The Character of Political Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis constitutes an inquiry into the nature or character of political philosophy. The work is in many ways Oakeshottian, and takes its structure principally from *Experience and its Modes*. Making use of the notion of the modes of practice, science and history the thesis examines the ways in which it is thought that political philosophy might relate to these modes. It is maintained that there is no justification for the attempt to found a prescriptive political philosophy by attaching philosophical writing to one of these modes. This case is pursued by an exegesis of the work of Kuhn, Feyerabend, Rorty and MacIntyre, among others. There is also an account of Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, and it is maintained that this work is, whilst being in some minimal sense "political", (that is concerned with political concepts), also meaningfully philosophical. The thesis will also maintain that the apparent change in Oakeshott's philosophical position from *Experience and its Modes* to his later work, the desire of political philosophers to engage in prescription, and the hostility of commentators to the work of Nozick all seems to hinge on what view we should take of the relationship of "art" to the world. I will show what is implied in becoming phlegmatic about the social consequences of our intellectual world and its products. We might thus go beyond Oakeshott, beyond prescription, and beyond any fear we might have of the consequences of the work of writers such as Nozick.

Contents

Preface

A Harvard author-date system of referencing is used throughout this thesis, with the references being found at the foot of the page to which they refer. A single sequence of numbers is used within each chapter to indicate all footnoted material, with notation being distinguished by the suffix:*fn*.

I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to the British tax-payer for funding this work, to the staff and students of the Department of Politics of the University of Glasgow, and most especially to my supervisor Dr.C.J.Berry.

Introduction

As will become obvious during the course of this work my interest in political philosophy is not that of the outsider who simply seeks, for its own sake, some knowledge or appreciation of an unfamiliar activity. Rather my involvement in what purported to be political philosophy preceded my present desire to achieve an understanding of the activity. Moreover I intend that this present understanding should be considered an argument concerning the question of how political philosophy should be practised. I may therefore seem to be involved in an activity which I will later explicitly caution against. That is, I may seem to be engaged in attempting to reform in some way what appears to be an on-going well-defined activity, and engaging in a practice (that is prescription) for which I criticize others.

When an activity is well specified in a practice such an attempted reformation would certainly be mistaken. Indeed, even where what is sought is not a reformatory understanding but rather simply an understanding "in other terms" there are still dangers. It may be, for example, that the novice, by mistaking the project as itself providing an alternative actually to engaging in a practice, might have his ability (or willingness) to become a participant in the activity compromised. Some justification is therefore needed for my, perhaps precocious, approach to political philosophy. It is beholden on me to give some account of my own activity, to give some indication of why, as I will argue, political philosophy should not proceed without the practitioners reflecting on the character of their activity. For of course there is no general need for such reflection. Few practising scientists, for example, are in doubt as to how their scientific activity ought to be conducted. Indeed we might well conclude that activities as diverse as virology and archaeology are in such apparent order that there would be little to be gained from an attempt to arrive at some reformatory understanding.

The question must then be, why is it reasonable to believe that the endeavour to define "political philosophy" might be worthwhile; that the possible costs are outweighed by the probable benefits?

The answer to this question is, to put the matter most simply, that political philosophy is an activity which, to use Oakeshott's terms, seems imperfectly specified in a "practice". "Political philosophy" is in fact a title under which categorically distinct activities are grouped, and it has been and remains the practice of political philosophers to do a large number of different things. Of course it must be stressed that what I regard as bona fide political philosophy can be written, and is the practice of at least some of those involved in political philosophy. There *is* a philosophical practice within political philosophy. Explanations can be written, and the driving force of these explanations is not the desire to justify and make appear defensible a state of affairs, or to persuade, but simply a desire for some philosophical satisfaction. It also seems that, given the opportunity of reading such works, there exists an audience who are prepared to bring the appropriate critical and philosophical faculties to bear. Political philosophy hence seems to have in place the two pre-requisites for existence as a literary genre, viz, a distinctive form of writing and an audience who are able to understand that writing in an appropriate manner. Just as today it seems possible that artistic objects may be created and bring about an aesthetic response, it seems that works of political philosophy may be created and provoke a philosophical response[1/fn].

As I have noted though this practice is not exhaustive of what takes place under the title of political philosophy. Pursuing philosophical inferences is not the only activity which is practised by political philosophers. They may also pursue activities intended to be of social influence. It is this pursuit, which I shall label "prescriptive political philosophy", that I seek to criticize and reform. I will return to what I think are the consequences of this state of affairs (and hence the benefits of purging it from political philosophy proper) shortly. Only by looking at the consequences can we understand *why* it might be worthwhile to attempt this reformation. For the moment, though, I would like to look at what I think are the misunderstandings underlying the

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1 Works generally may be viewed from different perspectives, but ideological works, for example, must be thought less likely to provoke a philosophical response.

current condition of political philosophy. By examining these misunderstandings we see *how* this state of affairs has arisen, and how it might be remedied.

There are at least two misunderstandings which underlie this situation where a plurality of goals, goals other than philosophical satisfaction, are pursued under the title of political philosophy; a general misunderstanding, and a particular distinct modern misconstrual of the nature of experience.

(i) Generally, for those who have sought a philosophical engagement it has proved difficult to make their activity appear distinct from the conduct of practical politics. As the practical business of going on with our lives preceded the reflections of the philosophically engaged, the activity of the political philosopher has not been understood as being categorically distinct. Political philosophy is seen as, self-evidently, an activity through which we might gain superior knowledge about our political world.

Moreover, the perceived intellectual bona fides of "philosophy", together with a misunderstanding of its character, may in fact have strengthened the notion implicit in prescriptive political philosophy that academic arguments should guide conduct, and alter (or perhaps even overthrow) our beliefs. This notion seems attractive to many of those who involve themselves in political philosophy. Therefore the ranks of those in favour of the notion of political philosophy as more than a philosophical activity are continually strengthened by the arrival to the activity of those who are keen to make their contribution to the business of squaring our beliefs (and hence our actions) with the requirements of reason. The academic or intellectual activity which exists in reflection on political concepts has had to compete with these activities. The outcome of this encounter, as judged by the work of political philosophers, makes the identification of political philosophy with political activity not necessarily untenable, as a description of what actually goes on.

(ii) Also, and importantly in the case of modern political philosophy, a particular theoretical understanding of the character of experience has altered the conception of some persons as to what might constitute political philosophy. A new

understanding of the character of experience has made it seem possible that, for example, there might be a place for mystical writing in the guidance of conduct. Put most simply this new understanding involves concluding from the proposition that "Experience is presuppositional" that almost any division of the world might be worthwhile. Our inherited political conceptions might therefore be replaced by ones created by the writer. The apparent contingency or the supposedly ephemeral nature of our understanding is held up as a reason why things might be seen very differently. Given the speed of the proliferation of this "new understanding" we might almost infer that we are attitudinally ill-equipped to have our beliefs "dictated" by that which is merely human and, in the absence of a belief in a "real world", we cannot believe that there are any bounds on how we might judge.

Contemporary philosophy of science in particular is thought to give strong support to this notion that the world is strongly constituted by our presuppositions, and that additionally, these presuppositions could be otherwise. A theoretical understanding of science is therefore held to justify a prescriptive and socially interventionist political philosophy. There has been a corresponding rise in the notion that the universe might be thought of as meaningfully shaped by the isolated cognizer. This is why any discussion of political philosophy must today be in part a discussion of the implications of a defensible Idealism.

I should say here that it may be that prescriptive political philosophy is especially vulnerable to mistaken theoretical understandings in a way that philosophy proper, or history, or the philosophy of science might not be. It may be that the activity of the prescriptive political philosopher is so amorphous that such misunderstandings are inevitable.

The "baggage" in terms of expectations which "political philosophy" must carry, the expectation that it will show us what we ought to do and how we ought to judge, makes it almost impossible for the nascent philosophical activity, which is within the multitude of activities practised by political philosophers, to be maintained as the sole concern of the political philosopher.

The first benefit, then, to be had from some consideration being given to the character of political philosophy is that the philosophical activity would benefit from distancing itself from political concerns: in virtue of this distance it could then be both written and read in an unconfused manner. However, as the situation stands at the moment a fledgling practitioner must of necessity be confused as to the role of political philosophy relative to other inquiries (in particular, I think, to economics) and to how he might best participate in his own activity. He must also wonder what weight to give to his pre-philosophical commitments. Before an audience of bona fide philosophers (as I define the activity) the philosopher will only be concerned to show defensible inferential relationships. But in prescriptive political philosophy the activity is not one simply with goods internal to it; that is, the activity of making defensible inferences. There seems instead a notion that the political philosopher, as well as being a philosopher, must also be a man who conducts himself well, and conducts himself well *in* the writing of his philosophy.

I should say that it might well be a consequence of defining political philosophy more precisely that many of those who have declared themselves concerned with great issues of state will see it as a mean project. It need not necessarily be the case that all those currently involved in what is unreflectively thought of as political philosophy would enjoy such a limited activity; indeed there is little reason to think that they might.

From the perspective of the person who wishes political philosophy, as I define it, to exist, the most important consequence of the confused state of prescriptive political philosophy is that it makes the existence of a purely philosophical activity problematic. From the perspective of the citizen though, (indeed from the perspective of the political philosopher as citizen), the possible benefit to be had from an examination of political philosophy is rather different. In large part my strategy is to argue that the various foundations for prescriptive political philosophies are not well-founded, and that in consequence all that is possible is, in stricter sense, a philosophical activity. If there is a more general social benefit to be gained in this undermining of

prescriptivism then it is that the citizen might be caused to question and examine his beliefs regarding the possibility of a philosophy which might guide conduct. At the moment for some, or indeed most, citizens, these general beliefs do not seem to need examination. Those who write to influence our judgement, and those who in reading are prepared to entertain the possibility of being so influenced, seem to assume that this intervention in judgement is validated by the titularly honorific association of "political philosophy" with philosophy. Given that prescriptive philosophy is concerned to influence judgement then disputes between these "political philosophers" turn away from what is "philosophical" to what is "practical". Hence what comes to pass is that what is at stake in discussions between political philosophers is our public conduct.

The *assumption* (and often it seems to be no more than that) is that political philosophy is a special study which constitutes a means to arrive at moral and political beliefs in some way superior to the beliefs which persons have as a result of their own lives. This "serious" academic study produces special knowledge of what should be done and how we might do it; this knowledge improves and refines the judgements of the man in the street and makes them "rational". A further consequence is that it can be thought that we ought to be ashamed of our inability to give a rationally defensible account of our beliefs, or a "demonstration" of how they fit together, cohere, and are consistent. Our "primitive urge" to tend to our lives can be jeopardized by our inability to give an irrefutable account of *why* we ought so to do; why it is rational so to do. Political and moral philosophy (and with the growth of prescriptivism they are indistinguishable) apparently must bear the burden of making it rational to do what we feel strongly inclined to do. In the process it may come to seem to the citizen that it is "rational", (and therefore by convention mandatory), to do that which we are disinclined to do. This notion of "political philosophy" may be thought to make it especially likely to mislead conduct. My hope is that an examination of the activity may help to prevent this harm. Should this be successful there is no danger that we might be without a guide to conduct; as members of societies we cannot be without such a guide.

There are a few more matters I ought to deal with here before beginning the work proper.

The reader may wonder why Oakeshott was chosen to provide a heuristic. A tool must of course be appropriate to its task. However we must not fall into the trap of thinking that the activity of ascertaining the worth of a tool will necessarily be a brief one. In order to see what might be achieved we may have to set about a lengthy investigation. If one had a very well developed idea of the particular use to which one wished to put a heuristic method, then there would be an obligation to compare that method to its rivals for that precisely stipulated and expressed purpose. Where the purpose is the more general one of making use of the method in order to examine an activity, such as political philosophy, the use itself might be seen as the argument for (or against) the efficacy of the method. Even if the method should ultimately be thought not especially valuable for its suggested purpose this (as Popper taught us) should not be thought of as a wasted effort. However I do not think that an Oakeshottian perspective will prove unproductive in the examination of political philosophy. Whilst in the initial choice there must of necessity have been an element of arbitrariness, through using "the tool" I have become convinced of its worth.

The work is laid out as follows. After the initial introductory chapter on the work of Oakeshott, and the establishment of a perspective from which to approach political philosophy, the following chapters have three distinct purposes. First there is in Chapters Two through Four a critique of various forms of, and supports for, prescriptive political philosophy, using Oakeshott's conception of the modes of "practice", science and history. Second in Chapter Five I develop an argument in favour of political philosophy as an explanatory activity using Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* as a case-study. Finally in Chapter Six I consider what must be true for this explanatory activity to exist as a categorically distinct activity. For it seems to me that it is relatively straightforward that political philosophy can only be explanatory once the prescriptive pretensions of the alternatives, such as propounding "ways of seeing" or "tendering advice", are examined. The real question is whether it can even be this.

There is a question as to whether political philosophers may write with a light heart, whether it is not in fact the case that all our actions, and especially all our public writings, are irredeemably political. There is a question whether a text which takes as its subject "political life" can, in an age when persons are accustomed to look to texts to guide conduct, in fact avoid referring (that is being taken to refer) to that political life.

Plainly, setting out to characterize an entire activity is a somewhat ambitious project, and the requirement to maintain some balance between the scope of the enterprise and the obligation to take seriously the detail of the works consulted explains why this project is pursued by exemplar. Furthermore although my intention is to examine political philosophy the activity does not present itself in an uncontroversial way; the boundaries may be argued over. However, the figures I propose to make use of are not peripheral figures; they are rather, I think, incontrovertibly central. Whether a successful explanatory collage can be constructed or not, these are not figures who in political philosophy can be ignored.

Chapter One

The Work of Michael Oakeshott

The work of Michael Oakeshott will provide both the subject of the following chapter and the leitmotif of the remainder of this work.

In Oakeshott we find a protracted concern with definition, and from this concern we may hope to gain some understanding of the nature of political philosophy. As we shall see the nature of political philosophy is far from straightforward and there is profound disagreement among those who consider themselves a part of this activity.

There is also, I shall argue, a central difficulty or tension in Oakeshott's work which points us to the heart of the problem of political philosophy. For in Oakeshott's work we find the broadly consistent exposition of a philosophical case over half a century, and at the same time pieces in that corpus of work which strike the reader who is aware of that philosophical case, as incongruous. I shall argue that the ambivalence in Oakeshott's mind concerning the relationship of "material life" to its cultural artefacts (such as political philosophy) underlies both this incongruity and, perhaps paradoxically, his change of heart concerning the nature of the "poetic" or aesthetic.

This chapter is arranged as follows. Firstly there is an account of Oakeshott's general philosophical position, and the modes of experience he discusses at length, that is, practice, science and history. I will then justify my claim that a good deal of his work sits oddly with this espoused position. Subsequent to this, through a discussion of philosophy, political philosophy, ideology and the "aesthetic", I will show how Oakeshott's central (unresolved) problem is whether life can produce parricidal off-shoots; whether through avoidable error, we can "get it wrong". Specifically the concern is whether poetry, or science or political philosophy might be an undesirable force and actor in the social world.

I myself will take up this question in the final chapter of this work, and whilst I cannot provide an answer I can show what is implied in various answers. I cannot "show" or demonstrate that life cannot produce art which is socially harmful. I cannot,

for example, show that political philosophy cannot mislead conduct. I can, however, instance the kinds of beliefs which we might have which would explain or make reasonable what seem to be our generally liberal beliefs with regard to ideas, and the communication of ideas in the written form.

I Oakeshott's General Philosophical Position

There are, of course, enormous differences of emphasis between Oakeshott's various works, from the (in a non-Oakeshottian sense) "abstract" philosophy of *Experience and its Modes* to the theory of volition and purposive behaviour of *On Human Conduct*. There is, however, a consistent philosophical case, and there is little error in describing that case as Idealist.

Throughout his work Oakeshott is concerned to attack all attempts to conceive of the human condition, of knowledge, or of truth which involve a participant not experientially laden, and not intimately involved with the situation he attempts to conceive. Indeed, even to state Oakeshott's case thus is to go further than he himself typically does toward realist suppositions. For what seem often pedagogic reasons Oakeshott will generally avoid accepting or discussing the existence of a world outside of experience. By "experience" Oakeshott means"..the single and indivisible whole within which experiencing and what is experienced have their place.."[1].

To posit a real world somewhere in this process, Oakeshott tells us, would merely create "distressing contradictions"[2] whilst not achieving anything. Oakeshott does not claim, (as realists often think Idealists do) that the universe depends on human mental states. The unity of experience does not imply that our conceptualizations can be just anything at all. Rather he simply holds that if "reality" is posited as an unknowable, outside of experience, then it is a "nonentity"[3]. Unlike Kant there is no possibility of, or at least no purpose in speaking of, "things in themselves". For the

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1 Oakeshott 1933:322.
2 Oakeshott 1933:54 see also 57,60,197.
3 Oakeshott 1933:57 see also 29,108,174.

British Idealists, in the words of Santayana,"..the only possible reality was consciousness.."[4].

This viewpoint, as Franco notes,[5] must be separated from that subjective Idealism which makes the subject the sole cause of "what is experienced". Oakeshott no more wishes to assert this than he wishes to discuss the contribution of a non-experiential world to experience[6]. It is, however, true that for pedagogic reasons Oakeshott does emphasize this latter error. Today though, for the same pedagogic reasons, I will later argue that it is important to attack subjective idealism, especially with regard to the understanding of science. It is important to attack the notion that science is merely a description on an equal footing with the description that might be arrived at by the musing of someone outside of the ongoing practice of science.

Given this unity of "experiencing" and "what is experienced", and the dependence of continuing experience on past experience, the notion of "the mind as a neutral instrument" with which to approach and analyse the world becomes untenable. Of this notion Oakeshott says;

> The mind, according to this hypothesis, is an independent instrument capable of dealing with experience. Beliefs, ideas, knowledge, the contents of mind, and above all the activities of men in the world, are not regarded as themselves mind, but as adventitious, posterior acquisitions of the mind, the results of mental activity which the mind might or might not have possessed or undertaken. The mind may acquire knowledge or cause bodily activity, but it is something that may exist destitute of all knowledge, and in the absence of any activity; and where it has acquired knowledge or provoked activity, it remains independent of its acquisition or its expression in activity (1962:86).

For Oakeshott this mind is a fiction. Rather:

> Mind as we know it is the offspring of knowledge and activity; it is composed entirely of thoughts. You do not first have a mind, which acquires a filling of ideas and then makes distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, reasonable and unreasonable, and then, as a third step, causes activity. Properly speaking the mind has no existence apart from, or in advance of, these

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4 Boucher 1984:195.
5 Franco 1990:21.
6 Oakeshott 1933:55.

> and other distinctions. These and other distinctions are not acquisitions; they are constitutive of the mind[7fn]. Extinguish in a man's mind these and other distinctions, and what is extinguished is not merely a man's "knowledge" (or part of it), but the mind itself. What is left is not a neutral, unprejudiced instrument, a pure intelligence, but nothing at all (1962:89-90).

Given this view of experience and of mind, knowledge cannot be something we at first lack and then later perhaps achieve. We cannot draw a clean line between what we generally think of as knowledge (for example, scientific "fact"), and beliefs, interpretations and judgements prior to this. From the very first instant of consciousness to the very last achievement of inquiry there is an essential continuity[8fn]. Judgement is always judgement within consciousness. Indeed expressing the precise nature of judgement involves the difficulty of judging how we judge. This necessarily limits the type of understanding available to us.

Therefore, Oakeshott's use of the idea of "coherence" in attempting to express the nature of this process of judgement should not be conceived of too narrowly. It is not inaccurate to say that Oakeshott has a "coherence theory" of truth[9], but his use of coherence is broader than that.

"Coherence" in Oakeshott is best thought of as the term (for some term is needed) for "what mind does". As this *is* consciousness to the extent to which it can be generally expressed it is as the experience of "coherence"; of a "world of ideas". As Oakeshott puts it,

> ...the given in experience can be nothing but ideas. But further, the given in experience is always a world or system. What we begin with is the situation in which we discover ourselves in the first moments of consciousness, and this situation is complex and a whole. The given in experience is, then, a world of ideas (Oakeshott 1933:28).

We cannot know in explicit detail how a "world of ideas" is obtained by mind, nor the nature of the inter-relationships of ideas in mind. Nevertheless, this is

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7 This claim is fundamental to Rorty's case as we shall see in chapter four.
8 We should note that this "essential continuity" does not, of course, imply that any contribution will meet the requirements of any mode to some (substantial) degree.
9 Oakeshott: 1933 113,323.

consciousness. Oakeshott expresses the movement or development of this consciousness thus;

> A world devoid of unity is a contradiction; to enhance a world is to enhance its unity. And in experience a given world of ideas is raised above its given condition by endowing it with a greater degree of unity. In experience we begin, consequently, with the negation of the presented unity wherever that is seen to be false or inadequate. The first step in experience is a denial of the confusion and lack of unity which it finds in its given world (Oakeshott 1933:30).

However, to reiterate, it would be a mistake to think of "the drive for coherence" as the conscious manipulation of rival "truths", all the while recognising them to be incommensurable. We do not plot the vector of each truth and then accept as the most true view the perceived intersection of these incommensurable truths. In consciousness we do not simply engage in difference splitting. Rather that which makes us conceive of a world of ideas (consciousness) makes us also make that world more "worldly". This is not simply Oakeshott's point that as there is no direct contact between worlds of ideas a fully coherent world is not that which emerges from a conflict[10]. It is that insofar as consciousness can be philosophically characterized at all it is as the experience of coherence, and the negation of perceived disunity.

So when Oakeshott tells us that what is achieved in experience"..is a world but more of a world; a system which is more systematic; a whole which is more unified and more complete"[11], we should appreciate that the terms "systematic", "unified" and "complete" are the only terms in which we can express at the most general level the nature of consciousness, and the subjective impression of how that world acquires more of the character which makes it what it is.

So far I have discussed the general character of experience. For us today, though, there exists the possibility of entering particular developed worlds of ideas, for example history, or science. These activities do not so much provide us with perspectives on "the world" (as Auspitz notes[12] that would involve notions which

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10 Oakeshott 1933:78.
11 Oakeshott 1933:48, see also 40,96.
12 Auspitz 1976:262.

Oakeshott systematically avoids, such as the idea of a world outside of experience), but rather they provide us with worlds of ideas.

II The Modes of Experience

Experience is experienced modally and in order to understand the nature of these modes it is important to bear in mind Oakeshott's rejection of the abstract individual and the notion of the mind as "neutral instrument". We are dependent on those who have gone before in great degree. The importance of this truth for genres of inquiry is well expressed at the outset of the essay "The Activity of being an Historian". There Oakeshott tells us that;

> Activities emerge naively, like games that children invent for themselves. Each appears first, not in response to a premeditated achievement, but as a direction of attention pursued without premonition of what it will lead to. How should our artless ancestor have known what (as it turned out) it is to be an astronomer, an accountant, or an historian? And yet it was he who, in play, set our feet on the paths that have led to these now narrowly specified activities. For a direction of attention, as it is pursued, may hollow out a character for itself and become specified in a "practice"...(1962:137).

For this reason, as Grant notes[13], the number of possible modes is theoretically infinite (or cannot be known to be limited). However, this is not the situation which faces the individual; life may create modes but the individual cannot. Modes as particular practices with understandings as to what counts as participating in the activity and what not, emerge as unintended consequences of actions.

We can however participate in these activities, and in *Experience and its Modes* (and in other places) Oakeshott seeks to define or theorise participation in such activities. For he believes that there is great danger in mistaking or misrepresenting what one does, or what others do. The arguments from one mode cannot be applied to another. As Oakeshott puts it;

> The fallacy inherent in any such attempt is in the nature of *ignoratio elenchi.* And the result of all such attempts is the most subtle and insidious of all

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13 Grant 1990:38.

> forms of error - irrelevance. This, in an extreme example, seems clear enough. That what is arithmetically true is morally neither true or false, but merely irrelevant appears obvious (1933:76).

Plainly removing the danger which arises from the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of activities may have practical consequences. This impact of philosophy on the practical world must, however, be thought quite different from other attempts to move from one world of ideas to another. Disabusing persons of such mistaken beliefs is merely to remove from the practical world a foreign body.

It may seem counter-intuitive that something which merely emerges from human activity can nevertheless have standards of participation. However, any difficulty we might have in accepting this stems from the twin difficulties which we have in accepting that we do not have any form of immediate access to the world, and that we in our lives and intellectual activities are the products of a particular contingent time and place.

Science and History could, as they evolved, begin to identify naturally and unreflectively those who were bona fide participants in the activities and those not. With the establishment of these activities as homogenous worlds of ideas, it also became possible for the philosopher to reflect on the character of these worlds of ideas. This, particularly in *Experience and its Modes* and in *On History*, is what Oakeshott sets out to do. I will outline the modes which he identifies in order to make clear the character of these worlds of ideas, and to establish the evaluative benchmarks which I will later make use of.

(i) The Mode of Practice

For Oakeshott "practice", or practical experience, is the mode in which, unless we explicitly try to leave it (for example for the world of science or philosophy) we live our lives[14]. Oakeshott tells us that other modes such as science and history might be abolished;

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14 Oakeshott 1933:248.

> But it is impossible to conceive of the modification of experience I have called Practice ever disappearing. It is an arrest in experience [like all modes], but it is indispensable to life (1933:350).

The distinguishing feature of the practical is that it is action oriented, indeed ultimately it is action itself[15]. In "Practice" we seek to maintain or bring about states of affairs in situations characterised by extreme fluidity; "The world of practical fact is the world of "what is now" as such. And consequently, what is practical fact to-day, may to-morrow be no fact at all"[16].

The mode of practice involves both "political" action and the pursuit of private satisfaction within a moral frame. Its difficulty is not only due to its fluidity. Acting well is not simply a question of applying the appropriate piece of "knowledge". Practical action in achieving or maintaining states of affairs through making use of technique is a separate form of expertise. Practice is not simply working in the dark.

For our purposes the mode of practice is special for two reasons; for what we learn about Oakeshott's theory of knowledge, and for what we learn about the nature of moral judgement.

Due to the dependence, in Oakeshott's understanding, of "theory" on "activity" (the former an abridgement of the latter), in practice more than anywhere else, successful abridgement of habits of behaviour is difficult if not impossible. For practice is essentially the conduct of life. Hence we cannot be taught practice in the way that we can be taught the off-shoots science and history. Our teachers are all around us, our apprenticeship is life itself. Through living we learn how to inspire, rebuke and commend, and we learn what is acceptable and unacceptable; not as injunctions to be avoided if possible, but as truths constitutive of who we are.

This is why our moral "intuitions" are neither "radically immediate" nor "the conclusions of our reason"[17]. The former notion fails to grasp the role of an evolved way of life in experience (or "mediation"). The latter harks back to the "mind as

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15 Oakeshott 1933:256.
16 Oakeshott 1933:262-3.
17 Oakeshott 1933:253.

neutral instrument" notion we discussed earlier. The rejection of both immediacy and bare reason also explains Oakeshott's remark[18] that if moral judgements were mere opinions there could be no contradiction. By contradiction as opposed to opinion, Oakeshott means to distinguish judgements as the product of a way of life from some mere opting by the individual. As moral judgements are part of the world of ideas of a form of life they are not mere opinions and therefore there can be contradiction.

I shall note in the final chapter how these claims can provide a fillip for the belief in the worth of democracy, and specifically its role in making conterminous a legal order with knowledge of right conduct.

(ii) The Mode of Science

Oakeshott's characterisation of science is, not surprisingly, as a world of ideas[19]. The peculiar postulates of this world of ideas include the upholding of the uniformity of nature[20], of the possibility of reductionist accounts[21], and of the fundamental importance of the communicability of ideas[22].

Many people find the idea of postulates problematic, and mistakenly regard them as something easily stated (like the presuppositions of a logical deduction), and perhaps even capricious. If such an error is made it is easy to misconceive Oakeshott's meaning. For example, he tells us that causal accounts are possible in science because of its "assumptions"[23] but impossible in history, not because of an insufficiency of evidence but because of the "presuppositions of historical thought". The reader, by this manner of expression, may be tempted to imagine that different "presuppositions", (wilfully and consciously assumed), would mandate and create a different inquiry with different possibilities; in this case the possibility of a causal history. This, however, would be a mistake.

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18 Oakeshott 1933:254.
19 Oakeshott 1933:181-182.
20 Oakeshott 1933:191.
21 Oakeshott 1933:177.
22 Oakeshott 1933:171,221,229, also 1962:215.
23 Oakeshott 1933:131.

Oakeshott is theorising an evolved activity, not giving methodological injunctions[24fn]. "Assumptions" and "postulates" are simply terms for expressing the character of an inquiry at its most general level. The distance between the knowledge of the postulates of an activity and the activity itself is almost absolute. Philosophy cannot reform the modes (although it can exclude from consideration activities not a part of the mode they lay claim to)[25fn].

Therefore in science, as in other activities, our dependence upon, or benefit from, what has gone before, can scarcely be overstated. As Oakeshott puts it,

> ...for the individual scientist,so far as his consciousness is concerned he begins with a highly complicated inheritance of scientific knowledge. But this knowledge implies the delineated world of science; he inherits his millions, but these imply the monetary system (1933:182).

But to think such delineation a problem is, to reiterate, to have failed to have understood ones contingency.

> [T]he notion of the categories of scientific knowledge or the instruments of scientific measurement interposing themselves between the scientist and his object is a notion utterly foreign to the character of scientific experience. Without the categories and the method, there is no matter; without the instruments of measurement, nothing to measure[26fn] (1933:191).

In science presuppositions are not a barrier to inquiry; presuppositions constitute the inquiry. Furthermore, these presuppositions are not acquired at one moment in time; they are time-worn. Therefore, as J.W.N. Watkins puts it, in the Polanyi/Oakeshott view,"..the conduct of a scientist who is faithful to his tradition is rational, while that of a crank is not"[27].

To conclude this section, *Experience and its Modes* constitutes a critique of at least three misapprehensions concerning the character of science. Two of these are obvious, and one, whilst perhaps less obvious, is today most important.

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24 Just as I will argue Kuhn's understanding cannot issue in advice.
25 Attacking mistaken theoretical understandings is not itself an *ignoratio elenchi.*
26 I will later argue that understanding this is the key to understanding the work of Kuhn.
27 Watkins 1952:328-329.

(1) Oakeshott necessarily, given the nature of his engagement, undermines attempts to conceive of science as the straightforward application of rules of research, or as the collection of "data", or indeed as in need of a technique of inquiry.

(2) He also attacks scientism[28/n], and quotes with approval Epicurus, "It is better to follow the myths of the gods than to become a slave to scientific truth"[29].

(3) What is often missed, though, is Oakeshott's recognition of the dangers of this very anti-scientistic case. At the time of writing *Experience and its Modes* Oakeshott saw that,

> ...scientists have come to regard science as a form of thought, as the construction of a world of ideas, and they conclude that it is consequently debarred from a true knowledge of the world of reality. Naturalism has given place to a mild and unintelligent scepticism (1933:174 see also 189).

To accept science as a "form of thought" and a "world of ideas" and then extrapolate from this some downgrading of science is fallacious. There is nothing mere about a world of ideas; it is all that we have.

In chapter three I will argue that the danger of scientism has been replaced by the danger of the unreflective acceptance of the anti-scientistic case.

(iii) The Mode of History

In an attempt to distinguish history from "what has gone before", Oakeshott rejects any discussion of something separate in history from the historian's judgement. He tells us that, "There is no fact in history which is not a judgement, no event which is not an inference. There is nothing whatever outside the historian's experience"[30].

This does not mean that judgements of relative coherence cannot be made within history, but only that there is no sovereign past with which the historians account can be compared. And we can see that this is straightforwardly true. All that the historian has before him are survivals, for example, participants accounts of battles,

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28 By which I mean the view that the scientific activity might issue in ends for man, or provide a method for the conduct of our lives.
29 Oakeshott 1933:315.
30 Oakeshott 1933:100.

contracts, letters of mark, and the like[31]. Interested in the past for its own sake, he tries to understand these survivals in terms of a coherent whole. The historian's past, though, is not the survivals themselves, and this can be seen if we take as an example some especially complete survivals. Oakeshott gives as examples the nineteenth century Statute Book (which is not a history of nineteenth century legislation), and the poetic utterances of *Corpus Poetarum Latinorum*, (which is not a history of classical Latin)[32]. For the historian such survivals, in themselves,

> ...provide nothing he seeks. For what he seeks - an historically understood past - is of a wholly different character: it is a past which has not itself survived. Indeed, it is a past which could not have survived because, not being composed of bygone utterances and artefacts, it was never itself present. It can neither be found nor dug up, nor retrieved, nor recollected, but only inferred.
>
> An historically understood past is, then, the conclusion of a critical inquiry of a certain sort; it is to be found nowhere but in a history book (1983:33).

Of course history must "make its material"[33]. That is, the historian must bring his world of judgement to the survivals which he has before him. This of necessity must be done, as it must always be done in any inquiry. But as an historian, unconcerned with the prosecution of any end, he must aim at the most coherent account. The most coherent account is defined as the one which he is obliged to believe[34]. These survivals of the past (or "past") do not stand in an inferior relationship to "what really happened". As Oakeshott says,

> ...history is not merely obliged to *postulate* nothing beyond the evidence. What is beyond the evidence is actually unknowable, a nonentity...There are not two worlds - the world of past happenings and the world of our present knowledge of those past events - there is only one world, and it is a world of present experience. The facts of history are present facts (1933:108).

The outcome of the historian's activity is a creation, usually an essay, where the survivals of past are made to compose a whole (Oakeshott uses the analogy of the

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31 Oakeshott 1983:8,28.
32 Oakeshott 1983:32-33.
33 Oakeshott 1933:90.
34 Oakeshott 1933:107-110.

construction of a dry-stone wall, where the constituent parts are moved around to create a structure[35]). What an historian has,

> ...are shapes of his own manufacture, more like ambiguous echoes which wind in and out, touch and modify one another; and what he composes is something more like a tune (which may be carried away by the wind) than a neatly fitted together solid structure (1983:117).

Doubtless many readers would regard the idea of the historian approaching the past "for its own sake" as naive, and believe that spin is always added to an historical account by the historian's motives and concerns. Of this we can say three things; (a) To the extent to which this is very fundamental it is unavoidable; an ineradicable feature of the experienced world we share. To posit this "bias" as a criticism is evidence for a vestigial realism. None of us can be someone else. Our particularity, because it cannot be eradicated, cannot be considered a problem. No palliative might make us a free floating intelligence; universal man. This holds equally for those of us who mistakenly imagine that we have transcended our particularity by a consciousness - raising process. (b) If historical survivals are ignored or oddly used by a particular historian then the coherence of his historical account will be weakened. The wall will fall down. (c) Lastly, if an historical account is in fact the pursuit of a practical political case, then it is no longer history[36*fn*].

However, having said this, the concern which the reader may have over the precise relationship which Oakeshott thinks exists between the historian and his material is far from being entirely misplaced. That is there is an undeniable difficulty in Oakeshott's account of the transformative inter-active relationship between present evidence for an historical past, and the historian's attempting to make coherent that evidence, for its own sake. His account of the nature of a new discovery in history makes this clear. On the one hand "..a new discovery cannot be appeased by being fitted into an old world, but only by being allowed to transform the whole of that

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35 Oakeshott 1983:94,113.

36 Although the *absence* of such a pursuit does not imply that the work cannot be taken as a political guide.

world..", while at the same time, "..the character of a new discovery is not given and fixed, but is determined by its place in the world of history as a whole"[37].

Such seeming obscurity or inconsistency must necessarily attract the attention of the reader. It is, though, difficult to see how much could be made of this. The difficulty of discussing the precise nature of the relationship which exists between the historian and his evidence is an aspect of the general difficulty of discussing experience. There is a difficulty in discussing the nature of being itself, as I discussed earlier[38/fn]. On balance, I think that all we can do here is characterize history proper, whilst attacking the grosser divergences from this notion of an inferential account from survivals, without extrinsic purpose.

Accordingly, whatever view we finally come to hold as to whether history (or philosophy, or poetry or any other distinct activity) can actually be engaged in, certain things must in all circumstances necessarily be rejected as constituting history. That is to say the transformative relationship of the historian to his historical survivals necessarily precludes from consideration as history many types of quasi-historical writing.

For example, where a historical survival is taken as evidence for the operation of some "law", what is entirely ignored is the transformation of such survivals by the historian[39]. As the outcome of the operation of some law an historical survival is taken as self-standing and self-explanatory, and not as evidence for what has not survived. Causal accounts fail similarly as, "A cause may be sought only for an already known and understood effect"[40].

For the historian there are no unwelcome archives, and his sole concern is to build an ever more detailed and coherent account. He has no care to the vector or direction of the final account; he will always trade direction for coherence.

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37 Oakeshott 1933:98-99.
38 see p19.
39 Oakeshott 1983:74,79.
40 Oakeshott 1983:81.

By contrast the "Whig historian" seeking to justify and make natural the emergence of the "British Constitution" must omit detail and contrive direction[41], and regardless of whether we can convincingly define history, we can certainly negatively define it as excluding the above sorts of activities.

Hence for the historian there is no possibility of law-like explanation, no survival which does not require incorporation into a world of ideas in order to be understood, no prospect of telling what would have happened, ceteris paribus, if some individual had not lived or "event" taken place[42]. If history is anything it is what is left when the historian eschews such attempts to avoid the inherent limitations of an inferential approach to survivals of past. The difficulty which remains over the character of what is left is, as we shall later, simply one more aspect of the problematic relationship between life and art. What remains is a history which may interest us, but which can teach us no lessons.

I would now like to spend a little time separating a major resource of practice from its modal cousin; that is "practical history" as separate from history.

(iv) "Practical History"

I should perhaps first say that practical history predates history, and the historians activity is in fact a development of an earlier concern to "make ourselves at home in the world"[43].

There is a small change in emphasis in Oakeshott's view of practical history between *Experience and its Modes* and his later work, although this is easily accounted for. In *Experience and its Modes* he tells us that history,

> ...can in no sense be considered to open to us a world of "past experience" lying outside our world of present. And whenever history is joined to practical experience an appeal is made, not to an extension of our present, practical, experience, but to experience as a whole disguised *sub specie praeteritorum*, to a mode of experience wholly without relevance to practical life. And whenever

41 Oakeshott 1983:106.
42 Oakeshott 1933:139.
43 Oakeshott 1983:117-118.

> history finds itself joined with practical experience, the result can be only the destruction of both. No guidance for practical life can be expected to follow from the organisation of the totality of experience *sub specie praeteritorum* (1933:157-8).

In later works whilst history proper remains useless or actually misleading if taken as a guide for practical conduct[44], Oakeshott has no concern to prescribe any particular in interest in the past, but only to distinguish the different interests[45]. Further, Oakeshott says,

> ...I have called the "practical" attitude to the past the chief undefeated enemy of "history" (although there is still both hesitation and confusion about this). But we recognize ,also, that it is a very difficult enemy to defeat. In this engagement one of our difficulties springs from our perception that a practical attitude towards the past, and the use of a practical idiom in speaking about the past, certainly cannot be dismissed as merely illegitimate. Who are we to forbid it? On what grounds should the primordial activity of making ourselves at home in the world by assimilating *our* past to *our* present be proscribed? This, perhaps, is no great difficulty; it is surmounted when we recognize that the practical past (including moral judgements about past conduct) is not the enemy of mankind, but only the enemy of "the historian" (1962:165).

However it is important to understand that this practical history is *practice*, and not history. If it were the "historical lessons" themselves that were doing the work then presumably the historian's account would be the one we would rely upon. In a world devoid of definitive accounts of what preceded our moment of consciousness, surely the most defensible account would be the best guide to conduct, no matter how distorted or faint[46/n].

But of course this is false because in practical history what is important is the aptness of the examples in a specific present situation, and not the pedagogic qualities of self-standing, self-subsistent, historical lessons. What is important is the understanding of present life which allows persons, for example, to select the correct "historical examples" to place before their children at a given time. This is why in this

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44 Oakeshott 1983:66.
45 Oakeshott 1983:34.
46 We might then become dependent on the lessons and diagnoses of Rorty or MacIntyre, whose work I will discuss in chapter four.

example it is immaterial whether the stories are legendary or "historic"[47], since all that is required are, "..emblematic characters and episodes.."[48] such as might be found in the Old Testament[49]. Practical history is a means of expressing practical, not historical, truths. And whilst it may seem reasonable to suppose that as fully socialized members of their society parents have the capacity to choose the appropriate "emblematic episodes" for their children, it is difficult to see how this relationship might exist more generally. For example, it is difficult to see how a writer might come to stand in such a parental relationship to the citizens of a society.

III Peculiar Practices

What we might expect in the way of intellectual labour from a person espousing Oakeshott's basic philosophical case would seem relatively clear. We would expect "philosophical" analysis, but not scientific or historical works, (as he would be incapable of them, and the acquisition of the relevant connoisseurship would be an enormous diversion[50], nor works of attempted practical effect (such things correctly taking place in the "fog of practical experience"[51] in which citizens and politicians move).

What we actually find is, I think, quite surprising. If we take the collection of essays of *Rationalism in Politics* and *On Human Conduct* in turn we will find, I believe, manners of reasoning, figures of speech and a form of analysis which sits ill with the philosophical position I have related above.

Of course it would be wrong to suggest that Oakeshott was somehow incapable of engaging in philosophy. As I shall note more fully in a moment, it seems that Oakeshott's engagement in activities which (I think) fall foul of his own injunctions seems founded on his belief that the facts of our existence have affected the character of works, making his attempt to ameliorate this situation the lesser evil.

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47 Oakeshott 1983:34.
48 Oakeshott 1983:38.
49 Oakeshott 1983:39.
50 Oakeshott 1962:99-100.
51 Oakeshott 1933:320-321.

By "rationalism" Oakeshott means a theory of knowledge which involves a belief in the sovereignty of reasoning, and of the worth of an "intellectual" approach, and which thus fails to understand that technique is always an abridgement of practical experience. Indeed Oakeshott goes further and maintains that there are many types of knowledge that cannot be meaningfully abridged at all, and exist only as practical knowledge[52]. The rationalist of course denies this also. He has not understood that all our "knowledge", formulae and technique are based fundamentally on human action; often, literally movement.

Thus far this seems to me to be, for want of a better word, a "philosophical" case; that is, a very general statement of the relationship which must exist between man and his world, and of the true character of what are often mistakenly seen as "truths", divorced from contingent experience and activity. Oakeshott, however, is far from satisfied with such a limited statement. He is not only proposing what we might describe as a "conservative" philosophical case, ("The fact of our survival must itself indicate some truth"). He is also proposing what I have to describe as a historicist case, (This is *how* we survived, this is *who* we are).

For instance in *Rationalism in Politics* Oakeshott tells us that;

> We are considering not merely the truth of a doctrine, but the significance of an intellectual fashion in the history of post-Renaissance Europe. And the questions we must try to answer are: What is the generation of this belief in the sovereignty of technique? Whence springs this supreme confidence in human "reason" thus interpreted? What is the provenance, the context of this intellectual character? And in what circumstances and with what effect did it come to invade European politics? (1962:13).

The story, the history, of the emergence of rationalism which Oakeshott intimates is as follows. At the beginning of the seventeenth century there was a perceived need for a means of discovering truth[53fn]. The project which sought to meet

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52 Oakeshott 1962:11.

53 Rorty's account of the emergence of the "philosophical style" which he criticizes is markedly similar to Oakeshott's account of the emergence of "Rationalism".

this need, in which Bacon and Descartes loom large, "..was the occasion of the unmistakable emergence of the new intellectual character I have called Rationalist"[54].

The cause of the "success" of rationalism as a doctrine, is explicable by noting the inclusion in European politics of the politically inexperienced[55]. The felt need of the politically inexperienced was such that they unhesitatingly welcomed a technique of "how to do politics". Thus, whatever their intention, the work of misguided thinkers (misguided as to the nature of their milieu, of the world their work would occupy) and their presuppositions about the nature of knowledge, helped make general a disadvantageous and socially injurious notion of knowledge[56fn].

Alongside this, and further compounding our "predicament", stands our inheritance of a defective morality. A morality, like every other practice, must be rooted in a habit of behaviour[57]. But our inheritance, both Greco-Roman and Christian, was fatally flawed. In the Greco-Roman world;

> ...the old habits of moral behaviour had lost their vitality. There were, no doubt, men who were good neighbours, faithful friends and pious citizens, whose confidence in the customs that determined their conduct was still unshaken; but, in general, the impetus of moral habit of behaviour seems to have been spent - illustrating, perhaps, the defect of a form of morality too securely insulated from the criticism of ideals. It was, in consequence, an age of moral reformers who, unavoidably, preached a morality of the pursuit of ideals, and taught a variety of dogmatic moral ideologies[58fn] (1962:76).

Similarly, Christian morality, as shown by the character of Nietzsche's (effective) attack, was a morality of ideals, and not a habit of behaviour[59]. It is, therefore, a "fact",

> ...that the moral inheritance of Western Europe, both from the classical culture of the ancient world and from Christianity, was not the gift of a morality of habitual behaviour, but of a moral ideology (1962:78).

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54 Oakeshott 1962:14.
55 Oakeshott 1962:23.
56 This claim, that the effects of works can be retrospectively shown, is both central to Rorty and MacIntyre's case and to the final chapter of this work.
57 Oakeshott 1962:72-73.
58 This, as I shall show in chapter four, is the essence of MacIntyre's case in *After Virtue*.
59 Oakeshott 1962:78.

We have mistakenly come to value our "liberation" from a moral habit of behaviour[60], and this Oakeshott seeks to investigate and expose. His method is that of an historical study as,

> ...nothing appears on the present surface of a tradition of political activity which has not its roots deep in the past, and...not to observe it coming into being is often to be denied the clue to its significance (1962:130).

Now of course what we (as a people) *think* happened (as Oakeshott puts it, "our underlinings"[61]) may be accepted as a bona fide part of our political education (see above on "practical history"). But this seems not to be such an illustration, but rather an attempt to infer practical truths from a historical account.

In *On Human Conduct* a similar method is employed on a similar target; that is, Oakeshott seeks to elucidate an aspect of "our predicament". In this work (and of course most clearly in the third part) Oakeshott, it seems to me, seeks to characterize definitively "The Modern European State". He does so in terms of two ideas,"..each capable of absorbing a whole direction of thought..", that is, "societas" and "universitas"[62]. "Societas" was a relationship, or was understood as an ideal form of relationship, in terms of rules to be observed in acting, and not a co-operative instrumental relationship aimed at a substantive end[63]. By contrast, the state understood as "universitas" is just such a corporate enterprise[64].

The important thing to understand is that, so far as I can comprehend, these concepts are intended as a form of "analysis", in order to help us understand the character of our society. Moreover, this understanding, whilst perhaps not programmatic, does seem intended to be socially influential, and in principle actionable. It does not seem to be only a theoretical understanding[65fn]. Thus it is claimed that we can see the origin of the state as a "productive-commercial" enterprise

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60 Oakeshott 1962:79.
61 Oakeshott 1962:130.
62 Oakeshott 1975:199.
63 Oakeshott 1975:201.
64 Oakeshott 1975:203-204.
65 If it were only a theoretical understanding then the purpose of juxtaposing it to "right" and "left" (which do not seem to be theoretical understandings) would seem obscure. See Oakeshott 1975:320.

in the existence in the office of the king of a "relic" of Lordship[66]. The "sentiment of individuality" emerged "..in the gradual and intermittent dissolution, beginning perhaps in the twelfth century, of the self-contained seigneurial estate.."[67].

The characters who nourished the notion of "universitas", of the enterprise state, were failed individuals; "individual manque"[68]. These characters were simply "played" by their leaders[69]. Had such characters not existed, "..then it may be conjectured that, in spite of other circumstances, [the European States] might have become unequivocal civil associations"[70fn].

Relative to the earlier notion of history as an activity done only by the historian, without extrinsic purpose and concerned only to give a coherent account, this seems odd. This is Grand History, cultural diagnosis. Writers are lauded for perceiving what was "afoot" in their century[71], and Oakeshott places his account of the emergence of the "enterprise state" in competition to that of those who see it as "..a response to a long age of governmental indifference and negligence, to so-called "capitalist" industrial undertaking, to more populous territories, to "atomized societies", or to lately "self-alienated" subjects"[72].

It is difficult to see, though, how Oakeshott's account differs from those he criticizes. His account may be of a different conclusion, but it seems to be of a similar character. We must wonder what the precise value of this second form of Oakeshottian history is if,

> ...the "future" appears when we understand the present events as evidence for what is about to happen, so what we call "the past" appears when we understand current happenings as evidence for what has already happened (1962:146),

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66 Oakeshott 1975:219.
67 Oakeshott 1975:239.
68 Oakeshott 1975:275.
69 Oakeshott 1975:278.
70 Oakeshott 1975:274. But of course how can the existence of such a "character", which Oakeshott plainly thinks unfortunate, be any more a disturbance to "the ordinary course of events" than George the third? See Oakeshott 1933:139.
71 Oakeshott 1975:256.
72 Oakeshott 1975:312.

and yet, it appears also, that we can from present documents, artefacts and evidence know next to nothing about the fashion in hats or the design of cars in twenty years time[73].

IV Philosophy, Ideology and the Aesthetic

The crucial unresolved question in Oakeshott's work, which accounts for the above tensions and inconsistency, is to what extent we are in a sense compelled to "get it right", or at least do our best, and to what extent free to err. Oakeshott can be seen to waver between two views on this question, and his indecision in this regard also underlies his changing position on the nature of the "aesthetic".

(i) An Harmonious Social Universe

Much of the time, throughout his work, Oakeshott is keen to develop the idealist notion of the social universe as an inter-related whole. This social universe consists of both persons and their attendant cultural, moral and legal systems[74]. Whilst these persons are a "creation" of their social systems, they also change them[75]. We should therefore (as Rilke finally did[76]), feel comfortable in our world, as we made it over time (that is, it is a consequence of our actions), and there is no other world available to us.

It would seem that we would have to believe this to some degree. We have to believe in some "fit" between the actions of men and the features of our found social world. Or to put the matter another way, if our world is "out of kilter" with us, the belief that it is so must always be in scare marks, for as Marx realized, very special explanations are required to account for this kind of phenomenon (if indeed we ever can).

The individual in this inter-related whole Oakeshott often characterizes in a deterministic fashion. He tells us that, "Human conduct in its most general character, is

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73 Oakeshott 1962:185.
74 see Grant 1990:78,85.
75 Grant 1990:14.
76 Grant 1990:11.

"energy"; it is not caused by energy, it does not express or display energy, it is energy"[77].

In the absence of the contingent features of our lives we have/are only energy. Therefore the language we use, the distinctions we make, the ideas we make use of and the adverbial qualifications we observe in acting (for example, do not kill murderously, do not light a fire arsonically[78]), constitute our freedom, our "stage" (that is, make our actions what they are). There is nothing without these ideas, languages and practices. These things are inseparable from life and action, and that is why (quite literally) habitual behaviour precedes the moral ideals which are an abridgement of it.

Oakeshott avoids a hard deterministic explanation of human behaviour by various devices. He shows us how a fundamental explanation of behaviour in terms of genes, for example, is made ridiculous if self-referring[79], and how we necessarily understand certain actions as subscriptions to practices (we grant to the actions of others what we feel to be true of our own)[80].

However, for our purposes what is important to note is this idea that the order, the language and the laws are in a sense coeval with the persons who live with them. The state, for example, is not "produced", it "emerges"[81]. This intimate relationship between persons and their world means that it is ridiculous to imagine that all the felt inconveniences of our world could be easily removed, or that our world can be condemned in the round. In short, "The world is the best of all possible worlds, and *everything* in it is a necessary evil"[82].

Within this view philosophy is conceived alternatively as "a mood", or as "experience without presupposition, reservation, arrest or modification..."[83]. Most importantly, philosophy has no bearing on practical life[84], it can only offer an escape[85].

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77 Oakeshott 1962:104.
78 Oakeshott 1975:58*fn*.
79 Oakeshott 1975:15fn,38fn.
80 Oakeshott 1975:15,39.
81 see Mapel 1990:404.
82 Oakeshott 1962:133.
83 Oakeshott 1933:2-3,82-83,319.
84 Oakeshott 1933:1,339.
85 Oakeshott 1933:2-3,296-297.

Oakeshott's account of philosophy as the exploration of the whole which is implied in the "abstract" modes seems obscure. Indeed this characterization seems often to rest on merely linguistic implication (*If* modes are abstractions, then there must be a whole[86]). We can though make good sense of the idea of philosophy as, in some sense, an attitude of mind.

Within political philosophy what this implies is a ceaseless endeavour to interrogate our postulates; to define our terms. Through political philosophy, at its best, we might learn something about the nature of philosophical thought, and (as Oakeshott says of the study of "political" texts), "..acquire the connoisseurship which can recognize a philosophical argument.."[87/fn].

The error (and I follow Oakeshott in regarding this an error) of believing that political philosophy should actually be concerned with the conduct of our lives is a continual target for Oakeshott. Bentham was a populist, but thin on inference, on *ratio decidendi*[88]. Hobbes, by contrast, provided a philosophical, and not simply a moral base for his political philosophy[89]. Poor practice in the reading of political philosophy is invariably founded on a belief that such works must be read for their practical effect[90/fn], as if these were pamphlets[91].

It may be that political philosophers *are* inspired by some practical end. But as Franco says,

> ...because Hobbes was above all a philosopher and therefore devoted to the tireless exploration of the postulates and conditions of political life, he could not long remain satisfied with this merely moral basis (Franco 1990:83).

What is important to note is that whilst the notion of an harmonious social whole is maintained the "prohibition" on believing works of political philosophy to be about practical life is principally to prevent academic bad practice. Similarly, the "prohibition" on ideology is not motivated by any great practical political concern (the

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86 Oakeshott 1933:77,79,327-328,351.
87 Oakeshott 1962:328. In chapter five I shall argue that this is the virtue of Nozick's work.
88 see Franco 1990 p81.
89 see Franco 1990:140-142.
90 Which I will later argue is, in essence, Brian Barry's reading of Nozick.
91 Oakeshott 1962:324.

ship of state is immune from such irrelevancies). So long as Oakeshott presupposes that the social whole is harmonious, an ideology is simply a plagiarised essay; a crib on an existing political tradition[92], which could give little cause for practical concern. This judgement extends to works such as Locke's *Second Treatise*, and Paine's *Rights of Man*[93]. Furthermore, these ideologies are not in some ultimate sense products of their environment; this is not akin to some postulate about the relationship of the artist to his world. They are rather straightforwardly lifted or abridged from a political tradition.

Accordingly so long as we believe that our social whole is functioning harmoniously and believe we have the background of a secure social life we may have explanatory political philosophy without Johnsonian[94fn] refutations of those works which in other circumstances might be thought to be morally injurious. Moreover we need not concern ourselves with ideologies. For these ideologies are irrelevant to our ongoing habit of conduct. Indeed it is conceivable that an ideology might, in the appropriate circumstances, be a social good[95fn].

(ii) An Endangered World

Oakeshott, however, it seems increasingly loses faith in the above case over the course of his life. It is this loss of faith which accounts for the "peculiar practices" I discussed earlier.

Most obviously, there is the threat which "Rationalism" (the belief in technique and in the unburdened reasoning mind) poses. Oakeshott plainly does not think "the ordinary course of events" (that is the course of events *sans* rationalism) an "extravagance of the imagination"[96]. Rather he thinks the threat real, but is unsure on what grounds to oppose it, since, as any number of commentators have pointed out, if

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92 Oakeshott 1962:120.
93 Oakeshott 1962:120-121.
94 In chapter three I will maintain that it is this form of refutation which Barry engages in.
95 Oakeshott 1962:122,125. I will discuss this notion in connection with the concept of "critical theory" in the final chapter.
96 Oakeshott 1933:139.

acting on the rationalist model is impossible wherein lies the danger[97]? The danger according to Oakeshott, "..is not that it may persuade people to act in an undesirable manner, but that it may confuse activity by putting it on a false scent"[98].

Surely, though, "confusing activity" by putting people on a "false scent" is causing them to act undesirably? Indeed as he says elsewhere, "rationalistic" conduct may result in "war and chaos"[99]. Moreover, "Rationalism" was the result of the use, uptake and misrepresentation of certain works. Many of these works, being of an intellectual character, should (if Oakeshott is to be believed) have been insulated from such utilization[100/fn]. If they had this effect where stands the distinction between practical, philosophical and historical work? If the work of the writer might be so very easily misunderstood or misused it must seem that the writer's claim to be engaged in philosophical (or other) work, and indeed the understanding of others (such as Oakeshott) that this is the "character" of his work, are irrelevant. The facts of our existence may make the work, in fact, of practical import[101/fn].

Oakeshott in discussing the effect of the work of Bacon, Descartes and Machiavelli in inspiring rationalism tells us;

> I do not think that any or all of the writers whom I have mentioned are responsible for our predicament. They are servants of circumstances which they have helped to perpetuate (on occasion they may be observed giving another turn to the screw), but which they did not create. And it is not to be supposed that they would always have approved of the use made of there books. Nor, again, am I concerned with genuinely philosophical writing about politics[102/fn]; in so far as that has either promoted or retarded the tendency to Rationalism in politics, it has always been through a misunderstanding of its design, which is not to recommend conduct, but to explain it (1962:29).

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97 For example see Franco 1990:123,134, or Spitz 1976:336.
98 Oakeshott 1962:89.
99 Watkins 1952:329.
100 I will discuss such "circumstantial insulation" in the final chapter.
101 My discussion in chapter six is concerned with what we might think of the world to avoid this conclusion.
102 I will argue in chapter five that Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* constitutes such a work.

It was not Machiavelli, but his followers who believed in the sovereignty of technique[103]. Those who used the prestige of the natural sciences to reinforce rationalism were not the great scientists, but lesser men[104]. The consequence has been the compromising of our moral life[105]. And as Oakeshott himself admits, all intellectual products,

> ...are objects launched into the present-future of practical activity, objects which occupy space, may be lost or destroyed, may perhaps be owned, sold and bought, are eligible to acquire an untold variety of use values and are at the disposal of whoever may use them, for whatever purpose, in his own practical engagements. The manuscript of Hume's *Treatise* may be used to stop a hole to keep the wind away (1983:25).

After this, the claim that, "The *argument* of Hume's *Treatises* cannot be used to stop a hole to keep the wind away.."[106] seems half-hearted. It is not enough to say that when philosophy is used ideologically it is no longer philosophy. That aspect of Hume's work which might interest the philosopher (that is, his "argument") is not the irrefutable "real" meaning of his work. We may also have to make some judgement as to the practical consequences of the work. I cannot simply excuse my killing of those around me by my interest in ballistics. Further, as Oakeshott says, it is impossible "..to "fix" a text before we begin to interpret it. To "fix" a text involves an interpretation; the text is the interpretation and the interpretation is the text"[107].

This basic problem, that the character of intellectual products is determined by their environment[108], also underlies, as I mentioned earlier, Oakeshott's manoeuvres on the nature of the aesthetic.

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103 Oakeshott 1962:25.
104 Oakeshott 1962:29.
105 Oakeshott 1962:72,79.
106 Oakeshott 1983:26.
107 Oakeshott 1933:113.
108 Oakeshott makes this point in his review of Mabbott's *The State and the Citizen* see Franco 1990 p105, or "Mind" 58 p385.

(iii) The Aesthetic

In *Experience and its Modes* Oakeshott characterizes "poetry" (or the aesthetic) as practical, that is concerned with maintaining or changing existence[109]. His volte face in "The Voice of Poetry" is complete, however. Here the contemplative images of poetry are entirely without both antecedents and consequents[110]; here:

> Corot could not misreport a landscape because he was not making a report at all, he was making a poetic image. Donatello's David is not an "imitation" King David as a boy; it is not even an imitation of a model: a sculptor's model is not a person, but a pose. A photograph (if it purports to record an event) may "lie", but a poetic image can never "lie" because it does not affirm anything (1962:227).

But of course what is difficult to accept here is the assertion of not only an absence of simple reference, but an absence of all influence. Non-reference we could perhaps accept (the strong poets work might be accepted as not obviously derivative), but non-effect, given what has been maintained about the primacy of interpretation in determining the meaning of a text, seems problematic. And as Grant notes;

> [Oakeshott] abandons almost all of his aesthetism - not to say his whole case - in observing that Shelley's claim, to the effect that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"; may after all be "merely a reflection of the manifold character of Apollo" (1990:109 see also Oakeshott 1962:240-241).

This dependence on interpretation may create special problems for political philosophy. For political philosophy must surely be thought more liable to interpretations unkeeping with it's character than other writing, such as poetry. As Oakeshott puts it;

> Politics offers the most difficult of all "literatures", the most difficult of all collections of "texts", in connection with which to learn to handle and manage the language of explanation: the idiom of the material to be studied is ever ready to impose itself upon the manner in which it is studied (1962:333 see also 329)[111fn].

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109 Oakeshott 1933:256-257.
110 Oakeshott 1962:217.
111 This matter will be discussed again, particularly in chapter five with reference to the reception of Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, and in chapter six in "The Sovereignty of the Audience".

If our acquired civil condition really is as fragile as Auspitz[112] and Oakeshott[113] seem to suggest, and we really are liable to have both our own judgements and those of our fellows jeopardized by the work of writers, and are further dependent on "poets" to rescue us, then I suspect that we are doomed. Our collective life is not manageable by individuals. It is a robust common creation or it is nothing. I cannot believe that if it is the case that persons mistakenly look to political philosophy to guide their conduct then political philosophers can write with a knowledge of that effect. It is my belief that if we really are in a situation where we must try to manage the impact of works such as those of Bacon and Descartes, and where we really are dependent on unacknowledged "poetic legislators" like Falck[114], Benn and Peters[115], then we are in a situation for which we are entirely unequipped.

Conclusion

The presumption of liberty of expression is the presumption of a benign relationship between life and its possible products. The character of these possible products cannot simply be dependent on their form, it must be dependent on their uptake. Bacon and Descartes, by Oakeshott's own admission, literally did not know what they were doing. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter Oakeshott's ambivalence regarding the possible dangers of ideological (and other) writing, and of the possibility of works being written which categorically do not "refer" and cannot be generally misconstrued, points us to the difficulty underlying the problematic status of political philosophy. My criticism of Oakeshott is not, therefore, merely internally relevant. By understanding *why* Oakeshott has this difficulty we can understand what is implied in a solution to this difficulty; and thus what is implied in accepting political philosophy as a distinct and bona fide intellectual activity.

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112 Auspitz 1976:289.
113 Oakeshott 1962:107.
114 Falck 1963:72.
115 Benn and Peters 1977:312.

The following chapters explore the ideas raised here; that is, political philosophy as wrongly conceived and as *ratio decidendi*, the character of "poetic legislation", the dangers of the anti-scientistic case, and what we must believe in order to write and feel at home in the world.

Chapter Two
Practical Political Philosophy

In this chapter I will examine what has become known as "political theory". Political theory describes the activity whereby writers, by various means, attempt to provide those engaged in the conduct of their political lives with alternative conceptualizations and considerations to those which they would otherwise have. It is an activity which is intended to be straightforwardly socially influential, and I will argue that it is not a fitting activity for the political philosopher to engage in.

In many ways the structure of political theory accurately reflects the tactics and conversational gambits employed in persuasion of many sorts. That is, the political theorist can both be seen to attempt to tell us how we should generally see "the world", in the round, and also to provide smaller-scale arguments, rebuttals and counter-points. These two activities may be thought of as the attempt to influence the world by influencing men (through altering their conceptual schema), and the attempt to influence measures (by attempting to alter what is done in a particular situation by citizens or public officials). I have therefore chosen to examine political theory under what appear to be its two constituent parts; that is ideological writing, and the tendering of political advice and argument to the citizen or politician. By far the largest and most theoretically challenging of these two constituents of political theory is ideology. Indeed the complexity of the notion of "ideology" means that any discussion of ideological writing must in many ways be a discussion of "considerations" on ideology; there are, I think, no knock-down arguments which might be generally accepted. I will therefore spend most time addressing the questions that the notion of ideological writing raises, and noting the considerations which make it, I think, an inappropriate activity for the political philosopher, before more briefly looking at the practical political philosophy of Brian Barry.

Those who (arguably) write works which aim to facilitate an ideological conceptual change usually have a theory of the source of the generation of our present

erroneous conceptual framework. Famously Marx identified the "means of production" as such a source. We will also see later, in chapter four, how Rorty suggests that philosophy itself, over at least the last three hundred years, has had a fundamental place in the creation of our dysfunctional "zeitgeist".

Of course in order for this determination to be meaningfully discussed there must exist a person or persons whose thought is not so determined; and one must surely admit of the possibility of a substantial difference between perceptions which are the product of an extended social process, and the gloss put on events through the characterizations of a writer.

The strength, therefore, of Marx's philosophy would seem to be his postulating of a unity in our inherited world; in the judgements we make, in the way we conduct ourselves, in our laws.

Conversely the weakness of Marxism, indeed perhaps more a weakness of Marxism than of Marx's philosophy itself, lies in the positing of individuals or a class who are privileged by the manner in which their perception is determined, and are thus allowed an insight not available to others.

Perhaps we should instead think of prescriptive political philosophers (members, let us not forget of a language community themselves) as gifted not with an ability to express the "content" or foundation of any community's "social program", nor its genesis, nor its future, but, in some sense, its *form*. If there were (as Oakeshott, among others, argued there are) beliefs abroad that knowledge consists exclusively of that which can be expressed in a book, and can be learned from a book, then ideological writing might represent the expression of this error with regard to civil conduct. Rather than thinking of the prescriptive political philosopher as possessing an ability for privileged cognitive access to our social world, perhaps we should think of him as producing literary works which are recognizably *of* the political. The form of these works might also cause them to resonate in the minds of some of those exposed to them, displacing evolved beliefs, or replacing such beliefs if they have lapsed. Neither of these two groups of readers need be thought to acquire a privileged cognitive access.

The apparent "conservatism" involved in challenging the provenance of ideological writers does not constitute a straightforward defense of the "hear and now". We both inherit a world ("experience") and inevitably change it. All that I doubt is the ability of anyone with the "knowledge" to be a citizen to stand outside of this world and be a seer also.

This attitude must be separated from the historical appearance of conservative attitudes, which may well have been responses to challenges to particular social or political orders. Here all we need to accept is the intuitive likelihood of there being a worthwhile distinction between conceptualizations as the product of a million social actions, and conceptualizations as the product of one solitary action, *viz* the reading of a book.

This, in itself, precludes no future for our society, although it does suggest that we may be stuck with one another to a far larger extent than is generally realized, and that in the matter of our very basic beliefs and judgements there may be no experts, but only citizens. Or at least this is the case I will seek to pursue.

This case will be prosecuted under three heads. The first section will examine the notion of an ideological understanding of the world and ideological conversion, the possibilities for "consciousness raising", and the descriptions it makes sense to maintain in our language, and which may be usefully applied to individuals by dint of their behaviour or locutions. The second section will pursue the idea of a non-political conservatism, and of an experienced world that it is senseless to condemn. I will also say something on the nature of language. The third section will examine some of the work of Brian Barry, as an exemplar of "practical" philosophy, which I will argue is indistinguishable from journalism, and lacks the character of a philosophical understanding.

In many ways the criticisms of this chapter can all be seen to stem from a general critique of the rationalistic theory of knowledge. That is, the notions that: (a) we have need to seek a theory of how to live and what to value, (b) our judgements are only defensible to the extent that their abridgement is "rationally" supreme, (c) the

rejection of literary reconceptualization as a source of change is the rejection of change itself and (d) the knowledge held by those engaged in political activity could be displaced by that of the "kibbitzing" intellectual. These are all rationalistic notions.

I (i) Passing Through the Ideological Veil

There is a strangeness about the notion of changing one's "world view" or "consciousness" in order to appreciate the attainment of a good which would not be appreciated, perhaps not even recognized, as a good until after the change in consciousness. The acceptance of such a proposition (assuming the actual realization of the posited end state to be unproblematic) would seem to involve, if not actual self-hatred, a willingness to gamble one's being on someone else's hypothesis.

It would be wrong to characterize this "choice" as being between remaining disgruntled Plato or becoming a, presumably, "gruntled", pig. Still, there is always an oddness involved in comparing apples and oranges, and this oddness becomes extreme when we are talking of the transformation of developed personalities. Manning and Robinson do seem to realize this problem when they tell us that, "The end of good health stands in no need of general justification, but the end of communism does. How, then, may the desirability of the end be shown?"[1].

However, their general approach entirely invalidates the meaningfulness of this question. Of the thesis that states of affairs cause beliefs they tell us;

> This can only prove plausible if it can be shown that we can distinguish between the cause, that which determines what we believe, and the effect, that which we believe, and this cannot be done in the case of experience of activity and relationships, and our beliefs about activity and relationships. It is the holding of beliefs about activities and relationships which makes the experience of them a logical possibility (1985:7)[2fn].

Thus it would seem that there is no statement of the terms of a relationship which would make the criticism of that relationship possible. This is not simply the rejection of an Archimedean point from which judgements might be made; this is the

1 Manning and Robinson 1985:30.
2 see also Manning and Robinson 1985:30,36-37,39. Oakeshott seems the source here; 1975:23.

rejection of judgement itself. Utopia is that which is thought to be Utopia. Contrary to Manning and Robinson's statement on the end of communism quoted above, if one dismisses one's present judgements (for us, perhaps, concerning liberty, and subjective satisfaction), and accepts that it is only from within a "relationship" that an end can be judged, then communism, for example, stands in no need of a *general* (that is, extra-relational) justification whatsoever. Communism here consists in holding certain relationships which cannot be held and criticized simultaneously (what would they be criticized in relation to?).

In the understanding which Manning and Robinson describe the plurality of one's goals seems lost, both the private wants which we seek to satisfy, and the publicly directed "ought" claims which we might champion in politics. One must accept, accordingly, that to lose the consciousness which one held in one's pre-ideologized state is to lose nothing of any value. You must, as I said at the beginning of the section, feel some self-hatred.

Of course, there is a conceptual similarity between what I have called "ought claims", and the ends that one might fulfil in conduct in an imagined society, including a communist one. Man does not come equipped with axiomatic imperatives which he must fulfil; or rather which it can be "rationally demonstrated" he must fulfil. No end and no life is indisputably the one which we should pursue. Or, to put the matter differently, it must be admitted that no end, no matter how timeworn, is insulated from the question of *why* it should be pursued. All ends, including for example the realization of communism, are to this extent equal.

Having admitted that there is no categorical, or at least straightforward, division to be made between the structure of different ends for life, I must, as other commentators have done, emphasize the strangeness of the acquisition of a new end to pursue in conduct, incommensurable with one's previous consciousness. For example, as Minogue says, individualism may involve selfishness, but it also involves self-awareness. Therefore:

> The problem thus arising is: Can selfishness be abolished, self-awareness remaining? The idea of a true community as composed of freely co-operating individuals gives an optimistic and utopian affirmative answer to this question. But this cannot be the ideological answer because so long as a real choice to co-operate remains, the co-operation would be contingent upon the human will rather than causally dependent upon a correct human consciousness. Hence the self-awareness which is a necessary (and in some ideological discourse, a sufficient) condition for selfishness must disappear and be replaced by a changed consciousness (1985:162).

The suspicion is therefore that at the ideological terminus,

> ...the problem of equality is not solved but rather transcended by the fact that there will no longer exist the entities - self-conscious choosing individuals - between whom such an equality might obtain (Ibid:163, see also 170).

Popper makes the same point concerning the nature of the highest form of the state in Plato's *Republic* (or as Popper would have it, *Constitution*). As Plato describes it,

> ...there is common property of wives, of children, and of all chattels. And everything possible has been done to eradicate from our life everywhere and in every way all that is private and individual. So far as it can be done, even those things which nature herself has made private and individual have somehow become the common property of all. Our very eyes and ears and hands seem to see, to hear, and to act, as if they belonged not to individuals but to the community. All men are moulded to be unanimous in the utmost degree in bestowing praise and blame and they even rejoice and grieve about the same things, and at the same time (1966:102).

Perhaps from some perspectives such a society might be well-valued. Aesthetically it might appeal, and the individuals, or humans, in the society might behave in a manner which in our society would lead an observer to believe that they were very contented. However, where the strangeness enters (and here I trust that the reader does find such a notional society slightly strange) is with the completely transformed consciousness on which it turns. It seems to me that no well-adjusted person could will themselves to pass through that conceptual veil, and not will themselves dead (assuming that they understood what was involved). Since to alter one's consciousness to this degree is to become a different person, and not one who can

include in his story an account of how he became, for example, more courageous or beneficent. If there is no continuity then there is no self. This is not an existing person within a new society, nor a better person within his own existing society. Both "variables" are being dramatically shifted at once, and anyone who looks forward to this looks forward to his own death.

This then is the source of the strangeness of the notion of an ideological goal, where the worth of the goal is only to be found and understood by those who have accepted the ideology in a more global sense. It involves changing one's perceptions not only to value something new, but to value it in terms incommensurable with the ones one used previously to value. This does not seem comparable to, say, coming to appreciate a form of music. If one had to characterize such a process (and given the prevalence of ideological writing it seems one must) one would have to think that something altogether more remarkable and sinister was happening. To use an analogy of Manning's[3], ideological conversion may be like falling in love, and we might say, as he does, that who we fall in love with depends on our "particular susceptibilities". But there is a difference, a difference signalled by the judgements we actually make, between the love of family and an infatuation with a film star, between the enjoyment of the established and the longing for some imagined future. As I have described it, ideological conversion involves what seems an abnormal rejection of all that has been established, and might be enjoyed; including one's own life.

(ii) The Rationalistic Presumption in Ideological Writing

If having an ideological understanding of a good has a strange quality, so also does the apparent assumption of many readers, writers and commentators on political philosophy of the possibility of meaningful or helpful ideological works being written. In ideological writing we most clearly see what I have described in the introduction to this work as the "general" misunderstanding which is made with regard to political philosophy. That is, we see the compounding of the notion of "philosophy" as an

3 O'Sullivan ed 1989:78.

academic or intellectual "understanding", with the notion of "philosophy of life". It is thus assumed as self-evidently the case that a writer might provide a "way of seeing" to rival that which we have (even that we have an obligation to acquire such a comprehensive and "rationally" defensible "way of seeing").

The source of the presumption in favour of ideology seems to be no more than the presumption that knowledge consists exclusively of that which can be communicated in a very explicit fashion, and indeed principally in the form of the book[4fn]. Given this rationalistic presumption that all knowledge can be so expressed, indeed that it is not *bona fide* knowledge unless and until it is so expressed, perhaps we should not be surprised that a literature should arise, based on this presumption, which aimed to tell us how best to judge and conduct ourselves.

When we accept the possibility of an ideological schema as a guide to action we make the mistake which Hayek, and others have identified as, perhaps ironically, inherent in the process which makes possible our general progress. That is, our progress depends on our imitation of action and our passing on what has been learned, and yet this imitation and communication is not an error-free process. We may mistake the character of contributions or imagined contributions; there may be interlopers in the process of transmitting knowledge. The source of our success therefore, "..presents to our intelligence problems it has not yet learnt to master"[5]. With regard to the relationship of ideological writing to our habit of conduct, to the extent to which we are rationalistic, we may find it difficult to accept the apparently amorphous postulate that right conduct can only be learned by a life among those who act well, in preference to the more explicit sources of "social knowledge" which might be found in a book.

There are of course many features of ideological writing, and indeed of writing generally, which may serve to promote a rationalistic attitude towards our beliefs and judgements. As Plamenatz notes, we seem to make an intuitive distinction between

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4 I do not think that there is merit in following Oakeshott and attempting to maintain that all ideologies are recognizable abridgements. The true weakness of ideological writing consists in its attempt to place a literary creation in competition with a habit of conduct, and not in its alleged plagiarism.
5 Hayek 1979:154.

ideological and other belief systems. This distinction seems to pivot around the role of the written word[6fn]. As he says, "ideology" is seldom used by social anthropologists who deal with pre-literate peoples, for in primitive societies "..there are no writers of books, there are no makers of theories, no ideologists, recognized as such"[7]. The relationship of writer to reader is fundamentally different to that of speaker to listener. In the former case the effect of repute, of the academic lustre of the form of a book, and of the opportunity to express ideas in a complex developed form, mark a change from social interlocutions in a language rooted in the same life-experiences.

Of course, in criticizing ideological conceptualization it must be admitted that it is impossible to act without "theory". Indeed, MacIntyre's suggestion that political theories and the interpretative schemes of ordinary persons may share some similarity may well be true[8]. However what ordinary interpretative schemes and political theory share, if anything, is not veracity, but (*in their public aspect*) form[9fn]. We must not believe that our precept and judgement, our theory, is defensible only to the extent to which it can be converted into a general statement or "philosophy" (into the form of its imagined rivals) and then *that* "philosophy" defended against other "philosophies". Political theory, in the sense of trying to use experience to modify future behaviour, must always be used. Theory, in the sense of that precept which is part of an ongoing way of life, though, is qualitatively different from schema.

We also must not assume that there is an immediate identity, an immediate continuity, between the human skills of writers and their writing. In other words we must not believe that writers are privileged not only in the means of communicating their impressions, but also in their ability to receive "true" impressions; in their representationalist as well as their impressionistic abilities. We must not simply assume that the practical skills which, for example, allowed Marx to participate in the

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6 The question of whether there has been a difference in communication since the ability to read and write became general is a constant in this work, and is particularly dealt with in the final chapter.
7 Plamenatz 1970:21.
8 Miller and Siedentop 1983:27.
9 Indeed, as Oakeshott says an ideology may have an advantage over a tradition of thought by its appearance of self-containment. Oakeshott 1962:12.

Paris Commune, are intimately related to his ability to write and strike chords. If we make an error in this regard, and characterize the writer as a man who can allow others to o'er leap life by following his guide, then to large degree we make ridiculous our own lives, by making ridiculous the judgements we make in, and because of, those lives.

Although I will wish to say something more on the nature of language later, a part of Skinner's account is interesting to note here. Given the various "aspects" of language that Skinner identifies, that is, what is intended by the speaker, what is understood by the audience and what the language allows to be said, do we believe that the ideologist's locutions avoid the chaos which seems to beset more simple attempts to communicate? What seems to be presumed by those who maintain the worth of ideological writings is that the "integration" of the ideologist in his society (evinced by his ability to speak and convey "meaning") necessarily makes his contributions worthwhile[10/n]. But the mere fact that it is possible for some of us to speak in radical and revolutionary (even persuasive) ways, should not be thought prima facie evidence that there is an explanation, a part of the sociology of knowledge, which shows why such contributions are valuable. Nor does the acceptance of the possibility of ideological writing by some of those who have had an education in conduct make reasonable the upholding of the possibility of ideological writing. Our education in conduct does not necessarily make us good judges in matters such as these. The fact that some writers can inspire or move us is evidence for only that.

I should say that I do not believe that my championing of timeworn ethical and political knowledge is undermined by my admission that citizens may be upset in their lives and deliberations by the actions, including literary actions, of other citizens. I do not have a "proof" that the vulnerability of time-worn conceptualizations to ideologies is irrelevant to the worth of those venerable ways of seeing, but I believe this to be so. The ability of citizens to judge ethically, and the fact that they yet have difficulty

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10 This question arises again in the final chapter with particular regard to the character of "critical theory".

judging (that is, dismissing) ideologies, may be due to the proximity of the ideologies to the capacity to judge itself. Lacking an explicit account of the development of our own judgement in virtue of its very "time-wornness"[11fn] (it was the product of many mens' actions, none aware of the process, all contributing), we may be impressed by the apparent intellectual bona fides of other ways of seeing.

In the final chapter of this present work I will examine the question of whether in some circumstances it might not be necessary to subordinate some aspects of our literary culture to our lives. Accepting ideological works as socially transformative is to accept epiphenomena as more important than the culture in which they arise, and if this is a widespread habit of mind it is not straightforward how we should respond to this state of affairs.

Having noted both the strangeness of the pursuit of a society in which we as we exist at the moment would disappear, and of the notion of there being those among us who can actually meaningfully comprehend society in its totality, and communicate that understanding, I should like to look at the question of how we should characterize the ideological convert (this question will also arise in the final chapter when I consider the institutionalized personality).

(iii) Describing the Convert

Ideologists have been successful in pejoratively labelling those whom they allege are victims of some defective consciousness. Yet rarely are the pronouncements of the ideological writer or convert thought to be "about" themselves, rather than about the world. We seem to shy away from considering such speech-acts as evidence for obsession or paranoia.

Minogue has certainly captured the feeling which we have when we believe that we are the masters and managers of our ideas, we "entertain" them. By contrast those who persist in ideas we feel they ought to have abandoned are judged "possessed" or

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11 As Oakeshott says a tradition of behaviour is a difficult thing to come to know. Oakeshott 1962:128.

"dominated"[12]. For some people, ideological schema come to structure their entire lives.

Although this is not a conclusive objection it does at least point to an area of interest. The idea that society is formulated, contingent and thus fragile leads to what Minogue has termed, "..the recurrent modern nightmare"[13] that society will fall apart, and this seems to result in attempts to manage the process, to see beyond the modern. Angst may be a straightforward result of the attempt to understand society in a very explicit way. This angst may be relieved by the provision of a new comprehensive explanation such as that provided by the ideologist; possession may be preferable to having nothing at all to hold on to.

Working through such a period of angst and arriving at an answer would of course be an achievement of some note. Therefore, as Minogue notes[14], revelations about the world flatter those who accept (in the argot, "understand") them. We might add that they provide even greater comfort and status for their formulators, those who produce the works which are accepted.

The mythology of ideological conversion includes a belief in the heroism of the convert in maintaining his hard-won world-view, an idea which dignifies the oppressed holder of truth. A small change in perspective, however, reveals a frequently social and conformist aspect of ideological conversion. The social element of an ideological conversion may account for the frequent conscription into an ideological understanding of those whom Minogue describes as comprising a "..miscellany of marginals and minorities"[15]. As he notes, no doubt some ex post facto theory could be quickly found to account for the fact that it should be these individuals who are allowed to perceive the nature of the coming world in the present. This explanation would focus on the distance of the ideological converts from the determining features of their society. By "determining features" I mean those aspects of the society which purportedly cause the

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12 Minogue 1985:67.
13 Minogue 1985:24.
14 Minogue 1985:119-120.
15 Minogue 1985:190.

majority of the population to be blinded to its true character. But there are other (at least as good and perhaps better) explanations available.

Explaining ideological conversion in terms of the personalities involved may seem unfair or hurtful, but perhaps the political consequences of the spread of ideological beliefs makes this the lesser evil. By political consequences I mean the loss to the common life of individuals who may have had a political contribution to make, who may (indeed must) have knowledge which might prove useful.

It may be that it is the comprehensiveness of an ideological understanding which makes us unwilling to question it in terms of the personality of the individual. Questioning other commitments in terms of qualities of the individual (such as the myopic witness or tone-deaf music critic) does not involve the same assault on the very central aspects of an individual's life. But if one wishes to question ideological conversion in terms of qualities inhering in individuals then this is what seems to be involved.

The simple concise explanation of ideological conversion in terms of the anomic personality of the convert removes the presumption that their locutions and schemas must necessarily indicate some cognitive insight. Instead this explanation attributes a more everyday character to this phenomenon. Literary ability and a schematicizing tendency do not begin to exclude paranoia. Nor does the ability to read complex works and discuss them in a more or less comprehensible fashion.

In making this case it would be an unnecessary complication to attempt to maintain that "our" perceptions (that is, non-transformed, still adhering to the time-worn) are categorically ontologically superior to those of the ideological convert. Similarly we need not deny that there may be some environment in which their conceptual matrix would not be most valuable[16fn]. We can concede this and still justify talking about the speech-acts of the ideological convert as being principally "about"

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16 With sufficient imagination scenarios which would involve many afflictions having life-saving advantages can be constructed.

themselves. Nothing prevents or discourages us from adopting this attitude to messianism.

As Sartori points out[17], we worry about ideologies because we worry about this apparent exercise of power over men, and yet many of us do not worry about the alternative influence of our inherited, and perhaps incoherent[18], belief system. This may be so because we have a (unarticulated) belief in the common generation of our social thought, and therefore also believe that at any moment in time, qua developed social actors, we should not be subject to, or capable of, ideological conversion. It would therefore follow that whatever changes providence has in store for our world inhere within us, collectively. We thus, by maintaining this distinction between our inherited belief system and ideological conceptualizations, in Oakeshott's sense, "back the field"[19].

Among those who have rejected their inherited conceptual scheme as a guide to action (or more likely have never considered it as it does not appear in the form of an answer to the question of how we should conceive the world) there may arise, as Medawar puts it, "..a hunger for answers"[20]. The quest that follows may result in the world being divided into all sorts of strange conceptual categories.

(iv) Consciousness-Raising

It does not seem that there is reason to exclude the titularly benign process of "consciousness-raising" from such criticism, as the distinguishing of consciousness raising from other persuasive and pedagogic activities seems difficult. Moreover the tendency of such activities to produce personalities very different to that of the developed citizen seems clear.

It certainly appears that far from being simply "raised" a consciousness is taught, and begins as a notion in the mind of the pedagogue. Unless one accepts that

17 Sartori 1969:411.
18 As I shall argue in the final chapter there is no reason to believe that we should strive to make our beliefs "cohere".
19 Oakeshott 1962:60.
20 Medawar 1983:22.

the subsequent condition where one's consciousness is "raised" is itself proof for the correctness of the "praxical" diagnosis (that is, unless one is prepared entirely to delete the term "indoctrination" as potentially applicable to the process of teaching someone how to "see") then the teaching of a consciousness seems to be the straightforward activity of the nationalist leader or the proselytising feminist. As Child notes concerning the praxical imputation of interests to a class, for example, this "..presupposes for its validity, the validity of the prior imputation of the interests themselves"[21].

For of course the interests become first those of the ideologist and then, "..the transfer of thought occurs in various ways, such as propaganda, education, coercion, which appear decidedly irrelevant to the theory of determination by class interests"[22].

The upshot of this process is individuals who differ quite profoundly in their consciousness from that of the man who has been formed or socialized by his society in a multitude of unplanned ways over time. As Minogue expresses it,

> ...it is the nature of human experience, at least in a modern society, to switch rapidly from one sort of consciousness to another. The required ideological consciousness, by contrast, is a stable and continuous awareness of category membership, a condition not easily distinguishable from the pathology of obsession (1985:191).

Consciousness-raising is putatively bringing to someone's attention a "state of the world". However the activity is not usually simply cognitive ("Look over there")[23fn], but involves seeing very differently what is already seen. Consciousness-raising, strictly speaking, can only take place between speakers within a conceptual framework. Anything else involves consciousness-creation, and is open to all of the objections to ideological writing generally. Consciousness-raising, as commonly used, seeks a rhetorical advantage over simple ideology, as its claim is to make us more of ourselves, to make our perceptions clearer. However this does not seem to be the most plausible explanatory gloss that we can put on the process.

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21 Child 1942:179.
22 Ibid.
23 The consequences of the theorists "gesturing" will be discussed again in the final chapter.

If we take for example Andrea Dworkin's categorisation of antifeminism we can see that what is involved is not a cognitive claim within a conceptual framework. She tells us that;

> Antifeminism is the politics of contempt for women as a class. This is true when the antifeminism is expressed in opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment or to the right to abortion on demand or to procedures against sexual harassment or to shelters for battered women or to reforms in rape laws. This is true whether the opposition is from the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, the Eagle Forum, the American Civil Liberties Union, The Communist Party, the Democrats or the Republicans. The same antifeminist contempt for women is expressed in resistance to affirmative action or in defenses of pornography or in the acceptance of prostitution as an institution of female sex labour. If one sees that women are being systematically exploited and abused, then the defense of anything, the acceptance of anything, that promotes or continues that exploitation or abuse expresses a hatred of women, a contempt for their freedom and dignity; and an effort to impede legislative, social, or economic initiatives that would improve the status of women, however radical or reformist those measures are, is an expression of the same contempt (1983:197).

This does not seem to be raising a consciousness but rather creating one, and creating one at the expense of all the fine judgements which, for example, a person might already have about the motives and intentions of the A.C.L.U., or of those who oppose abortion.

Conclusion of Section One

I will conclude this section by restating what has been claimed. That is, that there is a strangeness to the business of an ideological transformation, in that the only personality which the individual has, which makes him "himself", is lost. There is also an unargued (and I think untenable) assumption in ideological writing that such a thing as meaningful (that is, helpful) ideological literature is possible; that a citizen can be a seer. As an adjunct to this there is an unwillingness to consider ideological writing and ideological conversion in terms of the personalities involved, for reasons which seem at best unclear. I also demonstrate that the maintenance of a distinction between writing

intended to "raise consciousness" and more straightforward ideological writing is far from straightforward.

II (i) Conservatism and Ideology

For many people conservatism is a disgraceful doctrine, necessarily connected with the institutionalization and defence of privilege. However there is another aspect of conservatism, apparently little understood, and that is its antipathy towards certain processes of social change and forms of "philosophy".

Hence whilst I would not seek to defend Kirk's definition of conservatism as simply a matter of "will and intelligence"[24], nor would I wish to deny Huntington's claim that there is a history to the arisal of conservative attitudes that shows them to be often responses to threatened changes in established institutions or ways of life[25], I would wish to claim that there is some truth in the conservative response to some "philosophies" and events.

Take for example the perhaps paradoxical response of Burke, Bonald and de Maistre to the French Revolution; that is, that the Revolution might be decreed by "providence", and if this became clear opposing it would be, as Bonald puts it, "..not..resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate"[26].

Providence has religious resonances, but here not only religious resonances. What also lies behind this capacity of conservatives to reconcile themselves to even changes of great magnitude, is the idea that a revolution might be the product of, in some sense, *bona fide* factors, rather than a confection created by specific identifiable individuals. The individuals who might provoke such political action have long been a subject of conservative disapprobation. As Huntington puts it:

> Different radicals advance different panaceas, but they all have the same psychology which conservative thinkers have not been slow to identify. Hooker's sixteenth century puritan, Metternich's "presumptuous man", Burke's "metaphysical scribbler", Hawthorne's Hollingsworth, Cortes' "self-worshipping

24 Huntington 1957:454.
25 Huntington 1957:467.
26 Huntington 1957:460.

man", Hoffer's twentieth century "true believer" are all one and the same (1957:460).

This conservatism then could be said to be based on a distrust of a writer's self-ascription of genius and transcendence, and this would seem good sense. For we are who we are by dint of what surrounds us, not what is within us. Our lives do not represent the coming to consciousness of a personality who was awaiting language in order to express pre-existing thoughts. If we accept this then trying to "liberate" ourselves by overthrowing our conceptual matrix is nonsensical. With reference to the project of Foucault, Margolis precisely captures the importance of this. As he puts it,

> ...Foucault has caught the essential paradox of the Marxist notion of praxis applied in the context of political action; for what Foucault has done is make explicit the most extreme possibilities of ideology. All modes of thinking are ideological - normalizing - in the sense that emancipation [for Foucault] exists only to the extent that one effectuates a form of thinking and acting that goes beyond the enabling powers of one's own horizontal world, the world in which one comes to be an intelligent, cognitive, competent, effective subject in the first place (1980:373).

Or alternatively:

> Is it the case that the mere regularities of discourse, understanding, thought, purposive action constitute barriers to human freedom? The general answer must be Yes, in the benign sense that if thinking is praxical - hence, intransparent and horizontally restricted - then the reflexive grasp of the powers of any given set of concepts and habits of life must yield a sense of further equally contingent, constructive, historically untried possibilities made possible by the very limiting features of our present standard resources; and yet again, the general answer must be No, in the equally benign sense that our present powers of thinking must make the other possible, and any would-be enlargement of these powers must be suitably continuous with a reinterpretation of our present powers (Ibid:374-75).

This process as described by Margolis would involve change, on occasion perhaps even revolutionary change, but it would not necessarily be opposed by the conservative. This process is, I think, metaphysical rather than actionable; it says something very broad about our knowledge which serves to limit us rather than facilitate action. That is, to the extent to which we accept our contingency, our

"ourness", it would seem very strange to think that we could be misled by our "being" (misled in comparison to what?).

Foucault and Mannheim (among others) challenge this, and in different ways. Roth characterizes Foucault's history (or archaeology) in a way which is, I think, uncontroversial. He says;

> By situating himself at the beginning of a contemporary shift in the way we interact with the world, Foucault's histories assume a critical form insomuch as they attempt to hasten this transition by exposing [what are held to be] the limits of the present structures of experience (1981:35).

However as I have already said this notion of experience having a knowable and actionable structure mistakes the importance of the insight that our experience has a structure. A true appreciation that experience is "public" cannot result in an attempt to toy with the structures of that experience. Working happily within a mode will allow one to feel the structure of one's experience as an inheritance. If one has some existentialist programme to fulfil, and one comes to understand the importance of experience having a structure, then one might feel frustrated. But to wish endlessly to push self-consciously beyond the structure of experience is to fail to have understood that "it" is who one is.

Of course over time experience will change, but this change is inherent in the relationship which made possible experience. Change in cognition is inherent in experience. To accept the strength of this truth is to recognize as ridiculous non-modal, openly "revolutionary" activities. What often does not seem to be realized is that dismissing the possibility of such things as "seminal minds", and of there being something to know on a "grand scale"[27fn], does not itself entail *another* ideological view. The argument about ideology is not an argument about the correct way to live. It is an argument about what we ought to believe about the process of acquiring knowledge about how to live, and whether there is reason to believe that having writers involved in our lives telling us "how to see" is likely to be of benefit to us.

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27 See Manning in O'Sullivan ed 1989:87.

Mannheim also takes experience as often limiting but unlike Foucault who (arguably) wishes us simply to transcend this "limit", Mannheim has both a particular end in mind and a view of the manageability of political experience. Mannheim wishes to show the perspectives from which political viewpoints were arrived at in order, it seems, to synthesize these particular perspectives.

Later I will argue that it is a presumption of a developed democratic society that this synthesis takes place through political discussion, and through institutions which are continuous with that society. For the moment though, all I would wish to stress is how for Mannheim, like many others, experience provides an area for straightforward investigation. There is no suggestion that the realization that life produces consciousness might foreclose rather than facilitate action.

McLellan[28] identifies what he thinks is a continuity in German philosophy from Hegel and Marx through Mannheim to Habermas revolving around the notion of the "making of truth", and there seems to be some truth in this. However what seems to be lost in this idea of the making of truth through the explicit manipulation of the conditions under which thought will take place, is the understanding that action has already produced conditions for thinking, and that that action was not simply frivolous or misguided. As Hayek puts it, "Man acted before he thought and did not understand before he acted"[29].

Therefore whilst there is no such thing as "pre-theoretical innocence" with which we can contrast the mind of social man with that of the ideological convert, yet our present "history" in a Marxist sense, our thinking, was produced by other men who were men like us, and they should not be thought simply foolish or credulous. As a result we should not deny MacIntyre's claim that,

> ...at the level of characterization which allows us to correspond to the actions of others - that is, at the level of characterization which makes all social transactions possible - we are inevitably engaged in a task of theoretical interpretation (Miller and Siedentop 1983:23).

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28 McLellan 1986:9.
29 Hayek 1973:18.

Instead we should emphasize the status of our existing skills in this process. Our lived-in reality creates, if you will, a picture in our heads. By psychotherapy or ideology that picture may be changed or replaced, but any vulnerability in this respect should not cause us to lose sight of the worth of these "organic" pictures.

An obvious area of our culture which suffers from the loss of faith in the idea of a world congenial because created by the people who live in it is our language.

(ii) The Ideological View of Language

What seems to be commonly thought by ideologists and seers is that to the extent that our language contains a normative slant, it contains only problems. This presumption is shown by the odd way in which Charles Taylor accepts that our ideas may arise to fit our more fundamental lives. He says of ideas:

> We may have to explain their rise at least partly in terms of their fit with what we have become, rather than explaining in the reverse direction, where what we have become is a function of the language which has been imposed on us by strategies of power (Tully 1988:226).

In other words, the commonsense notion that language is publicly created and socially facilitative may, occasionally, have some little mileage in it. Our lives, to whatever small degree they may not be shaped by the power of others, may sometimes impinge on our language.

Many writers, including Hobbes and Bacon, have noted how an inherited language necessarily checks or structures what can be experienced and said, although Austin expresses the point as clearly as anyone. He says that, "..our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making"[30]. This truth about our language does not hold simply for what we think of as our language (for example in my case English), it must also apply to our own particular use of words; at one level of analysis we each speak a language of our own.

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30 Miller and Siedentop 1983:49.

What is not contained in this account or critique of language is how we should respond to this state of affairs, and I would argue that responding with anxiety has as its source a conceit, based on the belief that we can be much more than we are made. Furthermore, those accounts which concentrate on the coerciveness of language tend to downplay our ability to use language creatively, to qualify praise, to describe the illusion of a just and honest man. In some philosophy of language there seems almost a belief that a person might be compelled by his or her language to approve of behaviour contrary to their norms, which seems false.

Of course a person's approval may be "compelled" by their norms in that what they value will depend on who they are, and what their society values. But in a developed society the norms of that society will not be open to manipulation by individuals through the creative use of language. The extent to which this may be ignored, and that society may be seen in the grip of powerful and influential men is shown in the odd structure of a quotation from Tully, similar to the earlier one from Taylor. Tully tells us that if an agent wishes to legitimate his behaviour he faces, not simply,

> ...the instrumental problem of tailoring his normative language in order to fit his projects. It must in part be the problem of tailoring his projects in order to fit his normative language (1988:14).

If this quotation by Tully accurately reflected what was actually done by men, if our normative language was sufficiently promiscuous to justify any project, then our society would be entirely bankrupt.

Now if some philosophers are simply wrong about the nature of language then this might not matter. Unfortunately though, thinking a thing so sometimes makes it so, and the ideological belief in the coerciveness of our inherited language seems to encourage both obscure philosophy and a cynical distrust in the apolitical nature of much of our inheritance.

The nature of the coerciveness of the language of humans in society is, I would argue, not contrived. The crucial player in the acceptance of new usages is not the

innovator, but the audience; and the audience not through whim or interest (nor their "mere opinion"), but through reference to their "knowledge" of what is acceptable and unacceptable, which was acquired in a social life that was beyond the possibility of anyone's control.

In order to understand the nature of the coerciveness of a natural language we can look to Munz's parody of Rorty's understanding of the notion of "the conversation of mankind", as being an actual conservation taking place in a cellar. As Munz puts it,

> ...I had some real difficulty in gaining admission. Naturally, as some kind of game was to be played and as the rules were to be binding on all members and since no prior rules were available, they had to be very careful as to who would be allowed in. For once inside, I would be part of the rule constituting group and naturally, they scrutinized me carefully at the door (Radnitsky 1987:392).

The element of the ridiculous in this account should not blind us to the important ideas contained within. Typically those within a language community do not imagine there to be explicit rules or procedures governing who can join in the conversation. The conversation is an ongoing activity. Therefore there are no codified "rules" which govern contributions, but the nature of the "conversation" allows the identification of the bona fide.

This is why Rorty's constant counselling to ignore certain questions, that is, literally not to speak to certain philosophers[31/n], is so revealing. He is trying to alter the activity by extra-ordinary means.

The truth is that the condition, the current practices and beliefs of the participants, of an activity will allow some things (contributions and objections) to be said and understood. For example, whilst our evolving scientific language may be placing some men in a position to make some "discovery", a language in many ways continuous with the language which preceded the discovery will describe it. This is so because all there ever really was was a language dispersed among a number of carriers. Grandiloquent language is a vestige of great man theory, with thoughts occurring in the isolated mind and being brought to the surface in a tortuous fashion through the

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31 see chapter four.

inadequate medium of the existing language. In truth, though, when we think we in fact speak to ourselves. That is why new insights of necessity arrive complete with the language to communicate them[32fn].

The source of language in social communication gives us an insight into the situation where there has been a breakdown of communication between groups. For the losses in translation and the difficulties of translation in evolved languages seem far less than the failure of communication between ideological converts and some "post-modern" philosophers on the one hand, and the rest of us on the other. Because natural languages are the product of social living the "methodological circle of hermeneutics" is, as Munz says[33], not a vicious circle. Man is a language using animal and men are made by their progenitors. Therefore no-one has a history which allows them not to contribute. Obscure writing is thus certainly an affectation; poetry that pretends to something else.

Indeed a worry about language that "goes beyond the limit" of inherited language and conceptual structure is that it might be in some way socially influential. If we believe that life produces (or is intimately involved with) thought, then we may begin to worry about the influence of language that is by its own admission life-less or transtemporal. In the final chapter I will discuss what we might believe about the relationship between the world and our locutions. Here though we should note how natural languages are rooted in similar life events and involve constraints that apply to that life and cannot simply be ignored. Revolutionary or poetic uses of language may influence the practical life that it is no legitimate part of.

Furthermore, whilst what we mean may be a matter for ourselves, what we say is a matter for others. Austin's claim that there is a force co-ordinate with meaning may be taken even further[34]. To talk of a force co-ordinate with meaning is to single out the longevity of approximate meaning next to the sorts of situations we might wish to analyze. Even a simple request such as "Pass the salt", of whose approximate meaning

32 We can of course make poetic images, but they should not be thought part of science or practice.
33 Radnitsky 1987:369.
34 Tully 1988:61.

we are all reasonably sure, will depend on our notion of passing (which may depend on the sports we have played, our rules of etiquette, and so on). Austin was more right than he knew: force is meaning.

Therefore I cannot agree with Larkin that the poet has supreme authority over the meaning of his poem. This is decided by others. And the worry must be that whatever it is about our society that allows us to be tolerant of writing, may be stretched beyond breaking point by some forms of writing. The worry is that languages not continuous with natural language may displace in the minds of some individuals something worthwhile, and replace it with something worthless[35fn].

Conclusion of Section Two

As before I will conclude this section by reiterating what has been claimed. That is, that there is a possibility of opposing the process of social change through ideological reconceptualization without being simply engaged in a defence of some particular situation or privilege. By opposing the process of change through ideological reconceptualization rather than change itself we can discourage the notion that the prescriptive political philosopher might be usefully employed in helping persons to escape the "burden" of their judgements and language. For what a writer might provide is, at best, a literary schema. Our inheritance does not sit so lightly upon us that it can be usefully replaced by such a thing.

It was also maintained that the mere fact that our comprehension is structured by an inherited language does not tell us anything at all about how we should respond to this state of affairs. The apparent presumption that all one need do is note the inherited nature of language to demonstrate its oppressive quality was called into question.

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35 How we might come to be phlegmatic about "ideological" and other forms of writing is raised in the final chapter.

Section III

I should say at the outset that there is a very real danger that a critique of "practical" political philosophy may itself tend to become bathetic. However, completeness demands that I look at this form of writing. Before going on to discuss Barry's work I should also say that political contributions by a philosopher cannot be ruled out *tout court*. Depending on what you believe about the world and your society you may come to feel that you have a categorical moral obligation to enter politics, even from a professorial chair. Moral obligations may be felt to outweigh academic best practice.

One reason for coming to believe this might be the prior involvement of other philosophers, unwitting or otherwise, in politics; and indeed this is precisely what Barry[36], Plant[37], Miller and Siedentop[38] claim. Therefore, whilst not denying that it is conceivable that an individual may come to believe that it is imperative that he make a straightforwardly "political" contribution, I would argue that such a contribution must be unphilosophical, and to the extent to which it encroaches on specialist areas of research (for example, Economics), it is open to ridicule. It may also, due to its perceived status as a "serious work", involve claiming a right to special consideration for one's opinions which would not be granted if they were presented in a non-academic form.

(i) "Political" Philosophy

If one is engaged in a moral crusade in which the lives and welfare of persons are at stake, and in which those who oppose you do so in the knowledge that seeking additional utility and satisfaction for themselves must of necessity further blight the lives of those whose cause you champion, then you can have little respect for those who oppose the good you seek.

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36 Barry 1989a:3,98.
37 Plant 1989:xiv,210,218.
38 Miller and Siedentop 1983:2-4,51.

Therefore, for Barry, those "public choice" theorists who research the possibility of a link between democracy and inflation have a "hidden agenda" pursued by "shoddy reasoning"[39], and are in fact simply anti-democratic[40/n]. Sophisticated work on political obligation is "palpably fallacious"[41], and unbelievable to anyone of "ordinary intelligence". Similarly, Locke's theory of property is "palpable nonsense"[42], whilst a part of Nozick's theory of just compensation is "crass"[43]; and so on[44]. In "calmer times"(sic) the agenda of those who disagree with Barry would be recognized for the "reactionary twaddle"[45] that it is.

Of course this kind of rhetoric and vituperation is the stuff of politics, and if it were mere addendum, a vainglorious Q.E.D. at the end of a piece plainly politically inspired, but now of a philosophical form, it would remain incongruous but (perhaps) it would matter little.

However, as I will argue with reference to the work of Nozick, if one has an unshakeable confidence that one occupies the moral high-ground, and will be reviewed as such, this seems inevitably to affect one's work.

(ii) Unphilosophical Philosophy

We might well follow Oakeshott in accepting as a definition of philosophy a willingness to interrogate postulates, to pursue purported relationships, to question ceaselessly. Of course philosophy has come to mean canonical texts, but within these texts we can perceive a characteristic form which we think of as "philosophical".

If we look to Barry's work we will see how this form is abandoned, and how this leads to a non-discursive assertiveness, and to what I earlier referred to as "Johnsonian" refutations. For example Barry attempts to demonstrate how it is sometimes necessary to ignore straightforward commercial considerations in order to

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39 Barry 1989a:3,8.
40 Tone is added by noting their refusal to "recant", Barry 1989a:3,61.
41 Barry 1989a:27.
42 Barry 1989a:166.
43 Barry 1989b:68n.
44 Barry 1989a:21,167,172,324.
45 Barry 1989a:98.

provide persons with goods that they desire but which the market would not provide. He tells us that:

> Many of us attach a good deal of importance to having public telephones disseminated over the country in case we are stranded and need them, yet it may well be that a large number of these public telephones do not get enough use to "pay for themselves". Acting according to commercial criterion here would be failing to provide people with what they want and are willing to pay for. A fanatical marketeer could, presumably, suggest that everyone should adopt a telephone kiosk in some remote village and drive out periodically to it with a sackful of coins to make long telephone calls to Australia. I need not insult your intelligence by pointing out what is wrong with this proposal (1989a:532-33).

I may be wrong in claiming that what I am about to suggest would suggest itself to anyone not engaged in prescriptive philosophy, but does it not seem obvious that the very last thing that a "fanatical marketeer" would suggest is the solution which Barry attributes to him? Would not the fanatical marketeer suggest that the cost of dialling from telephones in remote areas be higher, relative to their low usage? Would this hypothetical marketeer not suggest that independent cellular networks be authorized? Would he not allow breakdown and emergency repair companies to install "dedicated" telephones in such remote areas?

Similarly Barry attacks Hirschman for his value premiss that, "..the quality of goods supplied in a market should be as high as possible at any given price". Barry tells us that:

> This is certainly not uncontroversial, but it is the sort of value premiss that economists have been using ever since Adam Smith: it assumes that consumption is the object of all economic activity. Thus Hirschman does not ask whether the gain to consumers from the elimination of "organizational slack" might be outweighed by the benefits to the managers of a quiet life, or (more seriously) whether it might not be more important for "organizational slack" to be taken up by pressure within the firm for improvements in the conditions of the employees than in quality improvements in the product (1989a:212).

But of course the reason that Hirschman does not ask Barry's self-posed question is that he sees the pay, pressures of work and conditions of employment of workers as a piece, with all being considered when a worker takes up, or continues in,

employment. Hirschman is arguing for the elimination of losses which have no benefits; he is arguing that the brake-pads of the firm's delivery vans should not rub against the drums, as cherry-red brake-drums are of no benefit to anyone.

There is, of course, an entire literature devoted to examining whether firms operate in perfect markets, whether the labour market is in any way perfect, how workers assess the relative advantages of different jobs of work, and so on. But Barry's critique of Hirschman does not seem to be a contribution to this literature. Rather he seems to be involved in trying to convince (or assure) others that prescriptive philosophy underwrites the public sector.

Perhaps the most sublime example of Barry's general approach is found in his discussion of Braithwaite's problem of two musicians who live in adjacent rooms and wish to play at the same hour, but have different perceptions of the nuisance that the other's playing constitutes. How should the hour when they both wish to play be allocated between them? Barry's response to the problem as stated is to say:

> Rather than plunge in and ask what adjudication Braithwaite should make, it would surely be sensible to ask first if it is really necessary to divide up the time at all. Why cannot the soundproofing be improved? Why cannot at least one of them move? Might not one of them rent a studio for an hour each evening (perhaps with a financial contribution from the other)? Is it really impossible for one of them to rearrange his schedule so as to play at some other hour? Or, going further away from the case as stated, might not one of them spend his free hour practising some other hobby (reading, building model ships, or whatever) while listening to the other play? (1989b:98).

To Braithwaite's condition that each may make as much noise as he wishes, Barry replies:

> Where are we supposed to imagine this as taking place? In a Hobbesian state of nature? In all civilized countries it would be possible to obtain an injunction to prevent a next-door neighbour from making "as much noise as he wishes". There are often in addition local rules more restrictive than those courts would enforce under tort law (Ibid).

Put simply, here is a philosopher who does not care for philosophical problems. Indeed he thinks Rawls "..the most original and interesting philosopher of this

century"[46], and yet counsels Rawls to omit all that could be considered philosophical in his *Theory of Justice*. For when Barry says that, "Rawls sometimes appears to say that the precise specification of the original position should be adjusted until it generates the right answers"[47] this is not criticism. Rawls's error is not to have his philosophy too close to his moral intuitions. His error is to try to produce a philosophy rather than staying with his intuitions; "..we would do better to go straight to Rawls's underlying moral intuitions and scrap their formulation in terms of choice in an original position"[48].

Conclusion of Section Three

We may wonder why Barry feels entitled to write in the manner in which he does, and the short answer is that he is not engaged in producing, what I shall call generically, "literature", but is rather making political contributions, which, thanks to the special study which he has made, his countrymen may pay heed with confidence. A mere writer, concerned to show relationships and inferences, and thus tell a coherent tale, would have need for imagination and fancy. Such skills are unneeded in Barry's more serious study. This is why he can boast of his "..extremely unspeculative turn of mind"[49], and also explains why he describes the work of game theorists as "..more sophisticated technically than philosophically"[50].

In his earliest work Barry drew this same distinction between mere puzzles[51], and the more crucial issues with which the prescriptive philosopher might engage. The former, I would hold, are for those who follow Montaigne, when he said that; "All I say is by way of discourse, and nothing by way of advice. I should not speak so boldly if it were my due to believed"[52]. The latter, it seems, involves the lives of one's fellow citizens, and entails placing oneself in some position of authority over them.

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46 Barry 1989b:147.
47 Barry 1989b:191.
48 Barry 1989b:224.
49 Barry 1989a:13.
50 Barry 1989b:139.
51 Barry 1965:xviii.
52 Hoffer 1952:11.

General Conclusion

Neither the possibilities offered by ideological writing, nor the possibility that political philosophers might be some kind of politically active general purpose intellectual, seems to provide a defensible role for the political philosopher, or an activity in which he might usefully engage.

Chapter Three
The Philosophy of Science

Science is, of course, a world of ideas, and any understanding that we non-scientists might achieve regarding the character of science cannot issue in a methodology for the scientist. Indeed no understanding which the scientist might achieve, other than the one he demonstrates in his scientific conduct, can issue in a scientific methodology either. We cannot through a theoretical understanding of science guide the conduct of the scientist. Nor can we make use of a theoretical understanding to create new sciences either.

However, the belief that the contemplation of the activity of the scientist can only result in a theoretical understanding, and cannot result in knowledge which would allow the creation of new sciences, has not been, and is not, the common belief. The desire to learn how inquiries might *become* scientific has been constant. Such knowledge is in particular sought by those who have assumed the title of scientist, without being able to demonstrate the predicative success of the natural sciences.

The general way in which science has been understood, and thus the way in which it is thought that, for example, the analysis of society might become scientific, has, though, changed through time.

The older belief is the belief in the special quality of scientific inquiries, and the belief in their being some "scientific" method practiced, perhaps unwittingly, by the scientist, which might be discovered by an analysis of his activity, and then applied to other activities to their benefit.

Among the beliefs which underlay this general faith in science was the belief that science contains Leibnizian "laws of nature" which are valid in all places and at all times. To have a scientific understanding, then, of how a state of affairs has or will come about is to know definitively what relations obtain between the "material ancestors" of that state of affairs. It is to understand a complex state of affairs in a

reductive fashion, so that amid apparent diversity and confusion, nature's laws may be seen to be reliably at work.

Therefore whilst the laymen may be generally prepared to accept the "scientific" as the authoritative because successful, others have looked for the reasons for, and conditions of, this success. Given the apparent success of science, the attempts to see "how the trick is done" are perhaps (although mistaken) not unnatural. What was until now, I think, common to the layman's, the philosopher's, the social scientist's and indeed the scientist's perception of science has been the basic idea of the specialness of science compared to other forms of inquiry.

The search for a transferable scientific methodology had of course necessarily to prove fruitless, and today the search for an answer to how science "works" is pursued with less heart than before. The time which has been spent unsuccessfully looking for an answer to the question is beginning to be thought of as evidence that there may not *be* an answer to the question[1]. Increasingly social scientists and philosophers have grown weary of the wait for an explanation of the trick. They have also began to suspect that should an explanation ever be given of science's success, it would not be of use in other fields of inquiry. This frustration perhaps explains the willingness to embrace the new view.

Perhaps it is wrong to describe this as a "new" view for as I noted earlier Oakeshott saw that there was a danger that the nature of science as a form of thought might be wrongly taken to imply a downgrading of science. That is, it might be mistakenly thought that as science is constituted by presuppositions, it is less valuable than it was when the prevailing belief was that it made direct contact with the universe as that universe incontrovertibly is. In this chapter we will see that this remains very much a danger. This attitude towards science rather than removing the desire to derive a political philosophy from a philosophy of science seems merely to have changed the rationale and nature of that "political philosophy".

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1 For example see Rorty 1982:xiv.

In order to understand how the "downgrading" of science might prove as important and as potent a source of mistaken notions concerning the character of political philosophy as the attempt, for example, to make a science of political philosophy from history is, we must look at the general nature of the new beliefs about science. Broadly the change from the old attitude to the new consists in moving from the belief that science must be examined in order that it might be emulated, to the belief that the examination of science has shown that science lacks any special relationship with reality, and therefore that there is nothing to prevent all activities being considered equally good; in an honorific sense equally "scientific".

This new and more phlegmatic attitude towards science is at least partly due to the existence of stock (although substantial) objections to all of the common formulations of a methodology for science. Although I do not think that it would be worthwhile to relate the history of failed attempts at a methodology for science (for example the weakness of Mill's view of what is possible through induction), I would like to note the general features of such objections.

For example, if we intuitively think that to be scientific is to have evidence for your beliefs then it is tempting to suppose that the scientist (natural or would-be) should actively seek confirmatory evidence for his hypotheses. However, with evidence it must seem that if you seek, then you will find. Given sufficient determination and imagination it would seem that some "evidence" can be found for any hypothesis.

If alternatively the scientist is counselled to attempt to falsify his theories he might well find that he is overly "successful". No hypothesis is entirely free from anomaly or disconfirmatory evidence, and it would have seemed strange, for example, to have dispensed with the periodic system of elements because argon and potassium had atomic weights the wrong way around.

The above methodological injunctions, which counsel the scientist to seek confirmatory or refuting evidence, may still assume a stable world of "facts", with which the shoring-up, or the destruction of a theory may be undertaken. But there is an

altogether more radical objection to the notion of "evidence". Separate from the belief that there is always, somewhere, in the universe of facts evidence for or against an hypothesis, there is the view that there exists no such universe of facts.

Therefore, if we use the word "experience" uncontroversially to denote the entire situation of the "knower" and the "known", it is possible to view experience as an overwhelmingly "knower" dominated activity. In other words, to conceive of "experience" as the attempt of a self-conscious and reflective mind to understand a universe of "givens" (facts) is a cardinal error.

Often this criticism is linked with a philosophy of language which sees an emphasis on the "known" as evidence for, and as an exemplification of, an inaccurate view of language. Such an inaccurate view might assume that scientific terms are merely markers, and that it is the hypothesized relationships between the forms of "base matter" which these markers denote, in which the scientist deals. In other words, the terms are simply uncontroversial short-hand for well defined objects with universally accepted properties[2fn].

The model of language learning which may follow from a view of language as consisting of labels may conceive of language being acquired through repeated exposure to simple objects while hearing their given name. There are, of course, reasons for seeing this as an inadequate view of language. For example, when we think of complex evaluative terms (for instance, "just", "beautiful" or "ennobling"), they do not seem to be learned by repetition. Therefore, if instead of looking at how we might acquire a lexicon of simple nouns, we look at the social process of acquiring language, we may come to believe that learning a language is a complex blend of sound, touch, smiles, frowns and a million other verbal and non-verbal cues. Hence whatever one takes from the ten thousand (or whatever) situations in which one encounters the word "justice" *is* one's concept (or at least this is the best we can do as an explanation).

To relate this to the discussion of science, if words do not correspond straightforwardly to objects, but rather *are* their usage, we may have difficulty showing

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2 Rorty is greatly opposed to this "representational" view of language, see Rorty 1989:21.

that an hypothesis is false[3]. Once words are part of the intellectual currency of the group which uses them, once the word and its developed usage are seen as coextensive, we may seem to begin to lose that which is necessary to compare theories. Words may best be thought of not as labels with unambiguous material referents, but as part and parcel of the theories which attend their acquisition and use.

The manner in which ideological writing receives a fillip from this popular reformation of our beliefs about science is relatively straightforward. There exists an obvious critique of our general capacity to perceive the world, analogous to the criticism of any simple realism on the part of the scientist. That is, if the scientist's observations are richly laden with concepts, so too are our "observations" generally. If we do not have a non-conceptual access to the natural world, then we do not have direct access to the remainder of our world either. Ideological writing may thus apparently receive support from the modern philosophy of science. Once we have come to accept that the world may be seen in different ways, a major resource may seem to have been added to the armoury of those who would seek to change the world. Moreover, an explanation has become necessary which did not seem necessary before; that is, the preferability of our present conceptual scheme cannot simply be assumed, nor can its benign character. Some theoretical justification for not engaging in ideological reconceptualization is necessary, since it seems to be available as a means of giving us more control over our world; ideological manipulation has scientific credentials. Through ideological manipulation it seems we may become the actual makers of our conceptual world, rather than apparently passive inheritors of a conceptual scheme which may be contributing to our oppression, or be functionally sub-optimal in some other way.

In the following quote we can see how Rorty associates the modern philosophies of science with the support of "socially influential" writing which aims at liberation. Rorty tells us that,

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3 see Kuhn in Lakatos 1970:2.

> ...the ability of an operationalist "meaning analysis" to characterize the essence of the referent in terms of presentations to be expected from it, seemed to give science what was lacking in religion and politics - the ability to use contact with the real as the touchstone of truth. The horror which greeted Quine's overthrow of the dogmas, and Kuhn's and Feyerabend's examples of the "theory-ladenness" of observation, was a result of the fear that there might be no such touchstone. For if we once admitted that Newton was better than Aristotle not because his words better correspond to reality but simply because Newton made us better able to cope, there would be nothing to distinguish science from religion or politics (1980:269).

As I mentioned earlier plainly if one wishes to raise the standing of an activity or inquiry relative to science, or grant an activity the honorific status of "scientific", there remains an alternative to trying to emulate the success of science. One can instead choose to reconceptualize that success. This often seems to be Rorty's approach. With regard to science it is instructive to see how Rorty imagines the two camps in modern philosophy shape up.

> For most contemporary intellectuals questions of ends as opposed to questions of means - questions about how to give sense to one's life or that of one's community - are questions for art or politics, or both, rather than for religion, philosophy or science. This development has lead to a split within philosophy. Some philosophers have remained faithful to the Enlightenment and have continued to identify themselves with the cause of science. They see the old struggle between science and religion, reason and unreason, as still going on, having now taken the form of a struggle between reason and all those forces within culture which think of "truth" as made rather than found. These philosophers take science as the paradigmatic human activity, and they insist that natural science discovers truth rather than makes it. They regard "making truth" as a merely metaphorical, and thoroughly misleading phrase. They think of politics and art as spheres in which the notion of "truth" is out of place. Other philosophers, realizing that the world as it is described by the physical sciences teaches no moral lesson, offers no spiritual comfort, have concluded that science is no more than the handmaiden of technology. These philosophers have ranged themselves alongside the political utopian and the innovative artist (1980:3).

Essentially Rorty associates what I have described as the increasingly out-of-date view of science with the philosophical old guard, whilst those who are *au fait* with

the "new discoveries" of Kuhn and Feyerabend have a new understanding of what it is to be scientific. Rorty sees it as an implication of the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend that the writings of the "political utopian" are indistinguishable from the work of the scientist.

In order to challenge this use of the philosophy of science I will undertake a textual exegesis of the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend, before returning in the conclusion to determine whether any support can be derived for a socially influential philosophy from their work.

Feyerabend and Kuhn seem to pursue Bernal's[4] advice for procuring a "science of science", by examining the actual research activity of the scientists. Although I cannot show that Feyerabend's and Kuhn's work is not a legitimate inference from the work of scientists, I can show that Rorty's work cannot receive the support that he imagines from their work, and that the character of their work seems to be generally mistaken. In that which is defensible in the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend we cannot find support for a political philosophy of poetic redescription. That the language of science is not nature's own language, independent of a describer, does not imply anything either for science as a practice, or for the status of other activities.

I The Work of Paul Feyerabend

Feyerabend's work may be thought of as an attack, indeed a successful attack, on science[5fn]. I think, however, this is a misconstrual, which does not survive a close reading of his work.

For clarity I have divided this section into two sub-sections.

(i) Feyerabend on the Conceptual Ladenness of Observation

The insight that who we are, in the broadest sense, affects what we see is of course an important one. Most of us can accept that this is the case to some extent. It is

4 Jevons 1973:130.

5 For example see Theocharis and Psimopoulos where Feyerabend is dubbed "...the Salvador Dali of academic philosophy and currently the worst enemy of science".

Feyerabend's claim that the relationship between what individuals see and who they are is a very intimate one. Usually we act as if we believe that even if who we are affects what we see to some extent, it is only to some small extent. Feyerabend's claim is that the precise opposite is true (or perhaps, "should be asserted"); that is, although "the thing observed" may make some contribution to experience, it is much modified by the process of perception, and may be altogether lost[6]. For experience always involves theory, and the contribution of theory to that experience may be near total[7].

> It is because what we see depends on pre-existing concepts, that,
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> ...decisive evidence against an opinion can often be articulated and found only with the help of an alternative [theory]. To forbid the use of alternatives until contrary evidence turns up while still demanding that theories be confronted with facts, therefore means putting the cart before the horse (1987:34, also 1975:29,38).

The solution to this apparent conundrum (that is, that an established theory will "provide" the scientist with the facts it needs to support itself), is to cultivate and maintain entirely divergent "world views". Feyerabend's claim is that the only way in which we may learn something of the particular way in which we perceive the world is by embracing, wholesale, entirely different ways of thinking. As he puts it, "*..we need a dream world in order to discover the features of the real world we think we inhabit*"[8].

Counter-intuitive and counter-inductive propositions can therefore be used as a "*detecting device*" in order to discover "the antediluvian components of our knowledge"[9].

To reiterate, Feyerabend claims that, in order to be a better scientist, the scientist must believe that his observations, and his work generally, are observationally laden. Furthermore, the only hope for some insight into how it is conceptually laden is by trying to see it as someone else, by adopting the "mental furniture" of someone else. Ready collections of such productive viewpoints may be found in the past views of other scientists, and the world views of other traditions and cultures. This is why we

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6 Feyerabend 1975:151.
7 Feyerabend 1975:168.
8 Feyerabend 1975:32.
9 Feyerabend 1975:77.

must follow Copernicus and hold onto the records of how others saw, "..like an inheritance"[10].

Feyerabend is of course by no means the only writer to have noted the role or possibilities of such devices or tendencies in science[11]. However he goes on to make controversial claims on the consequences of this entire state of affairs on the conduct of science.

Feyerabend maintains that one of the consequences of the tendency of our theories to become self-maintaining was to cause past great scientists to use "unscientific" methods to defend and propagate their theories (with the implication that such behaviour might conceivably still be justified). For example, he maintains that Galileo defended his arguments and ensured them a more lengthy hearing than that which they would have had otherwise, by using, "propaganda" and "psychological tricks"[12].

If we believe that observation is to some considerable degree conceptually laden, as Feyerabend claims, then to introduce an hypothesis into a world of hostile beliefs and observations, before that hypothesis had been nurtured to discover whether it too could produce supporting facts, would seem strange. Therefore we can make sense of Feyerabend's argument vis a vis the use of propaganda. His argument is coherent.

However, once we have said that his argument is logical and consistent, it is a quite different matter to "weigh" the argument. That is it is unresolvably contentious[13fn] as to what extent the use of propaganda (for example) was a feature of past science, and what effect its encouragement as a tactic would have on present science. As Margolis[14] and others[15] note, the formal features of a case are separate

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10 Feyerabend 1978:47.
11 see Russell's reference to Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* in Russell 1941, or Popper 1972:36.
12 Feyerabend 1975:81,154.
13 Williams makes a similar point about such apparent philosophy of science pedagogy (with reference to Popper and Kuhn) in Lakatos 1970:50.
14 Margolis 1986:24-25.
15 Shea 1971:240, Lindholm 1981:56.

from the consideration of its pertinence to a given inquiry as a methodological injunction. Moreover, methodological injunctions based on historical cases and directed at the practitioners in an ongoing activity must be thought suspect.

For the moment, though, I would like to move on to consider a frequently neglected feature of Feyerabend's work. Consideration of this feature gives credence to the notion that Feyerabend is not, in fact, attempting to reform the practice of science, but is rather pursuing, from his professorial chair, an ethical case. If it can be convincingly argued that Feyerabend is engaged in the pursuit of an ethical case this will help undermine the belief that his work "shows" that ideological redescriptions might be helpful; shows that it is "scientifically" validated.

(ii) Feyerabend's Ethical Position

It is in *Science in a Free Society* and *Farewell to Reason* that Feyerabend most clearly states his ethical position, as well as his fears regarding the impact of science on the lives of individuals[16fn].

If one had to summarize Feyerabend's view it is that our survival *as ourselves* requires that there be no unchallenged homogenizing ideologies loose in the world. For in the end we will all be dead, and whilst a scientific approach might, for example, lengthen our lives, if it also explodes the beliefs and values which make it our life, it may turn that life into a mere existence.

This is why Feyerabend believes that persons who are ill must not simply be treated as problems to be solved[17]. Hence it is possible to save someone's life and yet destroy their world (a blood transfusion forcibly performed on a devout and dying Jehovah's witness would be an obvious example). Similar reasoning underlies Feyerabend's insistence on the rights of individuals to belong to social groups with values at variance with those generally held within the greater society, and irrespective of a scientific critique of their way of life[18]. Likewise, a democracy engaged in a war

16 Although a brief statement may be found in Lakatos 1970:210.
17 Feyerabend 1987:32.
18 Feyerabend 1978:78.

must behave in a humane fashion, even if this makes victory less likely[19]. To be a Jehovah's witness, or an Amer-Indian, or a liberal may (will) mean that some things are so sacrilegious, socially destructive or heinous, that irrespective of their causal efficacy as means of saving life, managing land or winning wars, they must not be done. A purely scientistic approach may threaten the status of this truth, for such an approach may tend towards the atheistic, asocial and amoral.

Feyerabend is not, I think, accusing science or scientists of essential malevolence. It is that science as the sole source of truth may sweep aside as unscientific and unworthy of respect everything which makes us human, and it may do this because of mistaken ideas which are abroad concerning what it is to be scientific.

This criticism of a trend or tendency in science or the use of science is not, though, a critique of science itself. It is not a critique of the ability of the scientist to answer the questions which he poses himself, for Feyerabend, like Oakeshott[20], seems to accept that so long as it does not stray from its legitimate concerns science (like other activities) is unassailable. As he says in *Science in a Free Society*, he is engaged in the defence of political, and not philosophical, relativism. Political relativism is the belief that individuals should not be casually dispossessed of the norms and beliefs which make their lives human. This obtains even if these beliefs are adjudged by scientists to be unscientific, or dangerous to ones health, or whatever. By contrast, philosophical relativism,

> ...is the doctrine that all traditions, theories, ideas are equally true or equally false or, in an even more radical formulation, that any distribution of truth values over traditions is acceptable. This form of relativism is nowhere defended in the present book (1978:83).

I might add that I do not think that Feyerabend defends this latter form of relativism at all[21/n].

Feyerabend's conclusion is an entirely consistent and reasonable one, given his premises. That conclusion is that the relationship between scientists and other

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19 Feyerabend 1978:87.
20 Oakeshott 1933:329.
21 Indeed, for support for a mild realism see Feyerabend 1987:14.

individuals in a community must be of a certain sort. Fundamentally the freedom of the individuals in a society over-rides the scientists desire to pursue lines of reasoning and to propagate results. We might even say that it over-rides the right of the scientist to be considered "most correct by any worthwhile standard".

For "science as ideology", science which forgets its modality and asserts itself "unconditionally", may destroy features of belief systems which are central to the lives of individuals (such as the belief that human blood is of religious significance and is not simply a mineral suspension).

Of course, Feyerabend may be wrong in his assessment of the danger that science poses, and he may underestimate the dangers to freedom posed by other circumstances, such as the democratic control of science[22fn]. However his argument is a perfectly comprehensible one.

Indeed, his emphasis on *science* as ideology, may distract us from his general critique of ideology. Feyerabend sees science as the ideology of the moment; the near and present danger[23]. However, his opposition to this *form* of belief is far more broad. For he tells us that he agrees with those,

> ...who demand that people be protected from peer groups and leader pressures. But this caveat applies not only to religious leaders such as the Reverend Jones *but also* to secular leaders such as philosophers, Nobel Prize Winners, Marxists, Liberals, hitmen of foundations and there educational representatives: the young must be strengthened against being imposed upon by so-called teachers, and especially against ratiofascists like [Tibor] Machan and his peers (1987:303).

In short, "[T]he best education consists in immunizing people against systematic attempts at education"[24].

This is so because all ideologies, all universal truths, all pronouncements of an ideological structure with which to organize ones life, have failed to understand what it is to be human. To be human is always to be particular, and therefore any possible

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22 For his comments on the Lysenko affair see Feyerabend 1987:159.
23 Feyerabend 1975:21-22, 1987:61.
24 Feyerabend 1987:316.

question relating to humans must principally address who they are, and what their beliefs, goals and expectations are.

This is why Feyerabend believes that,

> ...politics..is in many ways related to love. It respects people, considers their personal wishes, does not "study" them whether by polls or by anthropological field work but again tries to understand them from within, and connects suggestions for change with the thoughts and emotions that flow from such an understanding. In a word: *politics rightly understood is firmly subjective* (1987:306).

This is why suggestions for changes in one's life can only come from friends (and could not be the aim of an inquiry, a "political philosophy"); that is, people who know the *particulars* of ones life. This is why one cannot "ratiocinate" about the lives of people one does not know. This is why humanity cannot be saved "..by groups of people shooting the breeze in well heated offices"[25].

(iii) A Summary of Feyerabend's Case

Feyerabend says things which are of interest to the philosopher of science (although a strong statement of the conceptual ladenness of observation is nothing new), and may conceivably be of interest (although I think not of use) to the practicing scientist. He also has a straightforward ethical position which I have discussed. However, Feyerabend does not doubt the ability of science to answer the questions it sets itself. While he does doubt (like Kuhn) that science can proceed towards the ontologically categorical, I do not think that this materially affects the standing of science relative to other inquiries, or the possibilities of other inquiries.

The fact that Feyerabend's ethical view is presented together with a philosophy of science may alert us to the possibility that he is consciously addressing the problem that Gellner and others, including Oakeshott, have identified as our "predicament". That is, our cognitive and scientific capabilities seem to have expanded enormously, while our social and moral obligations seem to have lost much of their categoricalness.

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25 Feyerabend 1987:17.

As Gellner says, with reference to Wittgenstein's example, "In recent centuries, our calculations have become incomparably more powerful than they had been, whilst our coronations have become much shakier"[26].

We may suspect, as I believe Feyerabend does, that part of the reason for the reduction in the felt compulsiveness of our moral obligations is the growth of, and our faith in, our scientific abilities.

It may be true that some philosophies of science do not accurately represent what took place in past great science. The extent to which an intellectual hegemony may be self-maintaining may have been underestimated. Therefore the testing, indeed the formulation, of a new hypothesis may require a lengthy and comprehensive attempt to reconceptualize the world in a way which allows the new hypothesis to work. These are Feyerabend's claims.

The notion that he says more than this is no doubt partly due to the rhetorical flourishes and extravagant uses of language in which he delights. This is done, I believe, to win allies in order to help advance his ethical case. Feyerabend is aware of the context in which he writes, and he admits that he is prepared to use whatever devices are necessary in order to make an impact on what he sees as an overweening scientistic hegemony[27]; in short, Feyerabend believes that *force majeure* justifies his otherwise academically doubtful practices. If others do not wish to become dumb foot-soldiers in his ethical battle then they should be aware of this; if we are to join with Feyerabend in creating an anti-scientistic counter-myth then we should be aware that this is what we are doing. For surely Plamenatz's quip about ideological discussions is true also of most other academic or intellectual debates. As he puts it, "..surely it is the talkers who are the dupes of the talkers; for not only do they do all the talking, they do most of the listening as well"[28].

As I hope I have shown, Feyerabend's work is reducible to a number of straightforward claims and propositions. This may be so because it is impossible to say

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26 Gellner 1985:185.
27 Feyerabend 1975:69-70, 1987:13.
28 Plamenatz 1970:144.

something both wildly revolutionary, and yet comprehensible, unless one has genuine insight; just as "speaking in tongues" is always reducible to re-arranged standard features of the speaker's native language. One cannot simply "pronounce" a revolutionary heuristic.

It is perhaps also true that some readers would like to believe that Feyerabend has provided the means for a radical reconceptualization of science (as his reputation and the titles of his work might lead one to believe), so that either all inquiry is "scientific", or none is. Prescriptive political philosophy is always open to new justifications for its activity, and Feyerabend's attack on scientism may ironically have given succour to the prescriptivism which he condemns. If it is true that Feyerabend's work has been made use of to justify prescriptivism, though, this is doubly true of the work of Kuhn.

II The Work of Thomas Kuhn

On reading *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* it is possible to leave with any one of a number of impressions as to Kuhn's aim in writing and of the intended aim of his work[29fn].

A common impression is that not only does Kuhn's work concern revolutions, but that it is itself revolutionary. Much of the cause of this misapprehension is no doubt due to a statement by Kuhn (perhaps not coincidentally at the beginning of his introduction), which at first glance appears to equate scientific statements with myths[30]. It is a residual belief that Kuhn does something like this which prompts Rorty to place Kuhn in a tradition stretching forward from Hegel, the first to "..put the study of nature in its place - a relatively low one"[31].

It is not generally realized how profoundly conservative Kuhn's work is, how little it threatens existing scientific practice, or how negligible is the effect of his work on the status of science vis a vis other forms of inquiry; in short, Kuhn's understanding

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29 Feyerabend expresses some confusion, see Lakatos 1970:198.
30 Kuhn 1970:2. For a typical interpretation Bicchieri 1978:1073.
31 Rorty 1982:149.

of the scientific activity sits very easily with that of Oakeshott. Indeed Kuhn's work is principally of concern only to the philosopher of science, for it presents a theory of science and scientific progress which is contrary to that propounded by many other philosophers. However, to reiterate, the effect of Kuhn's work on the practice of science, or on the standing of science relative to other inquiries (assuming that he is correct), is next to nothing. To stand Rorty's[32] claim on its head, distinctions remain between scientific and non-scientific inquiries.

Kuhn himself realizes this and tells us that it was principally the simple inaccuracy of some philosophies of science which made his own worth pursuing[33]. It is of course a fundamental premise of his argument that science has proceeded with a blithe disregard for the philosophies he attacks. Furthermore, he tells us plainly that it should continue to do so[34].

This is so because the pre-formed and given conceptual framework within which the scientist operates is not a problem (as it is at least some of the time for Feyerabend), it is itself knowledge, if there be any at all. Hence, given that we cannot simply see and then interpret what we have seen, Kuhn tells us that:

> What is built into the neural process that transforms stimuli to sensations has the following characteristics: it has been transmitted through education; it has, by trial, been found more effective than its historical competitors in a group's current environment; and finally it is subject to change both through further education and through the discovery of misfits with the environment (1970:196).

It is important to stress this little understood aspect of Kuhn's thought. Whilst some reflection on our "conceptual apparatus" is possible by "thought experiment"[35], this reflective thought is in no way superior to experience within a paradigm. A successful paradigm is our inheritance, to use Oakeshott's expression, our "millions"[36]. Therefore as Kuhn puts it;

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32 Rorty 1982:xvi,xliii.
33 Kuhn 1970:v.
34 Lakatos 1970:237.
35 Hacking 1981:7.
36 Oakeshott 1933:182.

> What makes the integrity of perception worth emphasizing is, of course, that so much past experience is embodied in the neural apparatus that transforms stimuli to sensations. An appropriately programmed perceptual mechanism has survival value. To say that the members of different groups may have different perceptions when confronted with the same stimuli is not to imply that they may just have any perception at all. In many environments a group that could not tell wolves from dogs could not endure. Nor would a group of nuclear physicists today survive as scientists if unable to recognize [what are known as] the tracks of alpha particles and electrons. *It is just because so very few ways of seeing will do that the ones that have withstood the tests of group use are worth transmitting from generation to generation* (1970:195-196. My emphasis).

Kuhn's is a specifically scientific (that is natural science) thesis. A superficial similarity between his work and other works in the history of art and literature is not an example of truth arising independently in different areas. Rather Kuhn drew part of his initial inspiration from these works[37]. He does not have any methodological recommendations for the social-scientist, or for anyone else[38]; save, we may suppose, for the natural scientist who is trying to make a pure Popperian methodology work[39fn]. Nor does Kuhn doubt that the nature of progress in the natural sciences is profoundly different from progress in other fields[40].

The above features of Kuhn's case make it inappropriate, I think, to follow Jevons in describing the behavioural sciences as akin to optics before Newton; in a "pre-paradigm" state[41]. Such use of language encourages the belief that a paradigm is a consensus or a conspiracy or a part of a methodology[42].

The source of most confusion with regard to Kuhn centres on his attitude to the conceptual ladenness of observation, which I would now like to discuss.

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37 Kuhn 1970:208
38 Lakatos 1970:244-245.
39 That is, for people who *have* mistaken how an activity might be reformed.
40 Kuhn 1970:209, Lakatos 1970:244.
41 Jevons 1973:63.
42 Lakatos notes these beliefs 1970:93.

(i) Kuhn on the Conceptual Ladenness of Observation

If nothing is ever observed without a massive contribution from the inquiring mind (with, for example, its scientific concepts and theories), then we may wonder how we can ever "know" (more or less definitely) anything about the world.

In Kuhn's work an enormous role is played in explaining the practice of science by the concept of "normal" science, which may be defined as science within the conceptual framework, within the terms, of a given scientific tradition. This conceptual framework Kuhn dubs a "paradigm". He tells us that;

> Close historical investigation of a given speciality at a given time discloses a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications. These are the community's paradigms, revealed in its textbooks, lectures and laboratory exercises. By studying them and by practicing with them, the members of the corresponding community learn their trade (1970:43).

Therefore if who we are affects what we see, then the scientist is a very particular person. What he sees is structured through the scientific education which he is given. We learn to recognize (or rather the scientist does) states of affairs as being similar or dissimilar by being given practical examples together with a theoretical framework within which to understand them. Furthermore, Kuhn tells us that "..once we have learned to do it, recognition of similarity must be as fully systematic as the beating of our hearts"[43].

This may seem, prima facie, a disagreeable state of affairs; the scientist sees what he sees due to an extended process of education. However this is not at all Kuhn's view. His thesis is that the human predicament is such that knowledge of the natural world can only be a part of an extended social process. Far from being in some way a relativistic thesis, his is an exaltation of the natural sciences. Whilst there can be great men in science they are only great relative to other men, and not the embedded knowledge of the tradition itself.

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43 Kuhn 1970:194.

This is why Rorty is so wrong in ascribing to Kuhn a view of scientific rationality which allows the scientist to fudge the results a little[44]. Far from opening the way for a radical reconceptualization of the world Kuhn, it seems, entirely removes the possibility[45/n].

This becomes clearer if we look to Kuhn's response to a number of the features of the science he describes. All of these features seem intuitively disadvantageous to science but have, within the schema Kuhn describes, an ultimate justification.

For example, "normal" paradigm-led science (that practised by most scientists most of the time) far from attempting to deal with "raw data" as it presents itself, deliberately contrives to fit nature into pre-formed conceptual "boxes"[46]. Such science lacks grandeur of conception and concentrates solely on minute and esoteric problems. It does not aim at novel or controversial results, but at results which are known in advance[47]. The individuals who practise this science are prepared for their role by being taught using systematically misleading textbooks, which bear no relation to the activity they putatively describe[48].

Through time this "zeitgeist" has had certain consequences. Aristarchus's third century B.C. "anticipation" of Copernicus was without impact on Greek science[49]. Uranium fission was slow in being identified as scientists were systematically misled by their expectations[50]. Physicists in the first quarter of the twentieth century ignored manifest inconsistencies in their scientific understanding to concentrate on "technical puzzles"[51].

Although this sounds like criticism it is not. The narrowly focussed activity of the normal scientist is the only means of identifying *significant* anomalies in a scientific theory[52]. Of course, looking backward, from solid ground to solid ground, we

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44 Rorty 1982:194-195.
45 Popper, by contrast, was at least prepared to accept Marx's theories as scientific, if falsified.
46 Kuhn 1970:5,24.
47 Kuhn 1970:52.
48 Kuhn 1970:136,165.
49 Kuhn 1970:75.
50 Kuhn 1970:60.
51 Lakatos 1970:257.
52 Kuhn 1970:34,64-65.

can identify what would have been a creative leap. But we cannot do so in advance. We can, of course, speculate, and create radical new interpretations of phenomena. But, children of our times as we are, they are not likely to amount to much. More importantly, we would have no means of identifying which speculations might be fruitful. This is why Aristarchus was rightly ignored[53fn]. Within his milieu a geocentric system worked perfectly well. It was when it had been lived with, and ultimately shown to be defective, that a competitor theory was considered.

This "social" nature of scientific knowledge in Kuhn's theory cannot be over-stressed, and marks a radical discontinuity between Kuhn's view of knowledge and those activities (such as ideologizing and myth making) which are lauded by some of those who take pleasure in what they think of as his debunking of science. It was the activity of those physicists who ignored "fundamental inconsistency" in the early twentieth century which isolated significant anomaly. In science real anomaly, and the opportunity for fundamental progress, occur only after lengthy investigation of a given conceptual framework. We might say that Popper's progress is the work of great men, whilst Kuhn's is the work of men. We might imagine that Popper would concentrate on a poet's use of language, Kuhn on the community which produced the language.

Indeed the analogy, or rather the disanalogy, between science and individual creative expression is a useful one. As Kuhn notes[54], with reference to Popper's insistence on self-conscious innovation in science, the characteristic expression of criticism in the creative arts is quite different from that in the sciences. In the creative arts men may talk of a work being "derivative" (as Bloom says[55], the strong poet fears influence), whereas in the sciences men are criticized for following "fads".

These different forms of criticism signal more fundamental differences. Without creative innovation non-scientific inquiries would stagnate. Yet without new works, discontinuous with previous works, science seems to progress in a quite different way from the non-sciences. Something about the conduct of science, and

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53 For Poppers view see 1972:102.
54 Lakatos 1970:244.
55 Bloom 1973.

most probably its subject of inquiry also, marks a distinction between the sciences and the non-sciences. It seems that creativeness in, for example, political philosophy is a "literary" or individualistic performance (which we hope is not seen as overly derivative), whilst in the sciences the activity is, as I have put it, "social".

It is perhaps instructive to contrast the views of Brian Barry with those of Kuhn with regard to the relationship between books and articles. Barry, in discussing the means by which the terms of an ethical debate may be changed, tells us that;

> In order for the critics of the old paradigm to go from the defensive to the offensive, it is necessary to have a critical mass of work that exemplifies the new approach and provides handholds for the less adept to scramble up after the virtuosi. Or to put it more mundanely, you cannot have articles until you have books (1989a:352).

This is no doubt true when we are discussing articles in political philosophy; seminal books do lead to derivative articles. However, as Kuhn notes, in the sciences it is the books which are derivative and the articles which are seminal. Scientific books are written by men who are no longer a part of the research activity. In contrast to the relationship which Barry postulates, in the scientific research program a problem or a puzzle is defined by an existing body of knowledge and precepts, and consequently contributions to the solution of that puzzle can be rapidly transmitted. Although the scientist's observations are conceptually laden, his concepts are also "observationally" laden, and so the research activity can take place concurrently in many places[56fn].

Whether this scientific "progress" has a discernible direction, and is coming closer to what is "really there", is doubted by Kuhn who prefers to talk of later scientific theories being better at solving puzzles in a group's present environment[57]. However, without wishing to try to defend the notion that science is ontologically progressive, there may, for the purpose of further undermining subjective idealism, be some merit in noting that the success of the collaborative science which Kuhn describes

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56 If there *is* anything analogous to this scientific activity taking place in our political life it is to be seen in the activity of the citizen who goes about his business without wishing to speak in new and radical ways, and without generally questioning what he knows.
57 Kuhn 1970:206.

seems crucially to depend on other men being "men like us". Thus it is unnecessary for each of us to reinvent the wheel (or the "meson", "positron" and "Krebs cycle"). If one was prepared (for this limited purpose) to tolerate the notion of a "universe" separate from consciousness[58fn], Kuhn's theory, it seems, indicates that our language evolves alongside a universe which is itself unaffected by the act of conceptualization. Therefore, at the very least it seems reasonable to say that, *as* a species, *for* the species, we seem to "mirror" nature. Such notions will not today, I think, be likely to increase error[59fn].

Indeed Kuhn's attack on the idea of scientific knowledge as a private product (through saying it would be as ridiculous as the idea of a private language[60]), and Medawar's attack on what he sees as the central conceit of psychoanalysis, that is a belief in some privileged access to the truth[61], seem to share this intuition.

Comparing Kuhn's work with that of Feyerabend we see quite different views on the significance of the conceptual ladenness of observation. Feyerabend argues that we must try to break the grip of our conceptual matrix by attempting to see the world as someone else. For Kuhn this is a conceit. The only way for a new conceptual matrix to be better than the old is for the new to be of the old. Tested to destruction a given theory identifies by the point and manner of its failure the structure of the new theory. On the role of theoretical pluralism in scientific research programmes Lakatos is therefore correct in putting Feyerabend and Popper on the one side and Kuhn on the other[62].

To conclude this section I would like to reiterate that Kuhn gives no support, intentional or otherwise, to the thesis that science may be overthrown by radical reconceptualizations of the world, nor does he provide a means for the re-evaluation of science relative to other activities. The grounding for the belief that he does seems to

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58 Oakeshott talks of "the universe as a whole" as an "absolute individual" 1933:157.
59 As Oakeshott thought they might at the time of writing *Experience and its Modes*, see 1933:197.
60 Lakatos 1970:253.
61 Medawar 1983:139-140.
62 Lakatos 1970:155.

be that if there is no hard distinction between observation terms and theory terms, then the comparison of a theory with observed phenomena cannot take place.

However, this is not Kuhn's view (nor, I think, a defensible view). We can learn from our mistakes *because of our milieu*. This is why Watkins is so wrong in describing Kuhn's "normal" science as "..a closed society of closed minds"[63]. Kuhn argues that our minds are opened by our social environment. They cannot be "open" in what I take to be Watkin's sense; like a wax impress absorbing the world (although the consequences of this are greatly misunderstood by Rorty). This is also why Williams is mistaken in thinking that the infrequency of scientific revolutions is attributable to the fact that most scientists are not trying to create such revolutions by refuting current theories[64]. Rather, such revolutions are an unforeseen collective product and, as Kuhn puts it, "..are not to be had for the asking"[65].

If science could be practised by a man alone it would be radically different from the activity that we know. Although his science could change and develop he would have difficulty making mistakes. It is a key feature of Kuhn's science that the mistakes of individuals are identified. The individual who has made a mistake,

> ...has failed to obey some established rule of logic, or of language, or of the relations between one of these and experience. Or he may instead have failed to recognize the consequences of a particular choice among the alternatives which the rules allow him. The individual can learn from his mistakes only because the group whose practice embodies these rules can isolate the individuals failure in applying them (Lakatos 1970:11).

Accordingly, for Kuhn, far from being misleading, a paradigm is absolutely indispensable. To imagine that a much-used conceptual matrix is an undesirable graft on the mind is to imagine that in the absence of such a paradigm one could stand foursquare to the world and do better in understanding than the entire community, through time, of which one is a member. This is the mistaken notion of the mind which exists independent of knowledge, which we saw Oakeshott attack earlier.

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63 Lakatos 1970:27.
64 Lakatos 1970:49.
65 Kuhn 1970:34.

In order further to try to separate scientific activity from other activities, particularly the activity of "poetic" redescription, I would like to suggest that there is some worth in the notion of "heuristic power".

III Science and Heuristic Power

Gellner has defined the problem of relativism as; *"We know better* - but how do we *know* we know better"[66]. We cannot lay bare a logic of scientific inquiry (as we are discussing an ongoing practice this should not surprise us), and, for example, my discussion of the work of Feyerabend and Kuhn is notably defensive and tentative. Yet many doubt the capacity of, as Margolis[67] puts it, "theoretical and metatheoretical anarchy" to account for the apparent success of scientific inquiries.

Lakatos has identified as a special quality of scientific understanding that it has "heuristic power", which he characterizes as, "..the power of a research programme to anticipate theoretically novel facts in its growth"[68].

That this anticipation will, or is intended to, take place is signalled by the manner in which new items of information are dealt with in the scientific programme. Although it is of course possible to comprehend and assimilate the novel by making adjustments in ones "background knowledge"[69fn], scientific programmes simply do not seem to operate in this way.

By suggesting that this feature of scientific programmes is important I do not mean to suggest that there is not much truth in Kuhn's description of the scientific "zeitgeist" as one which attempts to exploit to its limit a theoretical framework. Perhaps it is best to think of a common solution to a Kuhnian puzzle as involving a forward looking anticipation of further novel facts, these suggesting still more puzzles.

However, to repeat, scientific explanations have a progressiveness which simple redescription does not share. Lakatos describes the difference thus;

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66 Gellner 1985:1.
67 Margolis 1986:187.
68 Lakatos 1970:155n.
69 For a discussion of this see Gellner 1985:58.

> If we put forward a theory to resolve a contradiction between a previous theory and a counterexample in such a way that the new theory, instead of offering a content-increasing (scientific) *explanation*, only offers a content-decreasing (linguistic) *reinterpretation*, the contradiction is resolved in a merely semantical, unscientific way. *A given fact is explained scientifically only if a new fact is also explained with it.*

Therefore the problem is shifted from,

> ...how to appraise *theories* to the problem of how to appraise *series of theories*. Not an isolated theory but only a series of theories can be said to be scientific or unscientific...(Lakatos 1970:119).

Put simply, non-scientific redescription is not improved by its environment. The presumption of the propounder of a description is that it in some way "accounts" for the "facts" it explains; but it seems to do so without being "touched" by them. So although we may not believe that we are able to manipulate the world in the way that Popper[70] sometimes seems to suggest, it does seem reasonable to reject Rorty's attempt to compound scientific explanations with linguistic reinterpretations. Speaking of the attempt to maintain distinctions between forms of inquiry Rorty says;

> The most frequently cited datum is that science *works, succeeds* - enables us to cure diseases, blow up cities, and the like. How realists ask, would this be possible if some scientific statements did not correspond to the way things are in themselves? How, pragmatists rejoin, does *that* count as an explanation? What further specification of the "correspond" relation can be given which will enable this explanation to be better than "dormitive power" (Moliere's doctor's explanation of why opium puts people to sleep)? (1982:xxiv see also 1989:8).

In saying this Rorty is trying to persuade us that Lakatos's distinction cannot be drawn (between a linguistic reinterpretation, and a scientific explanation). But Kuhn[71], the likely source of this example, points us, once again, to its real significance. In the second half of the seventeenth century scientists ceased to talk of "dormitive power", and began to talk of the smooth shape of the opium particles having a soothing effect on the nerves.

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70 Popper 1972:112.
71 Kuhn 1970:104.

As neither explanation seems particularly impressive, it is easy to fail to notice the fundamental difference between the two. Simply, "dormitive power" never was an explanation, and never will be, whilst postulating a relationship between the shape of the particles of opium and the structure of our nerves always was an explanation, and always will be.

Perhaps it is this form of explanation which pushes us towards a scientific relationship with the natural world. Once we have begun to talk of the shape of opium particles we can ask what else might be true of particles with such a shape, whether they might be of a shape other than smooth but which sooths the nerves nevertheless, what must be true of the surface of the nerves, the lining of the stomach, and so on. As Gellner says; "Somehow or other, some cultures have succeeded in subjecting at least part of their cognitive life to external criteria, in the sphere of both formal and empirical truth"[72].

Given that understandings and descriptions are abroad which may have the effect of, as Oakeshott would characterize it, putting conduct on the wrong path, we should note this distinction between description and progressive explanation. Noting the distinction will not help to make new sciences, but it might help us to avoid misconstruing what we or others are actually doing.

Conclusion

Whitehead was doubtless correct that Newton's explanation without reasons illustrated that, "..a dead nature can give no reasons"[73]. This, however, is a truth of very limited importance. Particularly it does not affect the standing of other inquiries vis a vis science (qua science), nor does it alter (that is, raise) the worth of activities (such as mythologizing) which would aim to provide us with "ultimate reasons". As Medawar says of the mystical work of Teilhard de Chardin, we must not believe that "..the

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72 Gellner 1985:177.
73 Grene 1984:97.

discovery or rediscovery of the insufficiency of reason [has] given a paradoxical validity to nonsense"[74].

As Rorty is chary of giving anything approaching an explicit description of the sorts of writing he would like to see philosophers begin[75fn], it perhaps seems unfair to ascribe to him support for such work. However, as I will show his aim, insofar as he makes use of the philosophy of science[76fn] is to create an environment in which works simply succeed by their success; with no check save the contingent and variable tastes of the readers, and their propensity (or resistance) to behave in ways intended by the author of the work. If one accepts that there has been a general belief that science interfaces in an unmediated fashion with what is "really" there, it is a small error to believe that what has now been shown is the essential "promiscuity" of the universe, and its "willingness" to be conceptualized along any plane, and in any way. If science is merely a self-consistent and coherent story, it is easy to believe that with sufficient imagination new inquiries of equal coherence and consistency, and perhaps even greater practical worth, could be conceived. The notion that modern philosophy of science supports a socially influential political philosophy depends on attempts such as Rorty's to liken valued, and yet in a sense "baseless" science with baseless writing, which we may come to value. He is in error both in his characterization of science, and in his apparent valuing of activities which have been, and indeed are, rife in political philosophy.

For example, we must separate, as Rorty often does not, the impact of Kuhn and Feyerabend on those who operate with a base epistemology, and the support these writers lend to Rorty's general case for a reformed philosophy. Put simply, there is not nearly enough straw in a passivist classical empiricism to make a decent target. Read aright, Kuhn no doubt has a tremendous impact on anyone who believes that the contribution of the scientific observer and his "mental set" to scientific experience is non-existent or negligible. The dependence of science on hypotheses, paradigms and

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74 Medawar 1983:328-329.

75 The question of the character of Rorty's activity is discussed at length in chapter four.

76 In chapter four I examine the reliance of Rorty on an historical diagnosis.

conceptual schemes no doubt, as Rorty rightly points out, makes completely untenable the notion of an epistemological naif absorbing the world. But once this is accepted there exists a yawning gap between the insistence of the place of Feyerabend and Kuhn in the philosophy of science, and the claim that philosophy should reform itself. The flaw in this process of reasoning lies in the failure to recognize that the rejection of simple realism does little to shake a more general belief in a universe not transformed by the act of description. Now of course such a universe is for almost all purposes, as Oakeshott says, "a nullity". However, once we accept such a universe, then we can dismiss the question of ontological progress and still demonstrate profound philosophical consequences.

Rorty et al are therefore correct in their dismissal of attempts to lay claim to what is "really" there. Because our view (as humans, as members of contingent communities, and as individuals) is particular, there is no reason to believe that it is also partial, whether relative to the universe as a whole, or to what we think of as our world. Similarly there is no reason to believe that through conceptual communication over time our view comes closer to some notional "God's View".

However, none of this is necessary in order to make my case. It cannot be denied that our particularity renders our perceptions ontologically irrelevant (or ontology irrelevant). That is to say, we may well be wiped out by a "sucker-punch" which we, quite literally, do not even see coming. But at the moment we are interfacing with our environment, in the aspects currently relevant to us, and communicating useful (though subjective) impressions of that environment, faster than that perceived environment is changing. And this is all that we need in order to understand the weakness of much ideologizing, of the "post-modern" philosophical movement, and perhaps also of radicalism generally.

Moreover, once we adopt an Oakeshottian view of philosophy, and no longer expect it to facilitate our doing more good, for example, then Rorty's entire problem of whether philosophy can provide spiritual comfort, or "help people make sense of their lives" disappears.

It is no doubt unfortunate that men cannot be experts in the natural sciences in the way that was possible three hundred years ago. it is unfortunate that our best notions (for some purposes) about the world are inaccessible to most of us. But the idiom of science is not an affectation that can be replaced by a language created by great men. It is one part of an ongoing practice that was created by no individual. The genuineness, the "time-wornness", the social nature of this language, allows worthwhile communication to take place between practitioners; indeed Kuhn's[77] talk of such conversations involving very long and complex sentences is reminiscent of the positivist project. When Rorty can admit that there is a world independent of human mental states[78], and that science is a self-correcting enterprise[79], it is difficult to see why he insists on trying to maintain a strained analogy between science and creative writing. Just as science cannot reform poetry or practice, neither can Rorty's critique of science reform these modes. Poetry cannot be made, by a critique of science, a source of practical knowledge.

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77 Kuhn 1970:201-206.
78 Rorty 1980:276, 1989:4-5.
79 Rorty 1980:180-181.

Chapter Four

History as Diagnosis: Rorty and MacIntyre

Before going on to detail the manner in which I propose to deal with the work of Rorty and MacIntyre I should first note a difficulty. This difficulty is raised by the question: what notion of the nature of the world, and of their own status as writers, does their work embody? Shortly I will deal with these writers as if they were (as I believe they ultimately must be considered to be) propounding an historicist diagnosis of our "predicament", together with a solution to that predicament. They believe that if followed their recommendations might be reasonably expected to maximize liberty, or minimize cruelty (reasonably expected to do this because of what historical diagnosis has revealed about the nature of our society).

Before that though, I must deal with two objections to my characterization of Rorty and MacIntyre as "historicist diagnosticians". Both objections involve putting forward rival accounts of their work to mine. That is, Rorty and MacIntyre may be held to be simply producing "text". Alternatively they may be thought to be prosecuting a characterization of our world by writing a "history" for reasons external to that history itself.

Of the first alternative reading, the rationale for such production of text seems to depend on some belief about the liberalizing consequences of new descriptions. I will argue that the claim that new descriptions need necessarily be liberalizing is far from uncontroversial. This is a claim that needs to be defended, and neither Rorty nor MacIntyre in fact attempts such a defence.

Of the second alternative reading it must be said that it is difficult to imagine what reasons might underpin Rorty and MacIntyre's propagation of their historical accounts if they themselves do not find those accounts compelling and true. This is not to suggest that such accounts could or should guide conduct, that we should uphold such a notion of history. Rather it is merely to say that in the absence of a belief in historical diagnosis it is difficult to see what it is that Rorty and MacIntyre imagine

their accounts to rest upon. It becomes difficult to separate their belief that the change in consciousness which they seek to bring about will be to the good from simple self-belief.

(i) The Production of "Text"

Of the reading that Rorty and MacIntyre are merely producing "text", and that that activity is justified by the existential truth that new descriptions are *per se* liberalizing, we should note that save for Rorty's remarks on the primacy of "language games" (which I will discuss shortly) no attempt is made systematically to defend this thesis. Most keenly we must feel the absence of an account of how the descriptions provided by the "enlightenment philosophers" could have side-stepped the facts of our existence which necessarily must make the text of Rorty and MacIntyre liberty maximizing. If "text" is a mere resource, a tool, which enables men to become more free, how then could the text of the enlightenment philosophers not have had such a desirable effect (indeed have had a profoundly undesirable effect)?

Accepting for the moment that it might be appropriate for an academic to engage in the attempt to reform the social world we might reasonably then expect some account of *how* it is thought that his intellectual interjections will be socially beneficial, *how* it is thought new descriptions further the liberty of individuals. It is difficult to see why Rorty so enthusiastically and uncritically upholds the "abnormal discourse" of "utopian fantasists"[1] or the straightforward advocacy of creating new things through new names[2]. Prima facie *why* should there be a worry that the language "keeps changing"[3](why should we be concerned that it might suddenly stop so doing)? Given that we value liberty, *why* should we have an interest in making things easier for "poets and revolutionaries"[4]? If it really is the case, as Rorty sometimes seems to say, that the prime instrument for social change is not the (I would argue social and

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1 Malachowski 1990:342.
2 Malachowski 1990:345.
3 Malachowski 1990:342.
4 Malachowski 1990:340.

bounded) ability to argue, but rather the ability to "speak differently"[5], why should we feel phlegmatic about this ability falling to this new class (those who engage in the publication of new descriptions)? Was not the fundamental problem of "Enlightenment Rationalism" the (allegedly) misleading descriptions of mental processes which misguided attempts at a theoretical understanding created? If, as Hacking says[6], we "make up humans" in a strong sense then should we not end precisely the kind of reflection which Rorty and MacIntyre engage in? The claim that these writers should be thought of as simply producing "text" to help advance liberty desperately feels the want of some account of *how* it might be that text could have such an effect.

I mentioned earlier that one possible defence of the idea of "text" as necessarily liberalizing involves accepting the notion that all activities can be usefully characterized, in a very literal sense, as language games. Therefore the influence of any "text", however created, on a language game is of equal standing to any other influence on that language game. This however, I think, mistakenly attributes to language a fundamentality that language, in the sense of descriptions that might be invented by the abstract individual, does not have. As both Baker and Heale point out, for Wittgenstein "language games" rest on more primitive relations; experience, and not simply language, is fundamental. As Heale says,

> ...Rorty applauds Wittgenstein for his thesis (that language goes "all the way down"), which Rorty does not clearly distinguish from a second thesis (that vocabularies are chosen for convenience). Not only is the second thesis distinct from the first, but also, I believe, Wittgenstein would have endorsed the first (insofar as he would have endorsed any philosophical thesis) and would have repudiated the second (Baker:285).

It is Rorty's claim that,

> ...any vocabulary for describing anything - particles or persons - is just one vocabulary among others, useful for some purposes (otherwise nobody would have bothered to dream it up) and useless for others (Ibid; quote from "Comment on Dennett")

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5 Malachowski 1990:267.
6 Rorty et al 1984:115.

How far we have to stretch this notion of "usefulness" in order to make it true is unclear. As an "act" (presumably) the creation of a language, a set of descriptions, may have use for purposes other than the designation of relations. It might, for example, have a use in achieving popular acclaim, gaining acolytes, obtaining academic success, or whatever.

Rorty assumes that either we must have access to a non-linguistic world to which we can compare our language, or all language is equal. But as Baker says; "Our practices, and hence the vocabularies possible for us, are "materially" constrained by our "mindedness" (Lear's term), by the actual set of responses that we agree upon without reflection"[7].

If we believe that the things we agree upon, where the agreement has been arrived at through life, that is "materially", are fundamental then we will also agree that privileged vocabularies can exist, not only in for example science, but in social life also.

Moreover the fact that we may respond without reflection in new ways over time in response to a new intellectual initiative does not imply that the response validates the new "way of speaking". It may well be that the unquestioned assumption that the genesis of our ways of speaking, our "definitions of the situation", is not important in determining their worth for us is simply wrong[8/n]. Certainly the bare fact that someone has chosen to divide the world in a certain way does not seem reason enough to assume that the proliferation of this way of speaking, this "definition of the situation", will be liberty-maximizing, or cruelty-minimizing, or whatever. As Conway says, "..the world is often cruelly indifferent to our pet narratives" and "narrative self-creation might be foiled by an intractable extra-narrative world"[9].

Justification is inescapable for writers who both maintain that they are concerned with human freedom and that human freedom is furthered by their writing.

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7 Baker 1984:286. See also Heale in Malachowski 1990:112.
8 I will argue in the final chapter that if we come to believe this then we must act on this belief, even at the cost of liberty of expression.
9 Conway 1990:107.

If Rorty and MacIntyre are simply producing "texts" which will be interpreted, subsumed and "strongly misread" then it seems odd, to say the least, that their work should be in the form of a diagnostic history, rather than one of the many other forms that it might take, and their confidence that their works will not be strongly misread to the succour of illiberal forces is unaccounted for.

(ii) Rorty and MacIntyre as Great Men

According to the second alternative reading of Rorty and MacIntyre they may not themselves find their historical accounts compelling. Their historical accounts may rather be designed to encourage in their readers that attitude towards "modernity" which they have come (perhaps entirely independently of the "histories" which they have now published) to consider appropriate. This alternative too can be defended.

In support of this reading we should note that there is some evidence that Rorty does not consider himself to be (and does not consider MacIntyre to be) propounding a case which a reading of our history compels him to accept. There is a possibility that the source of Rorty's beliefs about the beneficial consequences of his locutions lies not in his historical analysis. Historical diagnosis might not represent the way in which MacIntyre and Rorty themselves came to hold their beliefs about the means for the attainment of the good society (and which a different understanding of the nature of history might disabuse both they and their readers of). It may be that Rorty and MacIntyre consider themselves (as Rorty tells us he considers MacIntyre[10]), a "*geisteshistoriker*"; someone who decides what the important issues are[11] and *then*, (it seems) does what is necessary to secure these issues their rightful place on the political and intellectual agenda[12*fn*].

We may come to understand Rorty's claim if we look to his characterization of doxography. Rorty tells us that doxography,

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10 Rorty et al 1984:56.
11 Rorty et al 1984:58.
12 A role played in the ancient world by the sage, see Rorty et al 1984:58.

> ...is the attempt to impose a problematic on a canon drawn up without reference to that problematic, or, conversely, to impose a canon on a problematic constructed without reference to that canon.

The problem, though, is not this violation of the notion of history. Rather, as Rorty tells us,

> ...the real trouble with doxography is that it is a *half-hearted*, attempt to tell a new story of intellectual progress by describing all texts in the light of recent discoveries. It is half-hearted because it lacks the courage to readjust the cannon to suit the new discoveries (Rorty et al 1984:61).

It seems that Rorty takes it as an implication of the fact that history involves inference and choice that any choice will do, *depending on one's purposes*; that is,on what it is that one is seeking to justify or make appear natural. The purposes are therefore prior to the "history". The suspicion may therefore be that it is not Rorty's belief in a pedagogic history that constitutes his major error. Indeed he may not believe in the notion of resurrecting the past in order to learn what it is that we should do. His most grievous error may be his use of the mistaken beliefs of others concerning the character of history. It may be that Rorty (and MacIntyre also to the extent to which Rorty's characterization of him is accurate) is prepared to make use of an "historical" case to manufacture support for some propositions about "modernity", all the while knowing that this support should be rightly undercut by an understanding of the limitations of an inferential approach to the past. Rorty's and MacIntyre's use of "history" may not represent a misunderstanding of the character of history, for they themselves may harbour no misapprehensions concerning the possibilities of history. In other words it may only be their personal judgements concerning what it will be beneficial for us to believe which underlies their historical "analysis".

The fear must of course be that the unalloyed judgement of these writers constitutes an even less secure basis (if one can imagine such a thing) for a view of "modernity" than attempting to judge our society and guide our conduct from an historical account.

Some of the claims which Rorty makes about what we might come to know through an understanding of the past reinforce the suspicion that for Rorty in particular the belief that things might be "shown to be the case" through an analysis of the past is perhaps only for others. He tells us that concerning Horkheimer and Adorno's prediction that the "dissolvant rationality" of the Enlightenment will bring about the end of the democracies;

> The only thing I have to say about this prediction is that the collapse of the liberal democracies should not, in itself, provide much evidence for the claim that human societies cannot survive without widely shared opinions on matters of ultimate importance - shared conceptions of our place in the universe and our mission on earth. Perhaps they cannot survive under such conditions, but the eventual collapse of the democracies would not, in itself, show that this was the case - any more than it would show that human societies require kings or an established religion, or that political community cannot exist outside of small city-states (Malachowski 1990:295).

But of course if this is accepted by Rorty it might be thought he cannot be propounding an historical "case" of which he himself is convinced. Because if he were, then this criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer would seem to also "infect" his own historical account, and all other eclectic accounts[13fn]. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer's prediction seems if anything more daring, more impressive, than the use which Rorty makes of historical survivals. Rorty seems certain that his recommendations for philosophy will be cruelty-minimizing, but when he abandons his historical case it is difficult to see how this confidence is separable from a belief in some privileged access to some social truth.

If the diagnosis itself, if the very *existence* in the world of the *particular* form of words of Rorty's historical analysis (as opposed to "text" and "descriptions" generally), is the palliative to our condition, then the process of reasoning which lead Rorty to the belief that the existence of these words could reasonably be thought to improve our predicament, rather than to leave it unchanged or to worsen it, remains entirely

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13 For Oakeshott on the lack of worth of eclecticism in history see 1983:89, on the superficial similarity of Mahayanian doctrine and Lutheran beliefs.

mysterious[14fn]. If Rorty's work consists of strong misreadings which are intended to create a case the very existence of which will do our society good, it is difficult to imagine the source of the practical/political knowledge that permits or underpins this confection of, as Oakeshott would put it, "emblematic characters and episodes". It seems we must conclude that the knowledge which validates this project is of divine origin, or the result of an inquiry which humanity generally would be incapable of understanding.

This is the extent of the evidence that Rorty and MacIntyre are doing something other than "diagnosing" our predicament. These alternative notions, that descriptions are *per se* liberalizing, or that they are defending through the writing of historical stories a social truth acquired by them from some unspecified source, are equally (if not more) problematic. I propose therefore to treat Rorty and MacIntyre as propounding a case in which they believe, and for which they believe the evidence conclusive. For they do not give an explicit account of their actions, and the only account that we can reasonably infer (as humans attempting to infer from the actions of others the nature of their beliefs about the world) is that they believe in the possibility of a diagnostic history. The body of their work itself compels this reading.

There are also two minor points which I should deal with concerning the character of Rorty and MacIntyre's work. The purpose of their work cannot be simply to justify their attitude to the present[15fn], as in a free society they can adopt any attitude that they wish; to go to the lengths that they do simply to justify their attitude would be perverse.

Nor can their work be simply a criticism of the allegedly unreflective attitude of the analytical philosopher toward his activity. They must believe their case or their criticism of analytical philosophy would entirely miss the mark; they cannot believe that analytical philosophy simply "requires" (for no particular reason) a history "showing" how it is the culmination of an activity, with its progenitors getting eternal

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14 What we might think about the relationship of art to the world is the subject of the final chapter.
15 Although Rorty tells us that MacIntyre's "downbeat stories" justifies his attitude to the state of things, Rorty et al 1984:57fn.

questions wrong and the current practitioners getting it right. The sole fault of analytical philosophers cannot be that they presume that which they should support with an historical case, or that they lack a consciousness of the contingency of their activity, (a consciousness that would not alter their conduct).

The character of Rorty and MacIntyre's work as a "case" belies any attempt to simply see it as a personal expression, or a critique of the unreflective nature of the participants in an activity. I will then, for these reasons, treat Rorty and MacIntyre as inferring truths concerning our existence from an account of our past, and from this explanation of how our society acquired its desirable and undesirable features they have understood how that society might be changed for the better.

These alternative readings of their works aside, Rorty and MacIntyre can in some ways be thought of as "Oakeshottian" writers. It is not a gross distortion to see Rorty as pursuing Oakeshott's attack on "Rationalism", and MacIntyre as taking up Oakeshott's fears concerning the loss of our habit of conduct. That is, they pursue those features of Oakeshott's work which I argued in the introduction Oakeshott would have been better not to have undertaken, and they pursue them in the manner of argumentation (that is by "diagnostic" history) which I have also argued is not appropriate. Their popularity is due to the enduring quality of the belief that it might be possible to understand society through a veridical account of its history, and then act on that understanding. It is in the light of what I consider the worthwhile and defensible aspects of Oakeshott's work, especially on the character of history, that I will criticize the work of Rorty and MacIntyre.

Rorty and MacIntyre's accounts can in many ways be seen as a part of a long tradition of concern for the consequences of reflection for civic virtue and successful practical conduct[16], and I will argue that indeed a more natural upshot of their case as stated is an anti-intellectualism and a distrust of reflection. Particularly in the case of MacIntyre there is the strong suggestion that virtue would benefit from a lack of thought.

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16 See Tessitore 1990.

I An Overview of Rorty and MacIntyre's Work

(i) Rorty

In the following section I will make use of a number of Rorty's works, including (and principally) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *Consequences of Pragmatism* and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

In an earlier chapter I suggested that Kuhn's general thesis sits easily with the view that we usefully interact with, "track", or "mirror" nature, and that the process he describes, and the attendant scientific development we believe we see, suggests that the accretion of scientific knowledge takes place by the continuous development of scientific "languages" through the social activity of essentially similar men relating to a, for our purposes, unchanging universe. It is notions such as this which Rorty is most against, and he blames such notions for what he sees as the undesirably "technical" nature of philosophy.

Perhaps it is useful to begin with the notion of "the mirror of nature". The crux of Rorty's critique is an attack on the ways of thinking he associates with this notion. Broadly, Rorty conceives of the belief in this notion as comprising the belief that we "track" the world, for instance the visual purple at the backs of our eyes is altered by external stimuli, together with the belief that this process can be contemplated from without, in some way. It is the belief in an "eye" of the mind. Such a general belief has a long ancestry. Thomas Henry Huxley in the first edition of "Nature" described the purpose of that magazine as "..to mirror the progress of that fashioning by Nature of a picture of herself, in the mind of Man, which we call the progress of science"[17].

For Rorty the belief that we in some way mirror nature is only a very small step away from the entirely simple-minded idea that we simply imbibe the universe "as is". Those who have acted as if we mirror nature may have understood that our perceptual and conceptual apparatus and matrix affects perception, but they have failed to understand that there is nothing outside of this process which might allow us to observe

17 Medawar 1983:13.

this process, and "adjust" for its influence. We cannot perceive perception, or as Siegfried puts it, we cannot "..step outside our skins"[18].

The story of how this way of thinking began, says Rorty, must begin with Descartes. Rorty tells us that;

> Whereas scepticism in the ancient world had been a matter of a moral attitude, a style of life, a reaction to the pretensions of the intellectual fashions of the day, scepticism in the manner of Descartes' "First Meditation" was a perfectly definite, precise, "professional" question - "How do we know anything which is mental represents anything which is not mental?" (1980:14).

Rorty believes that the "construction" of "the mirror of nature" began when philosophers took seriously this question. The way that they sought an answer, whilst accepting the sceptic's doubts, was to attempt to make use of our knowledge of ourselves. The belief might be expressed as "If we can know ourselves reflexively and indubitably from the inside, surely the "eye" that sees that it is indeed us can also see how the world makes its shape on our mind; and thus the shape of the world?"

The "mirror of nature" then is a shorthand expression for an orientation or belief among philosophers that not only is an extreme scepticism about claims to knowledge important, but that it is philosophy's task to find conditions for certain knowledge. This will be done through utilization our ability to witness the effect of the world on us. As Rorty himself puts it:

> The Cartesian change from mind-as-reason to mind-as-inner-arena was not the triumph of the prideful individual subject freed from scholastic shackles (which might sound like a liberation story which it is not Rorty's purpose to relate) so much as the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for wisdom. From that time forward, the way was open for philosophers either to attain the rigor of the mathematician or the mathematical physicist, or to explain the appearance of rigour in these fields, rather than to help people attain peace of mind. Science, rather than living, became philosophy's subject, and epistemology its center (1980:61).

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18 Siegfried 1990:108.

Philosophy therefore became side-tracked by insisting on "seeing" problems which no-one else troubled about[19]. Examples of such problems include "How can we know with certainty?", and "Which beliefs can be simultaneously maintained?".

We should also note the culpability of Locke and Kant in Rorty's account of how philosophy took on the character he ascribes to it. The creation of the Cartesian mind, says Rorty, would not have lead to the development of epistemology as we know it, without Locke's confusion of a "..mechanistic account of the operation of our mind and the grounding of our claims to knowledge"[20]. In answer to the self-posed question of why Locke should have thought a mechanistic account of how one arrived at a belief would justify one's holding that belief Rorty says that,

> ...Locke, and seventeenth century writers generally, did not think of knowledge as justified true belief. This was because they did not think of knowledge as a relation between a person and a proposition (1980:141).

In other words Locke et al thought of knowledge as non-propositional; the direct and unmediated impact of an outer "it" on an inner "you", without the intercession of, to use Oakeshott's phrase, "posterior acquisitions". Thought, then, for these writers, is only philosophical if like Kant's, "..it looks for causes of, rather than merely reasons for, claims to empirical knowledge"[21].

For the purposes of this outline I will ask that the reader accept that philosophy underwent the change that Rorty describes, and acquired the character which he claims it did. That is, that it abandoned real issues of relevance for the search for how we might know something with certainty. Given that this took place I will summarize the consequences which Rorty sees as following from this.

Essentially Rorty seems concerned with the loss of social influence which attends philosophy's attention to the technicalities of epistemology. Whilst philosophers have had their noses pressed against the epistemological grindstone, which would never have occurred to anyone as worthwhile save for some specific

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19 See Rorty 1989:12.
20 Rorty 1980:141.
21 Rorty 1980:150.

instances in the seventeenth century, they themselves have become an irrelevance (that is an irrelevance to the practical life of others). Moreover, this dissociation from the life of others has been to their disadvantage; they suffer from the non-involvement of philosophers in the conduct of their lives.

Ironically it was the natural science which unwittingly misled philosophy into epistemology which also gave philosophy its opportunity for real social influence, by weakening the grip of religion. But "technical" philosophy alienated its audience, and by the nineteenth century this philosophy was seen to wane greatly as a source of intellectual succour. As Rorty puts it:

> Descartes, Locke, and Kant had written in a period in which the secularisation of culture was being made possible by the success of natural science. But by the early twentieth century the scientists had become as remote from most intellectuals as had the theologians. Poets and novelists had taken the place of both preachers and philosophers as the moral teachers of the youth. The result was that the more "scientific" and "rigorous" philosophy became, the less it had to do with the rest of culture and the more absurd its traditional pretensions seemed. The attempts of both analytic philosophers and phenomenologists to "ground" this and "criticize" that were shrugged off by those whose activities were purportedly being grounded or criticized. Philosophy as a whole was shrugged off by those who wanted an ideology or a self-image (1980:5).

So from Rorty's perspective philosophy hamstrung itself just at the moment that its opportunity arose to acquire social influence (that is, when science weakened religion). What Rorty's attack on philosophy, and indeed science, means to provide is a second bite at the cherry.

(ii) MacIntyre

In this section I will examine the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. I will principally make use of his *After Virtue*, as it is there that he makes most clear (by engaging in) what it is that he believes philosophy should be about. I will also make some use of his earlier collection of essays entitled *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, and his more recent *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*.

MacIntyre like Oakeshott sees a moral order as being, or at least being founded on, a "habit of behaviour"[22]. Our present moral order is not especially valuable because the habit of behaviour that constituted or animated it, has withered away. A form of "anomie"[23] and a "rootless cosmopolitanism"[24] is therefore our "achievement".

We should note that MacIntyre accepts that, in discharging their obligations to inquire into the truth of *weltanschauungen*[25], other philosophers may become engaged in a defence of other characterizations of our "situation"[26]. He, though, thinks his characterization the most defensible.

As the habit of behavior which animated our moral order has withered away we can perform the analytical philosophers "trick" of reducing moral arguments to rival premisses[27], but we can go no further. We have lost the society which gave "ought" more than merely emotive force. Both sides to an argument can agree that we correctly associate their position with a certain premise without either being forced by a socially-imbibed judgement to cede the point[28fn]. That is, it need not be the case that one of the parties to a dispute secretly knows that they are wrong. Both may believe that they have a just claim, insofar as their claim can be made to attach to a principle (for example, "the liberty of the individual", or "equity") for which no reasons can be given[29fn].

"Moral" disagreement is then essentially, the pursuit of personal ends by other means. An argument, a rationalist chain of reasoning, linking one's ends with some vestige or representative of the dead habit of conduct retains some limited effectiveness, and will be deployed in a political dispute[30]. But it is deployed to

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22 MacIntyre 1981:2.
23 MacIntyre 1988:368.
24 MacIntyre 1988:388.
25 MacIntyre 1971:vii-viii.
26 MacIntyre 1988:401,369.
27 MacIntyre 1981:19, 1971:135.
28 As Schneewind says this is the Wittgensteinian point that "..if a language-bound practice like morality is to be in order, there must be agreement not only in definitions but also in judgements". Schneewind 1983:529.
29 As Hacking notes Rorty also regrets that moral judgements are not inter-subjective, Hacking 1980:579.
30 MacIntyre 1981:68-69,104.

counter the deployment by one's opponent of an equally "valid" argument. Linking one's desires to tarnished concepts is the small-arms fire of political argument; ubiquitous because straightforward, but not decisive. In truth, we can afford to be rid of this ghost of our habit of conduct, as its presence prevents our achievement of something better[31].

The notion that morality has something to do with the pursuit of personal goals underlies its association with the modern idea of rights[32]. We assert our rights because they help us achieve our particular chosen satisfaction. By contrast, where there is a strong notion of ends for man to pursue, characters for him to assume[33] (for example, classically the politician and the soldier), moral arguments (here not separable from political[34]) are only questions of what situation it is that we face. With no hidden agenda of personal ends in the way that we understand them, to encourage strategic posturing or deliberate obtuseness, once the character of a situation has been decided there would be near unanimity on how to respond[35]. Indeed the character of a situation would not so much be decided as discovered. Justification can therefore terminate, and there is, for example, no sense to the question of whether we should kill someone who has killed our kinsman[36]. We thus might have a dignified "aristocratic carelessness about consequences"[37]. The "virtues" are those qualities which allow individuals to respond well, to do what the situation and our role requires; for example, patience, courage and fortitude[38].

It would be wrong though to describe "the virtues" as only public qualities. They also allow the individual to express himself in evolved practices. He might be a

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31 MacIntyre 1971:191.
32 MacIntyre 1981:67-68, and for the notion that valuing is not definitionally a part of an *individuals* choosing see 1971:91,117-18,120,124.
33 MacIntyre 1981:28,115, or 1988:20.
34 MacIntyre 1981:116.
35 MacIntyre 1981:121,151.
36 See MacIntyre 1971:143-144, or 1988:14,15,22,140.
37 MacIntyre 1988:113.
38 MacIntyre 1981:171.

dancer, a poet, an essayist or an athlete. Such activities have goods internal to them, and the virtues enable us to achieve these goods[39].

Our position today then, lacking a habit of conduct, is that of a people shallow, who acquire material goods, but lack virtues[40], and whose only use for moral terms is for whatever small leverage they give in political disputes: a society of strangers whose desires are mere titillation, and not bound-up with any social role[41]. We think of "rationality" as simply concerning how to obtain that which we desire, and as prior to a concept of justice, because we do not have a living notion of just conduct which would make rationality a matter of doing that which we ought to do[42].

To this characterization some would say the obvious response is, "If true, so what?". It is MacIntyre's claim that the ease with which we can say this is a demonstration of the extent to which we have lost our culture[43fn]. As we do not believe that man has ends, we have come to a situation where all ends are equally good.

Lacking a criterion for judging between ends has consequences. We have, for example, no justification for encouraging children in some ends rather than others, no reason to encourage them to learn how to appreciate that which at the moment they do not appreciate, or do not appreciate fully. The best kind of society will have a hierarchy of teaching and learning, but *we* cannot educate our children into a habit of just conduct as we do not ourselves, in any meaningful sense, believe in such a thing[44]. The best society would understand that children are unable to judge how to live, and what ends to pursue, and must be educated in what ends to pursue. But lacking such indubitable knowledge of the good life ourselves, we are no position to socialize others. Pushpin has become as good as poetry, idleness as good as application. The sub-text, of course, is that as this has happened, as we have lost the community which provided us with meaning, we have lost our humanity.

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39 MacIntyre 1981:177-78.
40 MacIntyre 1981:182.
41 MacIntyre 1988:21,45.
42 MacIntyre 1988:342, see also 98,337.
43 MacIntyre 1981:21; This is Oakeshott's point that we seem to regard our ability to be rationalist and "objective" about our fundamental convictions as an achievement, see 1962:79.
44 MacIntyre 1988:30,98,105,109-110.

For Rorty the problem of "modernity" began with the propagation of the idea of the mind as a "mirror" for nature. MacIntyre also identifies a single crucial error that can be laid at the door of philosophy[45]. That error was the attempt to give a rational justification for morality[46].

That attempt had necessarily to fail because it did not include an understanding that the entire historical purpose of ethics was to realize man's true end[47]. By "historical purpose" I mean "what ethics has always been; what ethics has always meant". Liberalism peremptorily disallows MacIntyre's concept of the good, and of the virtues which will allow men to achieve that good, because it does not appreciate this[48]. The question as to whether ethics can be what the enlightenment philosophers thought it could be (that is, "grounded") has been answered in the negative[49]. If man has a position he must strive for, a function he must fulfil (if this categorically *is* the case) then he ought to behave in the manner that allows him to become and remain this man, this functionary[50]. Ethics describes the behaviour which will bring this about. Trying to deduce what ethical behaviour might consist in, and why we should behave ethically, without a concept of an end for man, was a project that had to fail; and indeed should never have been commenced[51]. For what this project actually achieved has been the very opposite of founding ethical behaviour, and morality (as Nietzsche saw) has become available for almost any use[52]. The rejection of the idea of an end for man, and the pursuit of a rational justification for morality (and its inevitable failure), ensured the success, the prevalence, of emotivism. To see what it might be rational and just to do involves "imaginatively assuming" an ongoing life; seeing oneself as a person a part of a tradition. By contrast an attempt at a "rational justification" must necessarily encourage people to bring to their encounter with a tradition standards of justification

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45 MacIntyre 1981:35.
46 MacIntyre 1981:47-48.
47 MacIntyre 1981:51.
48 MacIntyre 1971:171,186, 1988:122-23,125,133,335-36,345.
49 MacIntyre 1988:210,335.
50 MacIntyre 1981:55-56.
51 MacIntyre 1981:111, 1988:6.
52 MacIntyre 1981:104, cf Oakeshott 1962:78.

which no tradition could posssibly meet[53]. Indeed the teaching of the story of the attempt by the Enlightenment philosophers to found morality is itself destructive of a habit of behaviour; itself promotes emotivism[54].

II A Critique of Rorty and MacIntyre's Case

In this section I will claim that we should not accept the possibility of projects such as Rorty's and MacIntyre's. For the reasons discussed in chapter one on the character of history we must gravely suspect historicist glosses culminating in calls to action. Rorty and MacIntyre wish to conclude their discussions of the history of philosophy with a particular notion of what philosophy should be about. That is that it should provide "intellectual products" (myths and stories, for example) which might benefit both the private lives of individuals and also the commonweal. The production of these stories must be separated from the belief discussed in section one that their descriptions are necessarily liberalizing. When one believes this there is little reason to care for one particular character of work over another; little reason to prefer "Whig" history to babbling. By contrast, Rorty's and MacIntyre's is a serious task, the historical analysis determining the nature of the stories which children and citizens must be exposed to. My contention is that history cannot clarify our understanding, nor can we self-consciously improve our lot through stories.

In many ways Rorty is more guilty than MacIntyre as he more explicitly argues for a style of philosophy the possibility of which MacIntyre only assumes. Rorty seems more aware of the strong objections which exist to the very possibility of the philosophy he advocates. The gloominess which pervades MacIntyre's writing, and the incidental nature of his "recommendations" as to how we should alter our conduct in order to rescue ourselves means that it is principally MacIntyre's judgement of our society, and the source of that judgement which we must criticize; we must encourage those who have accepted MacIntyre's characterization not to be so gloomy. In Rorty's

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53 MacIntyre 1988:395.
54 MacIntyre 1981:111.

case, by contrast, the "lightness" of his assumption of a solution to our "predicament" compounds his error. MacIntyre's writing might be socially injurious in that it might encourage citizens to view their world as very imperfect; as might Rorty's. But Rorty in addition to his depressing characterization also perpetuates the dangerous myth that once this depression has been created, its alleviation by the creation of a new world more in keeping with our reformed judgement is straightforward.

The crucial question is whether by "historical analysis" we can attain a very clear and actionable self-consciousness, understand who we are and why we are the way we are, and then change our lives. Attempting to bring this actionable self-consciousness to politics cannot be the purview of the political philosopher. Ironically, of course, it is just such a false belief that the enlightenment philosopher's misconceptions about the nature of knowledge and perception allegedly led to, and which constitutes the core of Rorty and MacIntyre's case.

(i) Rorty

Surely we must have grave doubts about Rorty's "mythologizing" project. We must suspect the ability of the "mythologist" to provide "stories" with beneficial consequences and without unintended consequences, for example. We must suspect that for the purposes Rorty wishes the past is irretrievably complex.

It must be said that Rorty's general confidence in the feasibility of such an endeavour (he seems to see the problem as how to persuade the philosophy profession to change, rather than the feasibility of his new philosophy as such) is not entirely unequivocal. After saying of the reason for the success of "The Eye of the Mind",

> There was, we moderns may say with the ingratitude of hindsight, no particular reason why this ocular metaphor seized the imagination of the founders of Western Thought. But it did... (1980:38),

Rorty in his next work, en passant, lets us into some of his doubts. The philosophy he recommends may cause "The Conversation of Europe" to "falter and die away"; and, following James and Dewey he can give us no guarantees that it will not

do just that[55]. Now these doubts would not matter if Rorty felt that Western society had no charm. But this is not the case, and there is absolutely no distinction which can be drawn between an ideological attack on the institutions of a society, and a mythological attempt at their institutionalization. The *intention* does not mark a difference if the *process* by which the literary work comes to influence the world (that is, by altering persons perceptions) is the same. However much Rorty might regret the notion, some account of how an action is thought to relate to a desired result is necessary; and if it took three hundred years for the consequences of enlightenment rationalism to be recognized, it is difficult to see what account of his literary actions could be given.

It therefore must matter that the hypothesized relationships which Rorty assumes between philosophical writings and social institutions actually obtain. It is important that Rorty actually knows how the present is a product of the past (and knows this through his historical analysis; revelation being rejected as a possible source of knowledge). Some might wish to maintain that Rorty does not claim this knowledge, but that his real aim is to re-cast past philosophy, to make it look bad, in order to alter the ongoing activity. Much of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is indeed given over to the advocacy of such measures[56]. The difficulty of course is that, if this is true, if this is Rorty's chosen method, we *still* require some justification of the end chosen; which, for example, an account purporting to show how if such redescription is successful it necessarily identifies and prompts the reform of a socially discordant institution, would constitute. Rorty advocates a certain method for worthwhile interlocution between citizens who share a broad ethical and political perception (such as metaphor, analogy and redescribing your opponents examples), and also, it seems, uses something very similar to this to advocate a sea-change in the practice of philosophy, and to *arrive* at the appropriate character of that change. Whatever merits Rorty's recommendations may have vis a vis discussions between

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55 Rorty 1982:174.
56 For example, Rorty 1989:44,57,184-5.

"men of good faith" we must continue to enquire after the basis for his belief that a socially influential philosophy would be of some worth; would have desired consequences. We worry not for the argumentative effectiveness of Rorty's strategy, but for its consequences. Experience might tell us that the kind of argumentative norms that Rorty recommends to us are effective means for resolving disagreements in a free society, without courting the disaster of a complete breakdown in normal adjudicative procedures; without compromising the over-arching loyalty of the parties to the dispute to the society itself. "Talk" may simply be, as Walzer says, the democratic way, and Rorty's advice may be good advice as to how to engage in that talk. But Rorty's "gesturing" must inevitably be seen as a "case", as more than simply "talk"[57]. Whether a "plausible" historical case can be constructed which might persuade in the context of a democratic discussion is a very different question to that of the actual worth of this notion of "history"; and thus the worth of this history.

Moreover I would argue that if Rorty imagines he is participating in a democratic discussion then he is not in good faith. The construction of such "cases" is very different to a discussion, and as I have argued in Chapter Two and will develop further in Chapter Six of the present work, the vulnerability of judgement and free discussion to this kind of pedagogy does not compromise the general worth of these judgements or this process. Indeed, academic understandings which "police" or debunk sweeping accounts of our "predicament", because they ignore the limitations of an inferential approach to the past, may demonstrate one of the rare practical benefits of theorizing. We need not ask for a mechanistic account of how Rorty came to hold his belief in the worth of this socially influential philosophy. Some reasoned and (thus) persuasive account would suffice; but none is given. The fact that pragmatists may be men of good faith who, like Sydney Hook, aim to enlarge human freedom by "..the arts of intelligent social control"[58] does not in itself tell us anything about the likely success of such a project. In direct opposition to Rorty I would maintain that we do not know

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57 See Baker 1984:282.
58 Rorty 1982:69.

the "..grosser sociological consequences.."[59] of the sort of "philosophical" movement that he advocates.

As Janik[60] says Rorty, like Dewey, is concerned to "construct" a liberal society. It is difficult to see why the conceit of philosophers to "ground" this or "criticize" that (which can be explained as a simple misunderstanding of their task of explaining in other terms) should be thought more objectionable than this approach to society.

Rorty asks us to believe at least two fundamental claims. Firstly, that the history of Western Philosophy is dominated by the consequences of an accident that might not have happened. Secondly, we are asked to accept that the "dynamics" of the Western Liberal Polity are understandable through an historical analysis. We are asked to accept that much of previous philosophy was irrelevant or unhelpful, and that even where it was helpful, the precise extent of its helpfulness can be known. Rorty believes that he knows the precise antecedents, the genealogy, of the liberal polity.

For example, "enlightenment rationalism", "..was essential to the beginnings of liberal democracy" but "has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies". In this task of preserving and developing liberal democracy we require a vocabulary "..which revolves around notions of metaphor and self-creation, rather than around notions of truth, rationality, and moral obligation"[61].

In other words by "historical analysis" we can attain a very clear and actionable self-consciousness, understand who we are and why we are the way we are, and then change our lives. As Taylor says, we may come to see more "perspicuously"[62]. We can see what kind of writing we need, and just as importantly, do not need. By this kind of understanding we do not achieve an understanding in other terms, we improve the understanding which we have. We do not theorize our practical conduct. Through history we reform the practical understanding which we already have. This "historical method", when applied to an intellectual initiative, allows us to improve it, to see how

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59 Rorty 1982:62.
60 Janik 1989:82.
61 Rorty 1989:44.
62 Rorty et al 1984:18.

it is the way it is, to see its "relation to culture as a whole"[63]. This surely is a mistaken belief in a fundamental reforming understanding. Surely it is just such a false belief to which the enlightenment philosophers misconceptions about the nature of knowledge and perception allegedly led.

One of the very few examples which Rorty gives of what he means by the "vocabulary" which a historical analysis shows us to be in need of is the language of Freud. He tells us that the value of Freud's work is that,

> ...he gives each of us the equipment to construct our own private vocabulary of moral deliberation. For terms like "infantile" or "sadistic" or "obsessional" or "paranoid", unlike the names of vices and virtues which we inherit from the Greeks and the Christians, have very specific and very different resonances for each individual who uses them...(1989:32).

Earlier I claimed that there is reason to believe that the descriptions of the scientist are part of an ongoing inquiry outside the control of any individual, and that there is a scientific worth in these descriptions which could not be found in a contribution from outwith the activity. The analogous nature of social life generally to this scientific inquiry seems obvious. Our judgements as to why someone might come to hate their parents or what behaviour is evidence for a perverted love of cruelty seem similar to the judgements of, in Kuhn's phrase, the "normal scientist". The distinction between these types of time-worn observations and others not the part of an inquiry or ongoing habit of conduct becomes clear when we look to this example of Rorty's. It can be persuasively argued that the role of the concepts he provides as examples are to allow vulnerable individuals to re-jig their past, and provide false reasons for the things that they do, and therefore provide a false account of "who" they are. In the case of Freud's vocabulary it is not the complex conjunction of life that causes some people to speak the way they do, but something else. Nor does the vocabulary, despite the variety of resonances which the terms can be given, simply provide a means for self-expression[64fn]; for the exorcism of demons. The vocabulary brings about a

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63 Rorty et al 1984:13.

64 I will discuss the possibility of such a vocabulary in chapter six.

characteristic change in descriptive categories; reforms practical judgement. Rorty is telling us that what can be most charitably described as a theoretical understanding, and many would describe as "literature", should reform the practical understanding which people have of their lives. It does not seem to be axiomatic that our history shows that the proliferation of such work, together with an increase in its standing and repute, would necessarily make our lives more free.

Rorty is not only prepared to contemplate such activity for the individual in crisis (we might imagine that the more desperate one's plight the less relative risk of grasping at straws; of "mythopoeic introjection"), he is prepared to contemplate, indeed recommend, it at the level of the society. If it is a tortuous business to understand the history of an individual with a view to intervening in the forward progress of their life (many would say that this is impossible), how much more difficult this must be at the level of the society. It seems entirely unclear how we are to disentangle some features of past philosophy from the history of the societies in which the philosophers lived.

Even if we suppose that all we are concerned to do is to institutionalize and maintain the liberal polity it is difficult to see why anyone should seize upon the task of reformulating philosophy as a means to do this. It is difficult to see why this part of the history of the Western Polity or, (as this rather begs the question), the history of this activity which has taken place in Western Polities should be re-written in order to justify changing philosophy, and thus the ongoing nature of the society. Rorty's singling out of philosophy as both villain and potential salvation does not survive the most straightforward opposition.

Suppose, for example, that (as Rorty maintains) philosophers once helped their societies. Then there was a period of three hundred years where they did not. During this three hundred year period the discipline (for such it became) attracted different individuals than it would have done otherwise, and they were socialized differently also. This prompts the observation that astrologers have more in common with pre-Cartesian philosophers than academic philosophers have with their putatative ancestors.

As Janik says[65], the entry of traditional philosophers into the Rortyian post-philosophical activity seems to be based on their ability to analyze arguments. Yet how can this eminently "normal" philosophical skill be compatible with the capacity of the philosopher to create helpful perspectives and descriptions of the kind exemplified by Freud, but not Kant? The relationship of traditional philosophy to the hypothesized new intellectual initiative seems, to say the least, tenuous. The question arises why Rorty does not simply *begin* his new activity; why he thinks philosophy or philosophers might be useful to this new activity.

If we accept Rorty's notion of the history of the Liberal Polity as plausible we should also note that there are other notions that are equally "plausible" in this sense. For example, there is the notion that philosophy and the Liberal Polity had no direct relationship at all, and that the development of the latter (supposing we were *compelled* to give *some* kind of account[66/n]) can be explained by economic factors and the clash of arms. Or there is the notion that the search for a theory of knowledge kept occupied a number of potentially dangerous individuals, and prevented them from making myths and telling stories. For instance, it prevented them from expounding histories of racial and ethnic groups in western societies. Perhaps Rorty's insight is to tell us how philosophy won its laurels, its academic bona fides; how it began to emerge as a distinct activity. There are any number of hunches which might suggest themselves to the intelligent individual pondering the history of philosophy. Presumably it would not be impossible to find some evidence for, to tell stories about, these hunches also.

These examples are not as tangential to the critique of Rorty as they may sound. From his historical analysis it is Rorty's hunch[67/n] that our intuition about what is mental may simply be our compliance with a vocabulary[68]. It is also his hunch that J.S.Mill's notion of "good government" as that which best balances liberty with

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65 Janik 1989:80.
66 Despite my objections to this outlined in chapter one.
67 Although as I noted earlier, there is some doubt concerning the precise role of Rorty's hunches in his work.
68 Rorty 1980:22.

preventing suffering is the last "conceptual revolution" that Western Thought may need (assuming that it ever was needed)[69].

But if Rorty is to stand close to society as myth-maker and socially influential poet it is important for us that he apply his force in the correct place; that he produce the correct myths, in the correct language, for the correct individuals, at the correct time. If we take a rather more humble approach toward the past, and toward our ability to discern its intricacies, we might admit that all we are really sure of is that the present is a product of the past; all of the past. Rorty's protective and conservative attitude to the liberal polity sits oddly with his revolutionary attitude towards philosophy.

For example, Rorty tells us that if we dispense with the notion that human beings have a special capacity for knowledge, a "glassy essence" or "a mirror to nature":

> We shall not be tempted to think that the possession of an inner life, a stream of consciousness, is relevant to reason. Once consciousness and reason are separated out in this way, then personhood can be seen for what I claim it is - a matter of decision rather than knowledge, an acceptance of another being into fellowship rather than a recognition of a common essence (1980:37).

So prior to the beginning of philosophers producing socially useful myths, Rorty is happy to debunk a few of our present day myths. He is confident that we do not need these enduring myths which have attended that philosophy he criticizes. He is quite confident that once we are disabused of our belief that humans are of great worth because they have some special essence there is no difficulty in founding an effective humanist ethics.

Similarly:

> To suggest that the mind is the brain is to suggest that we secrete theorems and symphonies as our spleen secretes dark humours. Professional philosophers shy away from these "crude pictures" because they have other pictures - thought to be less crude - which were painted in the seventeenth century (1980:43-44).

Rorty is happy that theorems and symphonies will continue to be produced even when the prevailing mythology is that the formulators could not have done otherwise.

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69 Rorty 1989:63.

Likewise, as Guignon and Hiley point out, it might well be thought a natural consequence of everything being thought contingent and temporary (as Rorty recommends) that people should find it impossible to take seriously these epiphenomena; to stand up for what now count as their convictions, including their liberal convictions[70].

Perhaps the greatest justification for the "epistemological" project, and our present style of philosophy, may be the ease and speed with which Rorty, on abandoning it, slipped into advocating discredited modes of thinking. If the alternative to a rigorous and deductive style is ideologizing, and the tendering of advice ("kibbitzing") which the philosopher does not have, then perhaps we must remain with traditional philosophy. Rorty's enthusiasm for the case that philosophy aped science, and, as science is now shown to be without a method, philosophy must become socially influential, entirely ignores the extent to which such attempts at social influence have blighted political philosophy. It is difficult to see why we should have any faith in the consequences of Rorty's new intellectual initiative given the disastrous consequences of the intellectualism of Descartes, Locke and Kant, whose faith was as good as Rorty's. Rorty's is very much a philosophers case; he only considers what he is leaving and not where he can go. The reality is that if he leaves philosophy, there is nowhere to go.

(ii) MacIntyre

MacIntyre's solution to the problem posed by our loss of our habit of moral behaviour (and it is unclear to what extent he thinks our situation is recoverable or whether he simply laments a loss, and wishes us to feel the force of the loss too) is to ask whether it might not be possible to maintain, after all, (and especially after the diversion of the Enlightenment attempt to found morality) some Aristotelian notions of man and society.

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70 Malachowski 1990:358.

MacIntyre believes that morality is either in this sense "Aristotelian" (that is, incorporates ends for man[71]and therefore virtues that facilitate the realization of those ends) or morality is dead[72]. There is nothing in between.

The implication is that we must *self-consciously* politicize our world, because our world has *been* political (all our actions, including literary actions, have had political consequences), and by self-conscious action we can mitigate the consequences of our earlier actions. Our understanding of ourselves has not only made possible philosophy, but philosophy has fundamentally altered our understanding of ourselves. In ancient Athens the political consequences of actions were recognized and so, "..the philosopher risked comic portrayal and political punishment"[73].

Given the loss of virtue, then in the new society that we must try to achieve we must dispense with the liberal notion that government must be neutral between rival conceptions of the end for man[74]. Instead we must propagate a substantive notion of society, with attendant ends for man, and, of course, virtues that will make possible the realization of those ends. This will be done through the telling of stories[75], not only to children but also to adults, so that they may be brought to understand (were they made to understand that would smack of the bureaucratic manipulation that MacIntyre attacks) the new society, and hence themselves. This civic republicanism could not issue in any totalitarianism, as our condition is so lamentable even the strongest medicine is appropriate[76].

This medicine might not be generally available (because not generally effective). The hope for MacIntyre lies in separate communities[77*fn*], away from the herd, where "morality and civility" might resist "barbarism and darkness"[78*fn*]. The

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71 MacIntyre 1981:139.
72 MacIntyre 1981:111.
73 MacIntyre 1981:129.
74 MacIntyre 1981:182.
75 MacIntyre 1981:201.
76 MacIntyre 1981:221.
77 MacIntyre believes that virtue can be learned in institutions other than the polis, MacIntyre 1988:99.
78 MacIntyre 1981:244; the gist of his suggestion can be seen in his discussion of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun's proposal for eighteenth century Scotland, MacIntyre 1988:257.

failure of the Republicanism of the French Jacobins, as Schneewind notes[79], provides for MacIntyre a lesson in the futility of trying to revive morality for a whole nation when the habit of conduct is lost, where only interests are pursued and where politics is not above the pursuit of interests, but a part of it.

Taylor characterizes historical reconstructions like MacIntyre's as processes whereby we, "undo the forgetting" [80]. That is, we may, (and given our predicament must) bring ourselves to remember what it was like to live without the epistemological model and its attendant atomistic individualism. This reformation is, though, open to other characterization.

For example this therapy is very different from the natural progress of the "disease". Our consciousness and the "epistemological model" have been unselfconsciously co-existent. Even supposing that it would be desirable to conceptualize the world as someone who had never lived in a world corrupted by the epistemological model, that is not what we might attain by this project[81/n]. Life and liberty produced the epistemological model. This new project to ameliorate (allegedly) its effects is very different. It creates the academic, the counter-intuitive, the strained; that which must be *learned* (not as a participant learns in an activity, but as a discrete learning experience recognized as an adjunct, a palliative, to an ongoing activity). MacIntyre tells us that he imagines his reader as

> ...someone who, not as yet having given their allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry, is besieged by disputes over what is just and about how it is reasonable to act...(1988:393).

The belief by the citizen that some explicit commitment to some "enquiry" is necessary to avoid uncertainty about how to act, and the belief on the part of the writer that he might provide something of benefit should this situation arise, are beliefs which lead to activities which carry great risk. For example, we can point out how the claim that we have *forgotten* what it was like to live without the epistemological model

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79 Schneewind 1982:661-662.
80 Rorty et al 1984:21.
81 Strangely MacIntyre seems to recognize this difficulty in noting the problems that conservative politicians had in responding to Pericles and his succesors, MacIntyre 1988:54.

involves in itself a conceptualization and a judgement of that process. We generally do not wish to forget because we look upon knowledge as a reference library where items can be stored against possible future use without prejudice to the storage of other knowledge. Forgetting is a bad thing.

However, if we instead choose to think that we did not forget but instead sloughed-off our old mind-set then the question as to which mind-set is the more liberty maximizing becomes more open. Furthermore, our understanding has never ended, has been continuous; there is reason to prefer "sloughed-off" as a description of this process of coming to live differently to the way that we once did. Other characterizations of the situation MacIntyre describes are possible, and the question as to which is likely to have the more desirable long-term consequences re-appears in all its interminability.

It would also not seem, on the face of it, an impossible task to take the very story that MacIntyre tells and instead tell a liberation story; the historically emergent disparity between the notions of "good watch" and "good man" does not seem inhospitable to such a treatment[82]. A certain permissiveness with regard to ways of living, whilst not to everyones taste, does not seem to be entirely indefensible.

MacIntyre makes much of the virtues exemplified in conduct by individuals, and the development, over time, of characters which the individual might assume. It is not however to be deliberately obtuse to note that we have a different developed understanding of the politician and soldier of old than they did of themselves, or others did of them at their time. We seem to tend to romanticize past conduct, and impute grandeur to the motives of men whose actions must have seemed very different in their own time. One might hazard that our preparedness today to countenance violent conflict over not just interests but principles, to be prepared to try to prosecute some notion of just conduct beyond the political community, will in the future seem remarkable, as it most certainly would have done to our predecessors.

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82 MacIntyre 1971:158, also 1981:54-56.

We may also ask hard questions of MacIntyre concerning the details of his diagnosis so that we may make best use of it. As Schneewind notes[83], if our culture is in "disorder" as moral disputes are interminable, precisely how much disorder is acceptable before we must retreat from the darkness and form communities devoted to survival? For surely the sixteenth century toleration dispute must have seemed to the participants "interminable", and yet, in MacIntyre's scheme, their morality was still in order.

Pragmatically, if withdrawal from society is up for consideration as a response to what is thought of as a bankrupt morality, we might suggest that such withdrawal be undertaken by each individual in response to an interpretation that he is compelled to accept, rather than in response to the pedagogy of a central malcontent (for such is how we might label MacIntyre).

The style of Rorty and MacIntyre's work is remarked on by a number of writers[84]. The noticeable feature of their work is that referring to so many works, events and cultural phenomena, it is difficult to know which part of the academic community we should consider them a part of. The gist of the remarks on their style (which is often critical, but not always) is that, as Haydon puts it with reference to MacIntyre, they "display" rather than "argue". This process of display, if intended to be a form of argument, is open to some substantial objections. Indeed a tendency to "display" may very well be a consequence of the attempt to write diagnostic history.

For example, if MacIntyre's work does in some way depend on the actual worth and workability of Aristotelian society, can we assume the accurate (or actionable) representation of that society by surviving artefacts? What role would the historian or the archaeologist play in whether men had ever lived like this? As I have tried to show in the case of Rorty, with special reference to Kuhn and Feyerabend, the "canon" he makes use of to "prove" his case is full of contentious claims and readings, glib asides

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83 Schneewind 1983:529.

84 See Williams 26-27, Davidson 136-137, Fischer 241, Heal 101, Sorrell 17,23-24, Vision 97; all Malachowski 1990; Haydon 1987:8, Schneewind 1983:525,536, and 1982:662.

and "quick" deductions. Contra MacIntyre[85] if we are to begin justifying and defending "traditions" by writing histories such as his, it does not seem that the "resources" of different traditions (Oakeshottian survivals or artefacts) will check the histories that might be written.

To reiterate, if we have made an absolutely gross error in our understanding of the consequences of liberty (and in particular philosophy), then we have no way of telling the frying pan from the fire. Certainly MacIntyre's historical diagnosis, given the truth of his meta-theory (that is, that a direction of activity innocently pursued had disastrous consequences), would seem to be as likely to land us in deep water as the attempt to found morality (or for that matter the "Enlightenment philosophers'" attempt to discover a non-propositional source of knowledge). As Downing and Thigpen rightly note[86], the only reasonable consequence of MacIntyre's thesis is pessimism, unless he can tell us more of the solution; and should he attempt this we will realize how implausible the links between virtuous communes and the wider society are (just as the benign consequences of mythical stories seem unlikely). Perhaps the philosophers should simply be required to leave the cave; perhaps, regardless of whether it is worth living the unexamined life is the only life that we can live. For our next intellectual adventure, assuming the correctness of the diagnosis of the enlightenment, might kill us all.

As Schneewind notes[87], it is entirely consistent of MacIntyre to say that our morality is a dependent variable on the way we live, and therefore if we change the way we live we will change our morality. But this is not what he says. He maintains that we *should*, it would be *better* for us, if we changed our morality by (through intellectual initiatives and contrived social relations) changing the way we live. This process is open to all of the objections of ideological writing of chapter two.

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85 MacIntyre 1988:403.
86 Downing and Thigpen 1984:52.
87 Schneewind 1982:662.

Conclusion

For both MacIntyre and Rorty there is a fundamental inconsistency in explaining an unloved society in terms of the unintended consequences of an action of a number of centuries hence, and then proceeding to recommend a new and radical intellectual initiative. For liberty produced "Enlightenment Rationalism" and who is to say that that is the best (or rather the worst) that we can do. In Rorty's case, if he has incorrectly identified the enemy as not a particular philosophical predilection, but rather intellectualism in politics, then his solution is part of the problem. Quite simply we cannot, or cannot with any equanimity, accept that intellectual initiatives are constantly causing us to forget things that we desperately need to know. Liberalism cannot survive (indeed should not survive) the realization that our natural dynamic is towards disaster.

Scientists did not consult their history to decide whether to accept quantum mechanics; they decided. Philosophers should not consult their history to "understand" themselves, and thus decide whether to accept an entirely different activity as their true end. "False dichotomies" are always resolved by someone showing how an apparent dichotomy is in fact false. They ought not to be resolved by changing the subject[88/fn], or by telling an "historical story" about how the dichotomy arose (the implication being that our minds have somehow "stuck" on something only *apparently* meaningful). Scientists and philosophers live the history that they need in order to be able to decide, and change must come from within the "conversation"; argumentatively. Our understandings will be later made to look quaint, but we cannot second guess the perspective that will make them look quaint today, by using history. We can live our "ladenness", or we can have an understanding in other terms, but we cannot step outside of our skins; and to the extent that Rorty and MacIntyre believe that history can reform practice or science, then they believes that we can step outside of our skins.

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88 I cannot help but think that championing a cause by "the subversion of liberal modes of debate" involves precisely the leap of faith which I discussed earlier in connection with ideological writing, see MacIntyre 1988:401.

Citizens too can only live their ladenness, and must be presumed to be equipped to make the decisions that they must make. They must not be encouraged to accept that which seems nonsensical, implausible or counter-intuitive, by an historical story which explains how it is natural that they find these things so, and why therefore they ought to accept them regardless[89].

Where this is denied, and individuals try to convince us that judgement should be reformed wholesale because of what has been shown to be the case by an historical analysis, then the sceptical reader must rehearse the reasons why this kind of historical diagnosis and ideological programme should be thought impossible.

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89 See MacIntyre 1988:85,223.

Chapter Five

Robert Nozick and Political Philosophy

In this chapter I will examine the work of Robert Nozick, and in particular his *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. It is my contention that this work constitutes an eminently acceptable contribution to the corpus of political philosophy, but that this is by no means generally accepted. If this work does not constitute philosophical writing about politics then it is difficult to imagine in what such writing might consist. I especially wish to show that the beliefs about the nature of political philosophy which seem to underpin much of the hostility toward Nozick's work are not only false, but antithetical to the production of works of any scholarly interest.

I The Nature of an Explanation

In his *Philosophical Explanations* Nozick sketches a view of explanatory philosophy which seeks to demarcate it from the activities of providing scientific proof, or attempting to persuade. In contrast to proving or persuading, explanations are stories of how something is possible given something else.

For example, in considering how free will might be possible, the "something else" might be alleged universal causality. That is, alleged universal causality would seem to preclude the possibility that mens' actions could defy the laws which the apparent excluder holds govern all matter.

Nozick claims that he puts his explanations forward in "..a very tentative spirit"[1] and that he is not concerned with pursuing, "..the philosophically pointless task of attempting to convince the other person"[2]. It is of course difficult to draw a clean line between "explaining" how something might possibly be true, and influencing other persons. As Nozick puts it:

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1 Nozick 1981:4.
2 Nozick 1981:18.

> When the task is to examine some moral notion and the principles in which it is embedded, the distinction drawn in the introduction [of *Philosophical Explanations*] between explanation and justification becomes tenuous (1981:365).

This is so because: "Success in explanatory deduction itself may lend support and induce belief, previously absent, in the hypothesis"[3fn]. Nozick also states that: "The various means of control over conclusions explain why so few philosophers publish ones that (continue to) upset them"[4].

Given these facts about the nature of explanatory philosophy, together with the fact that Nozick quite definitely does have a particular perspective from which he "explains" and conclusions he wishes to justify, the question arises of how Nozick's work differs from that of those writers considered in chapters two through four who avowedly concern themselves with questions about their societies.

It does seem that Nozick makes terribly obvious both the potential of the political philosopher to influence his conclusions, and the conclusions that Nozick himself is attempting to "explain". His activity therefore seems very different to, for example, the attempts to give a cultural diagnosis the force of "historical necessity" discussed in the previous chapter. Take for example Nozick's discussion of the question of what constitutes just punishment. At the very outset he tells us;

> My aim is not to justify or argue for retributive punishment. It is true that I do think that such a view is correct, that retributive punishment sometimes is appropriate, even called for. For this reason, I investigate how it can be so...(1981:365-66).

Hence the reason that Nozick's discussion has the direction that it has, is because he has given it that direction. He tells us so. Nozick's premises seem merely to provide a starting point for his philosophy. Of course in political philosophy such points of departure do orientate works in a way which is not present, or less obviously present, in philosophy proper. There is though no subterfuge in his work and no suggestion that

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3 Nozick 1981:14. If this is thought probable it may be impossible for explanatory political philosophy to exist, as I argued in chapter one and will pursue further in the chapter following this.
4 Nozick 1981:2-3.

you must be a knave to reject his "conclusions"; which as we saw earlier is how Barry seems to see those who in some way disagree with him.

Furthermore there is far more to his work than the repeated and variform expression of his conclusions, which is sadly the nature of much political philosophy. Nozick is quite literally a journey-man, by which I mean that he is concerned with philosophical journeying. To describe him as an explanatory philosopher conveys far more information than describing him as a libertarian or a contractarian. He, like Hobbes (and unlike Barry), was not prepared to stop at a "merely moral basis".

It is perhaps now clear that I wish to argue that Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* is best read as an explanation; as an example of the application of the tools of explanatory philosophy to a question (to wit; "Given a strict concept of individual rights, how could a state arise and exist without violating those rights?")

It might be thought that I have the advantage of hindsight, and that once *Philosophical Explanations* was published, the nature of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* became clear. The great flaw in this reasoning is that it presumes that in the absence of Nozick's clear commitment to explanatory philosophy it was reasonable to assume that he was prescribing rules for society. It is this I wish to deny.

Nozick quite explicitly deals with bloodless individuals and fantastic states. It is the belief of Nozick's peers that he could conceivably do something other than this (and incidentally that they are doing something other than this), which accounts for the frequently hostile reaction to *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, despite its generally acknowledged brilliance.

Once political philosophy is considered as essentially intellectual literature (and in a university context, a teaching discipline) it is only work that "journeys", like Nozick's, which has merit, as it is only such work that provides space and opportunity for individuals to sharpen their philosophical teeth. Moralizing is weary, if not definitionally, then invariably in practice. Attempts to effect wholesale transformations in our beliefs do not seek discussants, but converts.

I should say that both Nozick and I may be wrong that it is possible to maintain a distinction between philosophical works and the ongoing life of the society. I have to say that if this is so there is no imperative that political philosophy continue to exist, no obligation on the state to sponsor sedition. If the form of political philosophy (the Grand Sweep which seems to subsume the messy particulars, the pithy generalization) cannot but create doctrine, then some justification for the writing of political philosophy must be given in the light of this knowledge; it cannot simply be ignored[5/n]. The expressive and representational features of the terms in which political philosophy works may make it impossible for us to respond appropriately to works such as Nozick's, and Mill's harm principle applies to writing, including political philosophy, as much as to any other action.

The remainder of this chapter contains (I) an account of Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, and (II) some philosophical criticism of the deductions that he makes. I hope to show how this work constitutes an intellectual puzzle. There is then (III) an account of the misconstrual of Nozick's work, and of the presumptive premises on which this misconstrual appears to rest.

II An Account of Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*

The first few sentences of the preface of the above work, and the notions behind them, are seminal and deserve to be quoted in full.

> Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating those rights). So strong and far-reaching are these rights that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do. How much room do individual rights leave for the state? The nature of the state, its legitimate functions and its justifications, if any, is the central concern of this book (1974:ix).

Nozick's initial concern is to show how a minimal state could arise from a situation of anarchy by a process that would not necessarily violate anyone's rights.

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5 These matters are the subject of the final chapter.

How something could happen is of course quite different from how we think it would or did happen.

Nozick takes seriously the anarchists' claims concerning both the nature of individual rights and the behaviour that it might be reasonable to expect in a situation without the state. Therefore in his pre-state situation, from which he tries to explain the evolution of the state, Nozick "allows" enough, in terms of conceding the possibility of moral behaviour in the absence of compulsion by the state, to make the explanation of how a state might legitimately arise far from straightforward. Nozick allows, for example, a non-state situation,

> ...in which people generally satisfy moral constraints and generally act as they ought. Such an assumption is not wildly optimistic; it does not assume that all people act exactly as they should. Yet this state-of-nature situation is the best anarchic situation one reasonably could hope for. Hence investigating its nature and defects is of crucial importance in deciding whether there should be a state rather than anarchy (1974:5).

We should note that had Nozick simply wanted to justify or defend a minimal state, to pare away the flesh of the welfare state to leave only the bones of law and order, it would not have been necessary to engage in this kind of explanation of how the state could have legitimately arisen. For even if the state had, in actual fact, unpleasant origins the complete and multiple change of office holders would seem to make churlish any opposition to using the basis of established states as the raw material for the minimal state[6]. Nozick seems genuinely keen to take up the anarchists' challenge and explain a non-rights violating derivation of the minimal state; that is, he is animated by a philosophical and not a doctrinaire spirit.

Nothing which could not normally be done by individuals is allowed by Nozick for the establishment of the state. Individuals do, though, have a general right to defend their rights, including a right to contract agents to defend these rights. It is through this devolving by individuals of their right to defend their rights (to agents) that Nozick seeks to explain how a state could arise.

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6 see Paul 1981:273-74.

If we accept that individuals have strong rights (as yet relatively undefined, but essentially "Lockean" rights to life, liberty and property), that they have the right to enforce these rights, and they have the right to devolve the enforcement of these rights to others, then we can see how some form of crude constabulary might arise. We can also see how a market in firms offering private constabulary and juridical services, a protection market, might arise.

But of course Nozick seeks something approximating a state; that is, the sole wielder of rightful authority in an area. Therefore we have to ask (seek a reason) why in the protection market "..would a virtual monopoly arise...without the government intervention that elsewhere creates and maintains it?"[7].

Nozick's explanation of how this virtual monopoly comes about depends on the purported fact that with such protective services, "..the worth of the product purchased, protection against others, is relative: it depends upon how strong the others are"[8].

For when one joins or hires a protective agency one seeks not only protection from assault, but also from malicious or hazardous prosecution. Each protective association will offer its clients protection from "wild" kinds of justice; each association will claim the right to vet the juridical procedures of other individuals and other protective associations, to ensure that they are fair.

But in conflicts between clients of different agencies, the agencies too may well come into conflict, as each seeks to protect its clients from what seem the dubious procedures of the other agency. The result of such a conflict will be that in future only the winning agency can credibly promise that only the procedures it vets will be applied to its clients. Therefore there will be a strong incentive for individuals to join such a dominant agency, and the agency that loses a conflict will lose its clients also.

As I hope to show later there are fundamental problems with this explanation. However, for the moment, we should simply note that it seems rational for individuals to join that agency which is in a position to ensure that its clients have only juridical

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7 Nozick 1974:17.
8 Nozick 1974:17.

procedures applied to them that it has sanctioned. Therefore there are forces at work in the protective services market (given that such a market legitimately arises) which tend to promote the existence of a single agency, which becomes the sole exerciser of rightful force in a given area.

This agency, Nozick holds, has only a de facto monopoly. It has no special rights which did not exist previously. As he puts it:

> As the most powerful applier of principles which it grants everyone the right to apply correctly it (that is, the Dominant Protective Agency) enforces its will, which, from the inside, it thinks is correct. From its strength stems its actual position as the ultimate enforcer and the ultimate judge with regard to its own clients. Claiming only the universal right to act correctly, it acts correctly by its own lights. It alone is in a position to act solely by its own lights (1974:109).

Aside from being the sole exerciser of rightful force in an area, Nozick must also explain how this Dominant Protective Agency might come to acquire that other aspect of the state; that is, to protect all those in its area. For some who live within the agency's area of dominance may not be able to pay for its services. In order for the Dominant Protective Agency to become statelike it must protect these individuals, but doing so without payment would seem to impose a cost on the agency's other clients, which would seem to be an infringement of their rights, as stated.

The way in which Nozick explains how the agency may come to protect all is via a theory of just compensation for the prohibition of risky activities. In other words, if x prevents y doing p, which is an action not intentionally or wilfully risky to x, but carries some risk of misadventure (and p is an action that would normally be allowable or defensible), then x owes y compensation in return for this increase in his (that is, x's) security.

Vis a vis the situation of the Dominant Protective Agency, and those who cannot afford its services, we must remember that these independents retain their rights, including the right to enforce their rights. However the juridical procedures of the independents in determining guilt are (ex hypothesi) inferior to those of the agency, or not knowably as reliable. Therefore although the agency can demand that its

procedures be used in regard to its clients, (not because they are its, but because they are superior; or at least are thought so) it must compensate the independents for this prohibition. As Nozick puts it;

> If the protective agency deems the independents' procedures for enforcing their own rights insufficiently reliable or fair when applied to its clients, it will prohibit the independents from such self-help enforcement. The grounds for this prohibition are that the self-help enforcement imposes risks of danger on its clients (1974:110).

This compensation, Nozick believes, is most naturally and obviously provided by granting the independents the protective services of the agency.

This then, in brief, is Nozick's story of the state. It is not intended to be a viable or credible explanation of how any state did arise, but rather; "Explaining how a state could arise from a state of nature without violating anyone's rights refutes the principled objections of the anarchist"[9].

Having attempted to show that there is a window in the beliefs of the anarchist through which an explanation of how a state-like entity could arise without violating anyones rights, Nozick attempts to show that this is all that could arise.

Put simply, Nozick maintains that to create something, or to receive it in a gift or transfer, or in recompense for a wrong, exhausts the possibilities for the just acquisition of property. The outcome of the operation of such a set of rules cannot be judged in aggregate, by reference to some standard. Nor can some individuals have their property taken to meet some (desirable) objective; for, ex hypothesi, their rights in that property are absolute.

Nozick essentially wants to compound the production and distribution of goods, which writers such as J.S.Mill have long thought possible to separate. Of things produced Nozick says;

> The situation is not one of something's getting made, and there being an open question of who is to get it. Things come into the world already attached to people having entitlements over them (1974:160).

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9 Nozick 1974:119.

Nozick's discussion of property rights and justice is structured somewhat differently to his derivation of the state. In the latter he is seeking to deny an apparent excluder; that is, the anarchist believes that the nature of individual rights precludes the possibility of a state arising and existing, which Nozick denies. In his discussion of justice his structuring of the argument makes it seem that he accepts the "excluder" with alacrity; he seems to suggest that the impossibility of transfer payments is the desirable state to be "explained". I shall say later why I think this reading is mistaken.

However the essential point concerning Nozick's objections to schemes of transfer payments and redistribution, is that they involve treating individuals as a means to some other end, by frustrating their free choices and compelling certain actions. For example, the outcome of the free transfer of goods, services and monies cannot be relied upon to result in a distribution that maximizes aggregate satisfaction (supposing it could be measured), or one which varies directly with moral worth (assuming an objective standard). Therefore any attempt to realize these goals must necessarily involve tampering with the rights of individuals to make transfers. This also holds good for any other such goal.

Justice for Nozick can only have reference to the conditions for individuals actions (there must not be force, fraud or theft). These actions, or their outcomes, cannot be aggregated. That said Nozick does believe that the outcomes of a free society are not arbitrary, and could be summarized as; "From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen"[10].

Before concluding this tour of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* I should note Nozick's concept of utopia, which like his concept of justice, relies on the inviolable nature of individual rights to give it meaning.

His idea is that utopia must in principle (given the widely differing goals of individuals) be utopias. Furthermore, given the rights of individuals we cannot coerce individuals to live in our utopia, for then of course it would not be theirs. Therefore by leaving and joining different associations of individuals (who will have us) we can

10 Nozick 1974:160.

maximize the benefits of association to ourselves. These benefits which we provide to and receive from the utopian association need not be solely monetary. We may join an association because of the number of handsome members that it has, and be allowed to join for our dry wit, which more than compensates for our physical unattractiveness. Therefore; "From no association will I be able to get something worth more to them than what I contribute is worth to them"[11].

Of course, equally, if I could be happier in another association I would be free to join it. This may not be utopia in the sense of most-wished-for imaginary society, but Nozick argues that given the rights of others an individual living in such a society would be as close to utopia as nature permits.

This has been quite a "thin" overview of Nozick's work. Mainly this is to avoid over-repetition as the particular features I wish to look at in detail will be discussed shortly. I am also keen to avoid becoming over-involved in the minutiae of Nozick's explanations, and instead will continue to stress the general structure and tenor of his work, together with the response of Western, and especially British, academe to his work. For in this particular work of political philosophy the philosophical dominates, and we should recognize why many political philosophers are averse to this.

First though we must look at some of Nozick's deductions more closely; we must make a philosophical response to this philosophical challenge. The nature of the work challenges us to do this, to see if we can find a weak deduction or an unconsidered possibility. Perhaps if more political philosophy had been written which excited this sort of response, the "obituaries" which were written for political philosophy would not have been thought necessary.

III Examining Nozick's Deductions

There are a number of places in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* where the coherence of the story Nozick is telling us seems in jeopardy. I will consider two, that is his derivation of the state and his theory of justice.

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11 Nozick 1974:301.

(i) The Derivation of the State

A major source of objections to the internal logic of Nozick's work is his derivation of the minimal state from a situation of anarchy. For example, an apparent problem arises with the hypotheticized move from the Ultra-Minimal State to the Minimal State (U.M.S and M.S. respectively). The former claims a monopoly of legitimate judical and law-enforcement procedures in its area but does not protect all. The latter also claims such a monopoly, but protects all.

The problem lies less with the objection that in claiming a monopoly of rightful force in its area but not protecting all, the U.M.S. constitutes an illegitimate "stage" in Nozick's explanation (the U.M.S. can be thought of as a hypothesized move rather than a corporeal stage), than with the status of the obligation of the U.M.S. to transform itself into the minimal state and protect all. So *if* the U.M.S. had an obligation to transform itself into the M.S. (by protecting all, and not only its clients) then the U.M.S. itself need not constitute a block to Nozick's derivation. It is the source of the U.M.S's obligation to protect all which is in doubt.

To reiterate, Nozick claims that the U.M.S. is obliged to extend its protection to all (and thus become the M.S.) in compensation for prohibiting the use by independents of their own private enforcement procedures, which only may have been risky to the clients of the agency.

However, as Holmes notes,

> ...either it is wrong to prohibit independents from trying to enforce their rights, and to punish them for doing so, in which case the U.M.S. acts immorally in doing these things, or it is not wrong, in which case there is no reason to transcend the U.M.S. (Paul 1981:61).

I wish to argue that the latter seems to hold; there appears to be no reason to transcend the U.M.S.[12/fn]. It would seem that professionalized protective agencies create investigative and judical procedures of a high standard which did not exist previously (ex hypothesi). There is therefore no legitimate reason why an independent,

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12 see also Goldsworthy 1987.

or a client of the agency (or U.M.S.), should not prefer to utilize the services of the agency. Therefore the problem posed for Nozick's derivation of the state by Holmes's objection noted above, concerns a justification for the redistributive nature of universal protection, and not the prohibition of the use of the independents own procedures. For prohibiting the use of the independents own procedures, and compelling the use of the agency's, in disputes with the agency's clients would only be a disadvantage to the independent if the agency was partial in the treatment of its clients; which would render the whole business of hiring agents illegitimate.

Imagine "Jack Flash", "Tess Meek" and five others on an island. Jack Flash wishes to ravish Ms Meek. He cannot ensure the non-involvement of the others by hiring them for the putative purpose of defending him against Ms Meek.

Similarly if the compensation due to independents is compensation for a power disadvantage which they suffer with regard to clients of the agency, then not only can no-one hire an agent (legitimately), but no-one can become an agent. Agents have moral obligations too.

So it would seem that between the clients of an agency who were involved in a dispute there would be no disagreement over having recourse to the procedures of the agency. The agency would not seem to have any interest in a dispute between independents. Where the client of the agency is in the role of defendant with an independent as plaintiff, the independent should have no objections to the use of the superior procedures of the agency. Where an independent is the defendant with the client of the agency as plaintiff, the superior procedures of the agency are a wind-fall gain to the independent.

It is this last scenario that shows the de facto compensation which the independent receives (by the fact of the existence of the agency) for the prohibition of the use of his own self-help judical arrangements with regard to clients of the agency. That is, when in conflict with clients of the agency, especially as defendant, the independent receives the benefit of the superior arrangements of the agency applying to his case. Of course he also benefits (if he is a good man) when he is plaintiff against a

client of the agency, as the superior arrangements of the agency lessen the possibility that he might be involved in a wrongful punishment.

I cannot then see how either an obligation or an opportunity arises for the U.M.S. to transform itself into the M.S. For there are no disadvantages imposed on the independent by the existence of the protective agency, provided the protective agency does not act wrongly.

Further problems arise for Nozick's derivation of the state when we consider our obligations to monitor and stand accountable for the actions of our agents. Wolff has argued that with the growth of a protective association it rapidly becomes impossible to exercise the supervision of one's agents (constables and court officers) which one ought, and therefore one must withdraw one's support from such an organization[13].

I am inclined to think that whilst there is obviously an element of truth in this, if one adopts a certain view of the constabulary in Nozick's explanation (and I think the problem of supervision is one that applies especially to constabularies) the problem is not insurmountable. If we imagine, for the moment, that courts exist - that is, I have accepted them as fit to judge in respect of cases relating to me - presumably I could not then resist an attempt by another person to convey me before this court (especially if there was compensation available for wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution). Therefore if we imagine Nozick's constabulary as simply conveying persons before the court, and if the evidence of the constabulary were to count for no more than it would have done were it given in their capacity as private citizens (we could even have them appear as citizens), then this perhaps represents a solution to the problem of how one supervises one's agents. For one's fellow citizens are at risk of false arrest by oneself, and vice versa. Therefore there seems no reason to fear the judgement of one's fellows regarding who is to be a constable (who is to choose who is to be a constable) than there is to fear their judgement generally. The constabulary are then simply paid to place themselves in the typical position of the law-enforcing citizen (out in the street, presumably) for longer periods of time than would be normal (although if we believed

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13 Paul 1981:94.

that by dint of creating such an agent he became more likely to violate rights than he would have done, *ceteris paribus*, as a citizen then this explanation does not hold).

Living with the constabulary, so constituted, would be no worse than living with "the society"; and of course Nozick wishes to explain how individuals could choose their own societies, their own laws and presumably their own constabulary.

Incidentally, we should note that hiring agents and creating protective agencies may have the effect of reducing rights violations for a reason which is perhaps not often considered. Wolff sees only the difficulty of supervising those whom one has had a hand in making agents (constables). However it is also true that a person may, in the cold light of day, accept that they are myopic, and that a constable must not be so, and yet when they believe that their rights have been violated insist that they "know" what they saw.

For this reason the rational decisions of individuals operating through their selection of agents and agencies may well skew the "population" of citizens in "law-enforcing situations" toward the clear-sighted (or the brave, or intelligent). If citizens, in the absence of protective agencies, have a certain amount of work to do in order to support themselves, to afford a constabulary they may have to do a little more. But if they are better at choosing a constable than they are at being a constable (and better at supporting a constable than he is at supporting himself, prior to the establishment of the constabulary), then the creation of the constabulary, this new division of labour, may have very desirable consequences. It may free ham-fisted Fred Just, the awful carpenter, to become clear-eyed Constable Just, guardian of the High Street.

There are of course other criticisms of Nozick's derivation of the state. However my main concern is to instance the sort of analytical criticism and discursive reasoning which Nozick's work promotes, rather than to review all such published criticism.

In a similar way, as promised, I wish to say something about Nozick's theory of justice.

(ii) Nozick's Theory of Justice

Nozick's justice, as I said earlier, is a procedural justice. That is, so long as just procedures of acquisition and transfer of goods are maintained the outcome is just (or at least not unjust). There is no standard which can be used to judge outcomes that are the result of just processes and therefore no possibility of any redistribution or other manipulation of the end shares.

An obvious problem for Nozick's theory is that in one sense there is nothing new under the sun. So all questions of how one might come to own something must also address the question of how anyone might come to own land or other natural resources, from which everything is made, but which were created by no-one.

O'Neill, commenting on the legitimacy of Henry Ford's wealth tells us;

> If A and others would buy from C, but only A has the resources to do so, and A has no just title to these resources, then when A buys an X, A's holding of (that) X is still not just (it was acquired with ill-gotten funds) and equally C's holding of A's payment is just only if C had title to the X he sold. Henry Ford's holdings after sales will be tainted if his holdings of the means of production of Ford motor cars was tainted; his customers' holdings of their cars will be tainted if the purchase money was tainted (Paul 1981:311).

Whilst I think this is correct, it is important to note precisely what this argument does (and does not) claim. O'Neill's argument says that if you trade stolen money for a car, this transaction does not make holding the car just. Equally if you trade a stolen car for money this does not make one's new holding just either. You cannot convert what you hold unjustly into something else and make that new holding just. However, this aside, if you trade a just holding for an unjust one the matter may be different. If you buy with just holdings and in good faith a stolen car we might think that you had some entitlement to it. Therefore a failure to justify the original acquisition of unowned resources need not necessarily lead to the unravelling of all entitlements; although it may.

Much depends on whether one views the advantage given by the original acquisition of natural resources as largely washed out over time (and relatively

insignificant at any time), or as the fundamental inequality underlying all inequalities (there were no blacks told to go West and take all they could hold).

In the above example we might think that almost all of the purchasers of Model-T's were farmers, who were purchasers of the vehicles principally because of their non-rightful holdings of land. Similarly we might think that Ford's success was due to the holding of, or privileged access to, raw materials such as iron ore.

However if we found that uncultivated but productive land was available very cheaply, and the wealth of the farmers who bought the Model-T's was directly related to the work that they did, we might look upon their holdings as legitimate. Likewise, we might find that Ford had had to buy his raw materials, or that they were readily available very cheaply, and that therefore the value of the vehicles he made was principally due to the value-added by the ingenious process of manufacture. So the fact that everything was made out of something that pre-dated all manufacturers does not in itself jeopardize Nozick's theory of justice.

What is specious, however, in Nozick's treatment of the question of how one comes to own natural resources, is his attempt to say both that natural resources prior to the activities of humans are not a common resource, but unowned, and at the same time discuss how the working of a free market meets the requirements of the Lockean proviso.

For as Ehman says the Lockean proviso makes sense for Locke, because he views the world as originally commonly owned, but not for Nozick who seems to believe that it is unowned[14fn]. Indeed Nozick's whole discussion of the status of holdings of natural resources seems unconvincing. He wants to say that because civilization is of benefit to all, compared to a situation where there is a free-for-all in the use of natural resources (at the very least we avoid the tragedy of the commons), then the private ownership of land is justified. However, the fact that there is an element of truth behind the common defence of private property compared to a situation of anarchy is irrelevant once one accepts that the fundamental character of

14 see also Wolff in Paul 1974:102-2.

land is as a common resource. The fact that illicit private holdings have positive externalities compared to a situation of anarchy is neither here nor there. Once we no longer believe that it is possible to own a natural resource by appropriation, all possible regimes for its use come in for consideration. We might ask for proposals and bids for the use of land under licence, or tax the earnings of those making use of natural resources up to the point where it is no more remunerative than any other such application of time and effort. In other words, the fact that X by occupying position Y is able to produce Z (and significantly lower the price of Z) is no reason why he, and not someone else, should occupy position Y.

Having said this I have no idea how we should view the holding of a natural resource which was bought from an illicit appropriator with (for the sake of argument) untainted resources (Compulsory purchase, with compensation equal to the value of the permanent improvements wrought on the land?).

However all this talk of "states" and "constabularies", "landed property" and "taxes", must not cause us to lose sight of the fact that what we have been doing is looking at the structure of a story. In the real world Nozick's theory of justice is not the end of the story of who comes to hold what, nor is it the beginning. The danger of referring to the real world is that such talk serves to bolster the fiction that Nozick could have conceivably opined authoritatively on the rightful structure of society.

Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* is merely an essay concerning the consequences of taking seriously a strict notion of individual rights. It is because he does not allow himself the luxury of appealing to "common-sense", or "what we all know" that the work is fascinating; when his notion of rights paints him into a corner he does not grab a life-line from the real world and bound free, like Jack. This is why his work has interest, why it is not worthless. However, it is of course literally, quite useless. There isn't a use that it can be put to[15fn].

The "relationship" that Nozick's theory has with the world is that Nozick learned how to use language in that world; and patently he learned well. But he is not a

15 Save, of course, in the teaching of the structure of a philosophical explanation.

seer, he is a writer. To take his writings and proceed back to the world, holding "the conclusions" of his wordplay would be a dangerous conceit.

The danger that wordplay could become dogma is, I think, an obvious one. The appropriate response is to do everything possible to discourage this, especially by refusing to make political philosophy mundane and obviously "political". Attempting to insulate works from appropriation may well have the contingent consequence of making them better philosophy.

An inappropriate response, and a common one, among political philosophers to the possibility that their work might become dogma, is to write with an awareness and acceptance of this influence. This work both implicitly claims a knowledge that the philosopher cannot have, and has unfortunate consequences for political philosophy, as I hope to show.

IV Nozick, the Zeitgeist and Social Reality

The belief that assumptions about the author's social purpose in writing can be legitimately (or at least commonly) supposed to play a part in the reception of his work is found in the introduction to the collection by Paul which brings together much of the published commentary on Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Paul tells us at the very beginning of his introduction that in contrast to

> ...the moderate and conventional ideological stance of John Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, its distinguished predecessor in political philosophy, Nozick's work announced a thesis so out of joint with its times that the critical acclaim accorded it by many of its reviewers must have astounded its author as much as it baffled its critics (Paul 1981:1).

In other words both the author and his critics could have reasonably supposed that the fact that the work (*Anarchy, State and Utopia*) was "out of joint with its times" (that is, it seemed to differ in its "conclusions" with the common sentiment among political philosophers) would provide a sufficient condition for its being attacked, and withheld the critical acclaim that, other things equal, it would have been due. Paul is

surprised that the work was not met with either "hostility or silence", "..because its themes run counter to the zeitgeist"[16].

Those who have read the modern critiques (or sociologies) of science, such as those of Kuhn and Feyerabend[17fn], will not be unaware of the seeming similarity between this notion of an orientating consensus of distributivist liberalism (within which Rawls is thought to operate and Nozick disregard), and the concept of a paradigm (which defines what is to be considered a scientific problem, and structures how it should be solved). Jeffrey Paul is certainly not unaware of this apparent similarity. He tells us that, perhaps

> ...Nozick's book is best appreciated when considered against the background of Thomas Kuhn's model for theory development in the natural sciences. In his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn suggested that current scientific knowledge may not represent the accumulated wisdom of the past but seems to embody the elucidation of a wholly new conceptual paradigm, one whose principle features are utterly incommensurable with its predecessors. If the development of moral knowledge is analogously structured, then, the very incommensurability of Nozick's theory with its competitors, accounts, in part, for its impact on social philosophy and social science (Paul 1981:2).

Aside from whatever deficiencies this may have as a reading of Kuhn, in what sense could "distributivist liberalism" constitute a "paradigm"? What sort of knowledge is the "moral knowledge" that Paul refers to in the above quotation? Presumably this distributivist paradigm must include moral knowledge that refers to something and solves some problems. Therefore the success of distributivist liberalism might be shown in the treatment of the old, the poor or the sick.

But this misconception of the milieu and context within which academic philosophers work could hardly be more complete. "Distributivist Liberalism" does not help the poor; it is our habit of conduct to help the poor. "Distributivist Liberalism" is a confection made by philosophers who have looked with approving eyes at some features of their society, and imagined that they must express the "form" of those

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16 Paul 1981:1.
17 Present work chapter three *passim*.

features, and institutionalize this accidental achievement, before it is lost for ever. As Paul says of Rawls's work, it was written "partly to restore the impaired foundations of the current ideological paradigm, distributivist liberalism"[18]. This is thought to be acceptable because the commitment of the political philosopher is not to philosophical journeying as such, but to aid, by providing justification for, the political pursuit of a pre-existing moral good. A good bias is thought no bias at all.

An alarming consequence of this belief is a reduction in the rigour of political philosophy which approaches from the desired direction. Rawls is hailed as a messiah because he produces something of a deductive form amongst a sea of works which talk in platitudes about the "absolute priority of need" or the "categorical nature of the right to self-fulfilment". If we start with the belief that we write to justify widely accepted social practices it is little wonder that the philosophy which pushes these (definitionally) open doors so often fails to satisfy. From a purely academic point of view, is it not revealing that it is so difficult to remember the details of those works which talk around "distributivist liberalism"? Might it not be true that Rawls is so popular because, at least, there are a few central ideas which can be retained, quoted and discussed? In Rawls there is at least a *process* of reasoning.

It has to be admitted that other things being equal political philosophers do prefer a process of reasoning and the correct conclusions, rather than simply an abstract statement of the correct conclusions. Rawls is preferred over weaker defenders of distributivist liberalism. Nevertheless, whilst it is true that a good advocate of "the good" is to be preferred over a bad advocate of "the good", a bad advocate of "the good" is preferable, it seems, to a brilliant advocate of "the bad". If this is to over-state the case we can at least say, quite truthfully, that those political philosophers who think of political philosophy as in some way prescriptive cannot accept as false their belief that a work of political philosophy should be judged not only by its coherence, but by the moral rectitude of its conclusions also. For they cannot accept that political philosophy is a form of literature.

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18 Paul 1981:2.

For example Gordon, painting a back-drop to Locke's *Treatises* tells us that seventeenth century England was

> ...a society racked by civil war, regicide, military dictatorships, reaction, and adamantine religious conflict. Seventeenth century contractarian theory was an effort to find a way across this sea of troubles.

Therefore due to this supposedly quite specific relationship between Locke's "mode of reasoning" and his historical period (and the alleged essential identity of Nozick's "mode of reasoning" with that of Locke);

> One follows Nozick's argument with great admiration for his skill; but it is like observing the work of an archaeologist ever so carefully peeling away the layers of protective covering from an ancient artifact, which finally appears for a moment as a thing of great beauty and then crumbles into dust from exposure to the light and air of man's ordinary environment. One is compelled to distinguish between the process and the product - the one superb the other trivial (Gordon 1976:578).

Gordon's assumption is that Locke's writing was a response to a particular situation, and therefore died with that situation, and that all philosophical arguments are responses to particular situations, or are dead. That "situation" is not a literary or academic situation, it is a social situation. Political philosophy cannot be content with superb processes, it must be socially influential.

It is this basic belief, that we are dealing with the lives of persons, which causes Wolff to conclude his discussion of Nozick's reasoning concerning the rationality of individuals in joining protective associations, by saying;

> However, all this is utterly irrelevant to questions of serious political philosophy! It is also very odd-sounding to anyone who has been brought-up, theoretically speaking, on the great traditions of Western political writing (Paul 1981:90)[19/fn].

Nozick's problem, Wolff tells us is his, "..persistent failure to take account of the nature of social reality"[20]. Furthermore, Wolff is deadly serious that philosophy can in principle do this. After talking about the "weirdness" of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* Wolff tells us that;

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19 Which is a similar notion of the political philosophers project to that of Barry.
20 Paul 1981:95.

> The root problem is not at all that the method (utility theory, game theory, rational choice) is too precise for the data (as Aristotle might have objected), but quite the reverse. *If Nozick's inferences were tight, then we should be obliged to live with them, no matter how counterintuitive his conclusions might be.* But of course we are not presented with inferences at all. We are offered a flood of rapidly sketched situations - scenarios - in which there are no actual figures cited or in which the figures are "for illustration only". The real burden of the argument is not on the reasonings themselves (for without more elaborate sophistication or more stringent simplification, we could never judge their validity), but on the plausibility of looking at matters in the manner implied by the language and methodology. Nothing is ever said to suggest a reason for accepting that new and peculiar way of looking at things (Paul 1981:100 my emphasis).

We should note two things about Wolff's view of political philosophy. Firstly, he cannot accept that Nozick's scenarios do not imply a way of looking at social reality at all, but only seem to imply such a view when read by someone who believes that political philosophy is about authoritatively opining on the nature of social reality. Secondly, although Wolff thinks Nozick's methodology is suspect as a means of arriving at absolute knowledge about society, there is no suggestion that such a thing as a methodology for establishing categorical social knowledge is impossible. To repeat, "more elaborate sophistication or more stringent simplification" could in principle result in "valid inferences" which we would be "obliged to live with" "no matter how counterintuitive". Such is the touchstone of those steeped in "the great traditions of western political writing".

This seems, to use Wolff's expression, most "weird"; that all that stands between us and the heinous treatment of others is our ability to see faults in deductive inferences. So if the devil ever seizes reason we are all damned by our slow wit; and as we do wrong we will continuously "know" it to be wrong, but our passions will be the abject slave of reason. The devil's arias will win the day.

I mentioned earlier that I thought that Nozick's treatment of property rights might not be as straightforward as it may appear. To reiterate, the way that Nozick structures his argument encourages the notion that he accepts the impossibility of

transfer payments with alacrity. Thomson's explanation of why this is so may well be true;

> At the outset, he (Nozick) is unclear what degree of stringency should be assigned to rights (and hopes to avoid having to take a stand on the matter), but by the time he gets to government, all is forgotten, and rights - at any rate property rights - are infinitely stringent (Paul 1981:137).

But why should we care if this is the case? Nozick's work is a good read as he attempts to defend his creation against both all-comers and dragons of his own making. Neither the purity of Nozick's heart, nor the purity of his purpose have anything to do with the worth of his philosophy. It is Wolff's incredible notion that the people that we are should or could be subject to overthrow by the musings of some bright spark (as it is often difficult to see whether an inference is valid or not, presumably the *brightest* spark has de facto power over what should be done)[21/n], that we have to re-invent ourselves every day, that leads Brian Barry into an ultimately rather embarrassing tirade against Nozick and his work. Of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* Barry says,

> ...the intellectual texture is of a sort of cuteness that would be wearing in a graduate student and seems to be quite indecent in someone who, from the lofty heights of a professorial chair, is proposing to starve or humiliate ten percent or so of his fellow citizens (if he recognizes the word) by eliminating all transfer payments through the state, leaving the sick, the old, the disabled, the mothers with young children and no breadwinner, and so on, to the tender mercies of private charity, given at the whim and pleasure of the donors and on any terms they choose to impose (Paul 1981:3).

Concluding Remarks

The central contention of this chapter has been that political philosophy requires a standard by which to assess the work of its participants, and that that standard must be the coherence of the works. Making use of terms of art criticism we might say that we must defend the autonomy principle of "internal plausibility", rather than the notion of "heteronomous truth".

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21 All mathematical deductions are remain conditional, no matter how widely accepted.

At the present time political philosophers seem to be thought of as "auto-biographers" rather than "novelists". If this is rather cryptic their views are imagined to be *their* views, and in their writing they tell us what kind of people they are. They are not allowed to be teachers or logicians, they are participants in a social fray. Other academics may make possible the construction of a nuclear weapon and declare it a chunk of matter until a further human (moral) decision is made, but political philosophers write as if they have an obligation to influence the shape of society. Only they have an open door to the fray.

Surely though if this self-perception ever had any truth, it has none now. It may be that the contribution of Hobbes or Locke to an ongoing political debate was so assumed by their readers that had they wished not to do so, not to be so construed, this would not have been possible for them. Nevertheless the situation has surely now changed. Political philosophy is today carried on by highly-qualified academics in state funded institutions. Today, picking up a pen is in no way the functional equivalent of strapping on a sword; nor should it be.

Some academics cannot accept this and continue to tell us (perhaps more realistically continue to tell one another) that it would be to the good if we did not allow the poor to starve. Furthermore, the irony of maintaining that society needs "distributivist liberalism" to justify helping the poor, and the upshot of political philosophy is distributivist liberalism, is that we set ourselves up for a demonstration that the upshot of political philosophy is a good deal more open than that.

If political philosophy is to become and remain a vigorous and professional discipline political philosophers must learn to eschew any reference to (or grant any let or favour because of) the perceived moral goodness of one another's works. At the moment even the terms we use to describe political philosophers tend to refer not to the way they reason but to the "positions" that they hold.

The most obvious and simple fact is that political philosophers do not govern society, they teach students. Many however seem to see this task as secondary. Their self-perception is that of the sole and trusted lieutenant of a weak and clueless

sovereign. Much of the commentary on Nozick is wrung from individuals with an all too obvious visceral dislike of his work, who struggle to remain within (and sometimes overstep) the bounds of academic convention. One can only guess at the cues and prompts that such persons "feed" students if they have the gall to imagine that their likes and dislikes have a place in the pages of a professional journal.

A distinction has to be made between political life and philosophical work. As I have suggested before, if we must disabuse individuals of their belief in the worth of referring to political philosophy for shibboleths, the most obvious way to do this is for political philosophy to become more "philosophical" and more deductively rigorous. Political philosophy must become both more obviously limited and yet "difficult". We cannot allow "Nozick is uncaring" to be a substitute for reading *Anarchy, State and Utopia* any more than we can allow "War is bad" to be a substitute for reading *War and Peace.*

Nozick, in *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, tells us at the beginning of the work that it is not a political tract[22], and at the end that the transfer payments of any particular society cannot be condemned using his analysis[23]. We should go further than this and completely reject the notion that such a work could conceivably revolutionize our society; that society rests on such beliefs, or could be stood on its head by them. I suspect that dispensing with this one belief is the keystone to better political philosophy. Political philosophy must divest itself from the self-assumed obligation to support the good society.

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22 Nozick 1974:xii.
23 Nozick 1974:231.

Chapter Six

Art and Society: The Possibility of Political Philosophy

Political philosophy, as distinct from ideology or political rhetoric, is that which is accepted as political philosophy; that is, it is mused over and analyzed but is not applied, nor is it thought capable of being applied, nor of being otherwise socially influential. Contra Rorty[1/fn], we do not have to change the way that philosophy is written in order for this state of affairs to obtain, but only the expectations of the audience; the way that it is read. However, as I argued in chapter five, such a new context might actually encourage the production of works which invite a philosophical engagement. Describing philosophy, or for that matter science, as "conversational" involves an outside understanding. As Fischer[2] argues with respect to literature activities may have great internal rigour and standards that participants must meet, and yet these activities may be appropriately described, for the purposes of an outside understanding, as "conversational". To imagine that science or philosophy should be "conversational" in a colloquial sense, that is, written in an urgent and engaged tone with the possibility that just anyone can meaningfully join in, is false.

In many ways much of what has gone before can be reduced to a central concern as to whether "the city" can afford to look upon "literature" as benign. That is, Oakeshott's concern that persons may be misled by ideological writing, Feyerabend's belief that misunderstanding the character of science might jeopardize our habit of conduct, the fear of Barry and others that Nozick's writing might have a similar effect, and the claim of Rorty and MacIntyre that philosophy has been morally pernicious, are all very similar. This chapter continues the discussion of that concern. I will argue that if it is the case that, for example, the philosophical quest to find conditions for certain knowledge might easily overspill to affect how we act politically and treat persons, then this is a situation that we cannot manage. We can only have "meta" beliefs about the relationship of art to the world; general beliefs about the consequences of liberty in

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1 Chapter four *passim*.
2 Malachowski 1990:235.

publication. We cannot strive for knowledge of how our works affect the conduct of those who have encountered them, as they move in the world. We cannot know what would have happened had we not written, *ceteris paribus*.

New activities, such as science and history once were and perhaps political philosophy still is, emerge with difficulty from the practical world. It is therefore not difficult to disestablish a new genre that is struggling for life, and this is what the work of some political philosophers who pursue openly political goals achieves.

The subject of the following chapter is whether political philosophy as a distinct activity can exist. That is, whether there can be a literature such as Nozick's which is not thought of as proselytizing the good society. This chapter is divided into four sections, the first three of which discuss themes touched on earlier.

The first section expands on the idea discussed towards the end of chapter one of citizens and their social world constituting an inter-related and interdependent whole. This "provides" something valuable which writing, such as that of Nozick, might be thought capable of damaging. Of course if one does not worry about which "definition of the situation" obtains then one would have no reason for preferring any established way of life over that which might be established by poetic redescription. The second section examines how in general it is thought that literature could threaten this symbiotic relationship, how, for example, writing might pervert our judgement. The third section upholds the claim that the nature of a work, the genre that it is a type of, depends on public judgement. If conventions exist then a writer can endeavour to meet these conventions, and thus help to determine the manner in which his work will be read, but essentially the character of a work is determined publicly. We cannot declare by *fiat* a genre "political philosophy", or "the novel". The fourth section, whilst no claim to comprehensiveness is made, details some of the meta-beliefs which one might have concerning the social nature of art; that is, how we might deny the claim made in section two concerning the threat that literature might pose, and instead believe that "the truth can shift for itself". By upholding beliefs like these we can defend liberty in publication without resorting to assertion. We can provide some answers as

to why Oakeshott should not concern himself with ideological abridgements, or Barry with the work of Nozick.

If we do not believe something of the nature of the beliefs of section four, but instead believe that (as Rorty and MacIntyre suggest) philosophical reflection might change our entire way of thinking for the worse, then we live in a world very different to that previously imagined and, I think, beyond the possibility of control.

Nowhere in this chapter should it be imagined that I am laying claim to categorical knowledge of "what the world is like" (although it is true that I believe that "value theory" must be in some measure true; that believing social norms to be simply coercive is unthinkable). Rather I am seeking to state the source of the unease which many people feel concerning some literature, and to show the kinds of ways that unease may be mollified.

I will be making particular reference to Milton's *Areopagitica*, and to the debate surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

I The Character of What is Threatened

Before discussing what it is that is thought might be threatened by a literature such as political philosophy, I must first make what some might see as a concession. That is, it must be admitted that there may be a distinction between a state and it's statutes on the one hand, and the normative order and laws of it's citizens on the other. Ultimately, of course, it is only the normative order itself to which we might attach value[3fn]. The political state in the actions that it undertakes and in the statutes that it enacts may not behave in a manner congruent with the society; that is with the practices that exist and with the expectations of the citizens. As Smith says:

> Legality connotes conformity with the law, the quality of lawfulness; while legitimacy refers to a wider order of norms and principles, and ultimately to the traditional moral system, not all the elements of which are adequately represented in the law...(Schutz and Slater 1990:4).

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3 Green accepts that the state may be merely coercive, acting alongside and in opposition to the traditional order. See Milne 1962:134.

The precise extent to which a state can insulate itself from, and impose itself upon, a people without a congruity emerging between the state, the legal order and the citizens is a vexed question. The truth though must surely lie somewhere between the strong thesis advanced by Green that a despotic government is, as Milne says, somehow "artificial", and Walzer's more modest formulation that, "A people's culture is always a joint, even if it isn't an entirely co-operative, production"[4].

The established though, the stable, is not in itself worthy of any great respect, as it may be established for all kinds of reasons irrelevant to its legitimacy. Before we make judgements about attitudes to established societies we must first make a judgement about that society itself[5]. Similarly we cannot justify law simply by pointing to its history[6], and at the very least if we attempt to justify law by pointing to it as the product of an evolutionary process we must accept that this process may continue[7]. In considering our society at the highest level of politics and constitutional law we may only be truly conservative about processes, and not states of affairs[8/n]. Of course to those enjoying the established, the given has in itself value; but what are even more valuable are the processes that ensure a continuing congruence of persons and their society. Our society must change through time.

Having allowed the above, we should note what it is that conservative theorists believe have been established. As we saw in chapter one, in Oakeshott there is an emphasis on practices that have been "hollowed out" over time, and thus may be engaged in and enjoyed. Hayek for his part stresses the evolution of market mechanisms and law. Both stress the dependence of law on common opinion.

In Oakeshott's case this is done by stressing how a people and a territory were one in the establishment of the modern European state[9], and how the people brought to these burgeoning states time-worn habits of conduct. The behaviour of the sovereign

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4 In Galston 1989:121.
5 Yinger 1965:189-90.
6 Ogus 1989:404-405.
7 Connin 1990:312.
8 As I said in chapter two.
9 Oakeshott 1975:186.

would be greatly circumscribed in these circumstances (or "circumscribed" if one has a view of a sovereign that sees him as possibly capricious or wilful in what he does; as having a blank sheet on which to write his "laws"). Indeed Oakeshott suggests that the king was "defined" by expectations that his conduct would be in sympathy with the pre-existing habits of conduct. Were it not he would cease to be recognized as a king. As Grant puts it;

> The lex which engages it's subjects loyalty is not any old lex, but one which on the whole generates laws agreeable to their moral intuitions and possesses sufficient flexibility to advance or retard itself accordingly (1990:85).

This is akin to what Walzer calls, "a dense moral culture"[10]. Hayek makes a similar point, the power of the legislator being derived from; "..a state of widespread opinion concerning the kinds of rules he is authorized to lay down"[11].

Rulers, from first to last, therefore, are not the authors of everything significant in the lives of their subjects. Rather, our legal and political order is one which we are very much at home with; one which is seamlessly continuous with our lives (although this is not to deny that at any moment in time there will not be those who have an interest in denying this). The Foucauldian claim that an order creates a self appropriate to it postulates a division that cannot be maintained[12].

Of course the Oakeshott and Hayek thesis cannot tell us what the laws or habits of conduct of any given society will be; there are no self-evidently true ends for man. The notion that this "predicament" makes all states of affairs equally good leads Falck to claim (making use of Oakeshott's imagery of the "ship of state" sailing a bottomless and boundless sea, and therefore having no great projects to pursue) that; "On a sea which was really boundless and bottomless there would be no difference between navigation and drifting, and no point in trying to establish one.."[13].

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10 Walzer 1987:16.
11 Hayek 1976:61, 1979:34.
12 Mapel 1990:403.
13 Falck 1963:67.

This is mistaken though. Our laws and institutions are *convivial*; they are not defensible by universal standards, but they fit us well[14/n].

For the men I described earlier, those who fear some kinds of literature, (and the conservative fear of the misconstrual of literature is categorically different to the fear of "distributivist liberals" that Nozick might constitute an ideological rival) the change that such laws and institutions undergo through time is change continuous with existing practices, and through mechanisms intrinsic to the establishment of these existing practices. The perception of such change is therefore that at any moment in time it is of a limited scale. Tocqueville expresses a similar idea;

> I do not assert that men living in democratic communities are naturally stationary; I think on the contrary that a perpetual stir prevails in the bosum of these societies and that rest is unknown there...they are forever varying, altering, and restoring secondary matters; but they carefully abstain from touching what is fundamental. They love change, but they dread revolutions...(Johnson 1983:181)[15/n].

This change which the customary and established undergoes can be characterized but not spelt out. We cannot provide the method which Rees[16] seeks for identifying what society "intimates" in the way of change any more than we can, as Oakeshott saw, provide a rationalist method for the scientist or the builder[17]. For the conservative we are to our hereditary social group as the scientist is to that which we non-scientists conceive of as the abstraction "science", and (unless misled[18/n]) we act better than we know, or can give an account of.

Political debate and disagreement may therefore be, as Herzog suggests[19], a positive good, demonstrating that the political actors (in whom alone the polity exists) are making use of the political knowledge that they have, and are fulfilling their role in both maintaining and creating the polity.

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14 Oakeshott talks of the particular enjoyment of things to which we have become attached in Oakeshott 1962:112-13,170.
15 Oakeshott makes the same point 1962:65, see also 128.
16 Rees 1953:71.
17 Oakeshott 1962:135-36.
18 I think that we can be misled but, like Oakeshott, am unsure to what degree and with what effect.
19 Herzog 1985:235.

This knowledge which the citizen has is akin to the knowledge which Hayek[20] ascribes to the judge and the scientist; that is, it is not a system of rules which can be articulated, but rather habits of conduct which allow the individual to move successfully within his world. The arguable effect of democracy is to make political and legal orders a more closely dependent variable of common judgement. Those who support or reconcile themselves to this state of affairs do so in the belief that judgement is "life-laden" and fundamental, and all else, including art and speechifying, are dependent and secondary[21/n]. The strength of democracy is in the pedigree of its judgements, which are rooted in life. Not least the people generally are best placed to feel "where the shoe pinches". It is this kind of claim which underlies Popper's use of Pericles of Athens; "Although only a few may originate a policy, we are all able to judge it"[22].

It must be said that this account of the development of our society as a moral community may be to a considerable degree romanticized. However, in its defence we can say that it does seem that we do in fact now share "definitions of the situation"[23/n], and these judgements are not thought simply coercive, either by those prepared to act on them or by many of those subject to their enforcement. The righteousness of the citizen making a judgement is not disingenuous[24/n]. Naturally created these censorious judgements may be ones that we cannot do without. Moreover, however they began, our broad "definitions of the situation" have persisted too long to be for the simple benefit of any group or class (unless that group or class is tautologically defined).

The case thus stated is of course in many ways a "conservative" case, but as Manning notes the intuition that underlies this case is shared, albeit with, from a conservative perspective, an unfortunate emphasis on the disembodied mind, by many

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20 Hayek 1973:120.
21 Rorty, by contrast, seems sometimes to claim that speechifying and "talking differently" are the most important qualities. See Malachowski 1990:267.
22 Popper 1973:7.
23 Which is, I believe, Talcott Parsons' expression.
24 As Hayek says, our opinions about the law are not simply wilful Hayek 1976:14.

liberals[25fn]. The liberal notion is one of "bona fide" change and social inter-action; of a "Social Newtonianism". The society thus characterized,

> ...generates within itself its own inexhaustible energy in the form of human will which directed along the path of reason, sustains the order necessary for the stability and survival of society. For liberals compulsion is undesirable because the motive force of society and the energy originate in the spontaneity of the independent mind and the power of the liberated will (Manning 1980:16).

Mill and von Humboldt feared that state education (representing an artificial and imposed uniformity) might upset this relationship of evolved complex countervailance; that is, a complex where each, fulfilling his "nature", engaging in his habitual conduct, achieves his own satisfaction and contributes to the maintenance of an order which makes the satisfaction of a diversity of ends possible.

II The Nature of the Threat

The question now to be addressed is that given this kind of view of society what sort of threat is it thought that writing, and perhaps especially political philosophy, might represent?

The claim is that the continuation of our way of life depends absolutely on the judgement of our fellow citizens. Our institutions, for example, exist only in the present judgements of our fellows. Or to put the matter another way, if all the citizens of our country were changed with the people of another land (the law books and courts, records of judgements, buildings concerned with the business of government, and so on, retained) we would be living in a very different country[26fn]. It therefore matters very much what the people around us think to be the case; how they define the situation. As Hayek says[27], we maintain our society by treating our beliefs as special, and therefore there is, prima facie, grounds for worry about the incursion of beliefs

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25 The conservative might explain the liberals emphasis on ideas of "the independent mind" and "the liberated will" as expressing how the experience of engaging in an idiom of conduct feels from the inside.

26 MacIntyre of course makes use of this notion in *After Virtue*.

27 Hayek 1979:172.

which are not our own into the common consciousness of the citizens upon whom the existence of the society depends.

Johnson, Milton and Locke were all agreed as to the potential social character of mens' literary works (although they differed as to what we should deduce from this). Johnson claimed that;

> ...if every dreamer of innovations may propagate his projects, there can be no settlement; if every murmurer at government may diffuse discontent, there can be no peace; and if every sceptic in theology may teach his follies, there can be no religion (Jebb ed 1940:xxxiii).

Milton, speaking in defence of liberty of printing still confessed that books; "..are as lively and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragons teeth: and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men"[28].

Locke propounds a similar thesis, accusing "..the pens of Englishmen of as much guilt as their swords.." and condemning the "furies" that are "..conjured up in private studies and from thence sent abroad to disturb the quiet we enjoyed"[29].

The crucial claim is the instrumentality of writing (whether deliberate or inadvertent) in producing discord. This claim is still very much alive. Hayek claims[30] that intellectual writings have damaged our concept of law (and hence law). As we saw in chapter one Oakeshott identifies Bacon as instrumental in the establishment of rationalism. Hoffer notes how ordinary enjoyment can be undermined by being trivialized, and how this can be done unintentionally by "artists, professors and intellectuals". The "man of words" delights in "..the clash of thought and in the give-and-take of controversy"[31], and whilst engaged in this, quite literally, selfish process he produces works that will materially affect the judgement of others. Such individuals often lack an account of what it is that they think they do at the level of the society.

Crawford Young's[32] cultural entrepreneurs, on the other hand have an explicit account of what they are trying to achieve. Through their collation of literature and

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28 Jebb ed 1940:6.
29 Abrams ed 1967:118.
30 Hayek 1973:2,70, 1976:53.
31 Hoffer 1952:162.
32 Young 1976:45-46.

standardization of language they create institutionalized segments within the culturally plural society.

Thus far we have been concerned with political and academic works. The "Rushdie Affair" brought the social status of a different form of writing, the novel, to the fore. I will say more about the novel very shortly, but here we should note the claims of Gee[33] and Ruthven[34] on how, in creating an alternative reality, the novel can to the believer seem blasphemous. It threatens to alter his religious community by undermining in the minds of the individuals who (and who alone) constitute it, their "definition of the situation". The feared effect of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* on the community of Islam is akin to the fear which some commentators have over the effect of Nozick's work on our political community. That is, that writing might straightforwardly undermine belief.

What is prima facie strange here is the belief that what is deep, time-worn and fundamental in a society can be threatened by what we think of as epiphenomena. In other words, that our habit of helping the poor, or our subjection to the will of God, can be threatened by art. This, though, is the belief of those who worry about the social affect of literature. The fear is that our judgement is fine, but delicate, equipment.

III The Sovereignty of the Audience

Communication is, definitionally, a public act, and what we say or write is the prerogative of others. When W.W.Bartley was asked what he had learned from Popper and Hayek it is reported that he replied; "I learnt from Karl Popper that we never know what we are talking about, and I learnt from Hayek that we never know what we are doing"[35].

To say that others interpret what we say is perhaps to place the emphasis in the wrong place. Others do not interpret what we say, rather we make guesses as to how to

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33 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:199.
34 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:205.
35 Connin 1990:315fn.

exploit situations which present themselves to us. Graham[36] uses the example of a bridge game where the conventions are such that regardless of our intention in uttering the word "redouble", if we do so in the appropriate circumstances we will bring about a certain determinate effect.

Similarly, both Graham and Femia note how the question of whether Locke put forward a defence or justification of unlimited capital accumulation (in his *Treatises*) is independent of his intention; "It may be that the text had the force (of such a justification) whether Locke intended it to or not"[37fn]. Now there is a difference here, or at least a difference for us, between social and political locutions on the one hand, and artistic acts on the other. The crucial thing about social and political locutions is that they are, or tend towards being (in an everyday sense), conversational, whilst art is intended to be discrete and self-standing; a silent, or at least un-augmented partner in the conversation. As Kirsch and Roen[38] note concerning Plato's advice to the rhetorician, Plato's counsel assumes an audience directly in front of the speaker, that he can inter-act with and accommodate. In such a situation there may be questions and answers, points of clarification. In this world (by which I mean the world of more-or-less immediate conversation), having made an attempt to communicate if we feel we are misunderstood we may usually try again.

In the West we of course retain this kind of general conversational framework (we could scarcely do without it), but we have also evolved special rules which pertain to artistic acts. Essentially what these rules are intended to do is to make some objects (here texts) available for a specific kind of reading. The rules are intended to make these objects available, as natural objects are, for contemplation.

The paradigm of such an aesthetic object would be the poem. Poets, as Bloom puts it, fight "..to have their initial chance alone"[39]. It was this character of the poem

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36 Tully 1988:152.
37 Tully 1988:153, also 172. Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* might similarly give support to anti-welfarist tendencies.
38 Kirsch and Roen 1990:15-16.
39 Bloom 1973:18.

that lead Socrates to say that poets were; "Like prophets and oracular persons, who say many fine things without knowing what it is that they are saying"[40].

The same point is of course made by Oakeshott[41]. Crucially for Oakeshott, we have *learned* how to appreciate "poetically". We have learned how not to treat poetry as political speech, and indeed we sometimes have difficulty in maintaining this stance[42]. Obviously if we cannot maintain the achievement of this perspective (the result of contact with objects which are non-symbolic *for us*[43]) then we will have difficulty with art. For the "author's meaning" (or some engagement other than delight) always remains in the background, and provides a radical alternative to poetic delight in the "object" itself. It is the autonomous notion of art which is continually under threat by the heteronomous.

If we look to the author's meaning we will then, as Olsen fears[44], have great addenda to literary works, with questions being asked of the author, and his responses being as legitimate a part of the work as his first (here) "unclear" attempt to express himself. We need also fear psychological and sociological accounts which purport to tell us not what the author meant, but what he had to mean.

The loss of the poetic engagement is, however, perhaps secondary to the other problem which arises when we find we cannot maintain our understanding of the non-symbolic and fictional as that. That is, we must worry about the consequences of works out of their environment and out of their time. Furthermore, whilst it may be true that all artistic work might be transformed by its context into a practical/political contribution, there seems plainly to be a special problem with literature (and as Oakeshott seems to suspect, particularly with political texts); certainly compared to, for example, sculpture[45]. Literature is at the inter-section of common expression and art,

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40 Newton-Molina 1976:17.
41 Oakeshott 1962:10,217.
42 Oakeshott 1962:239.
43 Oakeshott 1962:238.
44 Loewenberg 1975:46-47.
45 Loewenberg 1975:48.

and it therefore is the first to fall when the special conventions which surround art begin to crumble.

This change in conventions is dramatically illustrated when we look to the reception of Salman Rushdies *Satanic Verses* (although here conventions changed spatially, both between nations and within heterogeneous national groups, rather than temporally). The vicissitudes that beset Rushdie's work, and determine its "meaning", are no different to those that may be found to act on any other work.

If we look to the debate surrounding Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* what we find among the liberal intelligentsia is an absolute belief that anything that looks like a novel, and is sold as a novel, is necessarily a novel. There is a belief in art by designation; if something is intended by an author to be a poem then it is a poem, and not the shopping list that it appears to be[46].

Indeed this notion of art by designation is so strong that it allows some very surprising claims to be made, both by Rushdie and his supporters. In researching the *Satanic Verses* Rushdie had read works banned in the fundamentalist Islamic world, and had come to realize that his book would be regarded as blasphemy. Despite this Rushdie tells us that "..a writer must *suppress* the knowledge of what effect his words will have in order to do the writing"[47]. Noting Mohammed's tolerance on his return to Mecca, save his execution of a few authors (sic) and actresses, Rushdie resolved to "explore" the conflict "..between the sacred text and the profane text, between revealed literature and imagined literature"[48].

Those who speak in defence of Rushdie are resolute in their upholding of his right to sail this close to the wind. Michael Foot, for example, tells us that;

> If people are now being killed in Salman Rushdie's native Bombay because [sic] of his book, is it not time to cry halt, time for Rushdie and his publishers to call the whole thing off, recall copies and promise never to commit the same offence again?

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46 Loewenberg 1975:45.
47 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:4 my emphasis.
48 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:29.

> To which the short and the long answer must be: the killings are not attributable to Rushdie's book, not a single sentence within it incites people to kill or offers excuse for the killers (Appignanesi and Maitland 1990:242).

In a similar vein the "Observer" newspaper under the heading "Works of art need no apologies" told us that;

> It is not the job of the artist to make life more comfortable for societies or governments. It is the job of democratic governments to protect the artist's right to free expression and the liberty of life. That is what all the sound and fury over Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, is fundamentally about - not whether life would have been easier if he had never written it, nor whether it is an offensive or even readable book, nor whether its publication endangers our international interests (Ibid:121).

Or to put the matter clearly, it is held that if a piece of work causes great offence, is of little literary merit, endangers life and harms our national interests, the sole concern of government is to protect the author in his production of this work, and indeed presumably in the production of any other such works.

By contrast those who express some measure of opposition to Rushdie's work (mostly Muslims, but not entirely[49]) look to the social and political effects of his work. They assert that the form of his work meant that it must *necessarily* be considered abusive and vilification[50], and that Rushdie must have known that his work would be instrumental in bringing about violence[51]. In other words truths about the world meant that this form of words could not be without referent, could not be considered to be merely "a novel".

Most worrying is the suggestion of fundamental differences in literary conventions across the world, and the incomprehension and conflict that therefore must necessarily result from the translation and dissemination of works from one language into others. What is poetic transformation within one set of conventions may be abuse in another[52]. For example Malise Ruthven notes a fundamental difference between Western and Muslim literary conventions;

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49 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:217.
50 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:46,78.
51 Mazrui in CRE Report 1990:93.
52 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:25,26,28.

> In a society where most people are illiterate or semi-literate, reading and writing are public acts. The verb in Arabic for "to read" also means "to recite" and is pregnant with religious meaning: The command "Read/recite! in the Name of thy Lord" are the very first words God is supposed to have addressed to the Prophet Muhammed: the word "Quran" itself refers to Muhammed's reading or recitation of the divine word. In Muslim countries private speech is much freer than what is written: print - which was only introduced in the late nineteenth century - has largely been restricted to the public realm (Appignanesi and Maitland 1990:205).

Now it is possible simply to refuse to consider or act upon this dependence of the writer on his audience, and to assert an absolute liberty of expression. It is, however, difficult to see what this liberty is based upon. Whether there are such things as art and literature, or whether there are only social and political contributions, is not something that can be determined either by looking at the works that purport to be artistic, or by asking of the authors of those works what they intended in writing.

Furthermore, not to be a fundamentalist liberal is not in itself to be an authoritarian, which is a truth that many, including Rushdie himself, seem not to understand. This is evinced by his response to the banning of *Satanic Verses* in India. The banning order cites the risk that, through misrepresentation and distortion, the book might be instrumental in bringing about disorder. To this Rushdie replies (in an open letter to Rajiv Gandhi):

> So now it appears that my book is not deemed blasphemous or objectionable in itself, but is being proscribed for, so to speak, its own good! This really is astounding. It is as though, having identified an innocent person as a likely target for assault by muggers or rapists, you were to put that person in jail for protection. This is no way, Mr Gandhi, for a free society to behave (Appignanesi and Maitland 1990:43).

But of course in a free society you can be "arrested" for your own protection; under extreme threat innocent people (that is, innocent of any criminal offence) may have their liberty circumscribed. Of course Hume is correct that you cannot refute an hypothesis by pointing to what you believe are its practical consequences, but you can

oppose the propagation of that hypothesis, and regret the harm caused by it. You might well also regret that such a measure was necessary.

It *would* be unfortunate if some forms of writing were thought so generally unwholesome as to be intolerable. The special problem for works such as Nozick's is, of course, that in the West he represents the threat which in other cultures is posed by Rushdie. Further, neither the intellectuals nor the masses seem generally capable of seeing Nozick's work as other than prescriptive, and moreover as a prescriptivism which many of those who support Rushdie have no love for. As Oakeshott saw "political texts" do provide the most difficult literature. If this is the situation which we face then we must deal with it. Neither the constabulary nor the state is infinitely powerful, and each must deal with the world as it finds it. So must the author.

IV Solutions to the Dilemma

There are a large number of beliefs that we can have about the relationship of art to the world which lessen the concern that writing might harm the conceptual schema of citizens, or otherwise harmfully affect society. By maintaining beliefs such as these we might believe that the city should in fact be thought safe for philosophy, and that, for example, Barry might reconcile himself to the work of Nozick, and need not feel obliged to engage in un-philosophical rebuttal.

(i) An Evolved Hard Category of the Poetic

As I mentioned earlier, to the extent to which conventions exist which allow the writer to influence the uptake of his work, he can endeavour to meet those conventions. It will be of course impossible to deliberately create such a category, as its existence depends on the expectations of the audience; on their developed capacity to see with eyes which are, to use Fry's term, "biologically blasphemous"[53].

The kinds of things we might do to affect the uptake of a work might be to place it in an academic journal, and use expressions of a certain complexity and

53 see Blocker 1979:164.

exclusiveness, in an attempt to ensure an audience only of connoisseurs. By such means we might hope to indicate to the reader the character of the work, as distinct from its subject matter and the materials used in its production.

This, however, does assume that one's audience, for example the readership of a journal of political philosophy, consists exclusively or mainly of those least likely to respond inappropriately to the work, which of course need not necessarily be so. I do not think we can go as far down this path as May believes[54], giving consideration to all the predilections of an audience (especially for a work such as a novel). But to the extent to which conventions exist which identify the genre we wish to contribute to, we can attempt to meet them.

(ii) An Institutionalized Polity

As I have said before, a polity only exists in the judgements of its people, and therefore when we speak of an institutionalized polity what we really refer to is a people of solid and not easily swayed judgement. In other words we can deny that writing might conceivably pose a threat, and assert that that which is deep and valuable (our judgement), is similarly anchored. We can also here accept that the direction of a work's influence may be pernicious, but that its actual effect is so minimal that it can be ignored, and that other beneficial effects of this work, or alternatively the harmful effect of making liberty in publishing divisible, make this a situation that we should tolerate.

Milton[55] makes much of the stolid qualities of the Englishman, and tells us that when evil and error are abroad regulating publishing will not help us, but rather,

> ...those unwritten or at least unconstraining laws of virtuous education, religious and civil nurture, which Plato there mentions, as the bonds and ligaments of the commonwealth, the pillars and sustainers of every written statute; these they be, which will bear chief sway in such matters as these, when all licensing will be easily eluded (Jebb ed 1940:28).

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54 May 1989:892.
55 see Jebb ed 1940:37,38,50.

It may be, as Knutson suggests[56], that the degree of tolerance in a society reflects the degree to which the members share a cultural perspective, and indeed Rushdie himself cites the strength of Islam as a reason why his work should be tolerated[57]. Similarly we might imagine that our habit of helping the poor is so entrenched that we can afford to have Nozick's work in our world, and afford to respond to it philosophically.

(iii) Art as Nourishment

Instead of the view that we are relatively impervious to art, we may have the view that art nourishes us and makes us "more of ourselves". In other words works of literature are subsumed by the individual much in the way food is consumed. There might be a sense in which "we are what we eat", but it is a very attenuated one.

This kind of notion seems to be at the root of Fay Weldon's claim that the bible "..is a superior revelatory work to the *Koran*.." because it provides a God, "..more interesting...one worth studying...One you can *interpret*" [58].
Naguib Mahfouz, a previous winner of the Nobel prize for literature makes essentially the same point;

> When I take advantage of the cultural goods of others, I broaden my horizons, increase my knowledge. This is something positive. I take in what I like, build on it; I refuse what doesn't speak to me...(Appignanesi and Maitland 1990:191).

In other words we bring a "world of judgement" to poetic works, and the subsumption which then takes place makes ridiculous any great concern over any particular work. Art is in a sense supra-political, and can do only good[59]. As Milton puts it;

> To the pure all things are pure; not only meats and drinks but all kinds of knowledge, whether of good or evil: the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled. For books are as

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56 Knutson 1973:175.
57 Appignanesi & Maitland ed 1990:29.
58 CRE 1990:3. My Emphasis.
59 see Milton in Jebb ed 1940:6-7,24.

> meats and viands; some of good some of evil substance; and yet God in that unapocryphal vision said without exception; "Rise, Peter, kill and eat"; leaving the choice to each man's discreation. Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing fron unwholesome; and best books to a naughty mind are not unapplicable to occasions of evil (Jebb ed 1940:17-18).

The claim that a person or a society may be helped to become "more of themselves" also underlies Socrates justification of his own philosophizing. In Plato's "Apology" he tells his compatriots;

> ...if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to the city by the god - though it seems a ridiculous thing to say - as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfil some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city: I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company (May 1989:879).

The gadfly allows the horse to become more equinal, although it does not transform it. Similarly, a philosophically inspired debate or a perfect conversational situation might reduce any incongruity between a person or a society's norms and their behaviour.

It is the claim of critical theory that it, like the interjections of Socrates, might make us "more of ourselves". It is perhaps, therefore, appropriate to say something on the subject of "critical theory", or rather specifically on one aspect of critical theory which would perhaps make it unobjectionable, by insulating it from the criticisms of "Ideology" of chapter two.

As Geuss says, it is a supposition of critical theory that the theory is confirmed as true, validated, when the persons to whom it is directed act on the theory. It must therefore be the case that the "gesturing" by the theorist does not greatly affect the skills of judgement of the persons to whom it is directed. Geuss tells us that;

> A critical theory addressed to the proletariat is confirmed if its description of the objective situation of the proletariat in society is confirmed by normal observational means, and if the members of the proletariat freely assent to the theory, in particular to the views about freedom and coercion expressed in the theory (Geuss 1981:79).

Judgement may in fact be like this, although "normal observational means" seems to suggest that not everyone's judgement is like this. And for critical theory to be something more than misleading Ideology it is important that judgement actually be like this, for the reasons discussed in chapter two.

For example, where there are contending theorists there must be no general doubt as to which is the bona-fide critical theorist, and which the false prophet. The "truth" about the audiences condition, and their perception of it, can shift for itself. All but one of the contending theorists will be pointing at states of affairs which no-one can recognize.

Accepting its description of itself critical theory is, as Walzer says, "an inside job"[60]; the connected critic is "flesh of our flesh"[61]. Such prophets, "..had advocates in the hearts of their audience"[62].

The problem with the description "critical theorist" is that it identifies an authorial intention and not just a description that might come to be applied to a speaker or writer. This possibility I find unconvincing. Critical theorists, like the less reputable ideologists, have an account of how there should be some who are especially adept at discerning the dissonance in their society. The social critic is "marginal but deeply committed"[63]; he might be of the society but distant from it through being either young or old[64].

There is also the suggestion that as abridgements of the way that we or other men have lived (Walzer says he is "tempted" by Oakeshott's notion of "abridgement") critical theory is a crib that cannot mislead; as Walzer puts it, it is "..a reflection upon the familiar, a reinvention of our own homes"[65].

What is more plausible, I think, is the notion that some literary works might *become* critical theory, might stir our rememberence, help us (or at least be felt to help

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60 Walzer 1987:45.
61 Walzer 1987:69.
62 Walzer 1987:76.
63 Galston 1989:124.
64 Walzer 1987:61.
65 Walzer 1987:17.

us) become "more of ourselves". In other words what makes critical theory "flesh of our flesh" is our practical judgement of its aptness, our assimilation of it. We adopt it and make it our own. As Oakeshott would put it, the "transfusion" must be of our own blood group, we must assimilate it and make it our own, and in the end what matters is our "native strength"[66]. True enlightenment is a virtue not a realizable and achievable end. Critical theory, in my benign characterization, is a judgement of a works effect, not a genre to which we can straightforwardly contribute.

There are two ways we may "engage" in critical theory. That is we may write with the intention of contributing such a work, or we may, as readers, tolerate the possibility of such a work; read such works being minded to (perhaps) accepts their critique. The crucial question remains though, whether through critical theory we divest ourselves of the parasitic and contra-social, or whether we, in engaging in this activity, give the social order some false homogeneity, based on a reading of its "foundations" or its "essential character", which it does not, and should not, have. For a writer's characterization is not necessarily a reflection of the "spirit" of our institutions or mores. Indeed in a sense his characterization, in that it is not conduct, not activity, is necessarily "the letter". Whether this "letter" can shepherd conduct is doubtful. To reiterate, "critical theory" should best be thought of as a justification of art in the world, or perhaps what a writer would hope to produce, rather than a description of what any particular writer engages in.

(iv) Art as Facilitative but Non-Instrumental in Change

Similar to the idea of art simply nourishing us, and becoming subsumed (and thus changing form so completely as to disappear), here the artist produces things (principally terms) which persist and can be seen to persist in political life.

The advantage of this kind of thesis is that we account for the very obvious persistence of terms and concepts emanating from some writers in the political speech

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66 see Oakeshott 1962:107-8.

of some (often disenchanted) citizens, without attributing the disenchantment to the writing.

Manning takes up Oakeshott's claim that there is a "language" of politics which the political activist must learn in order to participate in the activity[67], and goes to some lengths to differentiate this language from the communication of information[68], the discernment of political goals or methods[69] or the prediction of political developments[70]. Instead what "political talk" provides "..is a medium in which we can make an effective declaration of our emotional commitments in the political arena"[71].

Ideological jargon is then a social marker of the kind of person that you are. Of course from the perspective of the writer (if he succeeds) he may see himself as, in Benn and Peters phrase[72], a "radical Hegelian", being very intimately involved in bringing about the new society.

The person concerned to defend liberty in publication could imagine art being taken up to the extent to which it is needed. A genetic analogy might make the matter clear; mutations are less important than the environment which allows some of them to survive. Or to change the analogy, we do not explain a fire in a foundry by citing the presence of sparks; the sparks are always with us, we must look for combustible material[73fn].

Indeed any account of political change that stresses the non-pedagogic/ideological/literary tends necessarily to create space for literature. If we believe that the source of political events is explained by non-literary factors, then even literary works that betray a wish on the part of the author to engage in the political world can be safely ignored. This mechanism of change can either be a meta-belief about the working of the social order, or a belief about the individuals involved in a political movement.

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67 see especially Oakeshott 1962:321-22.
68 Manning 1980:44.
69 Manning 1980:45.
70 Manning 1980:46.
71 Manning 1980:93, see also 119,121.
72 Benn and Peters 1977:312.
73 Tocqueville makes this point, Johnson 1983:88.

For example, if dramatic social change is explained by the modernization process[74fn], or the emergence of institutionalized cultural segments within a society by urbanization and economic change[75fn], then the activities of writers become less important. For the strict economic determinist for example liberty of expression is unproblematic. Misunderstanding the situation some might write in defence of the established order, and would thus identify themselves as apologists, and might be prosecuted for their guilty mind, or they might instead be tolerated. There could however be no civil action, as no harm would be done.

Additionally, we can give comfort to the artist or author who finds himself associated with malcontents[76fn] by identifying the cause of this state of affairs with, as Hoffer puts it "..responses indigenous to the frustrated mind"[77].

Where art is defended as being merely facilitative in social change, but in no way instrumental, its defence is made to rest, in a sense, on its impotence. Barry has, accordingly, mistaken the potency of Nozick's work.

(v) A Liberal Chaos

There is a danger in making use of a scientific theory from outside an ongoing tradition of scientific inquiry, and that is that one may engage in the hack "science" which I myself have criticized.

I must therefore make clear that I intend Chaos Theory to provide merely a metaphor for the way in which a liberal society may, and perhaps in an unreflective way already does, reconcile itself to literary products which may cause, or become associated with, change, disruption or upheaval.

Chaos Theory is as much an orientation as a developed body of theory[78], and it is as much concerned with finding order amid apparent disorder as it is with the

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74 For example see Huntington 1968 *passim* or Johnson 1983:176.
75 For example Young 1976:28.
76 When Manson tells us that he should not be held accountable as he "did not write the music" we need reasons to continue to look to him, and not to The Beatles "White Album"; see Cooper ed 1974:37, 130 (although this also means we must disclaim the claims made for "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or "Guernica").
77 Hoffer 1952:10.
78 Gleick 1988:5,306-7.

reverse. However, within Chaos Theory there is a standard illustration that may encourage a phlegmatic attitude towards art, and that illustration involves confounding the notion of the general understanding of the universe as a simple deterministic order. As Gleick puts it;

> Scientists marching under Newton's banner actually waved another flag that said something like this: Given an approximate knowledge of a system's initial conditions and an understanding of natural law, one can calculate the approximate behaviour of the system. This assumption lay at the philosophical heart of science. As one theoretician liked to tell his students:
>
> 'The basic idea of Western science is that you don't have to take into account the falling of a leaf on some planet in another galaxy when you're trying to account for the motion of a billiard ball on a pool table on earth. Very small influences can be neglected. There's a convergence in the way things work, and arbitrarily small influences don't blow up to have arbitrarily large effects'(Gleick 1988:14-15).

Now this may hold for billiard tables, but in other circumstances it does not hold; for instance, in economic forecasting and, famously, in weather forecasting. Gleick paraphrases the discovery of Edward Lorenz;

> [S]uppose the earth could be covered with sensors spread one foot apart, rising at one foot intervals all the way to the top of the atmosphere. Suppose every sensor gives perfectly accurate readings of temperature, pressure, humidity and any other quantity a meteorologist would want. Precisely at noon an infinitely powerful computer takes all the data and calculates what will happen at each point at 12.01, then 12.02, then 12.03...
>
> The computer will still be unable to predict whether Princeton, New Jersey, will have sun or rain on a day one month away. At noon the spaces between the sensors will hide fluctuations that the computer will not know about, tiny deviations from the average. By 12.01, those fluctuations will already have created small errors one foot away. Soon the errors will have multiplied to the ten-foot scale, and so on up to the size of the globe (Gleick 1988:21).

As Lorenz saw this "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" implies that we may alter the weather, but not in any foreseeable way. Similarly, a butterfly in Peking can transform the weather a month hence in New York, but not in a way that can cause us concern. This knowledge does not give us reason to kill butterflies; or gadflies for

that matter. If we believe that the social world is more like a weather system than a billiard table then we might also believe that an artistic expression might cause a revolution, but equally that same expression, in different but not *knowably* different circumstances, might prevent one. Nozick might undermine, bolster or leave unaffected our propensity to help the poor.

Conceiving of the relationship between art and the world as akin to that between a butterfly and a weather system allows us to maintain the non-reference and non-relevance of art, without being committed to maintaining non-effect also.

The insight, that some of the things which we can conceive of as wholes or systems are sufficiently impenetrable to allow knowledge of the effect of any constituent part is also made use of by Milton. Having talked of the complexity of society and of the infinite number of ways that persons may be influenced, Milton says of the attempt to manage society through the control of books;

> ...he who was pleasantly disposed could not well avoid to liken it to the exploit of that gallent man who thought to pound up the crows by shutting his park gate (Jebb ed 1940:23).

Put simply, our music, dancing, conversation[79], dress and "household habits" may have social effects, but they are outside the possibility of deliberate control; "[W]hatever thing we hear or see, sitting, walking, travelling or conversing, may be fitly called our book, and is of the same effect that writings are.."[80].

Our "book" is in this sense our precept, our knowledge, and it is obtained from an infinite number of sources, including the reinforcement of some precepts by the consideration and rejection of others.

Indeed, just as a weather system, whilst fluctuating wildly, does have a homoeostatic capacity and a mean, it may be that liberty of expression, whilst being involved in fluctuations within the political system, serves a purpose in maintaining the order *in toto*, the precise nature of which we cannot know[81/n].

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79 Jebb ed 1940:26-7.
80 Jebb ed 1940:30.
81 Which is, perhaps unfortunately, not unlike Elliot's notion that unpredictable forces might spontaneously create harmony; quoted in O'Sullivan 1976:127.

Conclusion

Fundamentally the problem that we have is that things do not in themselves have unmistakable poetic or philosophical characters. They may have such a character for the cognoscenti, but others may respond to such works in very different ways.

Whilst liberalism is now our credo, and our instinctive reaction is to defend an absolute liberty of expression, I feel that after a moment's thought it becomes clear that words are acts, and like all acts we must give some thought to their consequences. For example, as May[82] notes, Nietzsche's work was used to give support to anti-semitism, and given the climate of the times and the manner in which he wrote this could reasonably have been foreseen.

It is not enough to show, as Kaufmann tries to do, that a very close reading of Nietzsche's work makes it clear that his work cannot be read as a straightforward support of anti-semitism. Causation through a "misrepresentation" of one's writing, where that "misrepresentation" could be easily foreseen, is no different from any other causative act. We cannot unquestioningly assimilate Nietzsche to Corot and Donatello as engaged in the production of art. In the case of Nietzsche it might be argued that he should have ameliorated the consequences of his work with more straightforward political contributions, even if this addendum was thought to destroy his art.

As Locke saw[83], whether one, in one's writing, approaches a "gymnasium", or a "field of battle" depends on one's audience, one's context. And I cannot see how this truth can be simply ignored, or how ignoring it can be held to be the mark of a liberal. In determining what it is that one has done audience is all. Literary works, as T.S.Eliot argued are set loose in the world. We must have some kind of belief concerning the consequences of this.

The admission that we have "knowledge" through social living of how to conduct our lives seems to me to be, in some formulation, unavoidable. Literature (in

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82 May 1989:886-7.
83 Abrams ed 1940:210.

which I include political philosophy) cannot be (or rather should not; cannot be allowed to be) taken up wholesale to the displacement of this knowledge.

If it should come to seem that some things do matter, are pernicious, we require some account of the relationship of art to the world. If we are to have explanatory political philosophy we cannot allow life to become "fascinated by" and ultimately imitate, this "new wonder"[84fn].

84 Wilde's construal of the affect of art in the world; see Novitz.

Conclusion

To conclude I will (i) very briefly state what has been maintained in this thesis concerning the character of political philosophy, by noting the principal features of my case. I will also (ii) say something on what I think are the implications of this case, and in particular how the countering of prescriptivism might actually be pursued.

(i) In chapter one it was maintained that political philosophy is an ill-defined activity, and that the work of Oakeshott provides a means of illuminating the premises which underlie the various activities pursued by political philosophers. Once these premises are revealed then the activity in which it might be defensible for political philosophers to engage becomes more clear. Oakeshott makes this possible both by his "characterizations" of activities to which it is thought political philosophy might relate (that is philosophy, history, science and our practical judgement), and also in the tension in his own work, which largely prompted the discussion of chapter six.

In chapter two it was argued that it is a rationalistic presumption which allows us to equate ideological conceptualizations with a habit of conduct. It seems that the acceptance of ideological writing as in some way *bona fide* depends on this false identity being granted between a habit of conduct and an ideological conceptualization. Once we have removed this error from our thinking we may oppose many of the activities of political philosophers wholesale. We will no longer mistakenly continue to equate "philosophy" with our "philosophy of life", and no longer assume that the display in this area of the trappings of learning (such as theoretical terms) is itself evidence of an improvement. We will not assume that the replacement of our present judgements by more bookish descriptions is something self-evidently better; the replacement of "prejudice" by "knowledge".

The more mundane activity of the "kibbitzing" philosopher is also shown to be defective, albeit for different reasons. The activity of the "general purpose intellectual" involves some of the skills of the analytical philosopher in recognizing what the objections to an argument are likely to be. These objections are then met with "truths" and "proofs" drawn from more specialist inquiries, usually economics, but on occasion

other inquiries also. The kibbitzing intellectual lays claim to knowledge which he does not have, and his activity falls between three widely dispersed stools; that is, the practical knowledge of the citizen, the specialist theoretical understanding of the economist, and the understanding of the philosopher.

In chapter three the implications for political philosophy of the "new discoveries" in the philosophy of science were discussed. It was held that science is indeed a "world of ideas", but that this can no more lead to a prescriptive political philosophy than can the mistaken contrary notion that science interfaces in a more or less immediate fashion with what is "really" there. This case is pursued by examining the work of those writers whom it seems are thought to have demonstrated that support for a prescriptive political philosophy may follow from science being a world of ideas.

In chapter four, through a critique of the work of Rorty and MacIntyre the limitations of historical analysis as a diagnostic tool for the body politic were demonstrated. It was held that historical analysis can neither help us understand our "condition" nor tell us how we might conduct ourselves in order to realize some other state of affairs.

The legitimate activity of the political philosopher was the subject of chapter five. It was maintained that a deductive inferential tale is what the political philosopher might achieve. That is, the political philosopher may attempt to show what it can be plausibly argued follows or is implied. This activity provides an opportunity for us to learn the language of explanation. Some may criticize this activity as involving the reflection upon terms which have their use and life elsewhere; and this may well be so. But it is an activity in which, under the right circumstances, the skill of explanation might be learned.

In the final chapter I put forward the kind of argument which might be used to support political philosophy as this discrete activity. Thinking of the relationship of "art" to the world in one of the ways described there removes the fear that explanatory political philosophy might take on a politically influential character.

(ii) The implications for political philosophy of this case are as follows. At the moment it seems that in order to engage in political philosophy one must first engage in a willing suspension of disbelief; one must not be over-keen to ask hard questions. Indeed one is thought of as not engaging in good faith if all one has to offer are objections; or if one seems to be continually questioning the premises. This unwillingness to launch an attack on the whole notion of prescriptive political philosophy is at least in part a consequence of the fact that some variant of this is what most political philosophers or political theorists are engaged in. Almost all those who might be critics instead choose to live in glass houses.

Firstly, therefore, we must realize that there is in fact no *need* to suspend disbelief in prescriptive political philosophy. For of course the criticisms of prescriptivism seem telling and straightforward, and it seems that the only reason that they are not generally accepted and acted upon is that there is thought to be nothing else. We must stress therefore that there is a feasible and humane alternative available to us; that is, dealing with problems as they arise by making use of what we know, which today involves a life lived under law in a democratic political order. My attempt to limit what might be done by the political philosopher, and to accept as *bona-fide* whatever emerges from our established political procedures (whatever is seen to be intimated) must therefore be admitted to be a very different project to the one that I attack. Where political philosophy matches my characterization the only hand one has in prescription is in a political context with one's fellow citizens. Many political philosophers are engaged in what no doubt seem to them positive, perhaps progressive, and incontrovertibly necessary projects. Realizing that we in fact have no need for "political theory" would give great encouragement to the iconoclasm which would see an end to prescriptive political philosophy. I should say here that theorizing the relationship of the citizen to his more narrowly defined political milieu must be an engagement for another time.

In the actual attack on prescriptivism it must not be thought that the simple restatement of the objections to historicist diagnosis or to the attempts to found a

prescriptive philosophy on a philosophy of science would greatly alter the situation which we face. As I have tried to show the arguments against these forms of prescriptivism are old and powerful arguments. Rather, we must undertake the detailed treatment of each prescriptive philosophy as it arises. For example there is a need to demonstrate just what is possible through historical diagnosis by writing counter-histories to those of Rorty and MacIntyre; perhaps the writing of a "Whig history" of the present. There is also a need to attempt to state precisely what is asserted and denied in the work of the more influential continental thinkers.

As I said in the introduction the readership for political philosophy is largely those attracted to the prescriptivist project. Only those broadly disposed to the prescriptive notions apparently implicit in all these "new developments" are prepared to examine these matters; to "set down details and come to particulars". Those averse to the circumscription of the latest variant of prescriptivism, it being seen as their (at last satisfactory) contribution to the activity of setting the world to rights, must necessarily be thought unwilling and unable to conceive of the loss of this project, and its replacement by one in which they feel unsure of both their ability to participate, and of the worth of the project itself. In the absence of hard criticism the impression left is that great movements are afoot, that old prescriptive notions might be flawed but "new developments" have created new possibilities. Those who have withdrawn from the field badly hurt or mortally wounded, who have seen their own prescriptivist dream shattered, cannot but feel a common purpose with those who remain. There is therefore a need for some scepticism in the reading of new works. Men will not identify themselves as anything as crude as historicists, or as having mistaken what is implied in experience being pre-suppositional; they must be shown that this is what they are or have done.

The character of the activities of the scientist, the philosopher and the historian do, however, provide us with the material to set mistaken activities in their appropriate light; it gives us good ground on which to stand and fight.

It will not have escaped the reader that what remains for the political philosopher in the wake of the attack on prescriptivism is very much a "pseudo-philosophy"; an education in the language of explanation which has its weakness in its limited nature and its strength in its accessibility and its apparently important "implications". In this political philosophy we may re-enact great debates, "solve", far from the fray, what are thought intractable problems. This political philosophy has the strength which a well designed game has over formal logic; that is, colour. It has merit in its accessibility and, providing that this is not misunderstood, in its apparent contemporaneity.

What is left are the skills of the lawyer rather than the seer; a profession rather than a calling, with no particular place in public life, no place for oneself or one's work in the common consciousness, and no mention in history.

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