of thought is deeply connected to the idea that laws, not men should rule, which as we have seen can be traced back to classical republicanism. The exclusion of particular interests serves to prevent the state from being used as a means of domination, where one part of society enforces its will in an arbitrary fashion. Instead, the state shall only have laws which aim at the good of society as a whole and are thereby universally agreeable. According to the common views espoused by Hayek, Rousseau, and to a certain extent modern neo-republicans, such laws do not represent an exercise of arbitrary power. Indeed, classical republicanism has been described as opposing the contemporary pluralism according to which "democratic decision making usually involves strategic bargaining among largely self-interested actors" in favour of a process where only common interests are enforceable through the state (Fisher 1993: 561).

To summarise, the "no purposes"-idea does not claim that society has no purposes at all, which would imply that there are no criteria by which one could evaluate its merits. Instead, Hayek applies republican principles which restrict the kinds of goals that society might pursue. On the one hand, the state should not be used to impose any particular set of values regarding the "good life" on others. On the other, it should not be the instrument of special interests. Both of those requirements are derived from republican ideas. Furthermore, as has been shown, they are perfectly compatible with rationalist constructivism. Moreover, they can serve as planning goals for the political rationalist, as abstract goals that a good model constitution should reach. The "social engineer" could make use of political philosophy and empirical studies to deliberately develop an institutional framework which guarantees liberal neutrality and the exclusion of special interests, thereby safeguarding neo-Roman liberty.

DESIGNING FREEDOM: REPUBLICANISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Hayek believes that his anti-administrative, anti-state sentiments stand in direct opposition to both rationalist constructivism and socialism. In the previous section, however, we have seen that this might not be accurate. The "no purposes" clause, which is portrayed by Hayek as a reason to reject political rationalism (Hayek 1982: 38) can in fact be used as a goal for institutional design. This raises a more general question about the relationship between neo-Roman liberty and Prometheanism.

When we take a closer look at the opinions voiced by some of the most prominent rationalist constructivists, we are faced with a lot of sympathy for the rule of law. One example is Thomas Paine, whom we have described as archetypical political rationalist. In his attacks against the king of Britain, he calls him not only an "enemy of liberty", but also points to his "thirst for arbitrary power" (Paine 2014: 27). Just as Pettit and Skinner, he views freedom as something that is primarily opposed to slavery. For example, he complains that Americans will be "effectually enslaved" by the lack of proper laws (ibid.). Furthermore, he accuses those who do not understand that "freedom is destroyed by dependence" of having forgotten "the principles of Republican Government" (Paine 2014: 157). It has been suggested that Paine abandoned his "republican-based" argumentation as employed in Common Sense for a solely "rights-based" approach in his later work *The Rights of Man* (Paine 2014: 630). However as we have seen, classical republicanism and Enlightenment liberalism are not opposed to each other; instead, the political thought of the Enlightenment incorporated both the doctrine of natural rights and classical republican commitments. However, even if we accept this view, the "early Paine" provides us with an example for the compatibility of political rationalism and republicanism. Another example for this compatibility is provided by Algernon Sidney, who as a proponent of natural rights republicanism argued for the rule of law in order to limit the arbitrary power of magistrates (Ward 2004: 166).

And as we have seen, Rousseau, whom Hayek regards as a rationalist constructivist *par excellence*, shares the belief in the supremacy of the law as a tool of liberty. He proposes a system where all members of a state are, at the same time, "individually called *citizens*, inasmuch as they participate in the sovereign power, and s*ubjects*, inasmuch as they are subject to the laws of the State" (Rousseau 2002: 164). People collectively decide upon laws, which are then binding for all. Equality before the law is guaranteed:

> When I say that the object of laws is always general, I mean that law considers subjects collectively and actions abstract, never a man as an individual nor a particular action. Thus the law may indeed decree that there shall be privileges, but cannot name confer them on any person by name; the law can create several classes of citizens, and even assign the qualifications which shall entitle them to rank in these classes, but it cannot nominate such and such persons to be admitted to them; […] in a word, no function which has reference to an individual object appertains to the legislative power (Rousseau 2002: 179)

Since he is "a member of the State", even the prince is subject to the law (Rousseau 2002: 179). The law is the law only because it "combines the universality of the will with the universality of the object". Once the state acts with regard to a specific object, this "is not a law, but a decree, not an act of sovereignty, but of magistracy" (ibid.). But where it is magistrates and not laws which rule, we cannot speak of a republic, only of illegitimate government. As we can see, Rousseau's description of the rule of law closely aligns with the one provided by Hayek.

Similarly, in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, an important document of the French revolution, we find many ideas that are also espoused by Hayek. It says that the bounds of liberty "may be determined only by law" (France 1789). This law must be "the same for all, whether it protects and punishes". All citizens are "equal in its eyes". Persons who "solicit, expedite, carry out or cause to be carried out arbitrary orders must be punished". Here we find both a Hayekian espousal of the rule of law and a neo-Roman opposition to arbitrary power.

Even Karl Marx, the arch-enemy of Hayek, was deeply skeptical about administrative discretion and the powers of the state. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx attacks the demand for "elementary education by the state" because it gives undue powers to the apparatus of government:

> "Elementary education by the state" is altogether objectionable. Defining by a general law the expenditures on the elementary schools, the qualifications of the teaching staff, the branches of instruction, etc., and, as is done in the United States, supervising the fulfillment of these legal specifications by state inspectors, is a very different thing from appointing the state as the educator of the people! Government and church should rather be equally excluded from any influence on the school. Particularly, indeed, in the Prusso-German Empire (and one should not take refuge in the rotten subterfuge that one is speaking of a "state of the future"; we have seen how matters stand in this respect) the state has need, on the contrary, of a very stern education by the people. (Marx 1972)

Here, Marx clearly states that it is permissible to define the role and procedures of education "by a general law", and to supervise "these legal specifications by state inspectors". However, directly "appointing the state as the educator of the people" would lead to disaster. All administrative discretion must be avoided. The government has to be "excluded from any influence on the school". On the basis of such statements, Marx can be described as a theorist influenced by republican concerns (see also Roberts 2016).

If Hayek is right, Paine, Sidney, Rousseau, and Marx are all guilty of a self-contradiction. As we will see in the remainder of this section, the opposite is true. The rule of law and republicanism do not contradict rationalist constructivism. On the contrary, supporters of free institutions have good reasons to support at least some elements of a Promethean world view. As soon as non-domination is accepted as a substantial goal for society to pursue then it is expedient to plan society in a way that maximises such liberty. Pettit writes:

> This book is designed to show how institutions can be designed – specifically, designed in a republican pattern – so that people's enjoyment of non-domination is more or less smoothly maximised. (Pettit 1997a: 92)

Far from being antithetical to non-domination, rational design can be put into the service of such liberty. Institutions can be planned in a way which corresponds to its requirements. They can be designed so that they limit administrative discretion and prevent the emergence of arbitrary power. The political system, the economy, the courts can be constructed in order to limit imperium – or even dominium – as much as possible. The neo-Roman view of liberty in specific and the classical republican in general might very well be understood as a demand for the conscious creation of a free society.

Interestingly, and in contrast to his own traditionalist ideas, Hayek engages in such institutional design. His *The Constitution of Liberty* devotes a lot of attention to the explanation of the concept of liberty and the rule of law. But why should we acquire a theoretical understanding of liberty in the abstract? Why do we need to grasp concepts such as the rule of law on a conscious level? Assuming that those are simply the result of an evolutionary process and that their true function cannot be known by rational actors, it doesn't make sense to explain them. A deep theoretical analysis of liberty and the rule of law only seem to be reasonable if we intend to model our political institutions in a way which is conductive to their preservation and further development. One could say that *The Constitution of Liberty* is in fact an exercise in rationalist constructivism it overtly condemns. It is Promethean insofar as it maps the effects of different institutional arrangements on liberty and asks us to design them in a way which prevents tyranny. Where he acts as a defender of freedom, Hayek becomes a Promethean.

This tension becomes even more pronounced in Hayek's later work *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*. Here, Hayek proceeds to develop a "political order for a free people" (the title of the third book), "a model constitution" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 105) to be imposed onto the real world. This constitution is

substantially different from any constitution that has ever existed. It contains various detailed descriptions of what a state that respects liberty *should* look like. While he criticises the "constructivistic superstition" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 33), at the same time he provides us with a painstakingly concrete constitutional design of his, which is entirely based on abstract ideas.

Hayek's design is geared towards a single goal, the realisation of the rule of law. He proposes a precise "delimitation of the public sector" and the "independent sector" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 46-51) based on an assessment which services can be provided by the market and which have to be in the hands of the government. He stresses the necessity of a new basic clause to "restrict the means that government could employ" and claims that it will "achieve all and more than the traditional Bill of Rights" and make it so that "arbitrary power is […] prevented" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 109, 110). Once the public sector and the independent sector have been delimitated, he describes how laws are being made and enforced. On the one hand, there is a "distinctive legislative assembly", on the other "the second representational body which we shall call the Governmental Assembly". The former is to be responsible for legislation and shall create the *nomos*, while the latter is meant to organise the executive branch and cater to the particular interests of the citizens. In order to guarantee the independence of proper law from particular will, the Legislative Assembly must be filled in a different manner than the Governmental Assembly. If this were not the case, if both chambers were "composed of approximately the same proportions of representatives of the same groups and especially parties", then this would threaten to turn the Legislative Assembly into a mere tool of governance (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 111-112). Therefore, the proper legislature shall not be elected in a normal, democratic fashion. Instead, Hayek provides us with the following, very detailed description:

> What would thus appear to be needed for the purposes of legislation proper is an assembly of men and women elected at a relatively mature age for fairly long periods, such as fifteen years, so that they would not have to be concerned about being re-elected, after which period, to make them wholly independent of party discipline, they should not be re-eligible nor forced to return to earning a living in the market but be assured of continued public employment in such honorific but neutral positions as lay judges, so that during their tenure as legislators they would be neither dependent on party support nor concerned about their personal future. To assure this only people who have already proved themselves in the ordinary business of life should be elected and at the same time to prevent the assembly's containing too high a proportion of old persons, it would seem wise to rely on the old experience that a man's contemporaries are his fairest judges and to ask each group of people of the

> same age once in their lives, say in the calendar year in which they reached the age of 45, to select from their midst representatives to serve for fifteen years. (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 113)

Hayek then proceeds to describe his ideal state in even more detail. One particularly fanciful idea are "clubs of contemporaries" which would be "formed either at school-leaving age of at least when each class entered public life". Hayek notes that those "would possibly be more attractive if men of one age group were brought together with women two years or so younger" (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 117). Following this somewhat odd statement, the perfect constitutional court (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 120-122) and the optimal division of financial powers (Hayek 1982 vol. III: 126-127) are explained to us.

All of this is rationalist constructivism plain and simple. Hayek creates a blueprint for a future constitution based on his abstract understanding of the political process. He has a clear design goal in mind: furthering neo-Roman freedom, liberty as non-domination. Just as Pettit and Skinner, he is afraid of the "tyranny of the majority", thereby devising an institutional arrangement that guarantees that laws are proper laws, that they track "the interests and judgments of the persons affected" (Pettit 1997a: 55).

This has not been lost on the literature. For example, John Gray states that Hayek's "advocacy for bicameralism" is "marred by a tone of constructivist utopianism of the sort he elsewhere deplores" (Gray 1980: 134). Similarly, Chandran Kukathas argues that Hayek's partisanship in favour of liberal values conflicts with his low opinion about the capacities of reason (Kukathas 1990: 215). Another author who points out the contradiction between Hayek's anti-rationalism and his liberal designs is Norman Barry (1994). Barbara Rowland agrees, stating that Hayek "rationally chooses to 'interfere' with ongoing social processes" (Rowland 1988: 231) and thereby creates a significant tension with other parts of his work. On the one hand, he "tries to allot a place for both non-interference with cultural evolution", on the other, he demands "significant interference via the design of political institutions" (Rowland 1988: 235).

However, Rowland believes that she can reconcile those views, arguing that Hayek's critique is not directed against "any and all forms of constructivism" and that he "speaks favourably of a certain kind of constructivism". According to Rowland, there is a spectrum with "hubris/constructvist rationalism" on one end and "resignation" on the other (Rowland 1988: 227). Hayek, she claims, has to be situated in the middle. He is neither a full blown rationalist constructivist nor a staunch traditionalist, but someone who takes a more balanced position. "Hayek's work points to the

importance of constructivist rationalism", but it also reminds us that construction has to be "bounded" by existing culture and institutions (Rowland 1988: 240).

Not only does this view of Hayek from a critic of rationalist constructivism into an advocate of "bounded" constructivism contradict his often open hostility to political rationalism as such, it is also hardly compatible with the argumentation that Hayek employs. When talking about social evolution, Hayek embraces the anti-rationalist world view *in toto*, explaining why we should distrust our own understanding and instead fully embrace tradition. In this, he joins Edmund Burke, even though the evolutionary mechanism might be different (cultural group selection vs trial and error) Wherever rationalist constructivism is discussed, there is no middle ground in Hayek's writings. He argues for "submission to undesigned rules" the use value of which we don't understand (Hayek 1978: 63), and unambiguously states that the rationalist desire to "revolt" against those rules is deeply misguided.

Apart from the fact that Rowland's attempt to attribute a middling position to Hayek is unsupported by the text, it is also unable to provide us with any practical guideline when to resort to constructivism and when to trust in tradition. The real questions at hand are a) how much we can trust our own reason and b) how much we can trust cultural evolution. And while Rowland is unable to provide clear answers here, Hayek is clear as can be. The problem is, again, that his answer contradicts his ideas on freedom.

Even though Hayek uses rationalist constructivism when designing his ideal constitution, which is an obvious self-contradiction, it might still be possible to salvage his more general contention. It is possible to reconcile his opposition to rationalist constructivism with his advocacy for freedom if it could be demonstrated that social evolution more reliably produces liberty than any attempt at constitution-building and institution-designing.

To assess whether this could be argued, we will apply the three arguments that have been proposed against his account of social evolution to the question of liberty.

Evolution is not benevolent: As we have seen in the last chapter, the theory of cultural group selection does not provide us with good reasons to believe that desirable institutions would spontaneously arise. Now that we have a more concrete idea about what the goodness of institutions could mean – that they promote liberty – this rather abstract argument can be put in more concrete terms. The question is as follows. Does cultural group selection provide any mechanism which will

systematically bring about liberty? Do we have reasons to assume that the constituent elements of such liberty, such as the rule of law, will emerge spontaneously? The Hayekian must assume this.

There are good reasons to believe that the opposite is true. For a group to be successful when competing with other groups, it needs to display a certain kind of flexibility. In war, diplomacy, and trade, it is expedient to be able to react swiftly to circumstances which might be rapidly changing. Now, a free commonwealth that is heavily constrained by general and abstract laws which have to track the interests of the affected will be much more clumsy in this regard than a despotic state. The more administrative discretion the functionaries of the state possess, the more effective they will be at pursuing the game of military, diplomatic, or economic competition. The "natural" course of things, therefore, might very well be said to do the opposite of what Hayek suspects. It might detract from freedom and further the development of tyrannical government.

Evolution is too slow: If the institutions of liberty are to arise through a process of gradual evolution (and this is true not only for cultural group selection, but also for the mechanism proposed by trial-and-error theory), their emergence would require ample time and a relatively stable environment. These conditions are not given in the contemporary age. Democratic institutions, for example, are traditionally associated with small city states. Today, there are large democratic countries with hundreds of millions of citizens. Furthermore, neo-Roman freedom needs to find a way to deal with new technological inventions such as the internet, which might create new forms of domination and at the same time present new ways to reduce it. Lastly, we have to deal with challenges such as climate change and global pandemics. In our age of rapid change, slow and gradual evolution might not be enough to guarantee liberty as non-domination.

Path dependency: For free institutions to prevail under conditions of gradual evolution, there must be a pathway to more and more liberty that does not lead through a valley in the evolutionary landscape. Is this always plausible? It can be doubted. Authoritarianism has its benefits, and freedom is a practice that requires exercise – this is admitted by Hayek, Rousseau, and Marx. In the short run, many attempts to move towards a higher degree of liberty might therefore lead to a worsening of the situation. As has been argued in the last chapter, it is only faith in the validity of our designs that can sustain us when we move from a local optimum to a global one.

It seems that there are no good reasons to believe in the spontaneous emergence of liberty. And indeed, historically, social evolution has in many cases promoted authoritarianism. The Roman Republic devolved into a despotic empire. Where liberty has prevailed, on the other hand – in the

political revolutions connected to the Enlightenment, above all the French and American revolutions – it was often connected to political rationalism. Social evolution in the sense of trial and error might play a role in the refinement of the new order, however the leap forward that has created our current liberties can easily be attributed to a Promethean attitude. The American revolution got its ideas from rationalist constructivists such as Paine, and the French were inspired by the designs of Rousseau.[9]

Those who are committed to values such as liberty would do good not to trust in blind evolution alone. All that has been said leads us to the conclusion that they must, firstly, think about the concept of liberty, analyse it rationally and elaborate on its meaning and its conditions (*social mapping*). They must then carefully craft institutional arrangements which are conductive to this liberty (*institutional design*). And then, they must strive to implement them in the real world (*social transformation*). All of this is done not only by "continental" intellectuals such as Rousseau and Marx, but even by Hayek himself.

It is not that we have to choose between liberty and political rationalism. Political rationalism provides a means for the adherents of liberty to employ, and liberty provides a goal for political rationalists to pursue.

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND SOCIALISM

There are three Hayeks: Firstly the "Hayek of Tradition", a critic of rationalist constructivism. Secondly, the "Hayek of Liberty", a proponent of neo-Roman virtues and the rule of law. Thirdly, the "Hayek of Capitalism", who opposes socialism and advocates for a free-market economy. So far, we have seen that Hayek's traditionalism stands in a very uneasy relationship with his partisanship for liberty. Far from supporting his opposition to rationalist constructivism, Hayek's neo Roman attitude undermines the idea that institutional design is to be rejected.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will showcase that there are also significant tensions between the "Hayek of Capitalism" and the other two Hayeks. In this section, we will deal with the

[9] Some Marxist adherents of historical materialism, subscribing to the view that philosophy is nothing but a superstructural phenomenon, might argue that this statement gives to much weight to the causal power of ideas. However, it is perfectly compatible with historical materialism: The spread of Rousseau's and Paine's ideas can be attributed to specific material circumstances. Rationalist constructivism itself could be viewed as a form of consciousness that "mirrors" material aspects of modern society and modern science.

connection between the critique of rationalist constructivism on the one hand and the rejection of socialism on the other. In the next one, we will discuss whether Hayek's ideas on liberty are really incompatible with socialism.

Who is the "Hayek of Capitalism"? His story begins in 1920, when Ludwig von Mises published his article "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (Mises 1990), a reply to the socialisation debate that followed the 1918/1919 German Revolution. Mises claimed the impossibility of socialism based on the *calculation problem*. A functioning economy, so the argument goes, is impossible without economic calculation, which in turn requires a single unit as a measure of economic value. Such a unit is provided by market prices expressed in monetary terms. By calculating the monetary costs and gains of their economic activities, market participants can easily determine whether a certain action is economic or not. If however private property and with it competition are abolished, the market cannot function. Where there is no market, there can be no prices, no calculation, and finally no economy (Mises 1990: 18). Mises argued that this is true not only for consumer goods, but also and most critically for production goods. This argument is the starting point for the so-called *socialist calculation debate*.

A closer look reveals that there are several calculation debates (O'Neill 1996: 433-434). Most famously, there is the work of Lange (1935) and Lerner (1935). Lange and Lerner more or less accepted the premises of Mises's argument, for example the idea that a rational economy needs a single unit of calculation. However they argued that such a unit can be arrived at even in a system where no private property exists. To show how prices could be determined and used under socialism, they developed a system that that they themselves called "market socialist". This might be a misnomer since the Langer-Lerner model relies on simulated, not actual markets. More recently, more suggestions for socialist systems with a single unit of value have been proposed, for example by Cockshott and Cottrell (1993) and Dapprich (2022). While Cockshott and Cottrell suggest to use labour time as the unit of calculation, Dapprich proposes the use of opportunity cost valuations.

Another way to deal with the Austrian arguments can be found in Neurath. Pointing towards the incommensurability of of different goods, he argued that the market price mechanism does not provide a standard for a rational economy (Neurath 2004: 468. see also Uebel 2019: 202-204). According to O'Neill, Hayek shared Neuraths concerns, rejecting the idea that "rational calculation between options in social choices is possible" (O'Neill 1996: 442) and thereby contradicting both Mises and Lange/Lerner. By proposing his famous information argument, Hayek changes the focus of the debate from calculation to epistemology (O'Neill 1996: 440-441).

The information argument is perhaps Hayek's most concise and widely known contribution to the debate between pro-capitalist and pro-socialist theorists. It can be found in his seminal text *The Use of Knowledge in Society*. The main problem we face, so the argument goes, is that the knowledge necessary to make sound economic decisions "never exists in concentrated or integrated form but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge" (Hayek 1948: 77). In contrast to Mises, Hayek does not think that the decisive problem is "how to allocate 'given' resources" (ibid.) but how to make use of the knowledge that many different individuals possess.

Hayek relies on the assumption that knowledge is largely dispersed. It is possessed by many different actors. At the same time, such knowledge is very valuable when it comes to economic decision-making. A good economic system must therefore find a way to make use of it.

Dispersed knowledge is not primarily scientific knowledge, that is knowledge of general rules, but more often knowledge which refers to "particular circumstances" and "local conditions" (Hayek 1948: 80). One could imagine, for example, someone studying at a university town who knows that many of her fellow philosophers are vegan, and that there is a lack of vegan restaurants near the department of philosophy. Such knowledge of particular circumstances could be used to improve the economy. In Hayek's own work, there is mention of shippers, estate agents, and traders as examples for those who rely on their knowledge of local conditions in order to be effective (ibid.).

One possible solution to the problem of dispersed knowledge is to simply concentrate it. Hayek believes that this is impossible. Most local knowledge can never be "conveyed to any central authority" (Hayek 1948: 93). Such an authority would have to gather and process vast sums of information the reliability of which it could not reasonably assess. The planners might think that they could solve the problem by the use of statistics, but Hayek points out that this abstracts from the true conditions and thereby severely degrades the value of the information. No "central planner" can ever know what the "man on the spot" knows (ibid.).

According to Hayek, only the market alleviates the information problem. It does this by conveying relevant information quickly and allowing people to employ their local knowledge in order to find creative solutions to the requirements of the larger economic order. If, for example, demand for lithium increases because more batteries for electric cars are being produced, the price of the resource will go up. Other market participants do not have to be informed about the precise business practices of car manufacturers, however they will immediately recognise the price signal,

providing them with a good reason for a shift towards less lithium-intensive production methods. In the same way, a technological breakthrough in semiconductor production techniques would lead to lower prices, causing billions of people and companies to rely more heavily on computer chips. The market, therefore, allows humans to act in concert, and it doesn't even require central authority or unity of will. If we wanted to replace this self-organising mechanism with some method of deliberate planning, Hayek argues, we would have to "manually" organise all of the knowledge that was previously curated and distributed by the market. Only in a market economy, people can "take the right action" even if they know little (Hayek 1948: 85-86). Market prices allow us to take into account global information, and then act locally, employing their knowledge of particular facts in the service of the requirements of the larger economic order.

This is, in broad strokes, a summary of Hayek's information argument. It is perhaps his most famous idea. However, there are critics of this line of reasoning. Cockshott and Cottrell, for example, argue that Hayek relies on an erroneous understanding of what planning entails, and therefore draws the wrong conclusion. Specifically, they criticise Hayek's idea that socialist planning functions as "one mind" (Cockshott, Cottrell 1994: 8). They also argue that the market is a slow calculating device, and that modern computer technology allows us to be much more efficient (Cockshott, Cottrell 1994: 10-11).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to assess the validity of Hayek's information argument. The information argument is not an argument against rationalist constructivism, but an argument against socialism. It does not dispute the possibility of institutional planning as such, but only the possibility of a specific mode of production or economic system. It is a specific economic argument, not a general philosophical one that is directed against the idea of political rationalism as such.

Even if socialists were able to conclusively defeat both the calculation argument by Mises and the information argument by Hayek on economic grounds, their position would still be vulnerable against the more general anti-rationalist objection. Socialists might provide good reasons for believing that socialism is tenable, but the anti-rationalist point is precisely that such reasons cannot be trusted. In view of the complexity of society, we can neither believe that our reasoning is adequate nor that it is complete enough to predict the results of radical change. Assuming that economic calculation is possible under socialism, there could still be many other unintended consequences.

Hayek might be less well-known for his conservatism than for his economic thought, but we should remember that the second half of his career was almost exclusively focused on political philosophy, not economic theory. In the end, the Burkian mistrust of the "hubris of reason" and thereby of radical change might very well be a more potent obstacle to the socialist than any specific argument about the supposed disadvantages of a planned economy.

In some sense, the information argument is even rationalist insofar as it assumes that we know enough about society to make claims about the pros and cons of different economic systems. The information argument refers to the *known* advantages of capitalism and the (supposed) *known* disadvantages of socialism[10]. The critique of rationalist constructivism, on the other hand, points to the *unknowns*. It questions our very ability to identify and discuss the specific advantages and disadvantages of different designs on a theoretical level.

Far from being congenial to each other, the critique of rationalist constructivism severely restricts the scope of Hayek's advocacy for free-market capitalism. Or, to put it differently, his pro-capitalism is an expression of the very political rationalism he rejects. This tension is structurally similar to the one discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Hayek's critique of rationalist constructivism advises us to refrain from any attempt to consciously control the evolutionary process of institutional change. We are encouraged not to intervene on the basis of rational deliberations about the supposed desirability of specific institutional arrangements. This is so because the true value of an institution or custom is very often unknown to us (Hayek 1982: 9). Society functions precisely because we are "confined by rules whose purpose or origin we often do not know" (Hayek 1982: 11). If this is true, then it cannot be advisable to base one's opinion about any institutional framework on a set of specific arguments, that is, on *known reasons*. Hayek's evolutionary account of social development clearly implies that intervention based on rational assessment can only ever be harmful.

However, when he presents his case for capitalism in the form of the information argument, he employs precisely such speculation. Basing his assessment of different economic systems on purely theoretical ideas, he uses abstract reasoning of the kind that his own Burkianism would denounce as constructivist. This has been noted by Michael Oakeshott, another political anti-rationalist, who

[10] Strictly speaking, the information argument is an argument against central planning in general. However, both Mises and Hayek believe that such planning is inherent to socialism.

attacks Hayek because "a plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics" (Oakeshott 1962: 21).

This does not mean that anti-rationalism is in principle unable to criticise socialism. However, the anti-rationalist critique can defend capitalism only on the grounds that it is the *established* system, the one which has been selected by cultural evolution. What anti-rationalists cannot do is point to any specific advantages that might be ascribed to the capitalist mode of production, for doing so presupposes that we have the ability to assess institutions based on our "own private stock of reason" (Burke). It follows that the enemies of rationalist constructivism are neither inherently pro-capitalist nor anti-capitalist. They will certainly defend an established system of capitalism against the constructivist demand to transition to socialism. But the critique of political rationalism would have been equally suitable for those who wanted to defend the Soviet system against *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. This has been noted by David Miller:

> Hayek's foundationless liberalism only makes sense in one particular context; that of an established liberal society which is threatened by demands of a broadly socialist type. It would not have served the founders of liberalism and it will not serve liberals who find themselves subjected to authoritarian regimes of the left or right. (Miller 1977: 144)

It is important to note here that this is not merely hypothetical. As we have seen in the third chapter, the evolutionary view has indeed been used to argue against liberal views such as those held by Richard Price. The anti-rationalist perspective can never justify a specific political or economic system, it can only ever serve to defend the status quo against those who want to change it.

In contrast to the opposition to constructivism professed by the "Hayek of Tradition", the "Hayek of Capitalism" was part of an essentially constructivist political project. When Hayek wrote his major works – *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944, *The Constitution of Liberty* in 1960, and *Law, Legislation, Liberty* in 1973 to 1979 – socialist and welfarist states dominated much of the world. In the West, Keynesian economic thought prevailed and institutions were structured accordingly. This status quo of a mixed economy with a strong welfare state and strong labour unions – a result of experimentation and compromise – can easily be described as the result of spontaneous processes. Instead of defending it, Hayek laboured to implement rather radical changes. Proposing a set of abstract arguments in favour of free-market capitalism, he employed reasons accessible to the individual mind, and appealed to the public to reconstruct society in accordance with a design of his making. In this sense, the neoliberal revolution championed by the Mont Pelerin Society must be counted as a

Promethean project among the American, French and Russian revolutions. Or, to put it in Karl Polanyi's words:

> Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not. (Polanyi 1944: 141)

At the heart of the problem lies a failure on Hayek's part to differentiate between macro and micro level planning. Macro level planning here refers to designing the basic institutional framework of society. This revolves around questions such as whether democracy is desirable, what functions the different branches of government shall have, and how the economy shall be organised (socialist, capitalist, mixed economy and so on). Rationalist constructivism or Prometheanism is a thesis about the possibility and desirability of macro level planning. Micro level planning, on the other hand, refers to the day-to-day administration of political, economic, or social affairs. Hayek, who strives to implement a strictly market-based society and believes that he can invent a "Constitution of Liberty", might be acting in accordance with a disdain for micro level planning, but this activity in itself constitutes a case of macro-level planning. His critique of rationalist constructivism, however, is a critique of macro level planning.

Rationalist constructivists can be socialists or economic liberals. The very question that gives rise to the dichotomy between socialism and capitalism – in both cases, an ideal is to be imposed on society as it actually exists – is expressive of the political rationalism of the Enlightenment. Political anti-rationalism taken to its logical conclusion prohibits any partisanship in favour of social, economical, or political blueprints and any attempt to ponder the best way to organise society. A conservative political epistemology implies neither the ideal of socialism nor the ideal of free-market capitalism, but the defence of the complicated social structures that have actually developed in the course of history. In this sense, Michael Oakeshott is more faithful to their anti-constructivism than Hayek.

REPUBLICANISM AND SOCIALISM

Now that we have commented on the uneasy relationship between Hayek's principled pro-capitalism and his rejection of constructivism, we can devote our attention to the relationship between socialism and liberty. In this section, we will deal with the relationship between the "Hayek of Capitalism" and the "Hayek of Liberty". It is devoted to the question whether socialism and neo-Roman liberty are at all compatible.

The easiest way to argue for the incompatibility between socialism and liberty is of course to state that socialism involves interference with the free market, and that it is therefore inherently illiberal. Such an approach lends itself to the advocates of negative liberty, that is, to those who conceptualise liberty as non-interference. If liberty is compromised by interference, and if socialism interferes, then socialism is by its very nature incompatible with liberty. Hayek, however, does not take this route. He does not reject all governmental intervention in the economy:

> Freedom of economic activity had meant freedom under the law, not the absence of all government action. The "interference" or "intervention" of government which [Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill] opposed as a matter of principle therefore meant only the infringement of that private sphere which the general rules of law were intended to protect. They did not mean that government should never concern itself with any economic matters. But they did mean that there were certain kinds of governmental measure which should be precluded on principle and which could not be justified on any grounds of expediency. (Hayek 1978: 220, 221)

Regulation of the economy as such is not a problem. However it must be practiced in a way that respects the rule of law. It shall not involve the use of arbitrary power by government agencies. Society must not be dominated by the state. Far from supporting the "old formulae of laissez faire or non-intervention" (Hayek 1978: 231), Hayek's belief that socialism endangers freedom is based on his neo-Roman republicanism.

From the neo-Roman perspective, intervention as such is not objectionable. And in *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek indeed allows for different government activities: "provision of a reliable and efficient monetary system" (Hayek later changed his mind about this), "setting standards of weights and measures", and "providing of information". If based on clear rules, those activities serve to "provide a favourable framework for individual decisions". Hayek even tasks the government with "health services", "the construction and maintenance of roads", and "the amenities provided by municipalities for the inhabitants of cities" (Hayek 1978: 223). It shall also "take the initiative, in such areas as social insurance and education" (Hayek 1978: 258). In all of those cases, there exists a specific reason why the market cannot provide the services needed by society. In addition, there can be legislation pertaining that enforces safety measures and other general requirements that economic agents must satisfy:

> Furthermore, a free system does not exclude on principle all those general regulations of economic activity which can be laid down in the form of general rules specifying conditions which everybody

> who engages in a certain activity must satisfy. They include, in particular, all regulations governing the techniques of production (Hayek 1978: 224).

Some might argue that this creates a space for administrative discretion. However, while "the manner in which the authorities may have to act cannot be foreseen", it is nevertheless clear that the correct action "once a certain situation has arisen, can be made predictable to a high degree" (Hayek 1978: 225).

> The destroying of a farmer's cattle in order to stop the spreading of a contagious disease, the tearing-down of houses to prevent the spreading of a fire, the prohibition of an infected well, the requirement of protective measures in the transmission of high-tension electricity, and the enforcement of safety regulations in buildings undoubtedly demand that the authorities be given some discretion in applying general rules. But this need not be a discretion unlimited by general rules or of the kind which need to be exempt from judicial-review. (Hayek 1978: 225).

The freedom of contract is normally considered as one of the most important foundations of the liberal order. But according to Hayek, this does not mean that the state must enforce all kinds of contracts. "Contracts for criminal or immoral purposes", for example, do not have to be enforced, and the same is true for "contracts permanently binding the services of a person" (Hayek 1978: 230). Again, it is not a general opposition to regulation and intervention that motivates Hayek, but a concern for the rule of law. Above all, it is important "that the permissibility of a particular act depends only on general rules and not on its specific approval by authority" (ibid.). The state therefore has the right to lay down conditions which specify the kinds of contracts that are permissible and which will therefore be enforced by coercive means. Again, the only thing that is precluded here is to entrust some agency with the discretion to decide at will which contracts shall be considered as valid (ibid.).

Far from being an expression of laissez faire liberalism, Hayek's opposition to socialism is shaped by republican concerns. He believes that socialism must necessarily dispense with the rule of law, that it implies our total subordination to the arbitrary will of government. This is the case firstly because of the aims of socialism – an equitable distribution of wealth – and secondly because of the means it employs – full public control over the economy.

Let us begin with the first argument. According to Hayek, equal treatment by the government will always lead to unequal results. It follows that to achieve equality of outcome, the government must

treat people unequally. Those who strive for distributive justice will inevitably feel compelled to "determine the material position of particular people" (Hayek 1978: 231). It is "the very nature of their aim" to "favour discriminatory and discretionary action" (Hayek 1978: 232). The demands that the rule of law places upon government – equality before the law and the absence of administrative discretion – are thereby incompatible with the socialist aim to achieve full equality (or any other "just" distribution of income, for that matter).

This argument is rather weak, as it presupposes that unequal outcomes are naturally produced under every possible system of rules, so that equal outcomes can only ever be achieved through constant arbitrary intervention and the unequal treatment of persons. It is unclear why this should be the case. Equality of outcome could be guaranteed by a set of abstract rules alone. The easiest way to imagine this would be a law that determines a certain "general wage". This is not to say that such an arrangement would be beneficial from an economic standpoint. What is relevant to the argument is here only that it would guarantee equality of outcome while preserving equality before the law.

Now we can proceed to the second argument. Under socialism, the private sector is abolished, and thereby also the market. To "approach even remotely the ordering function of the market", the government has to "co-ordinate the whole economy". It has to create a "centrally planned and administered system" where all power emanates "from a single central authority" (Hayek 1978: 282). This, evidently, is the ultimate form of arbitrary power. The governmental planning board would have full administrative discretion with regard to every detail of economic life.

To a smaller extend, this threat exists in capitalist economies. Even if Hayek does not object to the existence of the public sector as such, he thinks that in order to keep administrative discretion at bay, it shall be as small as possible:

> No doubt if government became the exclusive provider of many essential services, it could, by determining the character of these services and the conditions on which they are rendered, exercise great influence on the material content of the order of the market. For this reason it is important that the size of this 'public sector' be limited and the government do not so coordinate its various services that their effects on particular people become predictable. (Hayek 1978: 140).

The public sector is for Hayek always a source of *imperium*, because it allows the government to directly and arbitrarily interfere with the life of its citizens. The more of the economy is controlled

by the public sector, the more pervasive the power of administration over civil society. The full abolition of private enterprise as advocated by socialists is the most radical assault on liberty. It implies full governmental control over *all* economic activity. Under such conditions, civil society would cease to exist. If we accept that administrative discretion is dangerous, then this can only appear as a grave threat to liberty.

Hayek's argument, however, suffers from similar problems as his purely economic critique of socialism. In both cases, he can only conceive of socialist economy as a command economy in the strictest sense, an economy where every decision is taken by a planning body with infinite power, micromanaging economic processes at will in accordance with the will of the executive branch. All non private institutions are thought of as pawns of some government ministry and therefore part of the state apparatus. Under such conditions, the head of the executive branch − the prime minister or president − could direct the whole economy as they see fit. The dangers inherent in such an arrangement are obvious.

However, Hayek presents us with a false dichotomy and a caricature of socialism. Socialists do demand that the means of production shall be publicly held. However this does not imply that they must be controlled by the executive branch. Public or non-private enterprise are not necessarily part of the state apparatus. Non-private, non-governmental institutions, far from being logically impossible, do exist in our world. We find them not in voluntary associations such as worker owned companies (worker's cooperatives) or NGOs, which are still strictly speaking private organisations, but in the so-called statuary corporations.[11]

One of the best examples would be the BBC in the United Kingdom. The British understood that the task of informing the public is too important to leave it to business interests. It follows that the BBC does not have private owners. At the same time, the government could not be trusted with this crucial task, as it would surely feel tempted to spread propaganda in its favour. The BBC is established under a royal charter, its mission defined by abstract and general laws. It is not subordinated to any ministry, it is independent from direct governmental influence, and thereby not subject to administrative discretion. The executive branch has no means to decide which programs the BBC shall broadcast. Laws, and only laws, define the framework in which the BBC must

[11] An economy based on such corporations would solve one of the major problems that socialists talk about: the exploitation of the working class and the profit making of those who already have access to capital. It remains to debate in what sense such an approach would get rid of or reestablish the "anarchy of the market".

operate. Administrative decisions are up to its own staff, which is selected in accordance to its own rules. Similar structures exist in Germany, for example, where the public service television broadcasters ARD and ZDF are non-private, and at the same time independent from government intervention ("öffentlich-rechtlich").

Another example for non-private institutions which are protected against executive branch meddling are, of course, the courts. They exist, they are independent of the particular will of the executive, and they are certainly not private enterprises.

Even though he thinks so, Hayek's legal philosophy cannot be used to present a clear case against public enterprises. Instead, it simply provides those rationalist constructivists who happen to be socialists with some interesting insights on how to build the institutions of the future. It showcases why they should prefer independent statuary corporations over those controlled by the government.

Hayek's opposition to the centralisation of administrative powers in the economy can even be used as an argument *for* socialism. At least in some sectors, market economies necessarily give rise to monopolies which have the ability to set prices at will. Thereby, ordinary people are dominated, which from a neo-Roman perspective compromises their liberty. The problem of monopolies and the difficulties of combating them without resorting to administrative tyranny is acknowledged by Hayek:

> So far as the enforcement of general rules (such as that of non-discrimination) can curb monopolistic powers, such action is all the good. But what can be done in this field must take the form of that gradual improvement of our law of corporations, patents, and taxation, on which little that is useful can be said briefly. I have become increasingly skeptical, however, about the beneficial character of any discretionary action of government against particular monopolies, and I am seriously alarmed at the arbitrary nature of all policy aimed at limiting the size of individual enterprises (Hayek 1978: 265)

Finally, Hayek capitulates, stating that while monopolies are harmful, they are so "in the same sense in which scarcity is undesirable" (Hayek 1978: 265). Socialists, on the other hand, can get rid of the problem. Under a socialist economy, where the responsibilities of different statuary corporations are clearly delimited by law, provisions can be made that prevent any of those corporations to simply buy off others. Such an arrangement can hardly be practical under capitalist conditions; the buying and selling of assets (means of production) is a necessary part of the economic whole.

From a republican perspective, monopolies are far from harmless. They create dependencies. If an essential good is monopolised by a single company, government agencies need to create close ties with its management. Business leaders and public officials thereby become mutually dependent upon each other. In the language of Machiavelli, Harrington, and Paine, this nothing short of a recipe for corruption.

Since the Court-Country debate, classical republicans have known that the centralisation of power is a dangerous thing. This is just as true with regard to economic power as it is with political force. The old concept of liberty that Hayek seeks to revive can provide good reasons to take a critical look at capitalism. This is an inherently Promethean enterprise because it requires us to radically re-design our society on the basis of theoretical insight.

Hayek argues that liberty and Prometheanism are incompatible. Rationalist constructivism leads to socialism, which inevitably implies tyranny. This warning presupposes the equivocation of liberty with capitalism, capitalism with traditionalism, and traditionalism with liberty. The previous sections however have demonstrated that the "Hayek of Tradition", the "Hayek of Liberty" and the "Hayek of Capitalism" do not form a coherent whole. Instead, their relationship to one another is tense. The republicanism espoused by Hayek, which views arbitrary power as dangerous, is incompatible neither with socialism, nor with the Promethean world view.

VI
Conclusion

Can we rationally design a new order? Can social progress be planned? Political rationalism and its critique have played a large role in history. They have informed and continue to inform many of the most important political conflicts of the modern age.

We have examined four different arguments that have been proposed to disprove Prometheanism and argue for a more conservative approach social development. Firstly, the irrationalist challenge. Irrationalist ideas have shown themselves not only as steps on the path to fascism, but also as self-contradictory or lacking in justification. They employ argumentation to prove that nothing can be proved by argumentation. They employ global theories about the emergence of thought (such as culturalism) to prove that no theory is universally valid.

The second argument was Hume's claim that morality and politics do not have first principles. Therefore, a rational system of government cannot be build. Politics always relies on certain fundamental values which cannot themselves be derived through reason. This meta-ethical pessimism can be read as an expression of the epistemic defeatism that underlies, to varying degrees, all four anti-Promethean arguments. At the same time we have seen that even if we were to fully accept Hume's meta-ethics, this would not provide a sound argument against political rationalism as such. Society can still be rationally designed, albeit not to fulfil goals which can themselves be proven to be unconditionally rational. Instead, we would rely on hypothetical imperatives. If we want democracy, we have to do x. The fundamental goals themselves would not be open to rational discussion, but the process of conscious design remains in place. Instead of a categorical political rationalism, we could get a hypothetical one.

The third and perhaps strongest argument is provided by Hayek. It is the theory of social evolution, which gives us an alternative understanding how and why institutions develop. On first glance, this understanding provides us with a good reason to refrain from rational planning. However, Hayek's argument depends on the crucial assumptions that evolution is benevolent and that our surroundings don't change. Furthermore, it has been shown that social evolution tends to get trapped in evolutionary valleys, leading to path dependence. An alternative version of social evolution, trial-and-error theory, has likewise been assessed and rejected.

The last and fourth argument claimed that Prometheanism leads to tyranny. But over the course of the thesis, we have seen that the very republican ideas that Hayek tries to leverage against the political rationalists provide reasons to re-design society. If we want prevent being dominated and if we seek to stave off the corruption which destroys liberty, we cannot simply "trust the process". Instead, we are forced to build new and better political and economical institutions, such that have been designed with republican liberty in mind. Rather than being anti-promethean, Hayek's advocacy for freedom provides an additional reason for institutional design.

This dissertation did not solve the question regarding political rationalism. The rebuttal of four important arguments is a step in the right direction, but many questions remain, both historical and systematic ones. Historically, the works of all major political philosophers can be read with the question regarding Prometheanism in mind. This would add more nuance to our image of the relationship between the politics of reason and the emancipatory currents of the modern age. Systematically, there is also a lot of work to do. Some anti-rationalist arguments, such as those provided by Oakeshott, have not been discussed here. Furthermore, this thesis did not provide a detailed positive account of the different stages of Prometehan design: social mapping, institutional design, social transformation. Such an account would have to deal with questions of epistemology and hermeneutics, with the justification of knowledge in general and the status of the social sciences in specific. It also needs to account for the gaps between theory and practice, with the difference between abstract blueprints and implementation.

As we have seen, many opponents of political rationalism point out that our knowledge is limited. They highlight the fact that we do not, and maybe can not, fully understand all mechanisms that govern the social realm. This thesis does not contest these claims; it does not argue that we know everything about society. However we should keep in mind that even in times where our knowledge of physics was rather underdeveloped, engineers built impressive machines. Why should the social engineer not also be able to work on the basis of partial knowledge? One can, at least in principle, accept limitations on our knowledge and still be a Promethean.

Many have diagnosed a decline in Promethean ambition. Frederic Jameson speaks of a "loss of a utopian language", Franco 'Bifo' Berardi of a "slow cancellation of the future" which has been "accompanied by a deflation of expectations" (Berardi 2011: 33). Just as the early modern success of natural sciences have inspired people to strive for a better future, the failures of the 20th century have undermined their confidence. To claim that we can rationally change the world sounds naive to our ears.

At the same time, change is necessary more than ever. Our planet is dying and our democratic institutions are decaying. That Prometheanism works has not been shown here. What has been demonstrated is that the idea deserves a lot for attention than it is currently given.

VII

Bibliography

Abizadeh, Arash (2001) "Banishing the Particular. Rousseau on Rhetoric, Patrie, and the Passions", *Political Theory*, Vol. 29 (4), August, pp. 556–582.

Alksnis, Gunnar (2015) *Chthonic Gnosis. Ludwig Klages and his Quest for the Pandaemonic All*. Munich: Theion Publishing

Adorno, Theodor (1996) *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag

Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max (2010) *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag

Adair, Douglass (1957) "'That Politics May be Reduced to A Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist", *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 20 (4), August, pp. 343-360

Arthur, W. Brian (1989) "Competing Technologies, Increasing Returns, and Lock-In by Historical Events", *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 99 (394), March, pp. 116-131

Bailyn, Bernard (2017) *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): The Belknap Press of Havard University Press

Bambach, Charles (1995) *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*. Cornell University Press

Barry, Norman P. (1982) "The Tradition of Spontaneous Order". *Literature of Liberty*, Vol 5, pp. 7–58.

Barry, Norman P. (1994) "The Road to Freedom – Hayek's Social and Economic Philosophy", in Birner, J. and van Zijp, R. (eds): *Hayek, Co-ordination and Evolution – His Legacy in Philosophy, Economics and the History of Ideas*, pp. 141-163, London: Routledge

Becker, Carl L (1942) *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*, New York: Vintage Books

Berardi, Franco 'Bifo' (2011) *After the Future*, Edinburgh: AK Press

Bergson, Henri (1910) *Time and Free Will*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Berlin, Isaiah (2001) *Against the Current. Essays in the History of Ideas*, New York: The Viking Press

Boykin, Scott A. (2010) "Spontaneous Order and Constitutional Design". *The Independent Review*, Vol. 15 (1), Summer, pp. 19-34.

Brownsey, P. F. (1978) "Hume and the Social Contract". in: *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950–)*, Vol. 28 (111), April, pp. 132-148

Buckley, F. H. (2005) "Perfectionism", *Supreme Court Economic Review*, Vol. 13, 133-163

Butler, Marilyn (editor) (1984): *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Burczak, Theodore A. (1994) "The Postmodern Moments of F. A. Hayek's Economics". *Economics and Philosophy*, Vol. 10 (1), pp. 31-58

Burke, Edmund (2015) *Reflections on the Revolution in France and Other Writings*, New York: Everyman's Library

Canavan, Francis P. (1959) "Edmund Burke's Conception of the Role of Reason in Politics". in: *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, February, pp. 60-79

Caldwell, Bruce J. (1994) "Hayek's Scientific Subjectivism". *Economics and Philosophy*, Vol. 10 (2), pp. 305-313

Caradonna, Jeremy L. (2015) "There was no Counter-Enlightenment". in: *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 49 (1), Fall, pp. 51-69

Cecere, Grazia et al (2014) "Lock-in and path dependence: an evolutionary approach to eco-innovations", published online 17 October 2014, Springer Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, DOI 10.1007/s00191-014-0381-5

Christman, John (2015) "Saving Positive Freedom". *Political Theory*, vol. 33(1), February, pp. 79-88

Cockshott, Paul, Cottrell, Allin (1993) *Towards a New Socialism*, Nottingham: Spokesman.

Cockshott, Paul, Cottrell, Allin (1994) "Information and Economics", published online October 1994, http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~wpc/reports/hayek/hayek.pdf (accessed 1st July 2022)

Cooper (2010) *Verstehen, Holism and Fascism*, published online by Cambridge University Press in January 2010, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100006068

Dapprich, Jan Philipp (2022) "Optimal Planning with Consumer Feedback: A Simulation of a Socialist Economy", *Review of Political Economy*, DOI: 10.1080/09538259.2021.2005367

Dawkins, Richard (1972) *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Derrida, Jacques (1997) *On Grammatology*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

Dilthey, Wilhelm (1965) *Gesammelte Schriften, VII. Band*, Stuttgart: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht

Dilthey, Wilhelm (1990) *Die Geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Erste Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, Stuttgart: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht

Dilthey, Wilhelm (1997) *Grundlegung der Wissenschaften von Menschen, der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte*, Stuttgart: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht

Dilthey, Wilhelm (2013) *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Berlin: Holzinger Verlag

Dilthey, Wilhelm (2017) *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, Berlin: Holzinger Verlag

Dorsey, Dale (2010) "Three Arguments for Perfectionism", *Nous*, Vol 44 (2), March, pp. 59-79

Droysen, Johann G. (1868) *Grundriss der Historik*, Leipzig

Dworetz, Steven (1990) *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*, Dunham: Duke University Press

Dworkin, Ronald (1985) "Liberalism". *A Matter of Principle*, London: Havard University Press

Fisher, William (1993) "Making Sense of Madison: Nedelsky on Private Property", Law & Social Inquiry, Vol 18 (3), Summer, pp. 547-572

Ford, Karen (1998) "Can Democracy Bind Itself in Perpetuity? Paine, the Bank Crisis, and the Concept of Economic Freedom", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 142 (4), December, pp. 557-577

The People of France (1789) *The Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, Available from: https://www.elysee.fr/en/french-presidency/the-declaration-of-the-rights-of-man-and-of-the-citizen [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Freeman, Michael (1978) "Edmund Burke and the Theory of Revolution", in: *Political Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 3, August, pp. 277-297

Gaus, G. F. (2006) "Hayek on the Evolution of Society and Mind". *The Cambridge Companion to Hayek*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Gaus, G. F. (2009) "State Neutrality and Controversial Values in On Liberty". *Mill's On Liberty: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 83-104

Garfield, Jay (2019) *The Concealed Influence of Custom: Hume's Treatise from the Inside Out*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Garrard, Graeme (2004) *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Routledge

Goethe, Johann W. (1985) *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben

Gray, John (1980) "F.A. Hayek on Liberty and Tradition", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Vol. 4 (2), Spring, pp. 119–137

Graham, Jenny (2000) *The Nation, the Law, and the King: Reform Politics in England 1789-1799 (two volumes)*. University Press of America

Gray, John (1984) *Hayek on Liberty*. Basil Blackwell. New York 1984

Hale, Matthew (1924) "Reflections by the Lrd. Chiefe Justice Hale on Mr. Hobbes his Dialogue of the Law". In W.S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, vol. 5: 500-513

Hamilton, Alexander (1999): "A Full Vindication", in: *The American Revolution: First Person Accounts by the Men Who Shaped Our Nation*, T. J. Stiles (ed.), New York: Prigee

Hayek, Friedrich August (1948) *Individualism and Economic Order*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Hayek, Friedrich August (1982) *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, London: Routledge

Hayek, Friedrich August (1978) *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Hayek, Friedrich August (1952) *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies in the Abuse of Reason*, Glencoe (Illinois): The Free Press

Heidegger, Martin (2000) "Die Frage nach der Technik". in: *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann

Hoerber T. (2019) "Edmund Burke's Liberalism". In: Hoerber T., Anquetil A. (editors): *Economic Theory and Globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23824-7_4

Horkheimer, Max (1974) *Eclipse of Reason Vol 1*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing

Hume, David (1985) *Essays. Moral, Political, and Literary*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund

Huyler, Jerome (1995) *Locke in America*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas

Irving, Sean (2020) *Hayek's Neo-Roman Liberalism*, European Journal of Political Theory, Vol 19 (4), 553-570

Israel, Jonathan (2011) *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Jenkinson, Clay (2004) *Becoming Jefferson's People: Re-inventing the American Republic in the Twenty-First Century*. Reno: Marmouth Press

Kain, Philip J.: "Rousseau, the General Will, and Individual Liberty", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol 7 (3), Juli 1990, 315-334

Kant, Immanuel (1965) *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill

Kant, Immanuel (1784) *What is Enlightenment?* https://users.manchester.edu/Facstaff/SSNaragon/Online/texts/318/Kant,%20Enlightenment.pdf (accessed 11th July 2022)

Kauders, Anthony (2013) "Antisemitismus und Selbsthingebung, oder: Der Kampf gegen den 'jüdischen Rationalismus'". in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 23 (1), Gefühle gegen Juden, pp. 502-526

Kekes, John (1997) "What is Conservatism?". in: *Philosophy*, Vol. 72, No. 281, July, pp. 351-674

Klages, Ludwig (1913) *Mensch und Erde*

Klages, Ludwig (2018) *Vom kosmogonischen Eros*, Munich: Theion Publishing

Klages, Ludwig (1931) *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth

Kramnick, Isaac (1990) *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Kriegel, Blandine (1995) *The State and the Rule of Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Kristjánson, Kristján: "What is Wrong With Positive Liberty?". *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 18(3), Fall 1992: 289-310

Kukathas, Chandran (1989) *Hayek and Modern Liberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Kymlicka, Will (1989) "Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality", *Ethics,* Vol. 99(4), July, pp. 883-905

Kymlicka, Will (1991) *Contemporary Political Philosophy,* Oxford: Clarendon Press

Laqueur, Walther (1962) *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, Transaction Publishers

Lange, Oskar: "Marxian Economics and Modern Theory". *The Review of Economic Studies*. Vol 2 (3), 1935, pp. 189–201

Lebovic, Nitzan (2006) "The Beauty and Terror of Lebensphilosophie: Ludwig Klages, Walter Benjamin and Alfred Baeumler". South Central Review, Year 39 (4), Fascism, Nazism: Legacies of Reaction, pp. 23-39

Lenzner, Steven J. (1991) "Strauss's Three Burkes: The Problem of Edmund Burke in Natural Right and History". in: *Political Theory*, Vol. 19 (3), August, pp. 364-390

Lerner, Abba (1938) "Theory and Practice in Socialist Economics". *The Review of Economic Studies*. Vol. 6(1), pp. 71–5

Lukács, György (1981) *The Destruction of Reason*, London: Humanities Press

Luxemburg, Rosa (2022) *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, Available from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Lyotard, Jean-Francois (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

MacIntyre, Alasdair (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London: Duckworth

MacIntyre, Alasdair (1959) "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'". in: *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 68 (4), October, pp. 451-468

Maclean, Michael (1982) "Johann Gustav Droysen and the Development of Historical Hermeneutics", *History and Theory*, Vol. 21 (3), October, pp. 347-365

Mannheim, Karl (1940) *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.

Marx, Karl (1904) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago: Charless H. Kerr & Company

Marx, Karl (1972) *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Beijing: People's Publishing House

Marx, Karl (2004a) *Capital: Volume I*, London: Penguin UK

Marx, Karl (2004b) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Available from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Marx, Karl (2009) *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Available from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Marx, Karl (2010) *Capital: Volume III*, Available from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

McArthur, Neil (2014) "Hume's Political Philosophy". in: *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

McMahon, Darrin M. (2002) *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Merriam, C.E. (1899) "Thomas Paine's Political Theories", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol 14 (3), September, pp 389-403

Miller, Ted (2001) "Oakeshott's Hobbes and the Fear of Political Rationalism", *Political Theory*, Vol 29 (6), pp 806-832

Mises, Ludwig (1922) *Die Gemeinwirtschaft*. Gustav Fischer-Verlag

Mises, Ludwig (1990) *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*. Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute

Navlakha, Gautam (1997) "Fear of Freedom". *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 32(44/45), November 8-14: 2854-2855

Nelson, Eric S (2013) "Hermeneutics: Schleiermacher and Dilthey". in: *History of Continental Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Nineteenth-Century Philosophy: Revolutionary Responses to the Existing Order (1840-1900), 139-160

Neurath, Otto (1973) *Empiricism and Sociology*, Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1877) *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter

Nisbet, Robert A.: "Rousseau and Totalitarianism", *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 1943), pp. 93-114

Norton, Robert E. (2007) "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment", Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol 68 (4), October, pp. 635-658

Nussbaum, Martha C. (2011) "Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 39 (1), Winter, pp. 3-45

Oakeshott, Michael (1962) *Rationalism in Politics*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd

Owen, David (2015) "Scepticism with Regard to Reason" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hume's Treatise*, Donald C. Ainslie and Annemarie Butler (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

O'Neill. John (1995) "Polity, Economy, Neutrality", *Political Studies*, Vol. 43, pp. 431-442

O'Neill, John (1996) "Who Won the Socialist Calculation Debate?", *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn), pp. 431-442

O'Neill, John et al (2002) "Socialist Calculation and Environmental Valuation: Money, Markets and Ecology", Science and Society, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Spring), pp. 137-158

O'Neill. John (2006) "Knowledge, Planning, and Markets: A Missing Chapter in the Socialist Calculation Debates", *Economics and Philosophy*, Vol. 22, pp. 55-78

Paden, Roger: "Reason and Tradition in Burke's Political Philosophy". in: *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 1988, pp. 63-77

Page, S: "Path Dependence" (2006) *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1 (1), 87-115

Paine, Thomas (2014) *Selected Writings of Thomas Paine*, New Haven: Yale University Press

Pangle, Thomas (1988) *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, Chicago: Chicago University Press

Pettit, Phillip (1997a) *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997

Pettit, Phillip (1997b) "Freedom with Honor: A Republican Ideal". *Social Research*, 64 (1), Spring, pp. 52-76

Perry, M (1988) *Morality, Politics and Law: A Bicentennial Essay*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Phillips, Leigh (2019) "Planning the Earth System". Available from: https://thebreakthrough.org/journal/no-11-summer-2019/planning-the-earth-system [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Pocock, J. G. A.: "Burke and the Ancient Constitution – A Problem in the History of Ideas". in: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1960, pp. 125-143

Pocock, J. G. A. (1972) "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century". The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol 3 (1), Summer, pp. 119-134

Pocock, J. G. A. (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Popper, Karl R. (1962) *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Basic Books

Popper, Karl R. (1966) *The Open Society & its Enemies*, Vol II, London: Routledge & Kegan

Raz, Joseph (1986) *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Rawls, John: "The Priority of the Right and Ideas of the Good", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol 17 (1988)

Rawls, John (1993) *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press

Rawls, John (1999) *A Theory of Justice*. Columbia University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts): Havard University Press

Reichenbach, Hans (1938) *Experience and Prediction. An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Richard, Stanislav Victor (2020) "Social justice and the distribution of republican freedom". *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 19(1), pp. 67-86

Richard, Stanislav Victor (2022) "Is freedom as non-domination a right-wing idea?". *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 21(1), pp. 187-196

Rixen, Thomas / Viola, Lora Anne (2015) "Putting path dependence in its place: toward a taxonomy of institutional change", *Journal of Theoretical Politics,* Vol 27 (2), pp. 301-323

Robbins, Caroline (1968) *Eighteenth Century Commenwealthman*, Havard: Havard University Press

Roberts, Andrew (2015) "A republican account of the value of privacy". *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 14(3), pp. 320-344

Roberts, William Claire (2018) *Marx's Inferno*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Rodi, Frithjof, Lessing, Hans-Ulrich (1984) *Materialien zur Philosophie Wilhelm Diltheys*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2002) *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, New Haven: Yale University Press

Rowland, Barbara M. (1988) "Beyond Hayek's Pessimism: Reason, Tradition and Bounded Constructivist Rationalism". *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 18(2), April, pp. 221-241

Ryan, Vanessa L. (2001) "The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason". in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62 (2), April, pp. 265-279

Ryle, Gilbert (1940) The Concept of Mind, Chicago: Chicago University Press

Skinner, Quentin (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Smith, Craig (2003) *The Idea of Spontaneous Order in Political Thought*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press

Smith, Maynard J. (1964) "Group Selection and Kin Selection", *Nature*, Vol 201 (4924), pp. 1145-1147

Smithhurst, Michael (2010) "Popper and the Scepticism of Evolutionary Epistemology, or, What Were Human Beings Made For?", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, Vol. 39, pp. 207–223. doi: 10.1017/S1358246100005518

Spengler, Oswald (1931) *Der Mensch und die Technik*, München: C.H. Beck

Spengler, Oswald (2014) *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Berlin: Albatros Verlag

Stauth, Georg, Turner, Bryan (1992): "Ludwig Klages and the Origins of Critical Theory". in: *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 9 (3), pp. 45-63

Steele, David Ramsey (1987) "Hayek's Theory of Cultural Group Selection", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Vol 8 (2), Summer, pp. 171-195

Steinberger, Peter (2015) "Rationalism in Politics", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 109 (4), pp. 750-763

Susato, Ryu (2015) *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Thompson, Michael J (2018) "The two faces of domination in republican political theory". *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 17(1), pp. 44-64

Traina, Robert (1968) "Hermeneutical Values in the Writings of Wilhelm Dilthey", *Asbury Journal*, Vol. 22 (2), 8-13

Trotsky, Leon (1932) *History of the Russian Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books

Uebel, Thomas (2019) "Rationality and Pseudo-Rationality in Political Economy: Neurath, Mises, Weber". *Neurath Reconsidered: New Sources and Perspectives*, edited by Jordi Cat and Adam Tamas Tuboly, Cham: Springer

Ullmann-Margalit, Edna (1977) "Invisible Hand Explanations". *Synthese*, Vol 39, pp. 263-291

Vanberg, Viktor (1986) "Spontaneous Market Order and Social Rules", *Economics and Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pp. 75-100

Ward, Lee (2004) *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Weber, Max (1988) *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, Tübingen

Wilson, David Sloan (2015) *Does Altruism Exist?: Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others*. Yale: Yale University Press

Wright, Seewall (1932) "The Roles of Mutation, Inbreeding, Crossbreeding and Selection in Evolution". *Proceedings of the 6th International Congress of Genetics*, 356-366

Wolfendale, Peter (2016) *Prometheanism and Rationalism*, Available from: https://deontologistics.co/2016/08/20/prometheanism-and-rationalism/ [Accessed on 20.09.2022]

Wolin, Sheldon S. (1954) "Hume and Conservatism", in: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 48 (4), December, pp. 999-1016

Wolin, Richard (2004) *The Seduction of Unreason*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Yack, Bernard (2001) "Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism", in: *Political Theory*, Vol. 29 (4), August, pp. 517-536

Zywicki, Todd J. (1999) "Was Hayek Right About Group Selection after All? Review Essay of Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior", Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=182509 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.182509