UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Postmodern Debate and the Search for Emancipation: Rationality, The Self and Politics in the Thought of Foucault, Derrida, Rorty and MacIntyre

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For Steve,

'God is dead, Marxism is undergoing crisis,
and I don't feel so hot myself.'

Umberto Eco

INTRODUCTION.

The postmodern philosophical project, which aims to undermine the universalistic, metanarrational and transcendental aspects of traditional Western thought and to bring about an awareness of 'otherness' through deconstruction, has been dismissed out of hand by some theorists. Roger Scruton, for example, has said,

> What deconstruction sets before us is a profound mystery, which can be approached only through the incantation of invented words, through a Newspeak which deconstructs its own meaning in the act of utterance. When at last the veil is lifted, we perceive a wondrous landscape: a world of negations, a world in which, wherever we look for presence we find absence, a world not of people but of vacant idols, a world which offers, in the places where we seek for order, friendship and moral value, only the skeleton of power. There is no creation in this world, though it is full of cleverness - a cleverness actively deployed in the cause of Nothing. . . It is, in short, the world of the Devil.[1]

While in general terms Scruton's intuitions on the subject may be right, such criticisms do not get to the heart of the 'postmodern problematic'. This thesis aims to demonstrate the following points: Firstly, that the postmodern insights and critique of the Enlightenment project are well founded, that there do not exist any universal or transcendental truths. Secondly, that the attempts of postmodern theorists to derive from these insights any implication for politics, society, or the self, whether of an emancipatory or of a pragmatic nature, are misplaced. The validity of the second point will be supported by a demonstration that there is an inevitable use of *a priori* truths in the work of the chosen thinkers as well as everyday discourse; and that postmodern theory, highlighted in the specific concerns of the deconstructed 'other', remains very much within the liberal democratic tradition, which can itself be seen as a product of the Enlightenment project.

The philosophers Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, and Alasdair MacIntyre have been chosen for analysis as their work exhibits the most fundamental tensions within the postmodern stance, tensions which need to be delineated and examined for an appraisal of the future of postmodern political philosophy. Each chapter is divided into sections on Rationality, The Self, and Politics and Society, in part to try to simplify

and make accessible their often complex and vague theses, but also as an attempt to reflect how their own rationalities, and views of rationality, are developed into political commentary and prescription.

It must be noted from the outset that these thinkers do not hold identical definitions of the Enlightenment or the Western philosophical tradition, and that subsequently, their critiques and analyses differ. While some postmodern theorists are attacking, for example, what they see as the failure of the Enlightenment project, others condemn the entire Western philosophic tradition from Plato onwards. This might appear less vague if we note that at many points in the postmodern debate the Enlightenment appears to be presented as the symbolic offspring of the Western tradition, with Plato as its father. Symbolic, that is, because this aspect of the postmodern project tends to characterise the Enlightenment in terms of its fundamental, underlying ethos of objectivity and transcendentalism, rather than of its specific manifestations. We similarly find that the references to their predecessors, from Aristotle to Nietzsche, have been criticised as often vague and based on misinterpretations. However, by allowing that these references are symbolic characterisations of ideas, we can attempt to capture the themes and tensions at the heart of the debate.

This approach might also go some way to explaining the way that terms such as transcendentalism, essentialism, objectivity, metanarrational and foundationalism are often used loosely and interchangeably. In general, the postmodern critique is aimed at traditional philosophy's attempt to know essential truths which can provide objective criteria by which to judge our representations 'accurately', and the subsequent moral positions which arise from this. The notion of transcendentalism is therefore always criticised, either implicitly or explicitly, as an inherent feature of the Western philosophic tradition. There appear to be two interrelated senses of 'transcendental' as referred to in the postmodern project. One

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applies to objects, truths, and concepts of reality as somehow outside of and prior to any contingent, spatio-temporal factors, including our description of them. The other applies to the *viewpoint* from which such objects, truths, and concepts of reality are described as outside of and prior to any contingent factors which could effect this description of them.

The argument central to postmodern philosophical discourse is therefore that while we might not be able to say for certain that no transcendental truths exist, we can say that there exists *no* transcendental viewpoint from which truths and reality can be known in this way. It is this critique of the notion of transcendentalism, and its accompanying conceptual terminology, which serves to characterise the thinkers under analysis as postmodern, whether they accept the label or not. And it is their desire to extrapolate political implications of this critique which characterises the 'postmodern problematic', and which this thesis aims to analyse.

With Foucault, it is the holistic, totalising approach of traditional philosophy and epistemology which he criticises:

> The old questions of the traditional analysis (what links should be made between disparate events? What continuity or overall significance do they possess? Is it possible to define a total history or must one be content with reconstituting connections?) are now being replaced by questions of another type: which strata should be isolated from others? What criteria of periodisation should be adopted for each of them?[2]

Derrida criticises the Western philosophical tradition for the way that it has downgraded the sign in its never-ending search for what lies behind it, the signified. This philosophical desire for an unmediated truth has resulted in the somewhat arrogant confidence of Western rationality, a confidence, he believes, which has come about through the deliberate exclusion of 'unreason' in a dialectic strategy which was adopted from Plato onwards. His concept of 'differance' is employed to explore how language and meaning have been constructed and constituted in such a way as to perpetuate this exclusion, and his

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deconstructive methodology is intended to highlight and overturn the hierarchies and universalism which have resulted from it.

Rorty's attack on the Western tradition can be seen as similar in that he believes that the attempt to explicate 'rationality' and 'objectivity' in terms of accurate representation is deceptive. In place of traditional epistemology, Rorty offers the 'hermeneutic conversation' and pragmatism, which avoid, he believes, the assumption that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable.

MacIntyre's critique is directed more specifically at what he believes to be the failure of the Enlightenment project, and the subsequent problems which have arisen from this failure. He firstly criticises the Enlightenment for its claimed neutrality, and argues that although there can be no *a priori* argument for the non-existence of a neutral stance or a universal standpoint, the fact that liberalism (as the strongest claimant to provide such grounds) has failed in this respect, is evidence enough that there is no such neutral ground. Secondly, he argues that the philosophical rejection of the Aristotelian view of the notion of 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-telos' is at odds with the attempts of the eighteenth century philosophers' attempts to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature. Thus MacIntyre's position is that there is a contemporary moral crisis resulting from the incommensurability of current moral debates. citations?

This overview of the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment, although useful in providing a sense in which these thinkers are alike and can be properly called 'postmodern', tends to conceal their differences and their problematics. The chapters are ordered in such a way as to present a (non-chronological) 'development' of sorts, whereby each subsequent philosopher is solving, to some degree, the problems which are apparent in the work of the previous thinker. With Foucault, it is difficult to see how, in his analysis

of power, he can move from being a disinterested historian to a social critic, without employing the kind of totalising theories and metaphysical assumptions which he attacks. Although he was working on an essay called 'What is Enlightenment?' towards the end of his life, which started to tackle this problem, none of his previous work exhibits the kind of self-awareness which we find in Derrida, for example.

Derrida starts from the premise that there is no privileged space outside of reason, and therefore accepts the permanence of our philosophical heritage, attacking it from within in an attempt to deconstruct our existing hierarchies. The difficulty which then arises for Derrida is that he has been accused of failing to be "explicit about the motivations behind this guerrilla warfare against the Enlightenment heritage"[3].

Rorty's criticism of the attempts of traditional epistemology to mirror nature stem from his convincing analysis of these attempts, rather from any societal observation. This tends to mean, however, that as with Derrida, we are left wondering *why* he feels the need to extrapolate these insights to the prescriptions he makes for the 'edification' of the individual, and a 'postmetaphysical' society. MacIntyre believes that there is a current 'crisis', and blames this on the failure of the Enlightenment project. He traces what he believes to be a direct causal link between this failure and what he describes as 'contemporary moral incommensurablity'. His remedy, to restate the Aristotelian concept of human nature, puts him in a peculiar position. While the other philosophers I have chosen see postmodernism in emancipatory terms, or at least try to derive applications of postmodern theory in such a way as to have emancipatory implications, MacIntyre sees postmodernism as a disastrous societal reality in the West.

Thus we can see an immediate difficulty with postmodern political philosophy: to remain true to the postmodern critique of the transcendental, foundational, universalistic, and

metanarrational aspects of the Enlightenment and traditional philosophy, these thinkers must be careful not to launch their attacks from a position outside of that which they are criticising, that is, they must not assume a transcendental position. This in itself is difficult, and has resulted in the criticism that postmodern theorising inevitably accepts (and remains within) the parameters set by traditional epistemology and the Enlightenment in particular. But furthermore, it leaves these philosophers open to questions regarding their motivations. In particular, I think it can be shown that any attempt to draw from their insights implications for politics or the self, comes *not* from postmodern insights into the lack of a metanarrational unity, which would be an inconsistent position, but rather from their temporally and spatially situated, hierarchically ordered, concerns.

The difficulties inherent in these starting points, and the tensions within the very nature of postmodern discourse can be explored through the following themes: i) The tensions which exist between nihilism, relativism and foundationalism; ii) The argument that postmodernism is searching for a more 'real' reality; iii) The contention, against postmodernism, that at the philosophical level, postmodern theorising involves exclusion and hierarchies; iv) That the postmodern hopes for the 'edification' of the self are impossible; v) The culturally contingent nature of the postmodern 'other'; vi) The view that postmodern thought ultimately defends liberal democracy; vii) The difficulties inherent in postmodern prescriptions for politics.

The first theme to emerge from an analysis of postmodern thought, then, is that which is concerned with the tensions between nihilism, relativism, and foundationalism. For in simple terms, what postmodernism is about above all else, is a criticism of totalising theories which attempt to explain the world through foundationalist means. What is special about postmodernism is its belief that this criticism does not have to entail a nihilistic or relativistic attitude. Without exception, however, all of the thinkers under examination can

be criticised for the nihilistic or relativistic implications of their work.

An immediate problem they face is their inability to provide us with the reason for their attack on the Western tradition's construction of metanarratives and totalising theories. What are their motivations for the deconstruction of traditional notions of truth, when they claim that there is nothing to go in its place? Any answer to that question, such as 'emancipation', can always be met with the question 'According to which value scheme, which description of human nature, is emancipation important?' In other words, how can we theorise and communicate without a metanarrational or transcendental view? The problem for postmodern theorists is to do this without resorting to relativism or nihilism.

For Foucault, truth is relative to an archive or 'episteme', within which validity can be discussed, but outside of which, it has no absolute or universal relevance. This contention, however, can be placed squarely within relativism, for which Foucault does not provide a defence. Derrida's attack on traditional semiology and in particular on the idea that we can reach the signified through the signifier, along with his questioning of the concept of the concept, not only have nihilistic implications, but also highlight the problem associated with the attempt to theorise at all from the postmodern standpoint.

Rorty and MacIntyre are most concerned that they should not be labelled 'relativists', and go to some lengths to defend their positions against what they see as the perils of holding a relativistic view. Rorty argues that beliefs can only be supported 'conversationally', that other sorts of support such as a neutral objectivity do not exist. Yet he believes that this is not the same as saying that every belief on a certain topic is as good as any other, which is the relativist's position. His pragmatism and hermeneutic 'intersubjectivity' are an attempt to work through the delicately balanced theoretical demands made by his critique of Western philosophy. The problem for MacIntyre emanates from his historicity and his

argument that moral debates are incommensurable. While the former remains anti-universalist and within the general spirit of postmodern philosophy, the latter is linked to MacIntyre's desire to overcome what he sees as contemporary moral chaos. It is through an examination of his 'tradition-based enquiry' that we see how these tensions relate to his view of the historically contingent nature of rationality and justice.

The second theme, regarding the ways in which postmodern theorists are searching for a more 'real' reality, centres on the fact that although there are relativistic and nihilistic implications of their work, they nevertheless invoke transcendental assumptions either in their methodologies, or their conclusions. Foucault's 'archaeological' method, for example, requires an ability to 'suspend belief', and to 'see things as they really are' in the attempt to achieve 'pure description'. More generally, his critique of power introduces normative notions and assumes a superior theoretical perspective.

Derrida specifically criticises Foucault for attempting to stand outside of that which he is challenging, and therefore carries out his analysis in what he believes to be a more self-aware fashion. However, his prescription for 'the political management of difference and equality', along with the deconstructive project in general, imply a normative aspect of his thought which is all the more worrying because he, and many of his followers, are blind to it. Rorty, despite his description of the 'edifying' ironist, cites specific human essences as universal, and in particular, makes universal prescriptions for human society on this basis. MacIntyre differs from the other theorists in that he is consciously looking for a teleological view of human nature, which he finds in Aristotle. He also argues that there are certain universal truths which become apparent to all traditions in times of epistemological crisis. The difficulty for MacIntyre is that this is at odds with the postmodern spirit of his historicity, which forms the main thrust of his work.

The above two themes are of central importance to my thesis because I hope to demonstrate that while the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment, and the Western tradition of philosophy, is correct, it is necessarily nihilistic. At the same time, however, it is clear that these thinkers cannot theorise without invoking transcendental assumptions of some kind or other. Furthermore, I believe that it can be shown that this is inevitable, that despite the lack of any objective, transcendental reality and truth, we theorise, think and communicate as if there were, meaning that postmodern philosophy can have no application to political theory or practice. The other themes which emerge from an analysis of the work of these thinkers support, and are supported by, this assertion. The third theme, then, centres on the idea that because, at the philosophical level, we have no choice but to prioritise and hierarchically order criteria (which inevitably invoke transcendental assumptions), theorising necessarily involves exclusion and hierarchies.

Foucault cannot simply remove unity and continuity as privileged concepts in order to leave the field open for 'pure description'; what he in fact does is to prioritise rupture and discontinuity - replacing one set of hierarchically ordered criteria with another. Derrida's critique of Plato's 'Phaedrus" which centres on how Plato excludes some possible definitions and meanings for the purpose of clarity, can itself be criticised.[4] Derrida seems to fail to realise that exclusion, and the hierarchical ordering of meanings, is an essential part of the very formation of any meaning.

Rorty's argument that "a liberal society is badly served by an attempt to supply it with 'philosophical foundations'"[5] demonstrates his lack of awareness of the point which I am making, and is ultimately undermined by his consequent list of specific, foundationalist criteria which exclude non-liberal values. MacIntyre is a different story. He provides arguments, in general, which support this theme. He criticises the Enlightenment and its ideological partners, Marxism and liberalism, not because, in its ambition to provide us

with a rationally justified standpoint from which to judge and to act, it had a mistaken goal, but rather because it lacked the essential teleology for achieving this goal. His attempt to reinstate such a teleology through the notion of 'practice-based virtues', however, fails because he covertly relies upon the type of transcendentalism for which he criticises the Enlightenment's claimed neutrality.

From this, follows the fourth theme regarding the self. The arguments which I am examining here centre on the implications of the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment for the subject. Foucault's notion of the self vacillates between that which is dominated, the effect of power, and an almost existential human nature. These contradictions can be seen as the natural upshot of his desire to provide a reason and explanation for resistance, while avoiding an essentialist mode of theorising.

Derrida has been criticised for annihilating the very idea of the human subject in his determination to dispense with essentialism. He argues that in deconstructing the subject, he is not denying its existence, but rather 'resituating' it. However, when one takes into account his desire to remove the 'concept of the concept', and his hopes for "the multiplicity of sexually marked voices"[6], it appears that what he is doing is not giving the subject a new, more useful identity, but rather removing any identity in his longing for emancipation from essence. While Derrida is correct in his argument that there is no human 'essence', in the same way that there is no transcendental truth, to prescribe the practice of deconstructing the self, whether for social, political, or individual ontological purposes, is a different argument altogether - yet this is certainly an implication of his work.

The type of implications which would follow from such a starting point, can be found in Rorty's 'ironist'. Rorty argues that freedom is the recognition of contingency in the subject, whereby it is understood that nothing has an intrinsic nature or real essence. The

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'ironist' is able to redescribe herself, to choose her beliefs because she knows that she does not have an absolute, objective essence. My argument is that this is impossible, that it would require a kind of 'ego-splitting', the ability to transcend oneself while choosing another self-description according to (supposedly) criterionless principles. So while the self does not have an essence, we cannot escape the practice of 'objectifying' ourselves, we cannot redescribe ourselves without reference (whether consciously or not) to some transcendental 'truth' about ourselves and the world which we inhabit.

Again, with MacIntyre it is different. He assumes that what he perceives to be the failure of the Enlightenment project has resulted in an 'emotivist' self, a self freed from essentialism. Rather than seeing this in emancipatory terms, he sees it as responsible for current moral chaos and incommensurability. Because of this view, he argues for the necessity of restating the Aristotelian human *telos*. If my argument is sound, however, human nature is not emotivist, and never could be, and in any case, individuals could not simply choose whether to adopt a teleology for themselves.

The fifth theme, regarding the cultural specificity of the 'other', comes from a concern that the thinkers (but specifically Derrida) who write about exclusion of the 'other' seem to be unaware of the possibility of an infinite number of excluded 'others'; and thus what they represent as *the* excluded 'others' are in fact a reflection of their spatio-temporal (Western liberal democratic) concerns. Derrida's method of deconstruction proceeds by overturning existing hierarchies in an attempt to make apparent and to emancipate all concepts from what he describes as the dominant force which has organised the logocentric hierarchy. However, he cannot simply overturn existing hierarchies and give precedence to that which has been downgraded, ignored and excluded, because he is unaware of (and would see as unimportant) most of that which is excluded.

Instead, out of all the possible meanings, definitions, concepts and values which have been excluded in the history of the human race, Derrida picks very specific 'others'. These 'others' are then cited as *the* 'others', the *only* 'others', and thus enable Derrida to elevate them to the top of new hierarchies as if this represents a 'fair' (almost 'neutral') way of demonstrating the arbitrariness of the old hierarchies. In fact, what Derrida has done is chosen 'others' which are ultimately concerned with upholding two values - equality and freedom - values which are at home in the twentieth century in the West. So instead of opening up discourse in the way that he hopes, he has closed it down. Of course, if my previous point, that theorising necessarily involves exclusion, is taken on board, that Derrida has fallen into this trap should not come as a surprise.

This leads to my sixth theme: it is not only the case that the 'other' will be determined by specific cultural values, but also that with postmodernism, these values ultimately uphold liberal democratic principles. For Rorty, for example, liberal democracy upholds and extends the principle of tolerance. He believes that liberalism does not need philosophical foundations, because he is unaware of the liberal values of freedom and democracy as values. In fact, the criticisms which can be made of Rorty on this point are the traditional criticisms of liberalism, but they are all the more hard-hitting because of Rorty's anti-Enlightenment critique. All the philosophers in question are defending the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and equality: Foucault's analysis of power, Derrida's deconstruction, and the liberal democratic structures required for MacIntyre's hopes for tradition-based enquiry, all emanate from the specific values which are themselves a result of the Enlightenment project.

The final theme, concerning the difficulties in postmodern prescriptions for politics and the self, explores the necessity of separating the postmodern insights into the non-existence of a transcendental, metanarrational unity, from any application or practical use. In other

words, it clarifies why this non-existence cannot translate to an argument for the emancipation of concepts and people from traditional logocentric hierarchies.

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CHAPTER 1.

MICHEL FOUCAULT.

PART I - RATIONALITY.

A: Introduction.

Michel Foucault's rationality is formed by two main factors. His style and approach are heavily influenced by the French structuralist tradition and later, Kant, while his philosophical oeuvre comes from Nietzsche. Throughout his work, Foucault moves to and fro between these opposed rationalities, never overcoming the difficulties in the project he sets for himself, and never finding a 'middle way'. At various stages in his work, however, we can discern stronger emphases on the different philosophical backgrounds which inform his goal of an 'anti-humanistic human liberation'.[1]

Foucault's early work on madness leads to a convincing critique of Enlightenment rationality as totalistic, exclusionist, and oppressive in its production of specific truths which ultimately constrain freedom. In opposition to the progressive, teleological aspects of Enlightenment thought, Foucault follows Nietzsche in emphasising rupture, discontinuity and contingency, claiming that truth is invented rather than discovered. In particular, he distances himself from subject-centred humanism, attempting to show how the self is constituted through complex power relations. This stage exhibits difficulties which remain unresolved throughout his work; namely, the tendency to both deny any sense of human agency, whilst covertly introducing an essentialist element which his project aims to refute.[2]

The second phase in Foucault's work, his archaeological method, has been criticised as structuralist in its attempts to further the critique of subjectivism through the 'discovery' and description of discursive rules which govern discursive formations and, in turn,

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determine the possibility of speech and thought. The aim of the archaeological method is to overturn what Foucault sees as the overly unified, progressive and emancipatory nature of Enlightenment thought. By 'suspending temporal successions', highlighting discontinuity as opposed to unity, and seeing 'truth' as relative to an era or 'episteme', he believes it is possible to access these deep-seated structures and therefore explain how specific truths are constituted while others are excluded. The criticisms which are fired at this attempt to extrapolate his critique of the Enlightenment come thick and fast, including arguments which say that archaeology is relativistic, transcendental, tautologous, overly unified, and functionalist. Both internally, and in relation to Foucault's overall project, archaeology is beset with the same difficulties and tensions found in his early and later work.[3]

In Foucault's genealogical phase from the mid-1970s onwards, the constitutive, positive side of power governing discursive practices and social relations is emphasised. Continuing from his earlier work on madness, subjects are conceived in radically anti-essentialist terms as 'docile bodies', constituted by what Foucault calls 'biopower'. By seeing power in a more positive light, as normalisation rather than repression, he now describes the emergence of bodies of knowledge as essentially linked to the will to power. In this way, Foucault attempts to use the enabling aspect of genealogical analysis to serve archaeology as a method of providing causal explanations for changes in discursive formations and epistemes. Because genealogy is not aimed at replacing archaeology, and due to the fact that even in genealogy there is a tendency for Foucault to slip into a view of power as negative rather than enabling, the criticisms targeted at this stage of Foucault's work remain the same as those for archaeology. Even in the areas where genealogy differs, such as the transformation of the will to truth as the will to power, Foucault is attacked for covertly making naturalistic, neutral and spatio-temporal generalizations.[4]

Foucault's later work, which introduces the notions of 'governmentality' and 'ethics of the

self' will be dealt with largely within the sections on 'Politics and Society' and 'The Self'. In relation to rationality, however, there are two things to be noted here; Foucault's concept of the aesthetic, and his turn to Kant. Towards the end of his life, Foucault was attempting to rethink his position in relation to the Enlightenment tradition, and took up the Kantian definition of critique as the analysis and reflection upon limits. So while he remains against the specific doctrines produced by Enlightenment thought, he wants to abstract from it its critical ethos. The notion of the aesthetic (conceived as an opposition to Enlightenment positivistic doctrines) is then used by Foucault in an effort to maintain this distinction. This exacerbates, rather than solves, the difficulties and tensions within his earlier work, as his vacillations between transcendental essentialism and an almost nihilistic contingency become more extreme.[5]

Foucault began, then, with a devastating critique of the Enlightenment which he fails to maintain as he moves from being a disinterested historian to a transcendental moralist. His earlier work privileges theory over practice, which his later work reverses in an attempt to remain consistent with his original goal. For this reason, it has been argued that Foucault's initial critique of the Enlightenment was overstated - such a critique does not make a good starting point for the project of human liberation, and is ultimately responsible for the incoherencies in his work. We could, however, take an alternative view of Foucault (and the problems encountered by postmodern theorists generally), and ask, "If Foucault's critique of the Enlightenment was correct, where does this leave the rest of his work?". What this question indicates, and what I hope to show, is that once the humanistic imperative is removed from his rationality - and this is precisely what he attempts (and fails) to do to the Enlightenment - we find that there is little left of Foucault save a few unremarkable and inaccurate historical observations. That is, his inability to remain consistent with his original task is not due to any failing in his initial insights into the Enlightenment, but rather, is a consequence of the attempt to extrapolate *anything* from the

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critique of the Enlightenment.

B: Foucault's Critique of the Enlightenment.

Foucault's criticism of the Enlightenment in his early work contains two main elements:

Firstly is the criticism of humanist values as repressive, which comes from his books on

institutions; and emanating from this is, secondly, his rejection of the holism inherent in

Enlightenment rationality.

Foucault criticises Kant for inducing an 'anthropological sleep' by focusing philosophy on

the question 'what is Man?'. He contends instead that there is no constant human subject to

history, and, heavily influenced by Nietzsche's 'de-subjectifying' of the subject; he argues

that the self is wholly contingent and culturally constructed, the object rather than the

subject of power relations. In his work on madness, Foucault describes how madness is

constituted through any deviation from the 'norm'. The asylum, in Foucault's eyes, is seen

as the instrument *par excellence* of Enlightenment thought, as its normalising function is

linked so closely with 'rational' behaviour. As Boyne points out:

> Philosophically, there is no foundation for the claim that our system of
> reasonable behaviour is the definitive expression of sanity and reason in
> human affairs... If we live in a fractured world, then the combined efforts
> of science and the moralising discourse of 'correct ideas' to prevent anyone
> from peering through the breaks must be treated with the greatest
> suspicion.[6]

So Foucault finds a covert problem within the conventional politics of good and evil,

which, he argues, instead of representing the 'truth' about human nature, are taken to be

transcendental categories and arbitrarily installed through institutions. Through his view of

madness as the excluded 'other' of reason, "the history of science is enlarged into a history

of reason because it studies the constituting of madness as a reflex image of the constituting

of reason".[7]

Foucault argues that, in its positivistic efforts to construct a total history capable of explaining the entire social reality, the Enlightenment imposed a unity and universalism which necessarily excludes in order to maintain itself: "A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre - a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view."[8] From this, Foucault attacks the progressive view of history as teleological. Without any transcendental, ideal forms to discover and measure our representations and understanding of truths and concepts against, there exists no goal to work towards:

> There are the displacements and transformations of concepts: they show that
> the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its continuously
> increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient but that of its various fields of
> constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many
> theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured.[9]

The main criticisms of Foucault's early work in relation to rationality stem from *why* he should want to reject totalities. He says that they are without foundation, that the dualisms they produce contain an inherent cruelty, but cruelty according to what criteria? He wants to liberate man from the repressive nature of Enlightenment rationality, but this implies that there is some innate feature of humankind to be set free. This is most apparent in his work on madness, where the excluded other of reason is privileged as more real than that which is the result of Enlightenment normalisation. Later, in 'The Birth of the Clinic', Foucault realises his mistake and explicitly rejects any access to the excluded. However, there still remains a liberational aspect to his work, and an implicit imperative to resist totalities.

C: Archaeology.

Having criticised the totalistic and unified nature of Enlightenment rationality so heavily,

Foucault proposes archaeology as an alternative method of analysis which is capable of

describing events and discourse in their specificity. He believes that before studying the

concepts of discontinuity, we must rid ourselves of concepts of continuity:

> We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we
> normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is
> recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by
> which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they
> must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign.[10]

We must also question, argues Foucault, those divisions or groupings with which we have

become so familiar. By this he means, for instance, the distinction between such forms or

genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history etc., and which tend to create

certain 'great historical individualities'. He makes the point that we are not always aware

when we use such distinctions, and that anyway, they are fairly recent categories, "...they

are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics".[11]

In order to apply Foucault's methodology, these pre-existing forms of continuity, all these

syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense. We must show, he

argues, that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a

construction the rules of which must be known, and the justification of which must be

scrutinised: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of

them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any

circumstances. Thus it is the case that theoretical choices exclude or imply the formation of

certain concepts,

> It is not the theoretical choice that governs the formation of the concept; but
> the choice has produced the concept by the mediation of specific rules for
> the formation of concepts, and by the set of relations that it holds at this
> level.[12]

It is also necessary, believes Foucault, that there should be a 'suspension of temporal successions', that is, of the calendar of formulations, the order of events and conceptual developments: "But this suspension is intended precisely to reveal the relations that characterize the temporality of discursive formations and articulate them in series whose intersection in no way precludes analysis."[13] Thus archaeology is a comparative analysis, argues Foucault, that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, or to outline the unity that must totalise them, but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures.

Once these immediate forms of continuity are suspended, Foucault contends, an entire field is set free. A vast field, he says, but one that can be defined nonetheless: this field is made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them. "One is led therefore to the project of a pure description of discursive events as the horizon for the search of unities that form within it."[14] Foucault sees this description of discourses as in opposition to the history of thought, whereby a system of thought can be reconstituted only on the basis of a definite discursive totality. The archaeological analysis of the discursive field is oriented in quite a different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence, determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes: "The question proper to such an analysis might be formulated in this way: what is this specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else?"[15]

However, Foucault does see some degree of order as existing between statements. Thus he argues that whenever we can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion; whenever, between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices,

one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), it can be said that we are dealing with a discursive formation. Thus avoiding, Foucault believes, words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as 'sciences', 'ideology', 'theory', or 'domain of objectivity'. The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected, he calls the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division.

Foucault distinguishes between what he sees as different types of relations between discourses. He calls 'real' or 'primary' relations those which exist between institutions, techniques, social forms, etc., which he separates from those he calls a system of 'reflexive' or 'secondary' relations, and those which might properly be called 'discursive': "The problem is to reveal the specificity of these discursive relations, and their interplay with the other two kinds."[16] Thus discursive relations are not internal to discourse: they do not connect concepts or words with one another; they do not establish a deductive or rhetorical structure between propositions or sentences. They determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them. The validity of discourse, argues Foucault, is derived from the status of those who offer it, whether this is sanctioned by law or tradition, judicially defined or spontaneously accepted. This involves criteria of competence and knowledge and a system of differentiation and relations. "It also involves a number of characteristics that define its functioning in relation to society as a whole."[17] Thus Foucault sees the importance of describing the institutional sites from which the doctor, for example, makes his discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application.

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Important for an understanding of Foucault's methodological approach is the conceptualisation of what he describes as a 'statement'. The statement, Foucault explains, is not the same kind of unit as the sentence, the proposition or the speech act; it cannot be referred therefore to the same criteria; but neither is it the same kind of unit as the material object, with its limits and independence. It is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense' according to what rule they follow. Therefore

> A statement exists outside any possibility of reappearing; and the relation that it possesses with what it states is not identical with its rules of use. It is a very special relation: and if in these conditions an identical formulation reappears, with the same words, substantially the same names - in fact, exactly the same sentence - it is not necessarily the same statement.[18]

This illustrates how Foucault believes that meaning in its purest form has its reality and validity defined by things which are external to it, and in order for us to truly grasp these meanings and accept them as legitimate, we need to be able to describe and substantiate the structure which gave birth to them. Therefore a statement is linked to a 'referential' that is made up not of 'things', 'facts', 'realities', or 'beings', but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated or described within it, and for the relations that are brought into play by the statement itself. The statement, then, must not be treated as an event that occurred in a particular time and place, and that the most one can do is recall it in an act of memory. But neither is it an ideal form that can be actualised in any body, at any time, in any circumstances, and in any material conditions.

> Too repeatable to be entirely identifiable with the spatio-temporal coordinates of its birth (it is more than the place and date of its appearance), too bound up with what surrounds it and supports it to be free as a pure form (it is more than a law of construction governing a group of elements)...the statement may be repeated - but always in strict conditions.[19]

Foucault's archaeology has been criticised by many as remaining within the epistemological tradition, although a few theorists have attempted to defend it. Machado, for example, argues that, unlike epistemology, archaeology "does not give priority to the normative question of truth"[20]; Wahl cites Foucault's challenging of the unity of an object as evidence for the difference between archaeology and traditional philosophy[21], and Janicaud argues that archaeology is simply offering an alternative method of analysing truth, rather than *the* definitive method[22] However, in each of these cases the defenders are citing Foucault's stated *aims* as evidence that archaeology is opposed to traditional epistemology, rather than critically analysing the processes involved.

The criticisms of archaeology are, in fact, far-reaching, and cannot be so easily refuted. They appear to fall into one of two categories: Firstly, there are those criticisms which are aimed at the archaeological method, at its often vague, contradictory, tautologous and relativistic aspects; secondly, there are those which indicate how archaeology is at odds with Foucault's stated project, and in particular, his critique of the Enlightenment.

To begin with, the term 'discourse' has been criticised as vague. Discourses can only be criticised and analysed if they are structured according to rules of formation, which indeed, is part of Foucault's definition of them. Yet 'rules of formation' has a transcendental ring to it which can only be avoided at the risk of an infinite regression or circularity. Although he later tried to solve this contradiction in his genealogical phase by arguing that discourse is ordered through the 'will to power', this does not solve the fundamental problem, as Frank points out,

> If this thesis were grounded, the untenable consequence would follow that the scientific credentials of the analytic of discourse could be guaranteed only through the repression of this will to power, which so overwhelmingly subjects and ties the disseminality of our talk to the restrictiveness of systems of exclusion. As such, the analytic of discourse would be forced into an appropriation of the subject (whose existence it incidentally denies) as a transcendental condition before it could proceed.[23]

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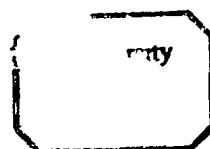
In other words, archaeological analysis is dependent on a notion of discourse with limits, as *necessarily* exclusionist, and the archaeological task of grasping a statement in its specificity, as a 'pure description of discursive events', would be over before it started.

Similarly, others have argued that the causal powers Foucault attributes to rules of formation are unintelligible. There are different aspects to this criticism. Some argue that archaeology *must* fail simply because it ignores any sense of human agency in its insistence on the constitutive role of discursive rules. Yet I do not see this as problematic in itself, as long as Foucault were able to maintain a coherent argument on this basis. Rather, there are two difficulties which follow from Foucault's dismissal of human agency in the analysis of the causal powers of discursive rules. Firstly, we begin to see an almost fatalistic impossibility of saying anything other than that which is made possible by the rules of discursive formation. In which case, Foucault's own work seems to imply either a claim to be able to stand outside the totalistic rules which apply to everyone else, or the futility of his own discourse in its attempts to provide a space from which to resist. The second problem which arises from Foucault's argument that discursive rules form the *sole* origin of all discourse, meaning and events, is the transcendental quality which these rules assume. Even if this were not completely antithetical to Foucault's project (wherein lies the main incoherency, of course), Freundlieb points out that the history of a discourse is in any case too unpredictable: "Foucault's suggestion that one can find a system of rules that determines which concepts were able to emerge and which ones were not is therefore extremely unlikely."24

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault distinguishes between the rules of grammar, which constitute conditions of *possibility*, and his rules of discursive formations, which he conceives of as conditions of *existence* (pp 34-35). That is, the rules of discursive formation do not simply make possible what can be said, they cause exactly what is said,

and nothing else. This means that when Foucault gives an example of a change in discursive formations, it relates to a singular historical event. With each 'rule' applying only once, archaeology becomes tautologous, with its main statement being not 'what has happened = what could have happened', but rather 'what has happened = what has happened', as the notion of a rule is emptied of all content.

Archaeology has also been criticised as relativistic, because it makes truth relative to an *episteme*. As with the lack of human agency, there are those who argue that archaeology *must* therefore fail because they cannot conceive of a philosophy which is based on this principle. More importantly, however, this has implications for the second group of criticisms regarding archaeology, that is, it is at odds with Foucault's stated aims and, in particular, his critique of the Enlightenment. Skinner points out

> Foucault's claim that truth is merely what counts as true within a discourse is not easy to accept. If what Foucault says is true, then truth is always relative to discourse; there cannot be any statements which are true in all discourses, nor can there be any statements which are true *for* all discourses - so that, on Foucault's own account, what he says cannot be true![25]

Yet it is not simply the case that all relativists occupy an incoherent position. What makes Foucault's relativism contradictory is his attempt to extrapolate, from his critique of the Enlightenment, an argument in favour of resistance. Furthermore, this critique is based not simply on the undermining of Enlightenment rationality, but also on his offering of a 'better' way of understanding why the universe is the way it is. So while it is the case that Foucault occupies an incoherent relativistic position, the incoherency arises out of the transcendental aspects of his work, and not relativism itself. Janicaud tries to defend Foucault on this point, arguing that Foucault was offering an *alternative* method of analysing, not *the true* method. However, there is no doubt that Foucault *does* imply that his own discourse is superior to the traditional history of knowledge, and this translates to an argument that it is somehow 'better', 'truer'.

Although there has been a strong debate both while Foucault was alive, and since his death, over whether he was a structuralist, the importance of the matter lies not in what labels can be applied to his work, but rather whether he was self-refuting. Gutting, for example, points out that archaeology does not serve Foucault's philosophical project, and is ultimately a means of reaching a fundamental truth behind reason. This can be seen in Foucault's insistence on the constitutive role of discourse. In order to avoid the implication that, for example, his discourse on madness actually *produces* madness, Foucault must covertly rely on a 'real' madness which exists prior to discourse. From this we can see that he cannot analyse *anything* without the assumption that it has an existence prior to our discourse on it. In order to escape this difficulty, he would not have to go so far as to hold that there are uninterpreted, transcendental facts, but simply acknowledge that all discourse relies upon the assumption that there are.

Linked to this is the more general criticism that archaeology, far from emphasising rupture and discontinuity, imposes meaning and unity, implying the existence of a referential structure. Habermas makes the point, for example, that Foucault's privileging of theory over practice is bound to produce totalities. So although Foucault explicitly rejects the unifying of groups of statements according to 'the identity and persistence of themes', he does covertly introduce a unifying criterion when he talks of a *system* of dispersion and a discursive *formation*:

> Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*.[26]

What must be remembered here is that, at this point in his work, Foucault totally rejects any sense of human agency, so these 'regularities' and 'formations' must *pre-exist* man. They do not even come about, in Foucault's eyes, through a culturally-determined ordering and categorisation of statements. It is only with his introduction of genealogy and the notion of

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'the will to power' that he begins to recognise and attempt to overcome these deep tensions within his work.

D: Genealogy

Genealogy is not designed to replace archaeology, but rather to serve it. It is an attempt, as Gutting points out, to bring archaeology into line with Foucault's earlier project of describing both discursive and non-discursive practices, and to provide a causal explanation of changes in discursive formations and epistemes. Before proceeding to a discussion of what genealogy is and how Foucault makes use of it, it is important to note that genealogy comes about as a reaction to the failure of archaeology to achieve its stated aims. What the above section attempted to show, however, is that although archaeology is internally incoherent, and to this extent may benefit from a genealogical supplement, the main problems which exist for Foucault arise because *any* attempt to theorise discursive or non-discursive formations is antithetical to his original critique of the Enlightenment. From this perspective, it can be seen that the development of Foucault's rationality takes a wrong turn quite early on, meaning that archaeology, genealogy and the subsequent work on governmentality and ethics is bound to fail, not due to methodological incompetence, but because the entire venture is ill-conceived in light of his original critical project with which he sporadically attempts to remain consistent.

Foucault borrowed the term 'genealogy' from Nietzsche, who used it to characterise his historical studies of how the interplay between power and knowledge results in subjectification. In *The Order of Discourse,* Foucault describes it as a method of analysis which traces the haphazard emergence of the event and how it is constituted through complex contingencies - the 'materialism of the incorporeal'. In *Discipline and Punish* and

The History of Sexuality, Volume I, Foucault places more emphasis on the social and institutional mechanisms of power, allowing him to explain changes in the history of discourse that are merely described by archaeology. In this way, power is conceived as a more positive, enabling phenomenon, underlying all social relations, and thus leads Foucault to an analysis of power in the diversity of its manifestations as a 'microphysics', rather than a power centralised in institutions and emanating to the masses.

Habermas argues that Foucault escapes the self-referentiality of archaeology by subordinating it to genealogy. That is, previously autonomous forms of discursive knowledge are now given a foundation within power technologies as their emergence is explained in terms of practices of power:

> Genealogical historiography clears away the autonomy of self-regulating discourses as well as the epochal and linear succession of global forms of knowledge. The danger of anthropocentrism is banished only when, under the incorruptible gaze of genealogy, discourses emerge and pop like glittering bubbles from a swamp of anonymous processes of subjugation.[27]

In this way, Habermas allows that Foucault is no longer trapped by his own archaeological rules of discursive formation; that is, genealogy now privileges practice over discourse, and in doing so, offers an explanation of how discursive rules are constituted.

However, it must be remembered that Foucault's use of genealogy does not involve a rejection of archaeology - he still seeks to describe the rules which govern discourse, and for this reason, it seems that genealogy remains rule-bound. For example, the 'documents' that Foucault must use to excavate an historical event may well be discursive in nature, and therefore, for an analysis which places importance on 'rules of possibility', it must be accepted that these documents are governed by rules too. Even non-discursive 'documents', from this perspective, must still be rule-bound, that is, governed by rules which are contemporary to the event under analysis. This implies that the practices to which Foucault believes he can apply 'pure description' are already rule-bound, and in analysing

them, he is drawn unaware into the rules which form them. Even if Foucault were able to describe an event or practice without being governed by the rules which governed the event at the time of its happening, endowed it with meaning and made it an 'event', he is inevitably bound by rules in any method he uses to describe or think about an event or practice, whether discursive or non-discursive. That is not to say that such rules exist, constituting, constituted, or in any form at all, but simply that from Foucault's own rationality, even with genealogy he is unable to provide a space from which he can describe or explain the event.

Habermas notices that Foucault's attempts to escape the incoherencies of archaeology produce further methodological problems in genealogy:

> Of course, Foucault only gains this basis by not thinking genealogically when it comes to his *own* genealogical historiography and by rendering unrecognizable the derivation of this transcendental-historicist concept of power.[28]

As Habermas points out, Foucault begins with an analysis of the will to knowledge, and covertly transforms this to a will to power. So Foucault's study of the will to knowledge is initially confined to the history of metaphysics (and hence his critique of the Enlightenment), and is subsequently covertly merged into a general theory of power as he argues that the 'true' is determined by specific effects of power. There are two hidden operations taking place in this transformation, as Habermas argues. Firstly, Foucault is making a universalist spatio-temporal generalisation in his argument that *all* societies throughout history have constituted truth through the will to power. Secondly, there is a concealed derivation of the will to power/truth in all discourse, from the will to power/truth in discourses which specialise in truth, and this de-differentiation remains unexamined and unexplained. From this, the wisdom can be seen in Habermas's conclusion that "...genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as precisely the *presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative* illusory science that it did not want to be"[29].

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That Foucault is still facing the same problems is highlighted by his replacement of the concept of the *episteme* with the *dispositif*. In archaeology, the episteme was intended to specify the systems of relations among the components of discourse, whereas the use of the dispositif in genealogy is for the purpose of analysing the power relations between discursive practices, non-discursive practices, and society at large. This indicates that in genealogy, as in archaeology, Foucault still fails to analyse without totalising, to categorise without being transcendental. His failure to do this arises from the fact that the whole *raison d'être* of archaeology and genealogy, that is, to analyse, categorise and explain, is at odds with his anti-Enlightenment stance.

E: Conclusion

Foucault essentially wants to do two things: i)criticise Enlightenment rationality, especially humanism; ii)provide an alternative method of analysis. In both of these, he wishes to provide a reason to resist. In i), the reason to resist the humanistic conclusions reached by Enlightenment rationality comes from Foucault's belief that this rationality has no privileged access to 'the truth' about the universe or human nature, and that consequently, its humanistic conclusions must be overturned and eschewed for any moral or political application. In ii), the reason for resistance is implied in the way that Foucault arbitrarily offers Enlightenment rationality's excluded, opposite, 'other' as an alternative method of analysis. That is, his stated aim is to emphasise discontinuity over continuity, rupture over progress, dispersion over unity. In this way, his very methodology implies an imperative to resist. However, these two aims fundamentally conflict. Foucault's critique of the Enlightenment is based on the (now widely accepted) argument that there are no *a priori* truths to be discovered. Yet just about all of his subsequent work is in conflict, if not direct

contradiction, with this original project. Habermas argues that Foucault's work contains postmodern terminology and rhetoric but does not really take on board postmodern assumptions. However, I would argue that Foucault's critique of the Enlightenment is evidence that he *does* take on board postmodern assumptions. What he fails to realise, along with many postmodernists, is that these assumptions inevitably proscribe further philosophical or political analysis.

Nancy Fraser's oft-quoted passage from her discussion of Foucault's oppositional stance to all-embracing theoretical assumptions grips the heart of the postmodern dilemma:

> Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could Foucault begin to answer this question. Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it.[30]

Many similar comments have been made: Scruton has argued that Foucault must be taking a 'superior' theoretical standpoint in order to pass judgement on Enlightenment rationality; Simons notes that Foucault's critique relies upon the very structure of reason it opposes; likewise McNay concurs with Habermas that this results in cryptonormativism. To these general criticisms can be added examples of methodological difficulties - that suspension of temporal successions makes causal analysis impossible, and that Foucault's desire to describe a 'disunited discourse' annihilates the very concept of discourse and kills off meaning along with it.

In his later work, Foucault is more specific about how Enlightenment rationality has limited human liberty through totalisation and individualisation. This gives added weight to his imperative of resistance, but further distances his work from the logical implications of his original critique. Should we therefore ignore Foucault's initial criticism of the Enlightenment, as the majority of his work would be more coherent without it? No. Although the ethical content of his later work causes Foucault to re-think his relationship to

Enlightenment rationality, there are two reasons for bearing his original project in mind when critically assessing Foucault as a whole. Firstly, the very fact that Foucault begins with such a far-reaching critique of the Enlightenment is important. It is this which causes him to attempt to develop an alternative rationality, and in a haphazard, problematical manner, leads him to his later work. In other words, the position he reached before his death is a product of his starting point, and the tensions apparent in his later work are the result of the initial difficulty in extrapolating anything from his critique of the Enlightenment. The second reason for continuing to assess Foucault according to his original stated aims is that, to a certain extent, this is what he does himself. The introduction of new concepts such as governmentality, aesthetics, and technologies of the self in his later work is not simply for the purpose of strengthening the case for resistance and liberation, but, more specifically, to do so within his own anti-universalist, anti-transcendental, anti-foundational criteria.

So while it is the case that, to a certain extent, a critical analysis of Foucault's rationality as incoherent pre-empts the conclusion on his work as a whole, aspects of his writings on politics, society and the self may still appear attractive and hold an interest for us. What now becomes important, then, is to find a way of situating the specific liberational goals valued by Foucault, as *effects* of his original anti-Enlightenment stance. It will be shown that not only are these specific goals borne from Enlightenment, liberal democratic concerns, but that the postmodern rebellion against Enlightenment rationality itself is almost inevitably the result of those concerns.

PART II - POLITICS AND SOCIETY.

A: Introduction.

As Foucault moves from a negative to a positive concept of power, his view of politics and society alters to take account of the dynamics of social change. It is thus through his analytics of power that we have access to his view of politics and society, both his understanding and his prescriptions to make it better.

Foucault's early work, which is explicitly aimed at criticising Enlightenment rationality, concentrates on how power is expressed through strategies of repression and exclusion in order to maintain norms. In his archaeological phase, this negative view of power is explained in terms of deep-seated rules of formation which constitute discourse and, by implication, society and social relations. The genealogical approach attempts to account for social change through an understanding of power in a more positive, enabling sense as the will to knowledge becomes the will to power. However, due in part to the fact that archaeology is not rejected, this will to power tends to reduce to rules of formation with a one-way causal effect from an independent, naturalistic power structure, to the regulation of social relations. In Foucault's later work on governmentality, the concept of modern power regimes as 'totalising and individualising' illustrates a more detailed analysis of the complexities of social relations, and there is a more sustained attempt to see power as a positive force, in the form of an agonistic struggle that takes place between individuals.

The change in Foucault's analysis of power and society reflects his increased awareness of the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the structuralist methodology of archaeology from an anti-Enlightenment viewpoint. While his early work on exclusion demands a more

thorough explanation of how this exclusion is constituted, it is when he provides this explanation through archaeology and genealogy that the contradictions in providing a causal analysis without transcendentalising becomes clear. So although Foucault's understanding of power and society is naturalistic in archaeology and genealogy, the power relations they describe are static and unable to explain social change. Yet the move towards a more complex, multidirectional concept of power relations continues to exhibit his search for a foundational causal explanation, while broadening the category of power to the extent that almost everything is the effect of the power structure, and as such, the concept of power is emptied of all meaning. The inevitability of this dilemma can be understood more clearly if we accept the argument that Foucault has an essentially functionalist view of society, with resistance as a dysfunctional element in the power structure. From this perspective, what he does, is to label all that is *not* an effect of the dominant power dispositif, 'resistance', thus producing a more unified structure of power. At the same time, this removes any possibility for resistance to change the system, and again raises the question of why Foucault should see any need to prescribe resistance. More generally, this leaves him open to the criticisms which have been aimed at functional analysis, in the main, concerning its teleology which results in a confusion of cause and effect, and its inability to explain change.

The result, then, of the attempt to derive principles for political analysis from his critique of the Enlightenment, is a series of vacillations between a reliance on transcendental categories and a nihilistic, aesthetic space, void of all meaning, until his work on governmentality contains both extremes in the attempt to avoid either. In the end, when he is forced to re-think his relationship to the Enlightenment, Foucault's politics appear as a more 'neutral' support for the liberal democratic values of freedom and equality.

B: Power and Exclusion

In his early work, Foucault argues that the change towards positivist methodology came about to serve the needs of medicine. From the problem of epidemics came the definition of a political status for medicine, and the constitution, at a state level, of a medical consciousness whose constant task was to provide information, supervision and constraint, thus relating as much to the police as to the field of medicine proper. According to Foucault's analysis, the role of the Societé de Royale in France

> ... was constantly being enlarged: as a control body for epidemics, it gradually became a point for the centralization of knowledge, an authority for the registration and judgement of all medical activity... The Societé no longer consisted solely of doctors who devoted themselves to the study of collective pathological phenomena; it had become the official organ of a collective consciousness of pathological phenomena, a consciousness that operated at both the level of experience and the level of knowledge, in the international as well as the national space.[31]

Foucault believed that a similar power centre existed in the Hôpital General, with relation to the insane. He argues that in its functioning, or in its purpose, it had little to do with any medical concept. Rather, it was an instance of order, "of the monarchical and bourgeois order being organized in France during this period"[32], and that this structure soon extended its network all over France. From this, Foucault argues, there evolved a definition of a 'healthy' man, the 'model' man: "In the ordering of human existence it assumes a normative posture, which authorizes it not only to distribute advice as to healthy life, but also to dedicate the standards for physical and moral relations of the individual and of the society in which he lives."[33]

Thus, according to Foucault, there is always an exclusion of specific groups of people which occurs with the production of societal norms. He argues that the 'other' of the medieval world was the leper, who served a symbolic function which was later fulfilled by the poor, the criminal, the homeless, the mad. These groups were not simply excluded in

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an abstract manner, but were physically removed to 'houses of confinement'. This was partly caused by the emergence of the new work ethic and the administrative expansion of the state, and resulted in, according to Foucault, the workhouse movement in England, the houses of correction in Germany, and the foundation of the Hôpital General in France, where he centres his analysis. On the surface, he says, the foundation of the Hôpital General appears to be just an administrative regrouping of several pre-existing establishments, but in May 1657, following an edict which made all forms of begging illegal, the militia began to round up all the beggars, thence distributing them among the various buildings of the hospital. The inmates of these institutions were both physically and administratively excluded from civil and political society, and the insane were in these places not because they were ill, but because they were unproductive. It was out of this heterogeneous process of incarceration, Foucault argues, that the mad were gradually crystallised, from the seventeenth century onwards, as the definitive social 'other' of the modern period. Thus the menace of madness is dealt with through the rites of reason which find their legitimation in the homogeneity of the rules of reason and the norms of the social group.

Foucault saw this exclusion as an inherent feature of the Enlightenment project, an absolutist project which enshrines a denial of otherness, of difference. In archaeology, this is parallelled by the exclusion which occurs with the production of discursive syntheses. This phase of Foucault's work is aimed at discovering how specific categories and totalities come about, and, as we saw in the Rationality section above, it concludes that there exist 'rules of formation'. So although Foucault does not directly address the question of power and society in his archaeological work, the implication for a causal analysis is clear; power goes in one direction, from fundamental rules of formation to the constitution of discourse, the self and social relations.

As the earlier criticisms of archaeology pointed out, this stage fails to adequately theorise non-discursive practices, their relation to rules of discursive formation, and how social change is possible. In attempting to overcome these problems, genealogy is aimed at re-opening the discussion started in his early work by associating the discursive formations which constitute the will to knowledge, with the will to power. Thus Foucault argues that, regarding education,

> ... we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social difference, conflicts and struggles. Every education system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and power they bring with them.[34]

Foucault himself recognised that his early work had placed too much emphasis on domination, which he now reinterprets as 'normalisation'. In doing so, it is the *practice* of the will to knowledge/power which now constitutes discourse and social relations, meaning that genealogy inaugurates a reversal, and privileges practice over the rules of discourse. This change is most noticeable in *Discipline and Punish*, where he writes of the 'normalizing judgement' of the prison system:

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.[35]

Yet even in genealogy this 'normalisation' is too unidirectional and tends to slip into a negative view of power, as Foucault himself later realises:

> When I was studying asylums, prisons, and so on, I insisted, I think, too much on the techniques of domination. . . We must not understand the exercise of power as pure violence or strict coercion. Power consists in complex relations: these relations involve a set of rational techniques, and the efficiency of those techniques is due to a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies.[36]

This self-critique, along with similar comments made by others about Foucault's concept of power in his archaeological and genealogical phases, centres on the point that this is an

unrealistic, overly simplified, and in Scruton's view, Marxist, understanding of society and how it functions. But what is more damaging to Foucault is the criticism that his explanation of social dynamics is unsound on epistemological grounds. Janicaud, for example, describes the debate between Foucault and Habermas in a comparison of the methodology of archaeology and genealogy with that of hermeneutics. While the hermeneuticist presupposes a hidden origin and therefore keeps in reserve a point from which judgements can be made, Foucault claims to analyse only the logic internal to power techniques. Yet, as Janicaud and Habermas point out, Foucault does not succeed in his task because, ultimately, he "cannot dispense with comparisons between the different complexes of power which he studies, and for this reason cannot avoid working on a hermeneutic basis"37. In other words, comparative analysis necessitates a transcendental standpoint from which to view the systems being studied, that is, an assumed neutrality which is not available to Foucault.

This assumed neutrality, however, inevitably carries with it a hidden set of values. While Foucault's very project implies a desire for liberation from totalities, his epistemological position is unable to offer an explanation as to *why* liberation should be a goal. Simons concurs with Taylor's argument that Foucault's critique of excessive power must rest on a notion of the human subject:

> Taylor holds that Foucault's concept of power is incoherent. It rests on the conviction that victims are dominated. This requires an understanding of what constitutes significant imposition on those victimised, which can be determined only against the background of shared significance. The root of Taylor's difficulty with Foucault is that he stands outside of all shared horizons of significance.38

To be more precise, Foucault *claims* to stand outside of shared horizons in his attempts at 'pure description' and his rejection of humanistic, Enlightenment categories of meaning. It is his inevitable failure to maintain this position, which gets him into difficulties, especially in light of the specifically emancipatory nature apparent in the perspective from which he

views power and society. The question now, then, is whether Foucault's recognition of the mistake, in archaeology and genealogy, of insisting on power as domination, enables him to overcome these difficulties.

C: Governmentality: Individualization and Totalization

'Governmentality' was a neologism coined by Foucault to designate the topic of 'governmental rationality' as an area for analysis and problematisation. He understood 'government' in the traditional, narrow sense, and as the wider, more general, 'conduct of conduct', by which he meant an activity concerning the relation between self and self, private interpersonal relations involving some form of control or guidance, relations within social institutions and communities and, finally, relations concerning the exercise of political sovereignty. In the *Volume II* and *Volume III* of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault tackles the government of the self by the self, which will be looked at in Part III, but in his annual lectures at the College de France he concerned himself principally with government in the political domain.

Foucault states that government in Western societies aim to govern 'all and each', resulting in what he calls a tendency to 'totalize' and to 'individualize'. The regulatory strategies employed by governments for the well-being of citizens is, he argues, individualistic in nature, focusing attention on the individual as sovereign in his domain. Yet the success of such policies results in a set of controls which specifically determine what it is to be an 'individual' in a Western society, thus becoming totalistic in nature through a process of large-scale normalisation. Humanist myths are therefore more insidious, he argues, because they incite us to seek our liberation through strategies that resubject us.

This new concept of power is now seen by Foucault as subjectivising as well as objectivising. It relies upon the internalisation of social norms through a manipulation of consciousness, rather than pure domination. It is at this point in Foucault's work that the concepts of freedom and autonomy are introduced with his notion of power relations existing as an 'agonistic struggle' between individuals. In this way, he differentiates between different kinds of power relations, and changes his definition in order to avoid understanding every cause and effect in terms of power. There is also a degree of optimism, as Foucault now distinguishes between power and violence, arguing that a power relation only exists where there is a potential for resistance. This seems to come from his view that 'normalisation' develops in terms of a shared rationality, and depends, to some degree, on the willingness of citizens to accept certain values and exist as subjects. Hence the 'agonism' involved in power relations; it is a struggle between the government and the governed, and, for the governed, within themselves, as power relations are decided through a multidirectional, highly contingent, almost existential development of morality.

So this work marks the transition in Foucault from the study of systems of power relations which, in *Discipline and Punish*, were able to absolutely tame and subject individuals, to a study of the creation of political agency through an endless and open strategic game. It enables Foucault to overcome some of the criticisms which were made of genealogy, in particular, those which centred on the point that it offered a view of power which was overly simplistic and unidirectional. Yet the doubt over the internal epistemological coherency of his project still remains. The concept of governmentality is confusing because while it begins with the more detailed critique of government in Western society which archaeology and genealogy were lacking, it at once attempts to offer a prescriptive theory of hope for the future. Does the introduction of governmentality involve a concealed derivation akin to that of the concept of power from the will to knowledge, which was the criticism made by Habermas of genealogy; or has Foucault at last provided a space from

which to resist without overturning his critique of foundationalism?

D: Resistance

Foucault's explanation of social change, which is necessary for overcoming the criticism

that archaeology and genealogy are unable to properly describe history, relies upon the

possibility for resistance. As in Nietzsche's agonistic contest, the point is to prevent the

solidification of strategic relations into states of domination. In this he fails, and for several

reasons. Firstly, Foucault radically undertheorises resistance, the result being, secondly,

that even his final works devote more space to discussing domination, and thirdly, that he

fails to provide motivation to resist. Finally, resistance requires a metanarrative that

Foucault is unable to provide, which perhaps explains his reticence towards developing a

theory of resistance more fully.

Brenner points out that while Foucault insists on the centrality of resistance to all power

relations, he devotes his studies of modernity almost exclusively to an analysis of modern

forms of power without ever examining corresponding forms of resistance.[39] Simons,

too, complains that "resistance is radically undertheorised in [Foucault's] work"[40], along

with McNay, who argues that,

> despite Foucault's assertions about the immanence of resistance to any
> system of power, this idea remains theoretically underdeveloped, and, in
> practice, Foucault's historical studies give the impression that the body
> presents no material resistance to the operations of power.[41]

Even in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault talks of bodies as 'saturated' with disciplinary

techniques, indicating his inability to maintain a positive concept of power. "The dialectic

of society and individual, implied in the concepts of power and the subject", McNay

continues,"remains frozen and top-heavy, obviating theories of agency and change"[42].

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Political theorists critical of Foucault argue that he fails to provide motivation or reason to resist. That is, the question arises of whether we are in a humanist trap, destined to be resubjected. Brenner argues that Foucault's understanding of power relations is functionalist, and as such, unable to explain social change. This critique rests on the fact that Foucault describes the *dispositif* in functionalist terminology, as a tool for analysing the complex relations among discursive practices, non-discursive practices, and their effects on society at large. In contrast to these functionally coordinated *dispositifs*, resistance is fragmented, distinguishable only by its 'dysfunctional' consequences on the dominant power *dispositif*. Thus Foucault's concept of resistance can be compared to Talcott Parson's idea of 'deviance':

> The distinguishing feature of the functions of which resistance is composed, like the 'deviant' motivational orientations in Parsonian normative functionalism, is simply the fact that they have not been 'institutionalised' or integrated into the dominant power *dispositif*. This purely reactive conception of resistance makes sense only in conjunction with the totalistic view of power Foucault claims to reject.[43]

That is, Foucault conceives resistance solely as counter-functions which by-pass or oppose the imperatives of the dominant power *dispositif*. In other words, Foucault's notion of resistance seems to rely on the existence of a totalistic, functionalist system of power; there seems to be no opportunity for such resistance to overthrow or radically alter the system.

Finally, there are criticisms which centre on the epistemological 'cryptonormative' difficulties which remain with Foucault's concept of power to the very end. His understanding of power relations as agonistic, for example, implicitly includes a regulative principle for the assessment of political regimes: "The question to be asked is whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system"[44.] This, along with the emancipatory imperative which haunts his work, seems to lead to an ethic of permanent resistance:

> The ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger. . . My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous . . . If everything is dangerous then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.[45]

This imperative to resist must rest ultimately on normative grounds, as is illustrated in Foucault's identification of his politics of resistance with, among other struggles, "opposition to the power of men over women"[46], despite the fact that his work is generally ungendered. If, however, one argues that emancipation for women must rely upon a metanarrative, this necessarily translates to a criticism of Foucault's work as cryptonormative. Although there is disagreement amongst feminists regarding whether stable, ahistorical categories of gender are necessary for an analysis of oppression, the point remains that even without these categories any resistance to the status quo requires normative notions of good and evil which are unavailable to Foucault.

Gutting disagrees with these criticisms of Foucault, arguing that it is possible to make judgements without grounding them in a metanarrative, and thus avoid the apparent contradiction in Foucault's work. He says: "Instead of basing our normative judgements on general philosophical principles, we can ground them in our direct, practical encounters with alleged sources of domination"[47], and that this will lead to local transformations of our society. What this kind of analysis fails to take on board, however, is the fact that *experiences* are interpreted in terms of our existing conceptual schemes which *do* invoke (even if they are not invoked *by*) general philosophical assumptions. It is not simply the case that Foucault's hope for resistance must rely upon metanarratives of some kind: more specifically, they involve liberal democratic values, and as such, form a part of the very Enlightenment rationality which he attacks.

E: Conclusion - Liberal Democracy?

Foucault explicitly criticises the liberal concepts of power and freedom, and in terms of his stated aims, there are fundamental differences between them. Foucault's later work attempts to mix power and freedom, as constituting each other in an enabling force. Liberalism places power and freedom in opposition to each other; increased government power means reduced individual freedom because the individual is originally free and the role of government must be restricted to maintaining these basic freedoms. Foucault, on the other hand, sees power as a precondition for freedom, that is, the free individual is an *effect* of power relations.

Connolly distinguishes between the liberal and the Foucauldian view of power with the concept of 'agonistic respect' as a description of the social relation between opponents:

> Agonistic respect differs from its sibling, liberal tolerance, in affirming a more ambiguous relation of interdependence and strife between identities over a passive letting the others be . . . [T]he call [for agonistic respect] is made in the context of showing [the fundamentalist] through genealogy some of the ways in which his fundaments too are questionable and contestable.[48]

In this sense, Foucault's final position leads not to a total condemnation of liberalism, but to transgressive work on its limits, to be specific, the limits of individualisation and totalisation. He wants power and freedom to be able to transform the liberal state. Yet the point raised by Connolly seems to imply a hidden assumption of neutrality in Foucault. If we ask '*Why* anti-fundamental?, *Why* genealogy?', and look for the criteria according to which Foucault judges this oppositional stance desirable, the proximity of his analysis to liberalism becomes clear, as McNay notes:

> While Foucault is explicitly hostile to formulating a positive basis for critique, he nevertheless implicitly draws on forms of normative judgements he claims to have forsworn. . . [T]he tone of disapprobation that Foucault adopts when discussing modern disciplinary techniques and his exhortations to resist the government of individualisation ... derives its force from an unacknowledged judgement about what is wrong with the

modern power-knowledge regime and from a covert appeal to the ideals of autonomy, dignity and reciprocity.[49]

The ambiguity in Foucault's analysis of power emanates from the tensions inherent in his original project. Not only does Foucault invoke universalistic norms, they are the norms of the liberal humanistic tradition which he attacks. It seems that he adopts the fundamental tenets of liberal democratic theory, and then criticises the ways in which actual existing liberal democracies are not living up to this ideal. So while it is liberal democracy which produces the kind of subjection that makes Foucault's concept of resistance necessary, it is liberal democratic values to which he appeals in his imperative to resist. This can be seen in his objection to the institutionalisation of freedom:

> Liberty is a *practice* . . . The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because 'liberty' is what must be exercised. . . I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom.[50]

Foucault has a similar problem with democracy. His work does embody a democratic ethos, but worries that if it were reduced to consensus politics, state mechanisms of electoral accountability would result in the production of internal and external others: in other words, the age-old problem of the tyranny of the majority.

The difficulties that Foucault has with liberal democracy are the difficulties that liberal democracy has with itself. That is, his work echoes the classic liberal dilemma; namely, that in order to achieve and maintain a liberal society, non-liberal methods and policies may have to be used. This arises from the fact that liberalism does not defend *every* kind of political freedom; it has a specific agenda, specific foundational ideals which are "often expressed with a bigoted aversion towards it opponents"[51]. The claims to the universal value of liberty in liberal theory are based on the connection of liberty with individual autonomy. What Foucault needs to do in order to provide support for his emancipatory

goals, is to analyse human nature in such a way as to take account of its autonomy *and* contingency without grounding this in a universalist theory.

PART III - THE SELF

A: Introduction.

Foucault criticises Enlightenment humanism for borrowing a specific theological and metaphysical conception of human nature - the human subject is not given with permanent structures that constitute or condition reality, but is produced historically from its social world. His central project is to show how human freedom has been constrained by the rationality which has viewed the human condition as constant and universal.

However, as Foucault's work developed, his concept of the self changed. In his early work on madness, he concentrates on illustrating how the effects of the Enlightenment, and Cartesian rationality in particular, translates to oppressive, exclusionist practices in institutions. Difficulties which arise from this stage of his analysis centre on his privileging of the excluded other, namely madness, as an aspect of human nature which has not been subsumed within the oppressive rationality of the Enlightenment. In his archaeological phase, he reasserts his original critique of the subject as the sole origin of meaning, claiming instead that there exist deep-seated rules of formation which produce discourse and constitute the subject. This area of his work has been criticised for removing any possibility of human agency and, as a consequence, sounding the death of the subject.

Foucault's genealogical works return to the study of institutions and attempt to reinterpret complete domination in terms of strategies of 'normalisation'. Although this is partly aimed at introducing a more positive and multidirectional concept of power, the tendency to see this 'normalisation' as hidden and repressive results in a concept of the self which still lacks a sense of agency. This problem is only really tackled directly in his later works, *The*

Use of Pleasure and *The Care of the Self*, (Volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality*), where the aspect of governmentality which relates to the conduct of oneself presents a notion of individual autonomy. The concept of the self is absolutely central to Foucault's work because it provides both the impetus for his original critique, and a space from which to theorise the imperative to resist. The necessary introduction of an essentialist moment through the concept of governmentality causes Foucault to re-think his relationship to the Enlightenment, but he still fails to grasp the ineluctable contradictions in his project and what this means for political philosophy.

B: Madness and the Essential Other.

In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault describes how, through confinement, madness is subjected to the rule of reason: the madman now lives under the jurisdiction of those who are sane, confined by their laws and instructed by their morality. According to Foucault,

> Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find his place within it; the essence of confinement was not the exorcism of a danger. Confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being; and by providing this manifestation, confinement thereby suppressed it, since it restored it to its truth as nothingness. Confinement is the practice which corresponds most exactly to madness experienced as unreason, that is, as the empty negativity of reason; by confinement, madness is acknowledged to be nothing.[52]

So there is a degree to which Foucault seems to view madness as culturally constituted through the labelling of behaviour which cannot be subsumed within the dominant conception of rationality. Yet this also imputes to madness a kind of essentialism which pre-exists any form of labelling by the constitutive powers of Enlightenment rationality; that is, in posing a threat to the dominant rationality, it must be repressed.

Gutting points out that Foucault strongly suggests that the mad's own experience of their

madness "has access to a privileged truth about the reality of madness. He further suggests that this truth, particularly as expressed though the literature of madness, is the key to an understanding of human reality that will lead us beyond the arbitrary restrictions of mere reason."[53] In other words, this aspect of Foucault's work seems to imply *not* that there are no truths to be discovered, no human nature as such; but rather that Enlightenment rationality, in order to produce 'rational' unities and categorical totalities, has distorted and oppressed the truth about the self. So, according to Gutting, this represents a desire in Foucault to find "a fundamental truth buried far beneath the realm of reason"[54]. There is also the implication that Foucault sees madness as a radically transgressive force, containing the ability to overcome the bastardized form of human nature produced by the Enlightenment and put us in touch with our true selves.

This confusion causes problems for Foucault's desire for emancipation. The view of the self as 'corrupted' by the Enlightenment is necessary because it provides a reason to resist which is not provided by the view that madness, and the self in general, are constituted by historical and cultural forces. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that Foucault believes that it is the view of the human condition as constant and universal which has constrained human freedom, thus prompting his attack of the Enlightenment. So to sum up: Foucault needs a constituted view of the self for his criticism of the Enlightenment, and an essentialist view of the self for his project of resistance and emancipation. This tension sets the stage for the schizophrenic battle which continues through archaeology and genealogy to the death of the author.

C: Biopower and Docile Bodies.

In archaeology Foucault seeks to reaffirm his anti-essentialist view of the self. He does not, however, directly put forward an analysis of human nature, rather this is to be read from his description of the powers of discursive rules of formation, and his argument that there is no pre-discursive subject. Pizzorno contends that from Foucault's discussion of the 'event' in archaeological analysis, we can derive the implications for his view of the individual:

> The notion of the individual human being therefore loses its privileged epistemological status. It is a construct like the others that are needed to make sense of acts and events that reach us like atoms and are to be pieced together and assigned to meaningful series. Personal identities are one among other series. They emerge in a battlefield, which means that differentiation and opposition are the main features through which they receive a recognisable form.[55]

This 'differentiation and opposition' refers to how the rules of formation structure discourse, the event, and the individual. The concept of the unified subject is thus uncovered as an illusion created by structural rules: the direction of causality operates from the system to the subject rather than the other way around.

Along with the criticism of the lack of agency in this view of the self, is the argument that Foucault causes further problems by separating the rules of discursive formation (and therefore, of the subject) from their social and cultural context, and is thus unable to explain how individuals come to occupy certain discursively constructed subject positions. Freundlieb argues that, on the contrary, "'subject positions' are, if anything, newly created rather than simply available for occupation"[56]. Thus it is not simply a sense of agency which is ignored by archaeology, it also seems to ignore the contingency of the self, the ways in which individuals are constituted by socio-historical factors; and this is due to the overly determined structuralist nature of archaeological analysis. So once again Foucault implies a view in which the subject is essentialist. He has avoided the autonomy and

'reality' which he seemed to attribute to madness in his earlier work, but only to replace it with a subject who is determined ultimately by transcendental rules, the origin of which is unaccounted for.

Genealogy attempts to explain how the rules of discursive formation originate through the notion of the 'will to power'. Foucault has another look at how institutions produce 'others', but now he emphasises the constitutive aspects of power relations, instead of viewing power as pure domination which corrupts the essence of human nature: "The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention paid to the body - to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces."[57] In this way, Foucault introduces a more positive concept of power as able to create docile yet productive bodies who have internalised the gaze of authority - it is normalising rather than purely repressive.

One of the problems with this concept of 'biopower' is that it replaces the subject with the body, invoking behaviourist assumptions. As McNay points out:

> The problem . . . with such a conception is that it tends to reduce all forms of psychic inner life and the diversity of human experience and creativity to the effects of a unifying bodily discipline . . . As some critics have argued, the construction of the subject cannot be explained simply through reference to bodily experiences, but must be legal, social and psychological constructs.[58]

This means that although Foucault avoids essentialism, he still excludes any sense of agency. The constitutive aspect of biopower is also vague and ephemeral; as Foucault slips again into a dominatory concept of power, its origins appear to remain transcendentally described as rules of formation. In other words, despite his attempt, in genealogy, to privilege practice over discourse for the purpose of causal explanation, the lack of human agency in biopower and his consequent inability to explain what motivates action, results in an ultimate reliance on archaeological method and all that it entails.

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D: Ethics of the Self.

In a lecture given at Dartmouth college in 1980, Foucault states "Now I wish to study those forms of self-understanding which the subject creates about himself"[59]. This project emanates from his work on governmentality, in the widest sense, as the 'conduct of conduct', and is aimed at providing a concept of individuals as having a sense of agency in order that they can resist the 'individualisation' and 'totalisation' of government power. Foucault argues that in contemporary society, adherence to a set of moral rules is disappearing, and in response to this he offers his interpretation of the Ancient Greek's aesthetic 'ethics of the self'.

In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault describes the 'agonistic' relationship that the Greco-Romans had with themselves as a method of the self-formation of the individual as a moral subject: "In classical Greek thought, the 'ascetics' that enable one to make oneself into an ethical subject was an integral part - down to its very form - of the practice of a virtuous life, which was also the life of a 'free' man in the full, positive, and political sense of the word."[60] Thus he emphasises the way that moral reflection intensified the relation to oneself by constituting oneself as the subject of one's acts. Forming oneself as an ethical subject requires, he argues, practices or 'technologies' of the self by which individuals "effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality."[61]

This ethics of the self came about, Foucault argues, through self-mastery, which had three central aspects. Firstly, there were 'testing procedures', exercises in abstinence and self-control. Secondly, it involved 'self-examination', that is, reviewing one's moral progress

at the end of the day, and praising or admonishing oneself in order to learn lessons for the future. Thirdly, there was 'a labour of thought within itself as object', screening one's representations to make sure they are true: "It is to assess the relationship between oneself and that which is represented, so as to accept in the relation to oneself only that which can depend on the subject's free and rational choice."[62]

Foucault argues that this self-mastery, particularly in its relation to sexual austerity, should be understood not as an expression of deep and essential prohibitions, but as the elaboration and stylization of an activity in the exercise of its power and the practice of its liberty. He thus distinguishes between morality that is code based, and morality born of an ethics of the self. Where morality exists as a code, emphasis is placed upon the authority that enforces it; that is, the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws. The other type of morality, which arises from practices of the self, on the other hand, places more importance on the forms of relations with the self, on the practice of working out personal ethics. Moral conceptions in Greco-Roman antiquity were, Foucault contends, much more oriented toward practices of the self than toward codifications of conduct: "If exception is made of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, one finds very few references to the principle of a code that would define in detail the right conduct to maintain."[63]

Although the theme of moral reflection and sexual austerity seems to continue with Christianity, Foucault points out that the ethical subject is not constituted in the same manner; instead of taking the form of a *savoir faire* and ethics of the self, the moral self is constituted through the recognition of the law and an obedience to pastoral authority. In Ancient Greece, however, the requirement of sexual austerity for the self-disciplined subject was not presented in the form of a universal law, "but rather as a stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible"[64]. In contrast, says Foucault, contemporary Western society, with its

institutionalisation of individualism, relies upon the normalising effects of moral codes, and for this very reason, the relations of oneself to oneself are largely undeveloped. As an antidote for these ills, Foucault presents the principle of an aesthetic of the self.

This concept of the aesthetic is borrowed from Nietzsche's notion of making one's life a work of art. For Nietzsche, life has value as an aesthetic achievement and ascetic practice as a method of self-constituting. Foucault turns to particular forms of self-reflective modern art in order create a space from which to reveal the limits of our thought and language, implying a form of transgression and the overcoming of strategies of normalisation. Thus liberty is achieved not in a state of liberation, but through the practice of freedom, through the act of creating oneself.

Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self' overcomes some of the problems with his earlier work by introducing a notion of autonomy and self-fashioning through agonistic struggle. The ultimately dominatory concept of individualisation in his genealogical phase is now presented with a counter-force with which individuals can resist, no longer 'docile bodies' produced by power techniques. Foucault himself seems to have noted the problems with his earlier conception of the self in archaeology and genealogy, and sees this later work as a direct attempt to overcome those difficulties: ". . . the self is not something to be discovered or deciphered as a very obscure text . . . The self has, on the contrary, not to be discovered but to be constituted, to be constituted through the force of truth."[65]

In responding to the criticisms that his earlier work lacked a sense of human agency, and was therefore unable to explain social change, Foucault has been led down a blind alley. The ultimate tensions in his work arise from the incoherency of his original project: the dream of providing a reason to resist what he sees the totalising nature of humanistic Enlightenment thought. While his earlier work was unable to provide the necessary

description of the subject without invoking universalistic and transcendental assumptions, and was thus unable to provide a reason to resist the dominant rationality, his later work on the ethics of the self swings to the other extreme.

To start with, Foucault exhibits a blatant disregard for historical accuracy in his determination to provide an alternative to code-based morality. Hadot points out that, from a historical perspective, the philosophical practice of the Stoics and the Platonists was *not* related only to the self, to the cultivation of the self and to the pleasure taken in the self. For the Stoics, the aim was to go beyond the self by thinking and acting in union with universal, transcendental reason. The 'screening of representations' that Foucault describes was thus *not* for the purpose of accepting 'only that which can depend on the subject's free and rational choice', but, on the contrary, to free oneself from one's individuality, to raise oneself to universality. Hadot points in particular to the role of the practice of writing as a method of linking the self to reason, logic and universality:

> As such one identifies oneself with an 'other' which is Nature, universal Reason, which is present in each individual. In this there is a radical transformation of perspective, a universalist and cosmic dimension which Foucault, it seems to me, did not sufficiently stress: interiorisation is going beyond the self in a way which leads to universalisation.[66]

At the epistemological level, there is the inevitable difficulty that, in introducing a sense of agency, Foucault necessarily implies an essentialist authenticity. There is the ambiguity, for example, of how an ethics of the self is to be distinguished from a moral code. He seems to simultaneously hold two views of human nature: When discussing code-based morality, he implies a behaviourist understanding of the body as 'normalised', but takes the opposite stance when describing techniques of the self. So is it the case that a society which cultivates self-formation actually *produces* autonomous agents? And if so, how is this to be distinguished from strategies of individualisation? In other words, Foucault cannot distinguish between a strong, powerful, but invisible code of normalisation (such as he

says exists in contemporary Western societies), and a society in which individuals feel that they form themselves unaffected by an invisible moral code, unless he states that individuals are constituted by external forces in *both* types of society (thereby losing any sense of agency), or he says that in one of the societies, individuals are suffering from a form of 'false-consciousness'. It is this latter stance which is most strongly implied - yet this invokes assumptions about an 'authentic' self, and, as McNay points out, "brings the idea of the ethics of the self close to a Sartrean existentialism"[66].

Foucault's attempt to distinguish between the 'individualisation' which takes place in modern society, and the cultivation of the self which he describes, seems to translate to the prescription for a more 'real' individualism. The concept of autonomy required by self-forming thus highlights the essentialist aspect of Foucault's work, which was previously seen in his notion of madness as the essential other. This is a double contradiction, for not only does it invoke an epistemology which is antithetical to his original project, it also relies upon the specifically Enlightenment values at which his critique is aimed: "Far from redefining a notion of the self along anti-essentialist lines, Foucault's ethics in fact reinstalls a notion of sovereign subjectivity in which there is a short-circuited link between aesthetic self-fashioning and self-knowledge"[67].

Foucault's privileging of modern art as a site of freedom also invokes transcendental-like forms, failing to consider the culturally contingent character of aesthetics, and consequently, how an appeal to aesthetics might simply re-confirm established norms and values. McNay points out, for example, that the conception of the artist as a free agent of creativity is both elitist and gendered, and Hadot concludes that "Foucault might have been advancing a cultivation of the self which was too purely aesthetic - that is to say, I fear, a new form of dandyism, a late-twentieth-century version"[68]. What is above all clear, is that Foucault's final version of the self contains a moral imperative - it is not only a historical

study, it was meant also to offer contemporary man a model of life.

E: Conclusion.

"Foucault's work is a search for truths that will make us free."[69]

Foucault offers two reasons for proposing an ethics of the self: Firstly, he argues, there is a *lack* of adherence to any rule-based morality in contemporary society, so a more appropriate alternative should be sought; secondly, he argues that the relation of oneself to oneself is underdeveloped in contemporary society due to the *normalising effect* of individualisation. The basic contradiction in these two statements is overwhelmingly apparent, and is a reflection of the tensions inherent in a project which seeks to both undermine any *a priori* concept of the self, while providing a basis for a 'better kind of freedom'.

The difficulty in Foucault's work is a manifestation of the postmodern contradiction in the political imperative to deconstruct existing hierarchies. That is, the attempt to extrapolate from the critique of transcendental categories and meanings *any* political implication, is doomed to failure, as Brenner points out:

> I contend that *all* forms of social theory and analysis rest upon determinate, normative, theoretical, and empirical assumptions about how human society works. Such assumptions, in my opinion, remain implicit even in postmodern approaches to social theory that claim to reject 'grand theory' and 'metanarratives'.[70]

So, while the critique of Enlightenment values and exclusions is based on the lack of any transcendental support for them, this cannot then provide support for deconstruction or the prioritising of previously excluded 'others'.

However, as we have seen, it is not simply the case that Foucault invokes transcendental assumptions of some kind; he invokes peculiarly *Enlightenment* assumptions. Yet he is unwilling and unable to explain the criteria to which he appeals in his attack on power, knowledge and subjectivity. These come not from the Nietzschean heritage of extreme anti-normativism and anti-universalism which he claims as his own, but from the modern culture which he denounces. The circularity in Foucault's argument arises because it is modern society which makes possible both the power structure which he criticises, *and* critiques such as his. That the critical theory which emerges from this starting point should be constituted by Enlightenment concerns, therefore, should not come as a surprise. What *is* surprising, however, is the radicality which continues to be imputed to it.

> Foucault, the vehement questioner, was after all a professor at the College de France: this position went almost unchallenged during his lifetime; after the death of Sartre, Foucault, the genealogist of morality, became a sort of moral authority. What then, is the biopower which leads to nominations of this nature? **Is it all just some kind of trick?**[71]

CHAPTER 2.

JACQUES DERRIDA.

PART I - RATIONALITY.

A: Introduction.

The conceptual and methodological approach adopted and put forward by Derrida takes as its starting point a general critique of the Western philosophical tradition. At the base of this critique is his assertion that this tradition has been founded on and shaped by a fundamental error, the belief that there is something present behind the concept, and that whatever does lie behind the concept (or behind the sign, the word) can be reached. Derrida illustrates that the point of arrival at 'reality' will always be deferred by the creation of another concept, and that the essence behind the idea can never be appropriated. This argument is supported by specific criticisms of various thinkers from Plato to Foucault, and is particularly persuasive in his comprehensive assessment of classical semiology and structuralism. By engaging in (dare we say it?) an almost *dialectical* debate with a succession of these thinkers, he shows that the idea of a transparent language, in which that which it describes is assumed to be immediately present, is pure fantasy. In other words, language itself is a medium, the signifier, and never the signified.

Through this debate, Derrida works out his central notion of the irreducible structure of *differance* as it operates in human consciousness, temporality, history and above all in the fundamental activity of writing. By means of this concept of differance - a neologism meaning both to 'defer' and to 'differ' - Derrida proposes to show how the major metaphysical definitions of Being as some timeless self-identity or presence, which dominated Western philosophy from Plato to the present day, could ultimately be deconstructed. Such a deconstruction is designed to show that in each instance, differance precedes presence rather than the contrary (as has been presupposed by what Derrida terms

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the 'logocentric' tradition of Western thought).

In his most central works, *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967), *Dissemination* (1972) and *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), Derrida applied his deconstructive analysis to a wide variety of subjects - literary, scientific, linguistic and psycho-analytic, as well as the strictly philosophical. Works such as *Glas* (1974) and *The Double Session* (1972) freely experiment with modes of thinking and writing in an attempt to overcome the rigid traditional divide between aesthetic and philosophical discourses: a divide determined by the 'logocentrism' of Western metaphysics which sought to exile from the realm of pure reason all that did not conform to its centralising logic of identity and non-contradiction.

By re-directing our attention to the shifting 'margins' and limits which determine such logocentric procedures of exclusion and division, Derrida contrives to dismantle our preconceived notions of identity to expose us to the challenge of hitherto suppressed or concealed 'otherness' - the 'other' side of experience, which has been ignored in order to preserve the illusion of truth as a perfectly self-contained and self-sufficient presence. Thus, for example, we find Derrida questioning and subverting the traditional priorities of speech over writing, presence over absence, sameness over difference, timelessness over time and so on. His work of rigorous deconstruction poses, accordingly, a radical challenge to such hallowed logocentric notions as the 'Eternal Idea of Plato', the 'Self-Thinking-Thought of Aristotle' or the cogito of Descartes.

Despite his radical claims, Derrida escapes many of the criticisms which can be made of other postmodern thinkers due to his realisation that there is an inevitable permanence of our logical-philosophical heritage, and that we cannot therefore escape Enlightenment rationality. This self-awareness directly disagrees with Foucault's attempts, for example, in

Madness and Civilization, to describe madness without using the Enlightenment rationality which defined it, thus replicating, in Derrida's eyes, Cartesian dualism. Derrida, on the other hand, seeks to show that there can be no privileged space outside of reason and no higher reason, so although it is permissable to write some kind of history of unreason, one cannot logically question reason-in-general.

This degree of self-awareness does not, however, automatically remove the problematic aspects of Derrida's project, in the same way that the fundamental contradictions in Foucault's work could never be overcome. Ultimately, it is the *critical* edge given to the concept of differance and the project of deconstruction which causes problems for Derrida. These problems highlight the inevitable dichotomy between nihilism and an idealised transcendentalism, along with Derrida's failure to avoid the former without invoking the latter.

B: Derrida's Critique of the Western Tradition.

Through his analysis, interpretation and critique of various thinkers, Derrida underscores the persistence of logocentrism in Western thought. At the same time, he takes something from each of them as he formulates a critique which undermines the confidence in the interpretive power of *logos* to overcome otherness in the process of reaching genuine understanding. Through his analysis of Hegel, for example, Derrida takes on board the significance of the negative other, while his critique of the synthesizing aspect of Hegelian dialectic shows that the 'other' is unsublatable, that at its heart, Hegelian semiology remains within the work of meaning and truth.

Among Derrida's first published works was a book on Husserl (*Speech and Phenomena,*

trans. 1973), in which he contested the idea that philosophy could work its way back to a

logic of meaning and experience derived from the immediate data of consciousness itself.

Husserl thought the sign, the mark, the word, to be a secondary phenomenon. What such

phenomena are secondary to, in his view, are the originating identity between

consciousness and meaning, a pure presence of meaning to consciousness prior to the

defilements of language. More specifically, Husserl drew a distinction between two kinds

of sign, the 'indicative' and the 'expressive'. It is only expressive signs, he argued, which

represent the communicative purpose or the intentional force which springs directly from

the consciousness of the speaker. Indicative signs, by contrast, are devoid of expressive

intent and function merely as 'lifeless' tokens in an arbitrary system. Thus Husserl

prioritizes expressive signs over indicative signs; the expressive as self-presence, the

speaker as present in his speech. It is the maintaining of this distinction at the linguistic

level, the separation of the authentic from the inauthentic, which characterises Derrida's

concern with semiotics:

> In both expressive and indicative communication the difference between
> reality and representation, between the true and the imaginary, and between
> simple presence and repetition has always already begun to be effaced. Does
> not the maintaining of this difference - in the history of metaphysics and for
> Husserl as well - answer to the obstinate desire to save presence and to
> reduce or derive the sign, and with it all powers of repetition?[1]

Thus Derrida shows that what Husserl calls 'expressive' signs cannot be distinguished

from 'indicative' signs, that all language is, in this sense, indicative, as it necessarily

conforms to the 'arbitrary system' talked of by Husserl and forever defers the immediate

presence to consciousness.

For Derrida, Husserl simply revives for modern philosophy the project of thought which

Descartes had initiated three centuries earlier, and is replicated even by Foucault. What

Derrida is fundamentally taking issue with here is the aim of re-establishing the certitudes

of reason. In Husserl, as we saw, this was attempted through the false dichotomy of

'expressive' and 'indicative' communication, by positioning the 'indicative' in a secondary, derivative position in order to establish the primary, privileged position of 'expressive' communication as certainty. Such an approach necessarily involves, argues Derrida, a prior position which is external to reason itself, and this is what both Descartes and Foucault do with respect to madness.

Derrida points out that Descartes' use of hyperbolic doubt to separate madness from deception by the senses fosters the illusion that one can step outside of philosophy in order to provide its definition from a fictitious exteriority. Foucault's interpretation of this exclusion of madness as a historical marker by which reason defines itself, then replicates, according to Derrida, the metaphysical transcendentalism which Foucault aims to criticise:

> The attempt to write the history of the decision, division, difference, runs
> the risk of construing the division as an event or a structure subsequent to
> the unity of an original presence, thereby confirming metaphysics in its
> fundamental operation.[2]

To put it simply, Foucault, like Descartes, must be adopting a transcendental stance which incorporates a preconceived notion of reason, in order to note the division between madness and reason. This Cartesian gesture is implicit, as Derrida suggests in his discussion of Foucault and his criticism of structuralism as a whole, in all of those who attempt to step outside of philosophy and find themselves paradoxically secured within it.

On the surface, Derrida finds in Saussurean structuralism an approach to linguistics which no longer privileges the signified over the sign, no longer downgrades the sign in relation to the immediate presence of an origin. Saussurean structuralism understands language as a differential network of meaning, whereby the meaning of a word, the sign, comes not from any link to a signified, but rather from its position in a referential structure, its relation to other signs. In other words, meaning is *produced* by the organizing ground-rules of language.

Derrida, however, saw that structuralism retained a residual attachment to a Western metaphysics of meaning and presence. More specifically, this can be found in Saussure's privileging of speech over writing. Derrida points out that for Saussure, writing is treated as a secondary form of linguistic notation, always dependent on the primary reality of speech and the sense of a speaker's 'presence' behind his words.[3] For Saussure, it seems, there is a two-way causal relationship between speech and the structure of the linguistic system, such that although the meaning of the sign is *determined by* its place in a linguistic system, it is also the case that this differential network of meaning *develops from*, and is *constituted by*, the practice of speaking. This paradox exists, argues Derrida, because it is only by downgrading the written word, by repressing its significance, that Saussure is able to maintain the spoken word as a source of truth and authenticity. So although Saussure professes to maintain the prior significance of language as a system, Derrida shows how he ultimately relies upon a notion of the privileged status of the speaking subject. It is this underlying assumption which places Saussure squarely within the Western metaphysical tradition, as Derrida argues:

> The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced. This logocentrism, this *epoch* of the full speech, has always placed in parenthesis, *suspended*, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing.[4]

Derrida's criticism, to put it simply, is that by prioritising speech over writing, the idea of an immediate, intuitive access to meaning and truth, is maintained. By reversing this hierarchy, within the parameters of a Saussurean linguistic system, Derrida completes Saussure's project, and finally 'depersonalises' language. That is, he shows how, without the medium of a thinking subject, the sign is forever separated from the signified. He undertakes this reversal *not* to introduce a new hierarchy - he does not want to prioritise writing over speech, but rather to indicate that the sign, whether written *or spoken*, is

always the product of a system, and does not denote any relation to an immediate presence.

In more general terms, Derrida's notion of the downgrading of 'otherness' in the Western philosophical tradition is heavily indebted to Heidegger. Heidegger attacked Western metaphysics for its dualistic approach to reality, and cited, as examples of this, Plato's separation of ideal Forms from everyday existence, the medieval separation of God and the physical world, and Descartes' separation of the thinking consciousness from its physical surroundings. For Heidegger, these dualisms, whereby certain aspects of human nature are always downgraded, result in 'inauthentic existence', an alienation from our true selves which should, and can, be overcome. Thus he saw his major task to be to carry out a *'Destruktion'* of the history of ontology. By this he does not mean 'destruction' in the usual sense of the word, but rather something close to a 'destructuring' or a 'dismantling'. For in Heidegger's view, by privileging some aspects of reality and excluding others, the tradition of ontological thought has served to conceal the original sources from which it arose. As he puts it,

> If the question of Being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it are necessary. We understand this task as the *destruction* of the traditional content of ancient ontology... This destruction is based upon the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of Being were gained.[5]

Thus through Heidegger, Derrida is introduced to the ways in which the Western tradition has always excluded the 'other' in its attempts to uncover an absolute, idealised truth, and also to the Heideggerian version of a deconstruction which aims to expose this concealment. Yet, as Derrida points out, Heidegger's longing for authenticity, for the immediate presence of an origin, replicates the quest in traditional metaphysics for a transcendental truth. In dividing 'authentic' existence from inauthentic existence, Heidegger is producing his oppositional own binary pair, his own dualism. This can be seen, for

example, where Derrida plays Heidegger off against Nietzsche:

> There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think of this without *nostalgia*; that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country or thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this, in the sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance.[6]

So Derrida's critique centres on the fact that Heidegger's 'destruktion' aims at deconstructing a tradition in order to get back to an original, unconcealed meaning, and it is this point of departure which begins to characterise Derrida's project of deconstruction.

Nietzsche, whom Heidegger criticised as the last of the metaphysicians, gets treated very differently by Derrida:

> Radicalizing the concepts of *interpretation, perspective, evaluation, difference* . . . Nietzsche, far from remaining simply (with Hegel and as Heidegger wished) within metaphysics, would have contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood.[7]

Derrida thus interprets Nietzsche's position as one which separates forever the signifier and the signified, in which writing is not subordinate to truth, while Heidegger argues that Nietzsche supposes the existence of determinate meanings. In *Spurs*, Derrida argues that Nietzsche's styles "protect against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat [of that] which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view: presence, content, the thing itself, meaning, truth"[8].
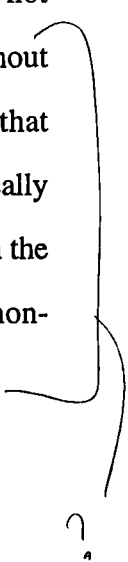
It is strange that Derrida does not apply his usual deconstructive critique to Nietzsche, for while it is arguably the case that Nietzsche is one of Derrida's more radical predecessors, and closer to Derrida than any other, it is not certain that Nietzsche's work could provide Derrida with the support which he imputes to it. Nietzsche's *style*, his poetics of writing for the purposes of diversion and parody, does, as Derrida recognises (and adopts for himself), undermine the notion of a transcendental signified. Yet Nietzsche's constant

position is that language ensues from a prelinguistic experience. Thus song and poetry, for Nietzsche, are meaningful not simply as tools for disrupting logocentric truths, but because they immediately access something more fundamental: the self. It seems that Derrida misinterprets Nietzsche, as Hoar points out,

> There is certainly a Nietzschean philosophy of writing, but it isn't exactly the one attributed to him by Derrida. For style as defined by Nietzsche ...
> does not amount to an absence of origin and absence of foundation. The world for Nietzsche is not a *groundless chess board*.[9]

If it is the case, as it appears to be, that Derrida turns a blind eye to the aspects of Nietzsche which do not support his own position, this could raise difficulties for his own project. The reason that Derrida is not critical of Nietzsche in the way that he is critical of just about every other philosopher, is that he believes that Nietzsche has shown that writing is not subordinate to any originary truth. Thus Derrida makes Nietzsche's style his own, without in the least adhering to Nietzsche's fundamental thesis, for if he were to recognise that "Nietzsche, just like Plato and Rousseau - in an entirely metaphysical manner - theoretically conceives of writing qua style as a pale imitation"[10], he would be left unable to explain the existence of writing and the sign without inviolating his own non-metaphysical, non-transcendental premises.

C: Differance.

'*Differance*' is the neologism coined by Derrida to describe how a sign comes to occupy a certain position in a system of signifiers. One must first of all understand this invention in the context of the modern French language. Unlike English, French has not developed two verbs from the Latin *differre*, but has maintained the senses of both to differ and to defer in the same verb, '*differer*'. Derrida's invented word, '*differance*', thus welds together *No*

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difference and deferral, containing a sense of both spatial and temporal difference.

More specifically, Derrida's concept of differance stems from his critique of classical semiology, which seems to be both a critique of semiology's interpretation of language and the sign, as well as a critique of how this interpretation represents and produces a typically Western understanding of signs, meaning and reality. This double critique, exposed by the concept of differance, also clarifies Derrida's own understanding of the nature of language. The following extract from *Margins of Philosophy* serves to summarise and elucidate Derrida's critique of classical semiology in relation to differance:

> The sign is usually said to be put in place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. Whether we are concerned with the verbal or the written sign, with the monetary sign, or with electoral delegation and political representation, the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence. What I am describing here in order to define it is the classically determined structure of the sign in all the banality of its characteristics - signification as the *differance* of temporization. And this structure presupposes that the sign, which defers presence, is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence that it defers and *moving towards* the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate. According to this classical semiology, the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the sign in this sense is a movement of mediation.[11] [emphasis added.]

In this way, differance describes how, in classical semiology, the sign is always understood as secondary to that which it represents; it is only a representation of the 'real' thing, the signified.

For Derrida, as we saw in his analyses of various thinkers and Saussure in particular, the meaning of the sign is constituted not by its relation to the signified, but through its position in a referential structure of other signs; its difference to other signs. The signified,

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the thing itself, is forever deferred by the sign, and the concept of an unmediated presence is a nostalgic fallacy. Derrida refers to the process by which the sign always replaces the lost origin as *supplementarity*:

> One could say . . . that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence - this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*.[12]

So for Derrida, the supplement is that which both signifies the lack of a 'presence', and compensates for that lack of presence by setting in motion its own economy of difference. Philosophies which take no account of its activity are, accordingly, doomed to mistake the sign for the missing origin which it represents. To put it simply, this permanent deferral is *caused* by difference. Derrida is arguing that because the sign is produced, determined by its relation to other signs, by not being other signs (for example, the meaning of the sign or word 'black' is determined by its relation to other signs, that is, 'not white', rather than any relation to an immediate, unsignified presence) we can see how this process of differentiation always gets in the way of, *defers*, the signified.

Derrida's description of linguistic meaning as the 'systematic play of differences', and the way in which this means that the signified is always deferred, is illustrated in his analysis of Plato's *Phaedrus*. The principal guide Derrida chooses to follow within the intricacies of this play is the family of pharmaceutical terms that are associated by Plato with writing, but particularly the term 'pharmakon'. In classical Greek, a pharmakon is a drug, and as such it may be taken to mean either a remedy or a poison, either the cure of an illness or its cause. This is problematic for Plato, argues Derrida, because pharmakon cannot be made to function as an unambiguous term available to dialectic reasoning. Instead, it enters the dialectic from both sides at once (remedy-poison, good-bad, positive-negative) and threatens the philosophical process from within: "It is precisely this ambiguity that Plato attempts to master, to dominate by inserting its definition into simple, clear-cut opposition:

good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance"[13]. What Derrida exposes here, is how the dialectical logic of Western philosophy requires that one term be valued over the other, that one term is necessarily excluded such that the concept is defined as the *difference* of the other. The efficacy of a particular sign depends upon the implied presence - that is, the absence, or non-presence - of the other linguistic signs with which it has an oppositional relationship. Linguistic signification and verbal meaning are thus inextricably interwoven with non-presence.

There are two criticisms which can be made of Derrida's concept of differance, the first centring on the inaccuracy of it as a descriptive tool, the second highlighting the way that it covertly moves from explanation to critique. Firstly, then, it could be the case that the 'systematic play of differences' is in fact less influential than Derrida believes in the determination and invention of a sign, and rather it is other non-linguistic cultural factors which place the sign in opposition to others in the existing linguistic structure. That is, by explaining the formation of signs in purely linguistic terms, Derrida is describing an enclosed system which seems to have no causal interaction with, for example, a society's ontological and cultural influences. He does notice this problem, pointing out that " . . . these differences are themselves effects. They have not fallen from the sky fully formed, and are no more inscribed in a 'topos noetos' than they are prescribed in the gray matter of the brain."[14] Yet despite this insight, Derrida somewhat ambiguously describes differance as something which produces difference, as something which is constituted historically as a weave of differences. So while he recognises that his concept of differance constitutes a complex and interrelated structure of both cause and effect, he is unable to describe the non-linguistic aspects of the process in more explicit terms without the danger of citing a non-linguistic 'origin' of differance, and this means that the dynamics at work in the 'systematic play of differences' take on a rather transcendental quality.

Secondly, it must be pointed out that Derrida's description of the *differance* explicit in Plato's *Phaedrus* does not logically equate with a criticism of it. Derrida's analysis could be read simply as a description of the way meanings are produced, yet Derrida strongly implies that he is critical of this process. But from what standpoint can a criticism be made? Derrida insists on the binary nature of differance, for every sign there is *one* excluded 'other'. Yet surely there must be an infinite number of excluded others for every sign which makes its way into our conceptual vocabulary. If this were the case, the critical aspect of differance could be shown to be groundless: exclusion is inevitable in the production of meaning. To put it another way, there is a *simplicity* apparent in the retrospective analysis that Derrida applies to Plato's *Phaedrus*, which makes deconstruction appear as a method of restoring a *natural* balance. That is, in highlighting the oppositional binary pair and the single excluded other, Derrida is imposing his own critical schema upon infinite heterogeneous possibilities - a multitude of excluded others. It is this partisan imposition which, mistakenly, gives differance its critical edge, and it is the criticism of the exclusion produced by this misunderstanding of differance which deconstruction aims to expose.

D: Deconstruction.

Derrida's well-known method of deconstruction is essentially an attempt to right the wrongs of Western philosophy as he sees them. Through this approach, Derrida aims to illustrate that the desire for an unmediated truth of the world is false, that since Plato, Western rationality has produced hierarchically-ordered concepts based upon binary oppositions, and that any attempt to totalise the text can be seen to depend transcendentally upon a generalised form of the differences it proposes to subsume.

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Derrida describes deconstruction as the genealogical analysis of how the concept is built and legitimised, that is, as a discovery of the concept's hidden assumptions. Thus Derrida exposes an uncertainty principle under the foundation stone of everything he deconstructs. In order to remove or make apparent the assumptions and hierarchies of Western rationality, Derrida has to hurdle an immediate obstacle; that is, he cannot simply stand outside of reason and take a neutral view of the metaphysical system of hierarchies that presents itself:

> Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralisation:
> it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing,
> practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general
> displacement of the system.[15]

In other words, deconstruction must initially give precedence to the 'other' of the metaphysical system, overturn hierarchies, not in order to produce yet another set of hierarchies, but to make apparent and to liberate all concepts from what Derrida describes as the dominant force which has organised the logocentric hierarchy.

Derrida believes that literary and poetic language, because it works around the limits of our logical concepts, can provide the space from which to attempt such a deconstruction. In *The Double Session* and *Glas*, for example, Derrida attempts to put deconstruction into practice with a typographic invention. In *The Double Session*, Derrida inserts the poetic text into the very 'process of truth' which has always been philosophy's exclusive concern. Thus this text initiates its highly complex trajectory with a single page on which a short piece by Mallarme (*Mimique*) appears inset into a fragment from Plato's *Philebus*. By means of this method, Derrida already announces an intention: to open up a space within the truth process inaugurated by Plato for a consideration of the poetic operation it has always condemned or excluded.

Glas is even more complex. On its large, square pages, two wide columns face off in

different type: smaller, denser on the left, larger, more spaced out on the right. There is also a third type in places, the smallest of the three, cutting into the column at various points, forming inscribed incisions either along its outermost edge or down the centre. On every page *Glas* attempts to demonstrate the borderless condition of texts, and their susceptibility to the most unexpected encounters. The Hegelian dialectic of Absolute Spirit, tracked relentlessly with the left hand, are compared with the writings of Jean Genet, on the right. The work of the negative which drives the dialectic towards an ever-higher synthesis on the left is constantly encroached upon by the glorification of the criminal underclass cited at length on the right. Thus Derrida is tracing what he sees as the failing dialectic attempt to totalise.

These attempts at deconstruction are pretentious and simplistic. More importantly, they fail to overcome both the transcendentalism derived from Derrida's misunderstanding of differance, and the nihilism of which he is often accused. Derrida is aware of the criticism of deconstruction as nihilistic, a label which he hastily refuses:

> There have been several misinterpretations of what I and other deconstructionists are trying to do. It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned by language; it is, in fact, saying exactly the opposite. The critique of logocentrism above all else is the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language'.[16]

Yet it is this search for *the* other which brings to the fore the transcendental character in Derrida's concept of differance and deconstruction, and in doing so, ultimately exposes the nihilistic tensions within his work. By speaking of the one, single excluded other, Derrida is unwittingly being drawn into the prevailing hierarchy which he aims to expose. That is, once it is realised that his understanding of differance is simplistic and partisan in the way it ignores the infinite possibility of a multitude of excluded others *for each sign which makes*

its way into our conceptual system, one can see how deconstruction gives precedence only to a single 'other' which is determined by the prevailing hierarchy. The result is, despite Derrida's claims, a transcendental view, a view which always already has a preconceived notion of what *the* 'other' is. In this way, Derrida necessarily replicates the system of hierarchies which deconstruction aims to expose.

Nevertheless, there is, in Derrida, an unconscious battle going on, a battle which surfaces here and there in his fight against transcendentalism and nihilism. For if we were to re-write differance and deconstruction in a way which, by recognising the infinite possibility of heterogeneous others, avoided this transcendentalism, deconstruction would then become a strategy of nihilism. It would become a strategy of nihilism because the predominant hierarchy would be shown not only to be arbitrary in relation to the single excluded other which exists (in Derrida's view) for each dominant concept, but to be absolutely arbitrary in relation to the infinite number of possible excluded others which exist for each concept. A strategy which then aims at exposing differance in this way, is a strategy which ultimately levels hierarchies as it exposes their absolute arbitrariness.

Glimpses of both the transcendental and nihilistic tendencies in Derrida can be found, for example, in his proposed two-phase programme of the deconstruction of sexual difference ('phase' being understood as structural rather than chronological). In the first place, as Derrida describes it, a reversal would take place in which the opposed terms would be inverted. Thus 'woman', the previously subordinate term, might become the dominant one in relation to 'man'. Yet because such a reversal could only repeat the traditional scheme (in which the hierarchy of duality is always constituted) it alone could not effect any significant change. Change would only occur, Derrida argues, through the 'second', more radical phase of deconstruction in which a new concept would be forged simultaneously.

Thus what we see here, is how Derrida's view of the excluded other is always binary and oppositional, and, more importantly, subconsciously arises from a predetermined notion of what the 'other' is. He does react to this tendency, however, although not, perhaps, from any real understanding of the source from which it emanates:

> It is the word 'concept' or 'conception' that I would in turn question in its relationship to any essence which is rigorously or properly identifiable... The concept of the concept, along with the entire system that attends it, belongs to a prescriptive order. It is that order that a problematics of woman and a problematics of differance, as sexual difference, should disrupt along the way.17

This implies, then, that deconstruction aims at the removal of the concept in an attempt to remove the hierarchies which produce, and are produced by it. One can see how Derrida is right in his argument that the concept is necessarily prescriptive - it is prescriptive because the mere existence of the concept means that an (or for Derrida *the*) alternative concept has been excluded. Yet it is prescriptive precisely because it carries a determinate meaning, such that to remove the concept through deconstruction does indeed become a strategy of nihilism.

Once Derrida's misunderstanding of differance is understood, it can be shown how the dichotomy between transcendentalism and nihilism prevails, and how Derrida avoids one only by invoking the other. His deconstruction of sexual difference, in its later, more radical form, is an example of how deconstruction would proceed if the misunderstanding of differance were to be worked through and revised in the way discussed. By replacing the binary opposed pair with the infinite possibility of heterogeneous others as I suggested above, the result would be a levelling of hierarchies and thus a removal of the concept But what it does, more importantly, is to show how more consistent notions of differance and deconstruction must be nihilistic if they are to avoid transcendentalism. If nihilism is to be avoided, then the message is clear - do not deconstruct, or at least, do not do it very well. Sooner or later, however, deconstruction must come up against the transcendentalist/nihilist

dichotomy.

To summarise this complex critique: It was shown how Derrida's understanding of differance is necessarily transcendental because the single, excluded 'other' is predetermined. Yet a proper understanding of differance unearths the nihilism apparent in the absolutely arbitrary way that concepts come to the fore from an infinite possibility of heterogeneous others. Because Derrida's deconstruction generally proceeds from his misunderstanding of differance, it exhibits a transcendentalism which is at odds with his project. Yet when he tries to counter this, as he does with his argument in favour of the removal of the concept, he inevitably exhibits the nihilism which is at the heart of differance. My argument is not, therefore, that there should be a more consistent form of deconstruction based on a better understanding of differance, but rather that because differance, the way that meanings and concepts come to exist, is necessarily nihilistic, there is little to be said in favour of the project of deconstruction at all.

E: Conclusion - Hermeneutics and 'Cinders'.

The debate between Derrida and hermeneutics is often an indirect one, but it is nevertheless useful to situate Derrida in relation to hermeneutics as a way of clarifying his position. In particular, it can be shown that Derrida's implicit critique of hermeneutics is a convincing one. In *Cinders*, a recent work of Derrida's which serves to summarise his critique of classical semiology, however, we find that he can be placed, along with Gadamer, Habermas, and the whole hermeneutic project, squarely within the Western metaphysical tradition.

In *Truth and Method* (1975), Gadamer defines his hermeneutic project as an attempt to

understand what the human sciences 'truly are', and 'what connects them with the totality

of our experience of world'. In particular, he is concerned to resist the truth-claims of

scientific method, to question its legitimacy and to situate it within truth-claims emanating

from non-scientific modes of experience. More specifically, his explanation of truth and

understanding centres on the intrinsic historicity of the object:

> . . . the purpose of my investigation is . . . to discover what is common to
> all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never
> subjective behaviour towards a given 'object', but towards its effective
> history - the history of its influence; in other words, understanding belongs
> to the being of that which is understood.[18]

This 'effective history' exists, for Gadamer, over and above interpretation, and means that

there is a universality of the hermeneutic viewpoint. In other words, there is a permanence

in our historical heritage which produces the definitive nature of objects prior to any

subjective interpretation of them, and that understanding of objects comes, in the main,

from this 'effective history'.

We find agreement between Derrida and Gadamer in some aspect of Gadamer's notion of

language. He says, for example, that "that which comes into language is not something that

is pre-given before language; rather it receives in the word its own definition"[19]. This

implies, as with Derrida, that there is no signified outside of that which is expressed in

language. For Gadamer, however, while the relation between the signifier and the signified

is not the distinction maintained in the notion of a 'mirror of nature' whereby there is an

absolute separation of signifier and signified, it is rather the belief that they are one and the

same. This is different from Derrida, who *could* be interpreted as reading signifier and

signified as one and the same, but only insofar as the signified disappears in any absolute,

'real' sense. For Gadamer, on the other hand, "to be expressed in language does not mean

that a second being is acquired. The way in which a thing presents itself is, rather, part of

its own being"[20]. In other words, the signifier is not mere linguistic representation, it is

also the 'thing itself', the signified.

The specific difficulty that Derrida would have with Gadamer's hermeneutics would centre on the fact that in order to avoid contradicting his assertion that understanding is a function of the object rather than the subject, Gadamer would have to maintain that the object, the signified, creates its own signifier, and that this is how the two are unified, how the signified exists in the signifier. However, this then presupposes a signified which pre-exists its signifier - for however fleeting a moment, the signified comes first, thus placing Gadamer within the traditional semiology of Husserl and others.

While Derrida has not entered into a debate with hermeneutics directly, Gadamer has tried to anticipate his objections, arguing that he has not 'wandered into the dried-up pastures of metaphysics'. Nuyen argues that such a critique from Derrida would be based on a misinterpretation of the nature of hermeneutic understanding:

> The concern is legitimate only if in every act of understanding, the overcoming of otherness reaches a finality, a Hegelian end-point. . . It is in fact a kind of understanding that always 'places itself in question', a conversation that 'never ends', a dialogue in which 'no word is the last word', and every word 'always gives rise to a new question'.21

However, Derrida would not have to show that hermeneutics has a 'Hegelian *terminus ad quem*', as Nuyen puts it, but only that Gadamer presupposes an *a priori* truth, as described above. Habermas makes the same point about Gadamer, pointing out that Gadamer feels that interpretation and understanding take place against a background of a consensus that is reliable because it is part of the tradition. In other words, Gadamer's concept of 'effective history' which produces the objects in which meaning is implicit, works with an always already achieved consensus, again placing Gadamer within metaphysics.

Habermas also criticises Derrida, however, arguing that he sets out to reduce all texts to an undifferentiated 'freeplay' of signification in his levelling of genre distinctions between philosophy and literature22. Habermas rightly goes on to point out that such a levelling

means that philosophy is just one 'kind of writing' among others, with no special claim to validity or truth. More importantly, however, he notices that this will mean that the same is true of poetry and literature, thus removing any emancipatory promise which Derrida attributes to it. This reflects the earlier criticism of deconstruction, above, in which it was shown that a more consistent analysis of differance would point to the absolutely arbitrary nature of meaning. There remains a problem with Habermas, however, and that is that his critique, instead of tackling the question of whether this unfortunate implication of Derrida's work is nevertheless true, is determined to maintain an *a priori* distinction between theoretical understanding, practical reason and aesthetic judgement, thus placing his notions of 'transcendental pragmatics' and 'ideal speech situations' within foundationalist thought along with Gadamer's 'effective history'.

The problems which hermeneutics point to in Derrida's work are therefore only problems if one remains within the traditional philosophical schema, and from this perspective, Derrida would have little difficulty in refuting the hermeneutic critique of his position. However, that is not to say that Derrida's position has no internal difficulties and contradictions. These can be exposed by a close examination of one of his more recent works, *Cinders*.

The whole book revolves around a single phrase, a phrase which first appeared in Derrida's *Dissemination*, and has been haunting him, it seems, ever since. The phrase is '*il y a là cendre*', with a grave accent over *là* so that it translates as "cinders there are", which means both 'cinders exist' and also points to them in a place, '*there* are cinders'. For Derrida, 'cinder' is a metaphor for the sign, its existence relying on the myth that it represents a signified, that it is what is left after that signified is burnt. But, of course, Derrida's point is that there was never anything there to burn, never an origin, only that which gives the impression of a reflection, a remnant of a non-existent fire: cinders. As Ned Lukacher puts it in the Introduction,

> The fire has always already consumed access to the origin of language and thus to the truth of being. But by leaving cinder remains, it allows the relation between the coming of language and the truth of being to presist, to smolder within the ashes. Cinders name both the extreme fragility and the uncanny tenacity of this tradition.[23]

So in this book, Derrida is doing several things. Firstly, through the use of this metaphor, he is reiterating his critique of classical semiology, deconstructing *differance* again, in order to clarify his argument regarding the significance of the sign in relation to a non-existent origin: "[The cinder] remains *from* what is not, in order to recall the delicate, charred bottom of itself only non-being or non-presence"[24]. Secondly, by deconstructing/destructing the word 'cinder', by playing with it, using it and re-using it until when he writes the word 'cinder' we no longer have the image of a cinder (ash, etc) in our minds, he is demonstrating the separateness of the sign from that which it is supposed to represent, the signified. That is, he is showing how the sign takes its meaning from the other signs that surround it, from its position in a referential structure.

Thirdly, and more specifically, Derrida is not taking as his starting point the argument that there is no such thing as the origin, but rather that as soon as we have a sign for something, its signified, its unmediated origin, disappears:

> I understand that the cinder is nothing that can be in the world, nothing that remains as an entity. It is the being, rather, that there is - this is the name of the being that there is there but which, giving itself, is nothing, remains beyond everything that is, remains unpronounceable in order to make saying possible although it is nothing.[25] (emphasis added)

In other words, in order to appropriate a meaning we must capture it, express it, grasp it, *through a sign* we must represent it. Yet in doing so, it exists solely in the sign, because the system of signifiers, differance, then determines its meaning. In capturing a meaning through the signifier, we lose it forever. And, because we cannot know something without its sign, we know only signs. Signs saturate meaning, and there is nothing left over.

Fourthly, and most importantly for an appraisal of Derrida, *Cinders* unintentionally implies the existence of the signified. In fact, one could not see how this book could be written unless Derrida has in mind an absolutely idealised picture of the signified. The debate seems to replicate the absolute distinction maintained by Plato and others between the signifier and the signified. For Derrida, the signified is something that can never be reached, unlike Platonic Forms. Yet it is there, nonetheless, despite his claims that cinders are what is left after a fire that never was, the impression/representation of a non-existent origin. For if he truly believed that there is nothing beyond the sign, surely he would not maintain the distinction between the sign and the signified? The sign, for Derrida, would *be* the signified. The origin would not be a non-origin, it would exist in the sign. The sign would be Derrida's reality, his total reality. Yet he cannot maintain a discourse, a writing or thinking of any kind, without the notion of an origin - non-existent or otherwise. Imagine, for example, that Derrida has completely taken on board his own claims about the non-existence of the signified, the free-play of signifiers; his thought, his writing, would contain no reference to the non-existence of the origin, or the signified, because it would be all there in the sign. He would write and think as if the sign were his total reality, all meaning forever only in the sign.

This point is worth emphasising, for it is fundamental to the whole deconstructionist/postmodernist debate. Derrida is protesting about the notion that signs represent something more real, that the sign is secondary to the signified. We can never get past the sign, he says, it forever defers the signified, and anyway, the meaning and use of the sign is determined by difference, by its position in a referential structure of other signs: all signs and no signifieds. Derrida's ultimate critique, therefore is aimed at the philosophical tradition which desires to know an unmediated signified. However, unless Derrida himself maintains a distinction between signifier and signified, he is replicating this. In asserting that the totality of meaning and reality is to be found within the sign, he is

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saying that truth is in the word and the word is God. Never mind how the meaning of the word is determined (this, after all, could be reduced to the nature/culture debate), if there is nothing but the text, then the text is everything - it is Derrida's transcendental signified, and it is more immediate than Platonic Forms. The significance attached to the signified in traditional Western metaphysics is simply transferred to the sign.

To avoid this conclusion, Derrida must argue that the truth and reality accorded to the sign, is somehow less true, less real, than that previously accorded to the signified. If we accept that Derrida is correct in his assertion that the meaning of a particular sign is derived solely from its position in relation to other signs, then does this somehow make it less real? Derrida is damned if it does, and damned if it does not. If it does not, then he is, as described above, transferring to the sign the significance previously attached to a transcendental signified - he is turning it into the Platonic Form of the twentieth century. If, however, the fact that the sign is determined by a linguistic system of differences *does* somehow make it less real, then we must ask 'less real than what?', and this implies that Derrida has in mind an unachievable, idealised transcendental signified, thus replicating the secondary position accorded to the sign in traditional semiology.

There is, of course, a third alternative to the above two ways in which Derrida replicates the traditional significance of the sign, and that is the removal of any significance whatsoever, as was implied in his deconstruction of sexual difference. The nihilism which goes hand-in-hand with this alternative approach, however, removes all support for a project of deconstruction. Such a project can only be supported by attaching some significance to meaning, which, as we have seen, necessarily replicates Western metaphysics, thereby reducing deconstruction to mere critique.

PART II - THE SELF.

A: Introduction.

Derrida points out that the individual has been defined and redefined, and that this illustrates that the subject is not a formal identity. Rather, he argues, the production of these definitions depends on external influences of which one must become aware.[26] This perspective has led some critics to accuse Derrida of annihilating the very idea of the human subject in his determination to dispense with all centralising agencies of meaning. However, Derrida has argued that:

> To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, 'operations' or 'effects' of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure cogito of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it.[27]

Derrida's 'resituation' of the subject emanates from his linguistic analysis, whereby subjectivity, like objectivity, is inscribed in a system of differance. This redescription of the self emancipates it from previously prescriptive notions of identity, but it can be shown that to do this effectively, such a project results in nihilistic implications. In an effort to avoid such implications, Derrida introduces the notion of 'invention' as an interplay of subject and object. Yet this almost existentialist view of the self seems to exacerbate, rather than overcome, the difficulty of finding a 'middle way' between the old transcendental concept of 'being' and the nihilism encountered by Derrida's attempt to free the subject. Manifestations of these confused vacillations can be found in a detailed examination of how Derrida separates speech acts from the speaker, ultimately exposing a covert transcendentalism in his desire to emancipate an idealised self.

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B: The Deconstruction and Resituation of the Subject.

As with his linguistic analysis of differance, meaning is dependent upon signs. Not only, asserts Derrida, can we not comprehend an object immediately and without the sign, it is also the case that *mental* phenomena can take place only via the mediation of signs. Furthermore, the deferral of an immediate self-consciousness is permanent and infinite; 'Being' exists only in the realm of signs:

> Subjectivity - like objectivity - is an effect of *differance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *differance*. That is why the *a* of *differance* also recalls the fact that spacing is *temporisation*, detour, delay via which intuition, perception, consumption, in a word the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being* (*étant*), are always deferred. Deferred precisely because of the principle of difference, which means that an element only functions and signifies, only takes or gives 'meaning' ('*sens*') by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces.[28]
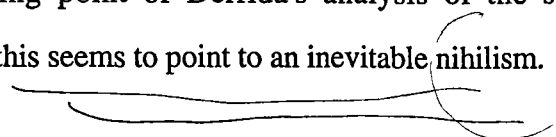
In other words, Derrida believes differance to be a *condition* of self consciousness. That is, one cannot be self-aware without signs, and in thinking of oneself through signs, the signified (oneself) is forever deferred. This is because, he argues, the self, the subject, is no different from the object, in that it is located within a system of signs. In the same way that the object, as a signified, is forever deferred because of the necessary conceptualisation of it through a system of signifiers, the subject too is constituted by the signifying rules of its formation. As Manfred Frank points out, "Instead of the play of reflection attesting or confirming the identity of what is reflecting with what is reflected, the detour through reflection is sufficient to deprive the self of its identity forever".[29]

For Derrida, the importance of this removal of identity lies in the fact that it erases prescriptivity along with it. By redescribing subjectivity as an effect of differance, Derrida points to the arbitrary nature of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, between prevailing concepts of what it is to be human, and what it actually is to be human. In particular, he seems to have an emancipatory vision of sexuality once the privileged

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status of existing identities are removed:

> . . . What if we were to approach here (for one does not arrive at this as one would at a determined location) the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine-masculine, beyond bi-sexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality, which come to the same thing. . . I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices.[30]

Derrida is attempting to avoid privileging the 'other' of prevailing notions of sexuality so that he cannot be accused of replicating the old schema of determinate sexual identity by producing a new hierarchy. But as was noted in the section on Deconstruction, above, he can only do this by removing the concept altogether, meaning, in this case, that he removes the self. That is, a Derridean deconstruction of the self can only remain internally coherent if it involves a removal of all definitions of what it is to be human, and when one bears in mind the starting point of Derrida's analysis of the subject, the deferral of self-consciousness, this seems to point to an inevitable nihilism.

C: The Human Reality Behind the Sign.

Despite the implication in his argument that 'being' is forever deferred, that subjectivity is constituted externally through the sign and differance, there sometimes appears to be a reticence, on Derrida's part, to sustain the implications of such a position. As Michel Hoar points out: "The yes, says Derrida, necessarily comes back to itself, refers back to its self. . . But this yes, again ambiguous, congeals, becomes immobilized, surprised by its audacity, as if it were afraid to recognize. . . *its force*."[31] Indeed, if it was not for the fact that Derrida has plainly stated that differance has a determining role in the signs which necessarily defer self-consciousness, one could see how his deconstruction of sexual

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difference, for example, could lead to an almost existentialist view of the self. That is, instead of pointing to nihilism, the removal of determining concepts and prescriptive definitions of identity could result in a kind of infinite freedom to be self-forming.

In *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, for example, Derrida's analysis of 'invention', in relation to the self, gives quite a different impression of subjectivity to that discussed elsewhere. He poses the following questions: Why is it that invention cannot be reduced to the discovery, the revelation, or the unveiling of truth? No more than it can be reduced to the creation, the imagination, or the production of the thing? In other words, Derrida sees invention as an interplay of object and subject, deriving neither solely from one or the other. This argument, that there is a human reality behind the sign, is necessary for Derrida to prescribe deconstruction as an emancipatory project. More importantly, however, it brings to the fore the contradictions in his concept of the self which stem from his desire to avoid both a transcendental notion of being, and nihilism.

D: Conclusion - Idealised Being.

The specific manifestations of these contradictions can be found in Derrida's discussion of the 'speaking subject'. Derrida argues that the speaker is not present in his discourse, and provides two main reasons for this; differance and the iterability of the sign, and the 'boundless context' of the speech act. In both of these cases, however, it can be shown that Derrida's arguments ultimately rely upon an idealised, transcendental notion of the self.

The concept of differance, as was discussed earlier, entails that presence is always deferred. But it will also be remembered that the meaning of a particular sign is determined by *difference*, by its oppositional relationship to the non-present 'other'. Since meaning is

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determined by the 'systematic play of differences' and the iterability of the sign is governed

by the rules which make it possible, argues Derrida, meaning must be an *effect* of

language, and cannot, therefore, emanate from the outside world or the speaking subject:

there can be no pre-linguistic self-consciousness:

> 'Language is not a function of the speaking subject.' This implies that the
> subject (self-identity or even consciousness of self-identity, self-
> consciousness) is inscribed in language, that he is a 'function' of the
> language. He becomes a *speaking* subject only by conforming his speech . .
> . to a system of differences . . . to the general law of differance.[32]

So on the one hand, Derrida seems to see the system of differences as *the law* of

differance, external to the subject, and almost transcendental. The subject exists only by

entering into a system of differences - he is situated, even produced, *made* by that system.

The meaning of a speech act is determined by conventions and the place of the word in a

system of signs, rather than by the intentions of the speaker. Yet Derrida talks of the

subject *conforming* his speech to a system of differences. What would the subject's speech

sound like before it was thus conformed? That is, Derrida implies a more *real* speech, or at

least, a pre-linguistic concept or meaning which is then bastardized as it comes under the

influence of differance in an attempt to express itself linguistically.

Derrida's second reason for his argument that the speaker is not present in his speech

centres on Austin's point that the meaning of words in a speech act are determined by the

context in which they are spoken. While Derrida agrees with this, he goes on to argue that

the context can never be completely specified. From this, he argues that as the meaning of

speech acts is neverthless determined by their context, the speaker cannot know what the

meaning of his speech will be. That is, if we cannot fully describe the context which gives

our speech meaning, we cannot intend what we say, we cannot be fully present in our

utterances.

Yet this argument only makes sense if one has a very idealised view of being. The

effectiveness of our speech acts, being able to fulfill a promise for example, has no bearing on whether we are 'fully present in our speech acts'. Our inability to fully specify the context in which we speak does not effect our 'being'. This would only be the case if we could argue that we *would* be present in our speech acts if only we could account for every aspect of the context in which we speak. The fact that this cannot be done, as Derrida rightly points out in his criticism of Austin, does not bring the relation of 'being' and contextualisation closer together. What it *should* show, is that 'being' is unrelated to contextualisation of speech acts. To summarise this point in simple terms: Derrida can only argue that non-being relies upon our inability to fully specify the context in which we speak, *if* he were to believe that 'being' relies upon an ability to fully specify that context. His argument that we can never fully specify that context because it is infinite therefore bears no relation to what 'being' is. In other words, to measure 'being' against a non-existent ideal is senseless unless one secretly believes in that ideal as a realistic criterion.

The criticisms which can be made of Derrida's concept of the self closely parallel those made of deconstruction in general: Derrida's critique of the transcendental signified (in this case 'being') must ultimately rely upon a transcendental notion of a lost origin. If Derrida were able to give up his idealised notion of 'being', he would remove the problem, as R. Tallis explains,

> The question of the context of acts can be approached in a non-Derridean spirit. The boundless text of society which no one can fully specify but which is requisite for acts to have their special meanings is not necessarily alien to the actors. It is arguable that the sum of our contexts, of circumstances, is what we are; or rather we are that in virtue of which all of this loci are specified or designated *as* contexts. There is no absolute difference between the self that has a context and the context that surrounds it.[33]

To put it slightly differently, a far more coherent view of the self than Derrida's would be to see it as fully constructed by a system of signifiers such that the meaning intended by the speaker in his speech act is also the meaning constructed by the system of signifiers. In this

way, there is no 'self' that is separate from, and compromised by, the need to conform to the linguistic system. The system of signifiers is not 'outside' of the self, but forms the self.

Derrida cannot rid his work of its transcendental aspects, however, for to do so would mean that deconstruction would lose its emancipatory force. The entire project would come tumbling down if it were not for the fact that, hidden in his work somewhere, is the assumption that human nature is somehow being distorted by the prevailing hierarchies. If Derrida were to fully take on board the fact that subjectivity is constituted by context, including differance, then the distinction he maintains between sign and signified would disappear, and as was noted in relation to *Cinders*, the sign (in this case the speech act) would replace the signified ('being'); speech would signify not deferred presence, but presence itself.

In everyday language, of course, speech is taken to imply presence. Yet, as Habermas argues, Derrida levels these genre distinctions, and as Tallis points out, "Derrida is caught up in an absurd confusion of levels - between metaphysical absolutes and the ordinary senses of words; or between the absolutes of the metaphysician and the facts of everyday experience"[34]. Thus if Derrida were to rethink his work in a way that would no longer maintain the distinction between signifier and signified, his notion of the self would closely resemble the everyday idea of what it is to be human. This does not detract from his insights regarding, for example, the arbitrary nature of hierarchies of meaning or the contextualised nature of 'being'. Rather, it is the transformation of these observations into a prescription for deconstruction through a covert introduction of a transcendental view of the self that causes problems for Derrida. Tallis attempts to sum up this complex critique as follows:

> That a literary critic should have his daily practice influenced by the 'discovery' that the external world is only an effect of language, and

consequently write and try to publish one kind of article rather than another, is rather like a sports commentator deriving the superiority of cricket over football from the discovery that the 'outside world' (including playing fields) is a mental construct.[35]

In other words, Derrida seems to believe that a readjustment of our academic assumptions can have a desirable effect on our everyday practices. There are two problems with this. Firstly, there is the question of whether his insights regarding the human condition could provoke a change in everyday ontology. The answer is a most definite 'no', and highlights the inevitably nihilistic implications of such a view of human nature. To carry on with normal life while having an awareness of our lack of intention and 'being' would require a kind of 'ego-splitting'. But even if it could be shown that such an outlook could be desirable in some way, it would not be logically possible at the personal level. To *believe* that one is not 'present' in one's speech or thought is still to believe something, after all. For as soon as we try to take on board Derrida's concept of the subject, we instantly refute it by thinking it. Another example from Tallis serves to illustrate the point:

> By abolishing intention from speech - or treating the idea that what we say is informed by our intentions as an aspect of the logocentric fallacy - then we must abolish intention from our entire lives. This conclusion must be unpalatable to Derrida himself. After all, he must have, in some sense, intended to write *Of Grammatology* rather than to earn his living as a harpooner or a tatooist.[36]

That is not to say that Derrida's interpretation of human nature is completely wrong - I am not trying to simply restate Descartes - but rather that it is useless. This takes us to the second problem. *Why* should it be desirable to have an awareness of our 'non-being'? What we find in Derrida, ultimately, is the desire to get at 'the truth of the matter', and this comes, not from contextualisation, but rather from the fact that, at the end of the day, he has a nostalgic, transcendental and idealised view of what it is to be human. Again, to measure 'being' against a non-existent ideal is senseless unless one secretly believes in that ideal as a realistic criterion.

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PART III - POLITICS AND SOCIETY.

A: Introduction.

Despite Derrida's turn to the political in his later works, there are two interrelated reasons which suggest that there can be *no* political implications of his earlier philosophical insights. Firstly, the sense of deferral in *differance* implies that any political stance which believes itself to be based on a 'truer' understanding of man and society is always mistaken: there are no Platonic Forms, no models to imitate, no 'good' or 'bad' by which we could judge a political system. Secondly, Derrida argues that the very concept of the concept necessarily belongs to a prescriptive order, and it is this prescriptivity which deconstruction aims to disrupt and expose as foundationless. In other words, because the concept *as such* implies the existence of an origin, a signified, it already defines 'truth' and necessarily prescribes that this truth be represented as closely as possible. In political terms, for example, determinate concepts such as 'man' and 'society' carry with them prescriptions for specific ideologies and political structures. So, from Derrida's point of view, the first point illustrates that it is only by mistaking the sign for the signified, in the form of determinate concepts of some kind, that we could have a political position at all. The second point shows that any attempt to describe man or society 'the way it really is' will necessarily be prescriptive.

Derridean deconstruction is political, nonetheless. The political stance implicit in deconstruction evolves from the covert critical edge which Derrida gives to his concept of *differance*. Derrida's insists on the *binary* nature of differance, for every sign there is *one* excluded 'other'. Yet as was discussed earlier, there must be an infinite number of excluded others for every sign which makes its way into our conceptual system. Once this

is established, the critical aspect of differance can be shown to be groundless - exclusion is inevitable in the production of meaning. So Derrida's concentration on the single excluded other covertly introduces critique into what should be simply a description of how meanings are made. It is only this introduction of critique, however, that can provide the motivations for the project of deconstruction. In practice, the deconstruction of traditional hierarchies means overturning existing privileged concepts in order to expose what Derrida sees as the previously downgraded 'other'.

Thus Derrida's interpretation of differance already casts the political die for deconstruction: to celebrate the marginal. And the marginal, in relation to the dominant political trends in the West this century, is generally encapsulated by the Left. Indeed, it has been argued that "there is no doubt that Derridean deconstruction was a political project from the outset, or that Jacques Derrida himself, in some suitably indeterminate sense, has always been a man of the Left"[37], and that "'deconstruction', if there is such a thing, always already moves within a certain spirit of Marx"[38]. This political characteristic of deconstruction is manifested in Derrida's more recent works, *The Other Heading* (1992) and *Specters of Marx* (1994), which attempt, respectively, to deconstruct liberal democracy and to offer a reinterpretation of the 'spirit of Marxism' as the basis for what Derrida calls 'The New International'.

An analysis of these two books, however, indicates that the bias, in Derrida's description of differance, is not simply in favour of the marginal *per se*, but leans, specifically, towards freedom and equality. This means that Derrida's 'critique' of liberal democracy comes from within, and rather than questioning its legitimacy, strives to make its practice more consistent with its ideals through a radically reinterpreted (even *misinterpreted*) 'spirit of Marxism'. The contradiction can be seen, for example, in the reductive nature of Derrida's position that "if the Enlightenment has given us human rights, political liberties

and responsibilities, it would surely be out of the question to want to do away with the Enlightenment project[39]. This is reductive because, as Derrida seems to forget, he has already provided us with very good reasons to regard the Enlightenment project as fundamentally flawed. Yet his initial insights into the Enlightenment project are ignored as he fails to critically analyse the origins and justification of liberal democratic ideals, and in the end, his new concept of Marxism is revealed as a charade which attempts to hide his support for an idealised liberal democracy.

B: Derrida's Critique of Liberal Democracy.

The significance of the title of Derrida's book *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, plays on the French translation of the word 'heading' as *cap*. He interprets this in several ways. Firstly, he says, he was thinking of 'heading' in terms of a direction, so by 'the other heading' he is referring to the other of the heading (direction) of Europe. He goes on to distinguish between the feminine *la capitale*, the capital city of a country, and the masculine *le capital*, meaning capital in the monetary sense. His aim is to analyse and deconstruct the current direction of European identity in terms of both of these senses of capital.

Derrida argues that European cultural identity cannot and must not be dispersed into a multiplicity of little nationalisms, but neither should it accept the capital (*la capitale*) of a centralizing authority:

> If it is necessary to make sure that a centralizing hegemony (the capital) not be reconstituted, it is also necessary, for all that, not to multiply the borders. . . It is necessary not to cultivate for their own sake minority differences, untranslatable idiolects, national antagonisms, or the chauvinisms of idioms. Responsibility seems to consist today in renouncing neither of these two contradictory imperatives. One must therefore try to *invent* gestures, discourses, politico-institutional practices that inscribe the alliance of these two promises or contracts: the capital and the a-capital, the other of the

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capital.[40]

In this way, Derrida seems to have pin-pointed the tensions within liberal democracy between the two extremes of homogeneity and heterogeneity. The tendency towards these two extremes, he appears to argue, emanates from liberal democracy itself, and measures must be taken to ensure a balance between these two contradictory injunctions.

Derrida also talks of the extremes of *le capital* in the monetary sense, arguing that we need

> a new way of taking capital into account while avoiding not only the frightening totalitarian dogmatism that some of us have known how to resist up until now, *but also and simultaneously*, the counter-dogmatism that is setting in today. . . Is it not necessary to have the courage and lucidity for a *new* critique of the *new* effects of capital (within unprecedented techno-social structures)? . . Is it not also necessary to resist with vigilance the neo-capitalist exploitation of the breakdown of an anti-capitalist dogmatism in those states that had incorporated it?[41]

In other words, Derrida wants a critique of contemporary capitalism in Europe, without simply offering an alternative which would be akin to the totalitarianism of the old communist states, while also guarding against the neo-capitalism that has sprung up in those states now.

Derrida's desire for a balance between such extremes can be understood, in the first place, as a backlash against the postmodern reaction to capital in both the senses he describes. That is, the initial Derridean reaction to *la capitale* and *le capital* reverses the traditional hierarchy imposed by the Enlightenment project, a project which posits and perpetuates homogeneous and free-market interpretations. The deconstructive reversal implies heterogeneity and socialism, but Derrida quite rightly realises that such a reversal would replace the traditional structure of hierarchy, and thus looks for an almost pragmatic solution (we could even say a *synthesis*) in order to avoid these extremes.

However, it could be argued that both of the oppositional interpretations of *la capitale* and

le capital emanate from the values of the Enlightenment: freedom and equality. In other words, the contradictions - homogeneity versus heterogeneity, capitalism versus socialism, are a result not of a *reaction to* liberal democratic values, but the *product of* the tensions within liberal democracies and liberal democratic ideals. If this is the case, Derrida's position is situated within the parameters of the liberal democratic debate, rather than opposed to it.

Now, of course it could be argued that Derrida cannot stand outside of liberal democracy, criticise it from a 'neutral' position, without invoking epistemological assumptions which are antithetical to his critique of the Enlightenment and classical semiology, and so, therefore, the only way forward for his discourse must be a discussion of the internal coherency of liberal democratic theory and practice. However, what we find in Derrida is a complete lack of analysis regarding the justifiability of liberal democratic ideals in the first place. He seems to have forgotten that he has undermined the *raison d'être* of the Enlightenment project. So tackling the contradictions which he so rightly highlights is a pure volte-face; it is an attempt to perfect a theory/practice which results from a misbegotten project. The apparent 'deconstruction' of liberal democracy does not continue his earlier critique of Enlightenment fallacies, but instead covertly jumps into Enlightenment manifestations without attempting to critically analyse their source. That is, he assumes that liberal democracy is good and desirable *per se*, and that the only difficulty is in preventing it from becoming either too fractured or too totalising. This then distracts, or even excludes, discourse which might, from an anti-Enlightenment perspective, argue that human rights and political liberties (for example) are unjustified, because Derrida's 'critique' gives the impression of having dealt with all fundamental questions in this regard.

That Derrida seems to have in mind some kind of 'golden mean', in terms of a liberal democratic ideal, is further indicated by his analysis of the tendency to extremes in

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European cultural identity in relation to language:

> What philosophy of translation will dominate in Europe? In a Europe that
> from now on should avoid both the nationalistic tensions of linguistic
> difference and the violent homogenization of languages through the
> neutrality of a translating medium that would claim to be transparent,
> metalinguistic, and universal?[42]

Why should Derrida be concerned to avoid these things specifically? Firstly, 'nationalistic

tensions of linguistic difference' are contra to European democracy, because democracy, by

its very nature, requires shared values and abidance by majorities. Secondly, 'the violent

homogenization of languages' is contra to liberty. In each of the specific 'extremes' cited

by Derrida, we find a description of tendencies which detract from the liberal democratic

ideal. Yet, as with the Aristotelian 'golden mean', this is posited as a form of neutrality. It

does not seem to cross Derrida's mind that these extremes are direct manifestations of

liberal democracy itself, of the contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment ideals of

freedom and equality. With this in mind, it appears that Derrida's desire to avoid these

extremes comes not from a critique of the Enlightenment project which gave birth to this

ideal, but from the wish to purify it, to keep liberal democratic practice liberal and

democratic.

Derrida talks of the need to guard against aiming for, or believing that we have achieved,

transparency in discourse:

> Claiming to speak in the name of intelligibility, good sense, common sense,
> or the democratic ethic, this discourse tends, by means of these very things,
> and as if naturally, to discredit anything that complicates this model. It tends
> to suspect or repress anything that bends, overdetermines, or even
> questions, in theory or in practice, this idea of language.[43]

Again, this demonstrates that Derrida is aware of the contradictions within liberal

democratic practice, aware of the fact that liberal 'freedom' is not absolute freedom, but that

it has its own specific list of values. But Derrida's motivation for guarding against the

imposition of homogeneous discursive norms springs not from an insight into the

incoherencies of liberal democracy, but from his desire to remain true to liberal democratic

ideals. He talks, for instance, of the multiplication of European projects that are explicitly 'pluralistic, democratic and tolerant', and says that "we can be happy about this, provided our attention does not lapse. For it is necessary that we learn to detect, in order then to resist, new forms of cultural takeover"[44]. So it could be said that Derrida himself is assuming a form of transparency, exposed in his vigilante approach to keeping liberal democracy pure.

There are a couple of points to be made in relation to Derrida's concerns regarding 'transparency'. Firstly, it could be argued that we cannot *but* operate with a notion of transparency, with the belief that, in some sense, our norms and our ontological concepts are 'true'. Secondly, that if we did not live and think like this, there would be an infinite regression. In other words, if it were not for the fact that Derrida inadvertently assumes a transparency of some kind, a 'truth' in his representations, where would he stop? He would not be able to be 'happy' about the 'pluralistic, democratic and tolerant' projects in Europe, because this *does*, on his own terms, assume the kind of transparency which he feels it necessary to guard against.

Derrida points to the gap between public opinion and the representation of public opinion:

> . . . if it had a proper place (but that is the whole question), public opinion would be the forum for a permanent and transparent discussion. It would be opposed to non-democratic powers, but also to its own political representation. Such representation will never become adequate to it, for it breathes, deliberates and decides according to other rhythms.[45].

In other words, the media through which public opinion is expressed, even produced and constituted, are always imprecise in their representations. But there are other, less explicit, assumptions exhibited in this extract. Firstly, Derrida assumes that public opinion is important, and that therefore it is desirable to represent it as accurately as possible. Secondly, he assumes that public opinion is always in favour of democracy. Thirdly, he states that public opinion is opposed to its own political representation. Finally, he believes

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that the representation of public opinion is a poor imitation of the 'real thing'.

These assumptions are all problematic. Firstly, as has been discussed, Derrida seems to believe that democracy is *a priori* good, so it comes as no surprise that he values public opinion in itself. That this position nevertheless remains unanalysed by Derrida is further supported by his assumption that public opinion is always in favour of democracy, although the two are plainly not synonymous. The last two assumptions indicate that Derrida has a highly idealised notion of liberal democracy. By separating representation from that which it represents, Derrida is replicating the separation of sign and signified. To maintain this distinction *and* to sketch a situation in which the representation (the sign) could be by-passed, or at least appropriated more accurately, exhibits an unexamined idealism which is antithetical to the very starting point which gave rise to Derridean deconstruction.

C: Derrida and Marxism.

Derrida's book *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994) continues the theme in *The Other Heading*. It compares the failures in liberal democratic practice with the liberal democratic ideal as characterised by 'the New World Order' in Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992). In particular, Derrida is concerned with the self-congratulatory optimism in the West that has followed events such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the 'global triumph of free market economies' in the late eighties and early nineties. As with *The Other Heading*, Derrida wants to guard against hegemony and neo-capitalism without going to the other extremes of nationalistic heterogeneity or old-style communism. To this end, he proposes a radical reinterpretation of the 'spirit' of Marxism. This reinterpretation, however, emerges

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as a *misinterpretation* of Marxism, one which, in the end, is aimed at positing a more rigorous adherence to an idealised liberal democracy.

Derrida begins by stating that the ghost of Marxism has never gone away:

> In proposing this title *Specters of Marx*, I was initially thinking of all the forms of a certain haunting obsession that seems to me to organise the *dominant* influence on discourse today. At a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting.[46]

By this he means that, as the 'other' of the prevalent political discourse, Marxism serves to define that discourse in more unified terms. What is more, the very hegemonic nature of the status quo, relying as it does on Marxism for the hegemony which sets its boundaries, ensures the continuing existence of Marxism through its repression. By phrasing the situation in such a way, Derrida attempts to provide the motivation for a deconstruction of the status quo in a manner which will avoid seeming arbitrary or partisan because it is simply invoking a temporary reversal of the existing hierarchy.

As the excluded 'other' of today's privileged concepts, Marxism, for Derrida, provides a space from which to criticise neo-liberalism and neo-capitalism. But this is not the Marxism of old. Derrida believes that we can delineate a certain 'spirit' of Marxism from traditional Marxist ideology, and suggests that the word *conjuration* sums up this spirit: "If Marx had written his *Manifesto* in my language, and if he had had some help with it, as a Frenchman can always dream of doing, I am sure that he would have played on the word *conjuration*"[47]. Derrida goes on to define this term: "A conjuration, then, is first of all an alliance, to be sure, sometimes a political alliance, more or less secret, if not tacit, a plot or a conspiracy. It is a matter of neutralizing a hegemony or overturning some power."[48] In this way, Derrida is extracting the *critical* aspect of Marxism in the senses in which it is compatible with deconstruction. As he puts it, "To continue to take inspiration from a

certain spirit of Marxism would be to keep faith with what has always made of Marxism in principle and first of all a *radical* critique, namely a procedure ready to undertake its self-critique"[49].

Derrida is aware, of course, that many aspects of Marxism are antithetical to his own postmodern stance, and that this means that he must reject these 'spirits' of Marxism:

> We would distinguish this spirit from other spirits of Marxism, those that rivet it to the body of Marxist doctrine, to its supposed systemic, metaphysical, or ontological totality (notably to its 'dialectical method' or to 'dialectical materialism'), to its fundamental concepts of labor, mode of production, social class, and consequently to the whole history of its apparatuses.[50]

So not only does Derrida want to distance himself from the ideological nature of Marxism, he also rejects the political manifestations of Marxism this century - 'the whole history of its apparatuses'. Yet he sees Marxism as more than simply an analytical tool for political theory. Derrida notes that

> people would be ready to accept the return of Marx or the return to Marx, on the condition that a silence is maintained about Marx's injunction not just to decipher but to act and to make the deciphering into a transformation that 'changes the world'. . . It is something altogether other that I wish to attempt here as I turn or return to Marx.[51]

So Derrida believes that his chosen 'spirit' of Marxism can provide a political imperative to act without invoking the metaphysical aspects of Marxist doctrine, and without resulting in the totalitarian regimes that have been connected with Marxism in the past.

Derrida's chosen 'spirit of Marxism' centres on the idea of permanent critique, but more specifically, critique for the purpose of emancipation:

> Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance. . . It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain 'spiritual' or 'abstract', but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth.[52]

It is quite clear that Derrida wants to equate this spirit of Marxism with deconstruction:

> Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as
> undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a
> certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the
> formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a
> messianic without messianism, an idea of justice - which we distinguish
> from law or right and even human rights - and an idea of democracy - which
> we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates
> today.53

The above extracts tell us several things. Firstly, it is clear that Derrida reinterprets

Marxism *as* deconstruction. That is, he highlights those aspects of Marxism which are not

reducible to an ideology, and in doing so, seems to attempt to justify deconstruction in the

same way. Secondly, the aspect of Marxism/deconstruction which is *over and above*

ideology is, according to Derrida, its *emancipatory* spirit. This tells us, in no uncertain

terms, what Derrida wants from deconstruction, what deconstruction is about. This

separation of the 'spirit' from the practical actuality also implies a transcendentalism in

Derrida's thought - the 'idea' of justice, the 'idea' of democracy, as with the emancipatory

'spirit' of Marxism/deconstruction. It is the maintenance of this dichotomy between theory

and practice which characterises the difficulties in Derridean thought. He cannot marry the

two, because this would produce an ideology, and this is why his discussion of Marxism

always backs away from the practical. Yet, as we saw with *Cinders*, these efforts to avoid

a replication of the ideological approach to philosophy and politics are always doomed.

Doomed because it inevitably involves a distinction between theory and practice, between

the signified and the signifier. As a result of this, we find in Derrida's work a flitting

between a transcendental idealism on the one hand, and an inability to say anything at all on

the other.

In reinterpreting Marxism as critique and emancipation, Derrida is simply disregarding all

those aspects of Marxism which do not coincide with his definition of deconstruction. By

renaming deconstruction 'Marxism' (which is what he is doing), he can introduce it to

political practice in a way which would have attracted much criticism if it had remained 'deconstruction'. Similarly, by renaming Marxism 'deconstruction', he can reintroduce it to political discourse in a way which he hopes will lose the totalitarian intonation. But this is a sleight of hand. Derrida is using (abusing) Marxism for his own purposes. Deconstruction, on its own, cannot even be called a method, let alone a political practice, without exposing internal contradictions and incoherencies. But by extracting those aspects of Marxism which can be directly translated as deconstruction, Derrida can use this 'spirit' of Marxism to do deconstruction's dirty work.

These difficulties can be better understood if we take a closer look at the similarities and differences between Marxism and deconstruction. Firstly, on a superficial level, one can see how Marx, like Derrida, wanted to point to contradictions in the status quo, and to show how the privileged status of certain concepts (and social groups) does not arise naturally, but through domination and repression. Therefore, Marx, again like Derrida, wanted to temporarily reverse this hierarchy in order to bring about a new state of affairs. So, on the one hand, Marx's work was purely descriptive, an explanation of the dynamics of social and economic history, and that element of Marxism is not incompatible with deconstruction.

On the other hand, there is arguably an element of prescriptivity in Marx. This arises from the more specific aspects of his description of historical change, a description that would not see deconstruction as necessary. Marx has a concept of the 'natural'. This can be found in his understanding of alienation and false consciousness. It is this aspect of Marxism which explains the step from description to prescription. More importantly, it forms the background to his 'description' of contradiction and historical change. So, unlike deconstruction, Marxism has a concept of 'natural man' from which it develops notions of right and wrong. It is this which allows Marx to join his 'description' of historical change

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to a prescription for activities which will help to bring about such change.[54]

Once it is understood how *all* of Marx's work is imbued with this prescriptivity, how, in fact, Marxism would not be Marxism without it, we can see how Marxism and deconstruction are, and must be, fundamentally different. Marx, like Heidegger, ultimately wanted to reinstate an unalienated origin to remove the distortions which produce an inauthentic existence. So whilst there may be many 'spirits' of Marxism, the desire for authenticity haunts all of them, and it is this which makes it fundamentally incompatible with deconstruction. More importantly, what this points to are the hidden normative assumptions in deconstruction, and in particular, Derrida's desire to privilege freedom as the very *raison d'être* of deconstruction.

So Derridean Marxism is not Marxism at all: it is deconstruction. And what this analysis tells us about deconstruction, is that it is ultimately no more than a discursive tool for the purpose of emancipation. Even the foundation stone of Derrida's deconstructive enterprise - *differance* - predetermines the single excluded 'other' as one which always lends itself to the project of emancipation. But this is not any kind of freedom, it is liberal democratic freedom, as becomes apparent in Derrida's discussion of Fukuyama.

Derrida quotes Fukuyama's argument that "While some present-day countries might fail to achieve stable liberal democracy, and others might lapse back into other, more primitive forms of rule like theocracy or military dictatorship, the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be improved on"[55]. Derrida argues that Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and The Last Man*, ignores the differences between the liberal democratic ideal and the experience of actual liberal democracies. So the criticism which Derrida raises against the above extract is that instead of recognising the problems that exist *within* liberal democracies, Fukuyama would see these problems as existing outside of liberal democracy, and label the societies in

which they exist as 'theocratic' or 'dictatorial'. In other words, Fukuyama refers only to

the aspects of liberal democracies which are compatible with the liberal democratic ideal.

So, as with *The Other Heading*, Derrida is pointing, in *Specters of Marx*, to the fact that

liberal democratic practice does not live up to the democratic ideal. However, he is *not*

taking issue with Fukuyama's comment that "the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be

improved on".

Derrida states:

> By hiding from themselves all these failures and all these threats, people
> would like to hide from the potential - force and virtuality - of what we will
> call the principle and even, still in the figure of irony, the *spirit* of the
> Marxist critique.[56]

But this 'spirit' of Marx, it must be remembered, is no more than a hope for emancipation

through permanent critique. And this critique, as Derrida applies it, exists for the purpose

of exposing "all these failures and all these threats", *not* in order to replace the ideals of

liberal democracy with those of Marxism, but rather in the hope that the gap between liberal

democratic practice and the liberal democratic ideal be lessened. So rather than seeing the

problems with liberal democratic practice as evidence that the ideal is flawed, Derrida

believes that it is necessary to resurrect a 'spirit of Marxism' (or, more accurately, the

'spirit of liberalism') in order that the ideal be appropriated more closely.

D: The New International.

Derrida suggests, as a way of maintaining the ideals of liberal democracy, 'The New

International'. This is a vague term, for while on the one hand he states that it should be

"an alliance without institution . . . inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of

Marxism"[57], on the other, he seems to interpret this concept in more specific terms as an

international law and government:

> International law should extend and diversify its field to include, if at least it is to be consistent with the idea of democracy and of human rights it proclaims, the *worldwide* economic and social field, beyond the sovereignty of States and of the phantom-States we mentioned a moment ago [the mafia, drug cartels etc.]. Despite appearances, what we are saying here is not simply anti-statist; in given and limited conditions, the super-state, which might be an international institution, may always be able to limit the appropriations and the violence of certain private socio-economic forces. But without necessarily subscribing to the whole Marxist discourse, one might still find inspiration in the Marxist 'spirit' to criticise the presumed autonomy of the juridicial and to denounce endlessly the *de facto* take-over of international authorities by powerful Nation-States, by concentrations of techno-scientific capital, symbolic capital, and financial capital, of State capital and private capital.[58]

Not only is this a further example of Derrida's abuse of Marxism, in that the concept of 'The New International' exists in order to keep liberal democracy more rigorous, it is also an indication of the superficiality of Derrida's political theorising. As Terry Eagleton points out, Derrida "has never been at his most impressive when at his most politically explicit"[59]. Derrida does not tell us, for example, from where such a super-state would receive its mandate. He makes it clear that the whole idea of 'The New International' is to maintain a consistency with democracy and human rights, but does not question or analyse the potential for conflict between national democracies and that of the international law which he prescribes. There seems to be a complete *lack* of any notion of power which could explain why some kinds of power are desirable, and some not. Instead, Derrida seems to assume, despite his critique of the excesses of liberal democracy, that democracy fosters democracy. One wonders, for example, what he would have to say about the French strikes of December 1995 and the political opposition in Britain to a more unified Europe. What these events point to is the fact that democracy is not always compatible with freedom and equality on the kind of grand scale which Derrida hopes for. Thus, at the end of the day, Derrida's 'New International' comes across, in Eagleton's words, as some kind of 'post-structuralist fantasy':

And what does Derrida counterpose . . . to the dire conditions he so magnificently denounces? A 'New International', one 'without status, without title and without name. . . without party, without country, without national community. . .' And, of course, as one gathers elsewhere in the book, without organization, without ontology, without method, without apparatus. It is the ultimate post-structuralist fantasy: an opposition without anything as distastefully systemic or drably 'orthodox' as an opposition, a dissent beyond all formulable discourse, a promise which would betray itself in the act of fulfilment, a perpetual excited openness to the Messiah who had better not let us down by doing anything as determinate as coming. Spectres of Marxism indeed.[60]

E: Conclusion.

Let us summarise the way in which deconstruction emerges from Derrida's critique of classical semiology and moves into the sphere of international politics. His starting point, then, is the argument that the sign is not constituted by its relation to a signified, but through its position in a referential structure of other signs - its difference to other signs. Through his examination of Plato's Phaedrus, we see how Derrida believes that the opposite 'other' of the sign is always excluded. By understanding differance and exclusion as binary, the task of deconstruction emerges in an almost self-evident manner as a project which aims simply to 'restore balance'.

What we find, however, is that this 'balance' inevitably has a certain bias. Even if we were to ignore the problems associated with Derrida's binary interpretation of differance, there is no reason for it to come out so clearly in favour of liberal democracy. In fact, Derrida himself has pointed to alternative political implications of the deconstructive project. He has stated, for example, that the political equivalent to deconstruction could take the form of 'responsible anarchy', while stressing the 'interminable obligation' to deconstruct these two terms 'responsible' and 'anarchy' in order to avoid them becoming unthinking and reified dogmas[61]. He has also pointed to the nationalistic implications of deconstruction,

directly contradicting his arguments in *The Other Heading* and *Specters of Marx*. He has

stated, for example, that because philosophy is nationally determined, and that as a concept

cannot be distinguished from the word to describe it, language is of central significance to

the development of culturally specific ontologies[62]. This interpretation would appear to

have implications more in line with the German conservatives of the last century and the

idea of a 'nation-state' than the 'New International' he prescribes.

In fact, incoherencies exist for Derridean politics at a more fundamental level. As was

pointed out in the section on rationality, the notion of differance as binary is wrong - there

could be an infinite multitude of excluded 'others' for every privileged sign which makes

its way into our conceptual system. Yet it is this misunderstanding which covertly gives

way to the critical aspect of the deconstructive project. That is, by reversing the privilege of

the binary pair, it appears to simply restore balance. Yet the excluded 'other' highlighted by

Derrida is as arbitrary as the sign which is privileged in the first place. This technical point,

along with the fact that Derrida fails to properly analyse power, means that the critical

aspect of deconstruction, and therefore its *raison d'être*, is removed. That deconstruction

cannot produce a politics and remain consistent is further indicated by Derrida's failure to

theorise his political prescription, as Boyne notes:

> The advice which can be drawn from Derrida is to overturn the privilege of
> the high side and celebrate the secondary, derivative, low-side: the
> supplement . . . But Derrida's deconstruction does not provide a practical
> social theory which would indicate what such an intervention, such a
> celebration of the low side, might look like, or how it might be achieved.[63]

So why does Derrida turn to Marxism? I think that there are two reasons for this. Firstly,

he wants to find support for his liberal democratic agenda without appearing to replicate the

old epistemological approach at which his critique is aimed and without appearing to simply

prop up the status quo. By stripping Marxism of all the characteristics which do not also

happen to be the characteristics of deconstruction and liberal democracy, he tries to make

use of this 'spirit of Marxism' by describing it as the 'other' of liberal democracy. Now, not only is it the case that liberal democracy has a multitude of political alternatives, of repressed 'others', it is also the case that Derrida's reinterpretation of Marxism is not one of them. The central values of freedom and equality in Marxism develop *from* liberalism, rather in opposition to it. For all intents and purposes, for Derrida's 'spirit of Marxism' read 'spirit of liberal democracy' or 'spirit of deconstruction'.

Secondly, and related to the above point, is the fact that not only is Marxism (in Derrida's eyes) the excluded other of liberal democracy, it is also marginal *per se*. As Eagleton notes, "Derrida has turned to Marxism just when it has become marginal, and so, in his post-structuralist reckoning, rather more alluring"[64]. He goes on:

> There is an exasperating kind of believer who holds what he does until he meets someone else who holds the same. At this point, confronted with the bugbear of 'orthodoxy', he starts nervously to retract, or at least to qualify. There is more than a touch of this adolescent perversity in Derrida, who like many a postmodernist appears to feel (it is a matter of sensibility rather than reasoned conviction) that the dominant is *ipso facto* demonic and the marginal precious *per se*.[65]

It is this need to privilege the underdog (one of the implications of deconstruction) that leads Derrida to hide his support for the status quo behind the Marxist banner.

It is clear, from the earlier analyses of *The Other Heading* and *Specters of Marx*, that Derrida wants to ensure that liberal democracy stays as close to its ideal form as possible, and it is also clear that he does not question for one moment the desirability of this ideal. What is more, he assumes that this ideal is universally desirable, and that liberal democracy equates with a reduction in human suffering if 'it is done properly'. These assumptions are all problematic in themselves, but more importantly, there is the question of *why* Derrida ranks liberal democratic values so highly: Where is Derrida coming from? The answer is simple - France, twentieth century France. Derrida is a man of his times. He is not a visionary or an alien from outer space, and therefore his critique and subsequent theorising

come from the concerns which form him.

There are two aspects of Derrida which are clearly manifested in his work: his outrage and his style. Firstly, then, he is severely upset about something. As Eagleton pointed out, the adolescent character of his work almost implies that it is unimportant what this something is, all that matters is that it be expressed. This is why, when we dig deep enough, we find that Derrida is such a mainstream conservative. Like a teenager, he needs to shout about something, and replies to those who tell him off that they do not understand him. As Boyne points out:

> [Derrida] is not explicit about the motivations behind this guerrilla warfare against the Enlightenment heritage. He has not made repeated accusations about, for example, reason and repression, or reason and evil. A sense of outrage does, however, permeate his work.[66]

This anger of Derrida's visibly produces a certain style of writing, and it is the combination of his temperament and its manifestation through a permanent questioning, which finds expression in his attack on the status quo despite his deepest desire to uphold it:

> What is it, now, to chew carrots? Why this plural? could there ever be more than one of them? Could this question ever have a meaning? Could one even speak of the 'chewing' of a carrot, and if so how, why, to whom, with what onto-teleo-theological animus?[67]

CHAPTER 3

RICHARD RORTY

PART I - RATIONALITY

A: Introduction.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty sets out his critique of traditional

philosophy:

> I argue that the attempt (which has defined traditional philosophy) to explicate 'rationality' and 'objectivity' in terms of accurate representation is a self-deceptive effort to externalize the normal discourse of the day, and that, since the Greeks, philosophy's self-image has been dominated by this attempt... I present Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey as philosophers whose aim is to edify - to help their readers, or society as a whole, break free from outworn vocabularies and attitudes, rather than to provide 'grounding' for the intuitions and customs of the present.[1]

After offering a convincing argument regarding the fallacy of knowledge as an accurate

representation of nature, Rorty goes on to offer an alternative approach in the form of a

hermeneutic 'conversation'. This, he asserts, should not be a successor subject to

epistemology, and that philosophy should steer clear of a 'universal pragmatics' or a

'transcendental hermeneutics'. Instead, the pragmatism which he is advocating is designed

to bring about a post-metaphysical society analogous in its relationship to the Platonic

tradition, with "secularists who urge that research concerning the Nature, or the Will, of

God, does not get us anywhere"[2].

Rorty's work can be criticised on several counts, both in the conclusions that he reaches,

and the methodology that he employs. There is a difficulty right at the start, as Jane Heal[3]

points out, in accounting for Rorty's claim that he is practising 'edifying' rather than

'systematic' philosophy - that is, as offering 'ironic' remarks which encourage us "to break

the crust of convention"[4]. However, as it is an implication of the criticisms which can be

made of Rorty that what he calls 'conversation' is more like 'inquiry' than he allows, it seems justifiable to represent him as proceeding in the customary fashion by offering claims and defending them with argument.

The difficulties in Rorty's 'non-realism' are common to postmodernism in general. It contains, for example, relativistic and universalistic elements which are at odds with his central thesis, as does his hope for 'conversation', which, it can be argued, demands a consensual belief in objective realities. Another implication of his argument is that we can choose what to believe, yet disagreement with this has been seen by some as sufficient to undermine his prescription for change. However, there is an underlying criticism of Rorty's pragmatic position which ties together these difficulties and strengthens the body of opposition, and that is that without occupying a transcendental viewpoint (which is what the pragmatist tries above all to avoid), he is unable to tell us why we should abandon mirroring nature.

To agree with Rorty's position on the fallacy of the Platonic legacy whilst disagreeing with the implications of his hermeneutics and pragmatism, thus leaves us wondering about the role of the philosopher. It will not be, as Rorty argues, "to help us avoid the self-deception which comes from believing that we know ourselves by knowing a set of objective facts"[5], but can only arise from a recognition of the human need to objectify oneself. In fact, Rorty's political conclusions would be far more consistent if he were to recognise this, as Cleveland points out, "In the end, perhaps one will see how a serious liberal concern for human solidarity creates a limit on how much contingency one can embrace"[6]. This also indicates that, despite Rorty's portrayal of his political writings as the natural logical upshot of his philosophical investigation, his 'ironist' philosophical stance on contingency is actually designed to serve the needs of his covert political agenda. The problem with Rorty is that his critique of traditional philosophy, and the correspondence theory of truth, is

convincing. Thus its incompatibility with liberalism results in an undermining of Rorty's liberal politics - it destroys the very project for which it was designed. Irony indeed.

B: The Platonic Legacy.

Rorty starts by pointing out that since Plato, philosophy's central concern has been "to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all."[7] According to Rorty, all subsequent philosophical theorising up until this century (apart from the occasional unheard protest) has consolidated this notion of a 'theory of knowledge'. In the seventeenth century, and due especially to the influence of Locke, this notion was based on an understanding of 'mental processes'; Descartes provided us with the notion of 'the mind' as a separate entity; and, partly as a consequence, Rorty implies, we owe the notion of philosophy as a tribunal of pure reason to the eighteenth century and especially to Kant. It was Kant, he asserts, who transformed the old idea of philosophy as the 'queen of the sciences' (in terms of it being concerned with what was most universal and least material) into a foundational discipline: "Philosophy became 'primary' no longer in the sense of 'highest' but in the sense of 'underlying'."[8] Tracing this consolidation further, Rorty points to the neo-Kantians as responsible for putting epistemology and metaphysics at the centre of philosophy, and describing metaphysics as something which emerges out of epistemology, rather than vice versa. At the beginning of our century, this claim was reaffirmed by philosophers such as Russell and Husserl, who were concerned to keep philosophy 'rigorous' and scientific. In their attempts to recapture the mathematical spirit of Plato, Rorty argues, Russell discovered 'logical form' and Husserl discovered 'essences'.

Thus Rorty comes to the conclusion that to think of knowledge as a 'problem' for which we need a theory, is a product of the above view. The above philosophers are seen by Rorty as having chosen 'perceptual metaphors' which make them want to get behind reasons to causes, and that it is this confusion between justification and causal explanation which produces the basic confusion in the idea of a 'theory of knowledge'. The reason for this confusion, he argues, is that the original dominating metaphor was one that saw our beliefs as determined by being brought face-to-face with the object of the belief ('the geometrical figure which proves the theorem, for example'). The implication of this confrontational metaphor was to attempt to discover a set of privileged representations whose accuracy could not be doubted. That Rorty is content to describe this development as a linear sequence can be seen in his assertion that: "we can at least take from Heidegger the idea that the desire for an 'epistemology' is simply the most recent product of the dialectical development of an originally chosen set of metaphors."[9] Even more recent in this dialectical development are what Rorty describes as the 'heretical' followers of Husserl and Russell (such as Sartre, Heidegger, Sellars and Quine), who raised the same sorts of questions about the possibility of apodictic truths as Hegel had raised about Kant.

Rorty rightly points out that linguistic analysis, despite its attempts to overcome the previous transcendental assumptions, is very much within the Kantian tradition in that it remains foundational, and is still committed to the construction of a permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture. Instead, Rorty subscribes to the Wittgensteinian position that if language is seen as a tool rather than a mirror, we will not look for the necessary conditions of the possibility of linguistic representation. The argument that he is offering states simply that since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths. He supports this position with Davidson's view that a theory of meaning for a language must do no more than "give an account of how the

meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words"[10].

It is an obvious implication of Rorty's description of this Platonic legacy that the very idea of 'apodictic' truths is irrelevant nonsense, and that the subsequent search for accurate representations of a 'reality' are a waste of time. "The trouble with Platonic notions is not that they are 'wrong' but that there is not a great deal to be said about them - specifically, there is no way to 'naturalize' them or otherwise connect them to the rest of inquiry, or culture, or life."[11] There almost exists a consensus in contemporary philosophy on this view. There tends to be more disagreement, however, on what happens next - where do we go from here?

C: Rorty's Dream: Hermeneutics and Contingency.

Epistemology, Rorty has argued, is the form that philosophical reflection takes when the idea of mirroring is our main concern. Hermeneutics is his name for the activity which he commends to us as what philosophers should concern themselves with once the mirroring notion has lost its grip. Hermeneutics is the study of various different ways of looking at and approaching the world, together with the attempt to interpret one way to another and to see what they have to offer. The hermeneutic philosopher is a pragmatist in that he sees different kinds of discourse (scientific, literary, moral) as different kinds of linguistic strategy that we have evolved for coping with the world and living our lives. Some of these linguistic practices are pursued by agreed rules and result in the delivery of agreed verdicts which are labelled 'objective' and 'true'. But there is no more to 'objectivity' than this resulting from an agreed procedure, and in particular, there is no link with the discarded idea of Truth.

Rorty emphasises the point that hermeneutics is not the name for a discipline, but rather an expression of the hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled. Whereas epistemology assumes that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable, hermeneutics is largely a struggle against this assumption. This means, for Rorty, that

> there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones - no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow inquirers.[12]

Rorty argues that this involves a fundamental choice for the reflective mind; that between accepting the contingent character of starting-points, and attempting to evade this contingency. He believes that to accept the contingency of starting-points is to accept our inheritance from, and our conversation with, our fellow humans as our only source of guidance.

Thus Rorty's hermeneutical position stems from his concept of contingency and his argument that

> We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say with commonsense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences, there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.[13]

The point of this passage is that Rorty is attempting to defend his view against the charge of linguistic idealism, the idea that language creates the world. This somewhat revises his assertion that since truth is a property of language, and since language is man-made, so are truths. So now, rather than simply stating that truth is created by human beings, the claim is that 'true sentences are created by human beings'. Yet this can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it could mean that i)'the sentences which are true are created by human beings', and secondly, that ii)'human beings make sentences be true; human beings bring it

about that 'is true' is rightly predicated of sentences'.

In assessing Rorty's claims, it must be remembered that his starting point is that of an ironist philosophical stance, that he is insisting on a theory of truth based on contingency rather than one based on correspondence. At the same time, however, Rorty is determined to avoid what he sees as the untenable position of linguistic idealism and any kind of relativism. To ascertain the validity of Rorty's analysis, we must clarify two points: Firstly, to what extent is his position internally coherent, that is, does his understanding of language and truth suit his purpose? Secondly, how does this discussion provide the philosophical world with a better understanding of the nature of truth?

D: Non-Realism and Transcendentalism.

I think that Rorty's ironist philosophical stance, which forms the basis of his view on the contingency of truths, is problematic from whichever way we look at it. Firstly, Timothy Cleveland's discussion of Rorty's claims regarding language and truth show that, in the end, Rorty has found no middle way between linguistic idealism and a correspondence theory of truth[14]. Secondly, Bhaskar's discussion regarding Rorty's failure to distinguish between ontological and epistemological transcendentalism goes some way to helping Rorty to avoid transcendental idealism. Ultimately, however, it can be shown that, as with Derrida's book *Cinders*, it is this very desire to avoid transcendental idealism which gets him into trouble.

To start with, then, the first interpretation of Rorty's argument, that i) 'the sentences that are true are created by human beings' consistently follows from the passage quoted above, but as Cleveland points out, this "does not capture any non-trivial sense in which truth is

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created"[15]. The reason for this triviality stems from the fact that it could still be the case that the world, and truth, is 'out there', and that sentences merely act as a vehicle for expressing that truth. A Platonist, for example, would have no problem with this claim. Cleveland rightly states that, in this interpretation, the talk of truth is irrelevant and misleading, and it would be more accurate to say 'the world is not created, but *sentences* are'. This lets Rorty off the hook as far as linguistic idealism is concerned, but makes a trivial point which tells us nothing about truth:

> If this is all that truths being created amounts to, then it is obviously compatible with a correspondence theory of truth. So although this trivial sense of the conclusion helps Rorty to distinguish his views from idealism it does so at the cost of deflating his idea that truth is created.[16]

However, if we take Rorty's argument to be ii)human beings make sentences to be true; human beings bring it about that 'is true' is rightly predicated of sentences', he is still faced with similar problems. It must be remembered that his desire to avoid linguistic idealism is a reaction to his original critique of attempts to mirror reality, and that this critique maintains an absolute separation between the world being out there and truth being out there. Cleveland argues that Rorty's insistence that "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed"[17], means that his entire position depends upon the claim that truth is created, and "the problem now is that Rorty seems to have abandoned any distinction between the world being out there and truth not"[18]. In other words, as far as Cleveland is concerned, Rorty has fallen into the trap of linguistic idealism.

This criticism of Rorty is based on the strong sense in which Rorty seems to believe that truth is created. What it fails to take account of, however, is the strong sense in which Rorty believes that this 'truth' has nothing to do with the world 'out there'. Or rather, Cleveland believes that if Rorty is going to make a substantial claim about the human creation of truth, he cannot consistently maintain a distinction between that truth and the

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world. The reason that Cleveland will not allow Rorty to maintain such a distinction, is that unless we fall back on a correspondence theory of truth and the world, we would have to claim that the truths made by humans simply *coincide* with the world in such a way as to make it possible for us to live in that world. So on the basis of both Rorty's assumptions, and Cleveland's analysis of the logical conclusion of these assumptions, either the world creates truth, or we create the world; that is, we must commit ourselves either to a correspondence theory of truth, or linguistic idealism - there is no middle way.

Cleveland's analysis is correct in that Rorty's position is internally incoherent, that it fails to provide an analysis of truth which could support his ironist stance on the contingent nature of truth. This does not mean, however, that truths are not contingent. Rather, these problems arise because both Rorty and Cleveland, and thinkers like them, remain imprisoned within the signifier/signified distinction. Bhaskar, for example, points out that Rorty confuses ontological transcendentalism with epistemological transcendentalism[19]. His point is that for Rorty, *all* transcendental truths are epistemological transcendental truths, and, as transcendental truths do not exist (the world does not create truth), are therefore always based on a falsehood. This means, he argues, that Rorty is operating with a notion of absolute (epistemological) transcendental truth, and cannot take account of the view that humans can *only* and *must* operate with a notion of (ontological) transcendental truth. So, in perceiving human use of (ontological) transcendental reality and truth, Rorty mistakes it for reference to a non-existent epistemological transcendental truth. It is on this basis, states Bhaskar, that he takes a wrong turn quite early on, and forecloses the possibility of operating (on a day-to-day level and philosophically) with ontological transcendental truths. This means that he then has to develop an ironist concept of the self and politics which attempts to avoid reference to *any* transcendental truth.

This dichotomy can be better understood if we examine what this alternative to

epistemological transcendental truth would look like:

> Such a philosophy would be a transcendental realism, not idealism: ontologically rather than epistemologically geared; and unafraid of recognizing epistemically relativist implications - which are . . . quite consistent with judgementally rationalist results.[20]

Bhaskar goes on to clarify his position by proposing that such a philosophy would "have a use for the category of the 'non-empirical but real', for example, in designating the transfactual operation of causal laws prior to, outside and independently of human experience"[21].

The distinctions made by Bhaskar are useful in understanding the more subtle dynamics at work in Rorty's understanding of truth, and the philosophical problems which these create. However, these insights do not, in themselves, provide us for a reason for maintaining a separation of the ontological from the epistemological. The reasons for doing so would come (and seem to, in Bhaskar's argument) from the desire to avoid a transcendental idealism, and therefore, ultimately, to avoid ideology and what Bhaskar refers to as 'the dangers of reifying or hypostatizing truth'. So while Bhaskar would be of some use to Rorty's attempts to avoid both correspondence theory *and* linguistic idealism, a discussion of his analysis reveals that such a project is misbegotten, that the desire to avoid 'reifying or hypostatizing truth' cannot be supported without contradicting Rorty's original insights into the fraudulent claims of Plato.

I would like to propose two arguments here: Firstly, that the desire to avoid a Platonic transcendental idealism and its consequences must come from either a confusion of ontological and epistemological transcendentalism which ultimately rests upon the epistemological kind, or, an infinite regress of ontological transcendentalism into relativism. Secondly, that the answer lies in the absolute conflation of ontological and epistemological transcendentalism such that there would be *no* use for the category of 'non-

empirical but real' - in fact, it would make no sense.

So firstly, then, let us summarise Bhaskar's proposed philosophical perspective. He wants to do two things through the separation of ontological and epistemological transcendentalism. These are i)to accord an unequivocal reality to things; while ii)avoiding transcendental idealism. He believes that ontological transcendentalism can be given its status through a recognition of the contingency and historicity of human knowledge. Yet this, as we saw with Foucault, cannot be done without invoking a transcendentalism of the epistemological kind. Both archaeological and genealogical methods necessarily involve, at some point, stepping outside of ontological transcendentalism in order to define categories and prioritise evidence. The alternative is to attempt an equalisation of the hierarchies of what counts as true so that all ontologies are given relative validity. This would be a fruitless task, but illustrates that without invoking epistemological transcendentalism, ontological transcendentalism would infinitely regress to absolute relativism and non-realism. This is in fact one of the implications of Rorty's philosophical stance, although for him this comes as an upshot of his confusion of ontology with epistemology, and the ultimate opposition of these two to his proposed anti-transcendental alternative, as mentioned before. As Taylor remarks:

> In particular I reject Rorty's non-realism. Rather, I believe that non-realism
> is itself one of the recurrently generated aporia of the tradition we both
> condemn. To get free of it is to come to an uncompromising realism . . . I
> see him in fact as still very much a prisoner of the epistemological world-
> view.22

So, in Bhaskar's discussion of Rorty we are witnessing a repeated fundamental mistake - the unconscious reliance upon epistemological transcendentalism. The nature of this unconscious activity can be better understood, and perhaps solved, if we take a closer look at Bhaskar's proposed example of the category of 'non-empirical but real'. Bhaskar's criticism of Rorty here is that by treating the 'ontological' and the

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'epistemological/empirical' as synonyms, he is automatically excluding any reference to the 'real' while nevertheless invoking a higher transcendentalism in order to maintain the distinction and downgrade this onto-empiricism as existing wholly 'within the mind', in the way that Kant conflates the *a priori* and the subjective. Yet, as we have seen, this proposed category of Bhaskar's (deliberately) maintains the distinction, thus (inadvertently) invoking an epistemological transcendental category in order to do so.

We can find the solution if we ask ourselves what would happen if the ontological and epistemological/empirical were to remain conflated but *not* downgraded. The result would be transcendentalism, resulting in 'reifying or hypostatizing truth'. But when it is realised that any alternative necessarily invokes the very kind of transcendental assumption which both Bhaskar and Rorty wish to avoid, the inevitability of such an outcome is clear.

A parallel point was made in relation to Derrida's *Cinders*, where it was found that Derrida could only avoid giving the signifier a transcendental significance (previously attributed to the signified) if he maintained the distinction between signifier and signified in the traditional way. Rorty is faced with the same choice as Derrida: non-realism or transcendentalism.

E: Conclusion.

Jane Heal argues

> Unless we can find a third way through, a way of finessing the question of why we hold so firmly to certain opinions, we shall fail to walk the tightrope between 'mirroring realism' on the one hand and some form of idealism on the other. Protest he never so much, Rorty has wobbled and fallen off on the idealist side.[23]

This criticism summarises many of those made by Rorty's critics, including that of

Bhaskar. What I hope to have shown, however, is that the very distinction between correspondence and idealism unconsciously relies upon transcendental assumptions, so that while it might appear that Rorty's 'ironist' stance towards contingency is idealist, such a position can only be reached through an attempt to mirror reality. The problem, then, is one of recognising the postmodern critique of the Platonic legacy as true, while finding a way of getting around our inescapable practise of talking about 'truths'. Rorty has not managed to provide a way forward for philosophy, instead, his thought has helped to highlight and clarify the problems which still need to be dealt with.

Charles Taylor offers the concept of 'framed representations' as a route out of this philosophical impasse:

> The framework understanding... is not in itself a representation of our position in the world. It is that against which I frame all my representations, and that in virtue of which I know that these are true or false because of the way things are.[24]

Rorty would not accept this point, believing that a representation which is not made true by some independent reality might just as well not be considered as a truth at all. Yet this reply would only make sense on the old schema. Once the idea of 'conceptual frameworks' is accepted, Taylor would say, it makes no sense to discuss whether there is a reality independent of these frameworks which makes them true or false. Rorty would reply that this outlook simply reduces philosophy to relativism, that it would not be able to provide opinions with any justification except that which relates to 'internal coherence'. As was shown above, however, he can only make this criticism if he maintains traditional distinctions which are not available to him.

Thus philosophy needs a new dualism which can cope with what would have seemed like contradictions in the metaphysical tradition, one which will break the back of the dialectic struggle forever. As Taylor states, only "really burying epistemology leads you back to

realism"[25]. My argument would be that if we were to do this consistently, we could not even talk about 'framed representations' without inadvertently invoking transcendental assumptions. Thus the only way to remain consistent would be to disregard Rorty's original critique of correspondence and refer to truth as if it were indeed *true*. Of course, all this navel contemplation might make such a simple, unselfconscious task appear impossible now, but if we were to be honest with ourselves, we would realise that this is all we ever have done, and all we could ever do.

After all of that philosophical *kibitzing*, Rorty somehow thinks that he has provided the perfect defence and that his work is therefore immune to criticism:

> The difficulty faced by a philosopher like myself . . . - one who thinks of himself as auxiliary to the poet rather than the physicist - is to avoid hinting that this suggestion gets something right, that my sort of philosophy corresponds to the way things really are.[26].

The phrase 'the way things really are' reinforces my main criticism of Rorty, but the point here, is whether Rorty *can* simply get out of trouble in this way by claiming that he was being 'ironic' all along, and that any critique which fails to take account of this must be trapped in the traditional epistemological view. My counter-attack is that as we are all trapped within epistemological transcendentalism anyway, my critique of Rorty is safe. His attempt to extrapolate from his philosophical stance a theory of the self and politics will further bear this out.

PART II - THE SELF.

A: Introduction.

Rorty's view of human nature arises from what he considers to be the logical implications of his critique of the metaphysical and epistemological tradition. On the one hand, his historicist approach enables him to understand the self as in some sense determined by specific temporal and spatial influences. On the other, embracing this type of contingency means that he takes an existentialist view of the possibility of human nature as self-constituting, or 'edifying', as he describes it. The difficulties in this analysis are akin to those contained in Rorty's rationality in general. It becomes clear that a universalistic, transcendental approach is necessary, and this is borne out by Rorty's own (somewhat contradictory) need to cite essences in order to be able to say anything at all about what it is to be human. The most significant criticism of Rorty's prescription for human 'edification' - and this can be said of the postmodern critique as a whole - is that it contains an element of cruelty, an element which can only be avoided by removing the need to make a description of human nature compatible with philosophical insights regarding the non-existence of an 'absolute good'.

B: The Contingency of the Self.

According to Rorty, there has been a

> tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of
> contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of
> contingency. The same tension has pervaded philosophy since Hegel's
> time, and particularly since Nietzsche. The important philosophers of our
> own century are those who have tried to follow through on the Romantic

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poets by breaking with Plato and seeing freedom as the recognition of contingency.27

Rorty relates Nietzsche's definition of truth as a 'mobile army of metaphors', which amounts, he argues, to saying that the whole idea of 'representing reality' by means of language, and thus the idea of finding a single context for all human lives, should be abandoned. He goes on to argue that if the notion of language as fitting the world is dropped, it means that the person who can use words in a way that they have never before been used, can appreciate her own contingency. "For then she can see, more clearly than the continuity-seeking historian, critic, or philosopher, that her language is as contingent as her parents or her historical epoch."28 Thus Rorty agrees with Freud's description of subconscious fantasy as a sign that man is self-constituting, because for Freud, fantasy is a faculty for creating metaphors.

To confuse matters, Rorty backtracks slightly, implying that he wishes to say that man is both constituting and constituted. He attacks Nietzsche for producing a kind of 'inverted Platonism' in his suggestion that a life of self-creation can be complete, although at times this is the argument which Rorty himself appears to be presenting. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty presents a concise view of what he means by the contingency of the self, in his description of the 'ironist'.

> I shall define an 'ironist' as someone who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is a power not in touch with a power not herself.29

This self-realisation, Rorty argues, puts the ironist in a position that Sartre called 'meta-stable': never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves. The opposition of irony, Rorty

states, is common sense. This involves an unselfconscious attitude in which it is taken for granted that statements formulated in one's own vocabulary "suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies"[30]. Thus the metaphysician is considered by Rorty to still be attached to common sense, in that he assumes that the terms in his own vocabulary refer to something which has a real essence.

The ironist, by contrast, Rorty describes as thinking that nothing has an intrinsic nature or a real essence.

> For us ironists, nothing can serve as a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary: there is no answer to redescription save a re-re-description. Since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original. Nothing can serve as a criticism of a person save another person, or of a culture save another culture - for persons and cultures are, for us, incarnated vocabularies.[31]

Two problems with Rorty's description of the ironist appear immediately. Firstly, one wonders how looking at other people, cultures and vocabularies help us to judge our own when they cannot be assessed by an external set of criteria, and we know our own criteria to be contingent. Rorty, it seems has instead provided a strong argument for the relativist's view that the most we can do is to look to the internal coherency of our final vocabularies. Secondly, Rorty's remarks seem to raise the question of why the ironist should *want* to create another final vocabulary, if (as Rorty makes it a condition) she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than any others, and others cannot be described as in any sense 'better'.

C: Transcendentalism and Essentialism.

Rorty agrees with Proust and Nietzsche that "there is nothing more powerful or important than self-rediscription"[32]. Yet Rorty's prescription for self-rediscription does not raise the question of whether it is within our power to account for everything which constitutes us. It assumes that we are able to describe ourselves in the first place, to know what it is that has made us what we are, and to know what it is that we are. But in order to be able to fully describe (and re-describe) ourselves, it seems that it would be necessary to be an onlooker, to have a neutral or differing viewpoint. The very idea of being able to transcend oneself is at odds with Rorty's thesis, yet 'self-rediscription' would appear to necessitate it. As Richard Bernstein says of Rorty:

> He is arguing against all notions of a centered and transcendental self. Whatever his motivations in coming up with a picture of 'the self as centerless, as historical contingency all the way through', he is arguing that his is a more perspicious - one is tempted to say a 'truer' - understanding of the self.[33]

This brings us to an even more obvious criticism of Rorty's view of human nature. It is illustrated above that he is already in a tricky position in attempting to describe human nature at all, even if it his view that man does not have a 'nature' as such. But Rorty makes the further mistake of being quite specific in his description. He distinctly names four human essences; that we have a desire to be kind, that we have a common susceptibility to humiliation, that we have a conscience which gives us dignity and rights, and that we have feelings of solidarity:

> The liberal ironist just wants our chances of being kind, of avoiding the humiliation of others, to be expanded by redescription. She thinks that recognition of a common susceptibility to humiliation is the only social bond that is needed.[34]
> [There is] a universal human faculty, conscience - possession of which constitutes the specifically human essence of each human being. This is the faculty which gives the individual human dignity and rights.[35]
> Our insistence on contingency, and our consequent opposition to ideas like 'essence', 'nature', and 'foundation', makes it impossible for us to retain

> the notion that some actions and attitudes are naturally 'inhuman'... Yet at times like that of Auschwitz, when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour are collapsing, we want something which stands beyond history and institutions. What can there be except human solidarity, our recognition of one another's common humanity?[36]

These essences which Rorty cites are not descriptions of perceptions and values within specific cultural ontologies, because of his fear of the label of relativism. But the point is, that they should be if his thought is to remain at all coherent. Again, it is because he feels the need to make his view of the self consistent with his critique of epistemology, that he falls into the trap of non-realism. And again, as we have seen, this means that he has to make universalistic claims and cite essences in order to remain consistent in this way.

More specifically, these problems stem from Rorty's desire to describe the self in such a way that would make it compatible with individual freedom. This is what produces his concept of 'edification', an existentialist, self-creating view of agency. But in order to avoid a thorough-going idealism, Rorty attempts to knit this together by also describing human nature in behaviouristic, materialistic and positivistic terms. as Bhaskar notes:

> Rorty comes to replicate the problematic of the Kantian solution. The basic distinction he invokes is that of Kant's " 'existentialist' distinction between people as empirical selves and as moral agents" (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature p382*). We are determined as material bodies *qua* empirical selves, but free as writing and speaking (ie. discursive) subjects *qua* moral agents.[37]

Bhaskar's point is that Rorty's specific description of what it is to be human in empirical, positivistic, terms gets in the way of self-creating agency. In trying to link the two, freedom would depend on the latter having an effect on the former, "for such agency depends on the agent 'making a difference' to the material world"[38]. In order to provide an adequate account of embodied human agency, this would require that the determined, physical world coincides with existential agency. This is either too much of a coincidence, or not agency at all.

D: The Impossibility and Cruelty of Edification.

There is a telling passage in Rorty's paper 'The Pragmatist's Progress' which serves to highlight not only the inconsistencies in his prescriptions for the ironist, but also to indicate *why* his desire for the recognition of one's contingency is an unachievable one:

> The final stage of the Pragmatist's Progress comes when one begins to see one's previous peripeties not as stages in the ascent toward Enlightenment, but simply as the contingent results of encounters with various books which happened to fall into one's hands. This stage is pretty hard to reach, for one is always being distracted by daydreams: daydreams in which the heroic pragmatist plays a Walter Mitty-type role in the immanent teleology of world history. But if the pragmatist can escape from such daydreams, he or she will eventually come to think of himself or herself as, like everything else, capable of as many descriptions as there are uses to which the pragmatist might be put, by his or her self or by others. This is the stage in which all descriptions (including one's self-description as a pragmatist) are evaluated according to their efficacy as instruments for purposes, rather than their fidelity to the object being described.[39]

There are several major criticisms which can be made of this passage. Firstly, despite Rorty's assertion that the pragmatist's self-conception exists in opposition to the mirroring model, no longer conceived of as partaking 'in the ascent toward Enlightenment', his talk of 'stages', 'the final stage', and 'progress' implies a teleology. As such, this teleology requires criteria according to which such progress can be judged. In Rorty's words, the criteria of self-description is to be judged not according to its ability to mirror reality, but according to its 'efficacy as instruments for purposes'. This has two problems: If these 'purposes' are multifarious and infinite, Rorty can be charged with the meaninglessness of any practical application of such criteria. Yet if they are limited, then the source of the criteria for such limitations needs to be made explicit. Also, we can question Rorty's use of the word 'efficacy' - surely it is another standard which begs the question of hidden assumptions and criteria.

The second major criticism centres on the mental state required for such 'progress';

namely, that it would require a schizophrenic approach to self-description. As Rorty's reference to Walter Mitty implies, the temptation is always there to fall back on Enlightenment-type teleological views of oneself and history. The very desire to overcome this nevertheless necessarily implies a desire to achieve enlightenment of some kind. Rorty's description of this 'progress' implies that it is necessary to be at once both aware and not aware - that it must happen at a subconscious level because as soon as we will it, we take a transcendental position in relation to ourselves, and this is antithetical to the very goal of this 'progress'.

This point is clarified very well by Jane Heal's discussion of our ability to choose to believe. It is central to Rorty's view that acquiring beliefs, theories or views can be regarded as a matter of choice. Yet as Heal points out, if we were able to choose our beliefs, it would be necessary for us to have a view of the world first, in order to have a reason for choosing certain beliefs over others. This would be the case whether we were attempting to choose beliefs on the basis that they represent 'reality', or if we were choosing them because we thought they would be more 'useful' to us. Thus Rorty's argument that we can choose certain beliefs because there are overwhelming practical reasons for doing so, makes little sense. As Heal explains,

> We have our concepts because we have our interests - no interests, no concepts. But this is not to be heard as saying that we choose or devise our concepts in the light of knowledge of our interests. That way of reading things presupposes that we can conceptualise our interests before we have any concepts, which is absurd.[40]

A third, more general criticism, which serves to summarise these points, is that Rorty's description of self-awareness implies that there is a non-contingent, 'core' of a self of which to be aware. The entire way in which he talks of the 'pragmatist's progress' is imbued with a certain elitist smugness, implying that this final stage is a higher enlightenment of a kind of Platonic ideal form. To clarify this, we can place this

characterisation of Rorty's 'final stage' in opposition to a view which would see it as merely contingent. The arrogance of the person who feels that he has reached a 'final stage' in his progress toward self-awareness by which he is aware of his own contingency, fails to acknowledge the contingency of *this* self-description.

Thus, in a rather obvious way, it can be seen that Rorty has a hierarchy of self-descriptions, with attempts to mirror reality at the bottom, and descriptions which are 'evaluated according to their efficacy as instruments for purposes' at the top. The fact that both kinds of self-description are contingent does not enter into the discussion, and the implied prescription for the latter, along with the hierarchy which accompanies it, indicates a hidden transcendentalism. In support of this point, we can look at two of the phrases in the quoted passage: i) 'books which happened to fall into one's hands'; and ii) 'this stage is pretty hard to reach'. The former indicates an almost complete *lack* of agency, while the latter requires quite the opposite, that is, that one has an ability to influence getting to this stage. This contradiction is akin to that pointed out by Bhaskar, that Rorty has not managed to find a way to consistently hold these opposing views of human nature. The reason that any attempt in this direction will inevitably be thwarted rests, as has been demonstrated above, upon the inevitability of taking a transcendental view in relation to oneself for the purpose of self-description.

Rorty believes that the social function of philosophy is to prevent "man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions"[41]. There seems to be an inherent cruelty in this. Rorty is, however, aware of the potential dangers:

> But most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms - taken seriously just as they are and just as they talk. The ironist tells them that the language they speak is up for grabs by her and her kind. There is something potentially cruel in that claim... But notice that redescription and possible humiliation are no more closely linked with ironism than with metaphysics. [The difference being, that with

metaphysics, redescription] presents itself as uncovering the interlocutors true self, or the real nature of a common public world which the speaker and the interlocutor share, [suggesting] that the person being redescribed is being empowered, not having his power diminished.[42]

But as Rorty notes, this is not what people want, metaphysical realities are a far more attractive proposition than the alternative 'pour-soi'. The effects are unlikely to be particularly healthy, either. As Guignon and Hiley point out, it seems more likely that Rorty's vision "would exacerbate rather then resolve disorders of the self"[43]. To a certain extent, however, these criticisms are merely hypothetical, as the argument that the edification which Rorty desires would be impossible to achieve, is extremely convincing. The difficulties which remain for Rorty centre on the point that, whatever he says to the contrary, his description of human nature as having the ability to recognise its own contingency comes across as a *prescription*, precisely as presenting itself to the person being redescribed in this way as being empowered by this recognition of contingency. Surely this is the cruellest thing of all?

E: Conclusion.

Rorty's position began by making the point that once we have dropped the notion of language as fitting the world, we are free to redescribe ourselves. Yet in order to avoid an 'inverted Platonism' of the Nietzschean kind, he goes on, this must involve an 'ironist' stance, whereby we recognise our contingency. My central criticism of this argument is that in order to be able to redescribe ourselves, we must transcend ourselves. It was also pointed out that Rorty's *specific* description of human nature makes his view essentialist, and this comes from his desire to describe a self which has a sense of agency and freedom, despite the inherent cruelty in the prescriptivity which necessarily accompanies this.

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It might appear that the problems with Rorty's concept of the self arise from the difficulties discussed in the Rationality section, that is, the impossibility of maintaining a distinction between correspondence and idealism without invoking transcendental assumptions. That is undoubtedly part of it. But for Rorty, his entire philosophical project, and the concept of the self that accompanies it, emanate from a hidden political agenda. This will be demonstrated in the following section.

PART III - POLITICS AND SOCIETY

A: Introduction.

Rorty's political theory contains similar tensions to those apparent in his thought on rationality and the self. On the one hand, he wants to make his prescriptions for society the outcome of his attack on traditional philosophy, while on the other, he feels the inevitable need to privilege certain concepts such as freedom and democracy. He attempts to justify such an apparently contradictory stance with four main assertions. Firstly, Rorty argues that private self-creation can be separated from public justice. Secondly, he sees liberal polity specifically as the natural upshot of the postmodern approach to rationality. Thirdly, he argues that although the justification for liberal democracy was initially grounded in Enlightenment rationality, it can continue without the need for such foundationalism. Finally, and linked to the last point, is Rorty's claim that internal, circular justification is all that is required for the maintenance of the liberal status quo. All of these assertions can be criticised in one way or another, but more importantly, it can be shown that the 'post-metaphysical' society which Rorty prescribes is an impossibility, and that his thesis ultimately appears to stem from his desire to justify liberal democracy, rather than from any philosophical insights.

B: The Postmodern Liberal Polity.

Rorty portrays his political theorising as if it is the logical consequence of the conclusions reached in his discourse on rationality and the self: "One of my claims . . . is to suggest the possibility of a liberal utopia: one in which ironism, in the relevant sense, is universal. A

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postmetaphysical culture seems to me no more impossible than a postreligious one, and equally desirable."[44] To attempt to give plausibility to his claim that his view is well adapted to a liberal polity, Rorty cites Isaiah Berlin's defense of 'negative liberty'. In Berlin's words, we need to give up the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and even entail each other. Quoting Joseph Schumpeter, Berlin argues that, "To realise the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly, is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbarian." On this, Berlin comments, "To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity"[45] Rorty argues that this translates into the claim that the liberal societies of our century have produced more and more people who are able to recognise the contingency of their own consciences, yet remain faithful to those consciences. He goes on to claim that 'freedom as the recognition of contingency' is the chief virtue of the members of a liberal society, and, in line with his postmodern theorising, "that the culture of such a society should aim at curing us of our 'deep metaphysical need'".[46]

Rorty recognises, however, that the ironist's power of redescription can hurt people, and that accordingly, could be considered *illiberal*:

> There is no way in which philosophy, or any other theoretical discipline, will ever let us [hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision]. The closest we will ever come to joining these two quests is to see the aim of a just and free society as letting its citizens be as privatistic, 'irrationalistic', and aestheticist as they please so long as they do it on their own time - causing no harm to others and using no resources needed by those less advantaged. There are practical measures to be taken to accomplish this goal. But there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory.[47]

Beware this disclaimer. It appears as if Rorty has already considered the possible criticisms of liberal ironist politics, and can therefore deflect any attack on the grounds that he has

already noted the problems of such a politics *in theory*. However, Rorty's next step is not to take practical measures to achieve this goal by, for example, becoming a politician or a policy-maker. Rather, he goes on to discuss, *at the theoretical level*, how self-creation and justice could be brought together in the postmodern liberal polity by limiting irony to the private sphere, while the public sphere remains liberal:

> . . . we need to distinguish between redescription for private and public purposes. For my private purposes, I may redescribe you and everyone else in terms which have nothing to do with my attitude toward your actual and possible suffering. My private purposes, and the part of my final vocabulary which is not relevant to any public actions, are none of your business. But as I am a liberal, the part of my final vocabulary which is relevant to such actions requires me to become aware of the various ways in which other human beings whom I might act upon can be humiliated.[48]

In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Rorty finally comes to see ironism restricted to the private domain as a way of ensuring individual 'self-invention' and freedom, while liberalism is restricted to the public domain to ensure justice. This would require, however, the kind of 'ego-splitting' described in the above discussion on the self. Why, or how, would an individual restrict his or her self descriptions to the private sphere? It is not simply the case that, as Guignon and Hiley put it, "An individual's self-descriptions are realised in his or her agency in the public world, and public practices and institutions impact on the individual's capacities for self-fulfilment"[49]; nor, as Nancy Frazer expresses it, "Final vocabularies do not neatly divide into public and private sectors; nor do actions neatly divide into public or private"[50], and "In particular, it is not possible to distinguish redescriptions that effect actions with consequences for others and those that do not"[51].

Rather, we should be asking 'from where do these private desires for self-invention originate'? Rorty cannot say that they come from the society in which the individual lives, for this begs the question. That is, it is on the basis of his description of human nature as ironist that he (supposedly) develops his notion of an ironist liberal society. As was

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demonstrated earlier, the difficulty with the Rortian notion of being aware of one's contingency rests on the fact that, in order to do so, one must take a transcendental stance in relation to oneself, and that such an act makes the kind of mind-bending that Rorty requires of us quite irrelevant because it makes impossible the idea of a thorough-going contingency.

So, on a superficial level, we can make the point that Rorty's concept of contingency precludes the separation of the public and the private because it does not allow that the contingent factors which make up the individual could come from social norms, values, education, laws, or anything which exists in the public space. The more important criticism, however, is that once it is established that reference to the transcendental will always get in the way of an awareness of one's contingency, there is no reason why a society should be structured in order to allow for private irony *except* to the extent that the very desire for self-invention emanates from shared social and political values. As mentioned above, this then destroys Rorty's argument regarding the reasons for the desirability of such a society.

In an attempt to counter some of the more obvious criticisms of the separation of the public and the private spheres, Rorty implies that irony might belong to an intellectual minority[52]. As Bhaskar points out, this gives Rorty's political stance an air of elitism, "No wonder that Rorty has been hailed as an ideologue of and for 'the chattering classes'[53]"[54]. He goes on to ask why a project of self-invention should be restricted to a privileged elite. This criticism is particularly pertinent when we bear in mind that intellectuals are no less a product of their society than anyone else, and that if we are to take Rorty's views on the contingency of the self seriously, then the desire for self-invention must emanate from our social and political values rather than from any description of the self which is based on the attempt to capture our 'true nature'.

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At a more practical level, whether or not private irony belongs to a minority, Rorty's hope

that the private sphere would consist of highly individual poets and eccentrics makes it

difficult to imagine how this could coexist with a homogenised public space, as Nancy

Frazer notes:

> In reaction against the extreme egotism and individualism of his conception
> of theory . . . politics assumes an overly communitarian and solidary
> character . . . Rorty assumes that there are no deep social cleavages capable
> of generating conflicting solidarities and opposing 'we's' . . . Social
> engineering can replace political struggle . . . Moreover with no deep rifts or
> pervasive axes of domination, practice can float free of theory . . . Thus
> politics can be detheorized . . . as theory becomes pure *poiesis* . . . politics
> approaches pure *techne*.[55]

From this, we could see how such an idealised liberal polity would have no need for

democracy. Any desire to change the status quo would, by Rorty's definition, belong to the

realm of private opinion, and should not, therefore, be able to effect anything in the public

realm. So democracy, which acts as medium between the private and the public, would be

both unnecessary and undesirable if it did anything other than *confirm* the political status

quo. In other words, any radical, emancipatory or transformative tendencies exposed

through the democratic process would be considered *illiberal* - and therefore undemocratic.

Before considering the implications of these problems for Rorty's political stance, and

indeed liberalism as a whole, we should assess the validity of another of Rorty's

disclaimers, and the degree to which this clause in his political thesis could make it

invulnerable to critique.

C: Rorty's Circular Justification and the Redundancy of Enlightenment Rationality.

Rorty would say of many of his critics that they fail to make an impact because they are evaluating his thesis according to a rationality which he has shown to be flawed, that is, according to Enlightenment standards. Rorty's argument is that we no longer need this rationality, that it is redundant: "I shall try to show that the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism, although it was essential to the beginnings of liberal democracy, has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies."[56] Instead, Rorty believes that he can reformulate the hopes of liberal society in a nonrationalist and nonuniversalist way. He refers to Dewey, Oakeshott, and Rawls as helping to undermine the idea of a transhistorical 'absolutely valid' set of concepts which would serve as 'philosophical foundations' of liberalism, and as seeing this undermining as a way of actually strengthening liberal institutions.

Rorty states that he would like to replace both religious and philosophical accounts of a suprahistorical grounding of liberal democracy with a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs. Such a culture, Rorty argues, would instead agree with Dewey that,

> imagination is the chief instrument of the good... art is more moral than moralities. For the latter either are, or tend to become, consecrations of the status quo... The moral prophets of humanity have always been poets even though they spoke in free verse or by parable.[57]

In Rorty's words, this means that:

> Although the idea of a central and universal human component called 'reason', a faculty which is the source of moral obligations, was very useful in creating modern democratic societies, it can now be dispensed with - and should be dispensed with, in order to help bring the liberal utopia into existence. I have been urging that the democracies are now in a position to throw away some of the ladders used in their own construction.[58]

Having attempted to rid liberal democracy of its traditionally Enlightenment justification,

Rorty does not say that it now has no justification, but instead argues:

> A circular justification of our practices, a justification which makes one
> feature of our culture look good by still citing another, or comparing our
> culture invidiously with others by reference to our own standards, is the
> only sort of justification we are going to get.[59]

Thus Rorty believes that liberal society can be convinced that loyalty to itself is morality

enough, and that such loyalty no longer needs an ahistorical backup - "it need be

responsible only to its own traditions, and not to the moral law as well"[60]. He argues that

we should see allegiance to social institutions as no more matters for justification by

reference to familiar, commonly accepted premises - but also as no more arbitrary - than

choices of friends or heroes. Such choices, he believes, are not made by reference to

criteria, and cannot be preceded by presuppositionless critical reflection, outside of

historical context.

There are four main criticisms which can be made of Rorty's attempt to extrapolate, for the

purposes of political analysis, his insights into correspondence theory. Firstly, his

concession that Enlightenment rationality was 'essential to the beginnings of liberal

democracy' confuses reasons with causes. The Enlightenment was not a tool or a method

used for the construction of liberal democracy, it was the *reason* for its existence. In

Rorty's confusion of the 'how' with the 'why' he loses sight of the fact that Enlightenment

rationality was not discarded as soon as liberal democratic institutions were in place, but

continues to be referred to as justification for their continued existence. This touches on a

major problem with Rorty's thesis - it is based on the critique of our practice of mirroring

reality, but simultaneously develops as if we are no longer in the grip of correspondence

theory. The wider implications of this will be discussed later.

The second criticism rests on the fact that Rorty's romantic notion of the poet replacing the

metaphysician is unconvincing. The poet is no more free of references to transcendental ideals than the metaphysician, and they have about an equal chance of influencing the world at large. What is more, the poet would seem less likely than the philosopher to be in the position to produce the kind of historical narrative Rorty hopes for. 'Imagination and art', although still the products of their time and place, are no doubt less constrained by the non-conflictual mainstream values that Rorty attributes to the public space in his liberal polity.

Thirdly, while Rorty is correct in his assertion that a circular justification of our cultural practices is all that we are going to get, he fails to recognise that this is all we ever have had, and he is therefore wrong to draw a distinction in this way between circular justification and traditional Enlightenment justification. This confusion is the result of his conflation of ontological and epistemological transcendentalism, as was pointed out earlier. The point is that 'a justification which makes one feature of our culture look good by still citing another' is no more free from an appeal to transcendental truths than the Enlightenment rationality which Rorty criticises. His picture of liberal democracy appears to be one in which we have reached the end of history, "that it is translucently clear what we mean by liberalism"[61] and that there is no potential for conflict. Yet political issues are continually raised such that it is necessary for us to 'touch base' and justify our political position. This is not to be taken as evidence that transcendental ideals exist at all, but simply that we cannot but help operating with notions which presuppose that they do.

Finally, and perhaps underpinning most of the above criticisms, is the fact that Rorty radically undertheorises liberalism. The kind of circular justification that Rorty is after would require a high degree of internal coherency and consensus. In his writing, he achieves this idealised picture of liberalism by calling anything that is non-liberal, non-political, and therefore as belonging to the private realm - he practically *defines* the liberal utopia into existence. Thus he presents it as a clear, simple political theory and practice

which takes no account of internal contradictions and overlooks "the fact that we are confronted with conflicting and incompatible interpretations and practices in 'liberal democracy'"62.

D: Privileging Freedom: The Problem with Liberalism.

Rorty states that "*Nothing* is more important than the preservation of liberal institutions"63. His discussion of Rawls indicates, more specifically, his belief that the preservation of liberal institutions is necessary for freedom, and freedom is antecedent to justice:

> Rawls argument against fanaticism is not that it threatens truth about the characteristics of an antecedent metaphysical and moral order by threatening free discussion, but simply that it threatens freedom, and thus threatens justice.64

Despite Rorty's attempts to separate freedom and justice from any 'antecedent and moral order', it can be demonstrated that, in privileging freedom, he presupposes 'a natural order of topics and arguments' in a way that is antithetical to his thesis, thus undermining his arguments in favour of a postmetaphysical liberal utopia. More than this, in the course of the discussion, it becomes clear that arguments for a liberal society cannot but fail to make metaphysical assumptions. This means that if Rorty's critique of truth mirroring nature is valid, liberal democracy, on Rorty's own terms, is unjustifiable.

Rorty focuses his attention on the distinction between persuasion and force as the key to liberalism:

> It is central to the idea of a liberal society that, in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes. This openmindedness... should be fostered for its own sake. A liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be. That is why a liberal society is badly served by an attempt to supply it with 'philosophical foundations'. For the attempt to supply such foundations presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between old and new

vocabularies.[65]

There are two main criticisms which can be made of this position. Firstly, Rorty is quite specific about the necessary conditions for discovering such truths. It has to be the result of 'free discussion', and this, for Rorty, is the sort which goes on when the press, the judiciary, the elections, and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common, and peace and wealth have made possible the leisure necessary to listen to 'lots of different people and think about what they say'[66]. This is problematic in two ways. For a start, it 'presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments' which are not agreed upon in America, let alone in the rest of the world. Rorty is stating this list as a method of achieving truth, and as such, steps outside of the sort of circular justification that he prescribes. There is no room in this argument for the separation of method and ideals: the method he proposes will determine what sort of truths arise. As Cleveland points out, this might not advance equality or diminish suffering:

> This is because the universal and higher education which people share in this 'free' society may simply be the indoctrination of standards that allow the masses to be manipulated by the propaganda of the press, the universities, and the politicians in such a way that voting does not represent the autonomous will of the people.[67]

If, however, we were to allow that Rorty's private world of self-inventing ironists were able to influence the public space with their individually, poetically discovered values, and that this list of criteria for discovering truths was as neutral a vehicle as he hopes, there is no reason to suppose that a liberal polity would be long-lived: "Rorty's ironist philosophy is more at home in the world of George Orwell's *1984* than in a liberal society concerned with human equality and liberal freedoms"[68].

The second criticism follows on from this, but involves, more specifically, Rorty's distinction between persuasion and force. The only way that Rorty can escape the criticism that, for the ironist, such a distinction must be arbitrary or biased, is by distinguishing

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reasons from causes:

> Within a language game, within a set of agreements about what is important, we can usefully distinguish reasons for belief from causes for belief which are not reasons. We do this by starting with such obvious differences as that between Socratic dialogue and hypnotic suggestion. We then try to firm up the distinction by dealing with the messier cases: brainwashing, media hype, and what the Marxists call 'false consciousness'. There is, to be sure, no neat way to draw the line between persuasion and force, and therefore no neat way to draw the line between a cause of a changed belief which was also a reason and one which was a 'mere' cause. But the distinction is no fuzzier than most.[69]

There are two problems here. Rorty seems to start his distinction with clear cases which must rely either upon intuition or a set of antecedent values, neither of which are available to the ironist. To get around this, Rorty puts the distinction 'within a language game', but this language game might very well be non-liberal. Again, analysis shows that a liberal society would not serve the needs of the ironist.

As Bernstein points out, 'liberalism' itself is a vague term that embraces many diverse and even incompatible positions. At times, however, Rorty writes as if 'we' all have common intuitions about what liberal democracy means or should mean. It is ironical that he falls into an essentialist way of talking when he speaks of 'liberal democracy' or 'political freedom', despite his own arguments against 'essentialism'. He is also contradictory in his belief that there can exist consensus about conceptions of justice, when he explicitly argues that we can (and should) be 'edifying' and aware of the contingency of all our values. Cleveland argues that from this we can conclude that 'liberalism limits concessions to contingency'. But surely the converse is true. Is it not rather the case that unless we can disprove Rorty's critique of the correspondence theory of truth, it is the validity of the liberal position that is questionable?

E: Conclusion: An Apologia for the Status Quo.

Rorty's starting point is the critique of the fact that both philosophical and common conceptions of truth are based on attempts to 'mirror nature'. Instead, he argues, both human nature and conceptions of truth are contingent upon cultural and historical factors. In this he is correct. But from this accurate description of the way things are, he tries to turn it into evidence for the prescription that things should be different. Therein lies his fundamental philosophical error. My argument is that his entire philosophical thesis comes not from any insights into the truth about truth, but from his desire to justify the liberal status quo: his argument is reductive and designed to deceive.

Rorty bases his idea of circular justification on his view that liberalism is the natural upshot of his description of the self. The problem is that he is *criticising* the way in which we attempt to mirror nature. Yet if what we do is attempt to mirror nature, then we are not ironists, and his politics is unfounded. His thesis comes from two opposing directions: i) we do mirror nature; and ii) we do not mirror nature. Because he wishes to make it appear as though his liberal politics is the natural upshot of his philosophical stance as based on ii), it continually comes up against problems. The main problem is that Rorty's work only makes sense if he is prescribing that we stop doing i) and recognise ii), but this kind of prescriptivity does not fall within the parameters of circular justification, is antithetical to his philosophical outlook, and necessitates that he is offering a 'truer' view of the world: a philosophy which corresponds to the way things really are.

Rorty's defence is that his work is 'poetic', that in an ironical way he is simply trying to stretch our imaginations, but quite apart from the fact that this is hard to believe, this position is self-defeating:

> [Even] if he does not intend all his talk of the liberal ironist to be taken

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seriously as advocating a new philosophical position but only as a 'poetic' attempt to change our lives and our actions, then ironically this view will be achieved only as long as his readers take him seriously: the ironist effect only results if one fails to understand that it is all irony.[70]

Finally, this brings us to the question of what this means for liberalism. Rorty tends to downplay what has become a major problem for any internal or external critique of liberalism - the disparity between the 'ideals' of liberty and equality that liberals profess, and the actual state of affairs in so-called liberal societies. This, it can be argued, is the result of the internal contradictions in liberal theory itself. Many of Rorty's critics focus on the incompatibility of irony and liberalism, concluding, as Cleveland does, that liberalism cannot consistently tolerate Rorty's ironist. But this conception of the self is not new to liberalism, rather, it is a description of human nature that, in all its relevant points concerning agency, is embraced by liberalism. The schism in liberalism arises from its claim to neutrality, and Rorty's thesis provides an unwitting exposé of this rather than an indication that the postmodern critique of correspondence theories of truth should be dropped. Rorty does not explore these problems or attempt to defend his case, he simply asserts it. As Richard Bernstein points out,

> Rorty's thesis of the priority of democracy over philosophy, his celebration of a new tolerant jouissance of multiple language games and vocabularies is little more than an ideological apologia for an old-fashioned version of cold-war liberalism dressed up in fashionable 'postmodern' discourse. This is surely one step forward, two steps back.[71]

CHAPTER 4.

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE.

PART I - RATIONALITY.

A: Introduction: The Contemporary Moral Crisis.

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981), marks a major change in his thought, arising from his reflections on the inadequacies of his previous work, and "from a growing dissatisfaction with the conception of 'moral philosophy' as an independent and isolable area of inquiry"[1]. Although he still agrees with the central theme in his earlier works (*A Short History of Ethics*, 1966; *Secularisation and Moral Change*, 1967; *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 1971), that the moral philosopher must take an historical approach as opposed to studying concepts of morality by mere reflection, he now states: "...it was as clear to others as it ought to have been to me that my historical and sociological accounts were, and could not fail but be, informed by a distinctive evaluative standpoint."[2] In other words, he had previously reached the conclusion, common to many contemporary postmodern thinkers, that it is no longer possible, as a method of enquiry, to appeal to moral criteria; and for MacIntyre this meant that moral justification in modern society is groundless, and the result is a moral calamity. The epistemological difficulty with such a position, he now realises, is that he must have been employing criteria of some kind in order to reach such a conclusion: "But to what could I be appealing, if my own analysis was correct?"[3]

Already we can see how MacIntyre's work acts as a direct critique of Foucault, Derrida and Rorty. For a start, MacIntyre believes that the failure of Enlightenment rationality to provide us with universal truths which in turn could tell us how to live, has had disastrous effects for society. The other thinkers have a different approach. They believe that by pointing out the ways in which the Enlightenment must *inevitably* fail to produce that kind of certainty, we can be emancipated from the hierarchies which result from such a concept

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of truth. MacIntyre would argue that these thinkers fail to be aware of the values which they must invoke when they express this desire for emancipation.

MacIntyre's conclusion in *After Virtue* is that the moral defects and failures of both Marxism and liberal individualism embody the ethos of the modern world, and that only a rejection of that ethos in favour of Aristotelianism will provide us with a rationally justified standpoint from which to judge and to act. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, published as a sequel in 1988, Aristotle is replaced by Aquinas, who MacIntyre feels manages to synthesize the Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions in such a way as to provide a rational basis for what MacIntyre calls 'tradition-based enquiry'. This proposed method, also expanded in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), describes MacIntyre's hopes for a practical rationality which both takes account of the historicity of moral traditions, while providing "the kind of debate from which one party can emerge as undoubtedly rationally superior"[4]

Thus we are introduced immediately to the problem which MacIntyre faces; he at once wishes to take account of the historical contingency which is the essential nature of our morality, whilst avoiding what he believes to be the horrors of relativism, *and* provide us with a universal, timeless body of criteria with which we can judge our tradition-based values. These difficulties become more explicit when we look at MacIntyre's political analysis. On the one hand, his description and critique of liberal societies as 'emotivist' means that it is difficult to see how a Thomist revival could be implemented in practice, while on the other, his acknowledgement of the fact that contemporary societies covertly embody a hierarchy of values means that once they are described as forming a tradition, he is unable to find a standpoint from which to provide a critique. In the end, this means that MacIntyre's position is, inadvertently, compatible with liberal practices.

First, however, we must take a look at why MacIntyre believes that morality is in a state of grave disorder. It is because, he says, contemporary moral debates are conceptually incommensurable, by which he means that although each is internally logically valid, they follow from different premises and cannot, therefore, provide critiques of each other. Yet despite the private arbitrariness upon which these premises rest, they each purport to be impersonal, thus presupposing the existence of a set of objective criteria. MacIntyre stresses that this does not amount to saying that we live in a pluralist society, which would imply that we have 'an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints', but rather that contemporary moral theory contains 'an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments'. The reason for this chaos, he believes, is due to our inheritance of a variety of moral concepts which were originally at home within larger, coherent traditions of morality, and no longer make sense without the rational framework which is necessary to support them. Thus, for MacIntyre, differing concepts of morality relate directly to differing concepts of rationality - there exists a causal relationship between the two, and because of the lack of an overall rationality by which incommensurable concepts can be considered, the result is mere assertion and counterassertion of alternative and incompatible sets of premises. So MacIntyre sees the outstanding task of philosophy today to be to understand the sources of the epistemological and moral crisis of contemporary culture and of the incommensurable values that it involves.

What compounds (and is indeed part of) the problem, argues MacIntyre, is that this grave disorder has gone unnoticed, that the appearance of morality persists. That is, people still talk in terms of 'true' and 'false', although it is no longer clear in virtue of what a moral judgement can be true or false. For this MacIntyre lays the blame with the failure of the Enlightenment project, which, while claiming the existence of a teleological-free, neutral and universal structure of rationality and morality to which all philosophical problems could be addressed, was unable to agree upon what form that rationality should take. However,

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what remains, MacIntyre states, is a confidence found in the use of moral language which presupposes the existence of a neutral set of moral rules, the consequence of which is emotivism. Thus moral judgements continue to be expressed with an assumed authority, yet without the teleological or categorical character which is needed to support this authority:

> If such rules cannot be found a new status which will make appeal to them rational, appeal to them will indeed appear as a mere instrument of desire and will. Hence there is a pressure to vindicate them either by devising some new teleology or by finding some new categorical status for them.[5]

So MacIntyre is criticising what he believes to be central to the emotivist argument:"...that there are and can be *no* valid rational justification for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards."[6] What needs to be clarified, then, is how MacIntyre feels it is possible to disagree with this emotivist stance, whilst simultaneously criticising the Enlightenment project, which he believes was doomed to failure from the outset.

MacIntyre characterises the Enlightenment project's central aspiration as the attempt to provide standards and methods of rational justification by which every course of action could be judged to be rational or irrational, just or unjust. In this way, it was hoped that rationality would replace the arbitrary authority of tradition, convention, and superstition:

> Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places.[7]

MacIntyre makes two main criticisms of this project. Firstly, along with many contemporary theorists, he argues that the attempt to discover a neutral, independent set of standards or modes of characterising data has proved to be a chimera. For evidence, he points to the lack of a set of universal values which would be acceptable to all rational persons and able to determine the truth on matters which, for example, two traditions are at

variance. He also notes that in even in liberal individualist society, where rationality is seen to have priority over justice, the claimed neutrality does not exist. Instead, he rightly points out that liberalism embodies certain values, liberal values, which necessarily impose a particular conception of the good life, and ensures through its procedures and terms of debate the exclusion of rival theories. Even the debates within liberalism as to the fundamental principles of liberal justice imply that liberalism has not discovered a fundamental rationality independent of tradition, but rather that liberalism is itself part of a developed and developing tradition. MacIntyre realises that liberalism's failure at this project does not necessarily mean that there is no neutral stance or universal standpoint, and indeed, there can be no *a priori* argument that one could not exist, yet:

> What is equally clear, however, is that liberalism is by far the strongest claimant to provide such a ground which has so far appeared in human history or is likely to appear in the foreseeable future. That liberalism fails in this respect, therefore, provides the strongest reason that we can actually have for asserting that there is no such neutral ground, that there is no place for appeals to a practical-rationality-as-such or a practical-justice-as-such to which all rational persons would by their very rationality be compelled to give their allegiance.[8]

MacIntyre's second criticism of the Enlightenment project is based less upon its epistemological difficulties, and is directed more towards the specific course that it took. This in itself is something which should be noted; that is, any supplement to the epistemological criticism above should surely be redundant, and in fact can only detract from the force of the argument. This second point made by MacIntyre relates to what he believes to be an incorrect view of human nature shared by the Enlightenment thinkers. He argues that the secular rejection of Protestant and Catholic theology, combined with the philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism, resulted in the elimination of any notion of 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-telos'. Yet the whole point of morality, says MacIntyre, was to provide a scheme by which human nature could be corrected, improved, and educated; *not* to be deduced from 'true' statements about human nature or justified in some

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other way by appealing to its characteristics, which was what the Enlightenment thinkers were trying to do:

> Hence the eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project; for they did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other.[9]

These two criticisms seem to directly contradict each other. The first implies that MacIntyre must take a relativist stance, that he is above all opposed to any foundational principles from which explanations and prescriptions regarding rationality and morality can be deduced. His second criticism, however, implies that he merely believes that the *specific* assumptions made by Enlightenment thinkers regarding human nature were incorrect. These confusions become more explicit in MacIntyre's proposed solutions to this contemporary 'crisis'.

B: MacIntyre's Solution Part 1: Restating Aristotle.

MacIntyre draws a sharp dichotomy between Aristotelian teleology and Nietzschean nihilism, arguing that ever since the belief in Aristotelian teleology was discredited, various attempts to provide rational grounds for morality have failed, and that this failure was perceived clearly by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's response to such an insight was to 'raze to the ground' the structure and very foundation of our inherited moral beliefs and rationality in a negative philosophy which, as MacIntyre notes, possessed a certain plausibility.

> ...unless of course the initial rejection of the moral tradition to which Aristotle's teaching about the virtues is central turned out to have been misconceived and mistaken. Unless that tradition could be rationally vindicated, Nietzsche's stance would have a terrible plausibility.[10]

Thus MacIntyre believes that there can be only two choices: either one must follow through the aspirations and inevitable collapse of the Enlightenment project until there is nothing left but Nietzschean nihilism, or one must hold that the entire project, including its rejection of the teleological view of man, was mistaken from the outset - there is no third alternative. It is here that one of the central issues in the work of MacIntyre and other contemporary theorists raises its head; that is, the question of the relevance of this philosophical discussion to our everyday lives. For MacIntyre, the Nietzschean stance is not an escape from the structures imposed by the Enlightenment, but is rather a symptom of contemporary liberal democracy, itself a product of those structures: "It is therefore after all the case that the crucial moral opposition is between liberal individualism in some version or other and the Aristotelian tradition in some version or other."11

MacIntyre goes on to support his case with the argument that the Nietzschean critique, made so convincingly of the foundational rules of morality in the modern tradition, does not actually extend to the Aristotelian tradition. The reason for this, he argues, stems from the fact that for Aristotle, it was the virtues, and not rules, which formed the central part of the moral system, yet the Nietzschean critique was aimed at discrediting rule-based moral theory. This argument is weak for several reasons. Firstly, MacIntyre's dichotomy between rules and virtues is not uncontentious; it could be argued that a virtue-based morality necessarily produces a set of ethical rules, and conversely, that a rule-based morality necessarily makes assumptions regarding what it is to be virtuous. This would mean that the Nietzschean critique *does* extend to the Aristotelian tradition. Secondly, if we are to allow that Nietzsche's critique does not apply to Aristotle, it is difficult to see in what sense they can be opposed, and this will have implications for MacIntyre's argument that we must choose between liberal individualism and Aristotelianism.

This second criticism has been taken up by Sabina Lovibond12, who suggests that

Nietzsche and Aristotle do not differ in the way required by MacIntyre's argument. In relation to this, she makes three interrelated points. Firstly, she notes that MacIntyre's "analysis is strikingly idealist in character - 'idealist' in the sense of seeking to explain social phenomena by reference to ideas, or intellectual tendencies, rather than by reference to material forces"[13]. Nietzsche, on the other hand, has no intention of extrapolating prescriptions for a 'Nietzschean man' from the use of rational argument. Secondly, she argues that

> Nietzsche's philosophy is, precisely, the outcome of a self-conscious attempt . . . to adopt the pre-Christian idea of an 'aesthetics of character' to the needs of the post-Christian world. Certainly he believed that we could take some important first steps towards an appreciation of our own collective spiritual ugliness simply be attending with due humility to the merits of Greek culture. Like Hegel, however, he recognised the inadequacy of any merely nostalgic Hellenism, that is, of any notion of literally imitating what was of value in antiquity without regard for intervening historical change.[14]

In this way, we can see that while Nietzsche and Aristotle have in common some concept of an 'aesthetics of character', MacIntyre's non-contextualised application of this differs wildly from Nietzsche's. This application emanates, ultimately, from the way in which MacIntyre unconsciously follows Aristotle's spatio-temporal generalisations about man and society. Thirdly, then, Lovibond points to where Nietzsche and Aristotle differ, and this centres on the conception of the human good as having "a claim to universal acceptance based on the strength of its rational superiority to rival conceptions"[15]. At the point where Nietzsche and Aristotle part, MacIntyre follows Aristotle, and has to, in order to maintain the opposition between the two positions. But the important point to note is that MacIntyre *should* be closer to Nietzsche if he wishes to maintain his historicist account.

In any case, MacIntyre feels that the Aristotelian tradition of virtues can be restated in such a way as to restore intelligibility to our moral commitments. To this end, he describes two interrelated advantages of the Aristotelian conceptual scheme which he believes have something to offer to the contemporary situation. Firstly, he points to the Greek concept of

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dike, justice, meaning to conduct one's affairs in accordance with the grand scheme of things, and Aristotle's application of this concept with regard to one's membership in the polis:

> Without such a membership . . . one is bound to lack essential elements of the education into the virtues and of the experience of the life of the virtues which is necessary for such apprehension. But more than this, one is bound also to lack the capacity to reason practically.[16]

Aristotle, then, according to MacIntyre, was offering a *relativistic* view of justice and rationality, determined as it was within the polis, and not by appeal to some neutral set of standards which could equally apply to all. This aspect of Aristotelianism is intended, by MacIntyre, to overcome the foundational and universalistic element of Enlightenment thought which has been criticised so widely.

The second advantage of seeing things the Aristotelian way, is one intended to overcome Nietzschean nihilism. MacIntyre takes on the naturalistic fallacy, disagreeing with Hume's argument that an 'is' premise can never produce an 'ought' without invoking a moral judgement. There are, he argues 'functional concepts', for example 'watch' and 'farmer', which contain an idea of what a *good* watch and farmer are. This is also true, he says, of the concept of 'man' in the classical Aristotelian tradition, where justice was related to man's role, and human nature was perceived to have a teleological essence: "It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that 'man' ceases to be a functional concept."[17]

Here again, the question of the link between theory and practice is raised, because MacIntyre has not in fact produced a convincing critique of the naturalistic fallacy. It is precisely this kind of moral supplement, at which the criticism made by the naturalistic fallacy, is aimed. He cannot say that man, in the times of Ancient Greece, had a teleological essence which he no longer has. If the naturalistic fallacy is true now, then it was true then.

So firstly, he has failed to show that contemporary man's self-perception does not involve a telos; secondly, he does not tell us what the virtues should be; and, thirdly, he does not explain how the Aristotelian tradition can be reinstated in practice. As Frankena points out:

> A conception of the good which is man's telos is required, and it must be drawn from the very considerations that led MacIntyre to transcend the 'limited' conception of the virtues in terms of practices. I do not, however, find any clear conception of the good or telos in MacIntyre.[18]

C: MacIntyre's Solution Part 2: Tradition-Based Enquiry.

At the end of *After Virtue* MacIntyre states that we still need to find a systematic way to establish rational procedures for settling moral disputes, and it is this task at which his concept of tradition-based enquiry is aimed in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. He begins with a criticism of what he believes to be a central characteristic of modernity: ". . . the confident belief that all cultural phenomena must be potentially translucent to understanding, that all texts must be capable of being translated into the language which the adherents of modernity speak to each other."[19] This belief, he argues, is manifested in a variety of activities including the teaching of foreign and historical texts, the conducting of international negotiations, and in the form of philosophical theses about universal translatability.

More specifically, MacIntyre directs his critique towards contemporary philosophers who take themselves to be representing a timeless form of practical thinking, when in fact, their rationality is peculiar to their own culture. This means, effectively, that often the voices of tradition outside of liberalism are precluded from being heard, as they are evaluated with a rationality which is already predisposed towards a particular judgement. So what MacIntyre is looking for is a mode of understanding which can enable us to reunite our convictions on

matters concerning morality and justice, with rational justification, yet without inadvertently continuing to accept the standards of the Enlightenment. This, he argues, can be found in a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* this theme is continued and set within his description of the debate between the 'Encyclopaedic' (or what he generally previously referred to as the Enlightenment); the Genealogical (referring to his interpretation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*); and the Thomist tradition as what he sees as the only viable alternative to the other two, remaining, for the purposes of his argument, substantially the same as his revival of Aristotelianism.

In this most recent book, however, MacIntyre's understanding of a 'tradition' is both confused and confusing. He uses 'tradition' and 'Thomism' interchangeably, rather than citing Thomism as an example of a tradition, and the other two versions are sometimes posed in opposition to tradition, and sometimes as examples of tradition. The reasons for this confusion may well arise from some fundamental difficulties with MacIntyre's own position, which we will come to later, but for now we have to return to *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* in order to find a clear definition of what he means by a 'tradition' when he discusses the need for tradition-based enquiry:

> A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.[20]

He goes on to say that a tradition of enquiry is more than a coherent movement of thought: it is such a movement in the course of which those engaging in that movement become aware of it and its direction, and in a self-aware fashion attempt to engage in its debates and carry its enquiries forward. So the concept of rational justification which is at home in that form of enquiry is essentially historical. This may produce, MacIntyre explains, theses which appear to have the status of first principles, with other claims being justified by

derivation from these first principles.

Unlike Enlightenment methodology, however, what justifies the first principles is ". . . the rational superiority of that particular structure to all previous attempts within that particular tradition to formulate such theories and principles"[21]. Thus whereas the Enlightenment project attempted to illustrate whether doctrines were true or false independent of their historical origin, MacIntyre is arguing that doctrines, theses and arguments all have to be understood in terms of historical contexts. The radical aspect of this approach is MacIntyre's claim that this

> . . . does not entail that the differences between rival and incompatible traditions cannot be rationally resolved. How and under what conditions they can be so resolved is something only to be understood after a prior understanding of the nature of such traditions has been achieved. From the standpoint of traditions of rational enquiry the problem of diversity is not abolished, but is transformed in a way that renders it amenable of solution.[22]

Thus MacIntyre is explicitly arguing that there is a method by which traditions of enquiry can be *judged*. He says, for example, that traditions inevitably recognize their own problematics and inadequacies, and often overcome these difficulties through employing the concepts and resources provided by alien traditions. To MacIntyre, this ability of traditions of thought to take a 'supra-traditional' view and to sit in judgement of themselves in this way, is evidence that " . . . the Platonic distinction between 'is true' and 'seems true to such and such person'" is correct.[23]

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre describes the two-stage method by which rival intellectual traditions can make this distinction. They start, he says, by characterising the contentions of the rival tradition in their own terms, making explicit the grounds for rejecting what is incompatible with their own central theses. The second stage is reached when the protagonists of each tradition have considered the areas which, by their own internal standards, are problematic, and are unable to develop their enquiries beyond a

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certain point using only the concepts which have hitherto been available. At this point in the controversy, intellectual traditions may discover that their rivals can provide concepts which are able to characterise and to explain the failings and defects of their own tradition. MacIntyre strongly implies that these concepts do not simply 'seem true to such and such persons', they are, in virtue of their universality, true.

The method of tradition-based enquiry is thus aimed at discovering truths in a way which takes account of the contingently historical nature of rationality and yet can provide us with a set of criteria by which we can judge all traditions of thought. There are several problems with this project, problems which serve to characterise, to a certain degree, the contemporary dilemma in political philosophy. The first relates to how we define a tradition. MacIntyre himself seems to have a rather simplistic view of traditions of thought, seeing them as few in number, large in terms of members, long-lasting, and coherent; participating in a general squabble over a long period of time, to see who will reign supreme.

However, considering the problem of moral chaos and incommensurability at which MacIntyre aims his method of tradition-based enquiry as a solution, his description of traditions does not seem to be realistic or useful. While it is most certainly the case that controversies and incommensurability exists between alternative schemes of thought, it is surely also true that sub-cultures, economic classes, and even individuals have their 'own body of canonical texts' and their 'own exemplary images'. To a certain extent this highlights the somewhat idealistic nature of MacIntyre's tradition-based enquiry. Is it really possible to identify and characterise 'traditions of thought' in a way that renders them susceptible to analysis of this sort? If not, one wonders if what MacIntyre believes to be contemporary moral anarchy is, in fact, a timeless and inevitable feature of rationality.

This idealistic aspect of MacIntyre's thought is further illustrated by the empathetic expectations he has of intellectual traditions. He has placed himself in an awkward position: on the one hand he wishes to attribute the current chaotic incommensurability to our inability and lack of desire to understand rival rationalities, whilst on the other he sees knowledge and understanding of alternative traditions of thought as the solution to the problem. What he fails to provide is the necessary motivation for such acts of empathy; a new motivation, what is more, which would be capable of producing empathy where none existed before.

Related to this is a further difficulty: even if there existed a will to understand rival traditions in order to make use of their concepts and conceptual schemes for solving problematics, MacIntyre's own insights have suggested that this would be an impossible task. What characterises his work above all else is its thorough-going historicity - the view that all standpoints on rationality and justice are necessarily tradition-constituted and historically contingent. How then, can we expect an intellectual tradition, with its interwoven conceptual structure and belief systems, to be able to abstract a concept from another tradition, and to employ it in the way intended by that rival tradition? We must bear in mind that MacIntyre heavily criticises liberal individualism for abstracting theses for analysis from the traditions in which they developed, thus predetermining the judgements to be reached on them. Yet if a tradition is truly able to adopt a problem-solving concept or conceptual scheme, seeing it through the eyes of the tradition in which it was originally at home, then we are surely not talking about two fundamentally incompatible traditions. In other words, the very definition of traditions of thought which are fundamentally incompatible relies upon the fact that they could not possibly adopt concepts from each other in the way which MacIntyre requires. If, however, he is in fact saying that there is a sense in which intellectual traditions are *not* fundamentally incompatible (and this is also implied by his desire to discover concepts by which all traditions of thought can be

judged), then this detracts, in a major way, from his historicity.

Related to all of these points, and perhaps underlying them, is the difficulty of placing MacIntyre's own position in relation to traditions *per se*. It seems that MacIntyre, like Foucault's relation to his own archaeological and genealogical enquiries, must be taking an external, ahistorical stance in order to delineate traditions, in fact, to describe them at all. This is especially the case for MacIntyre's teleological view, as Gordon Graham points out:

> For precisely how we tell the normative story - as one of progress, decline, purification or deviation - will depend on what we identify as the tradition's normatively necessary elements. If we are to avoid arbitrary stipulation on this point (which is what the 'ready-made thought' criticism comes to) and at the same time preserve the normative character, we have no alternative but ahistorical argument of the kind MacIntyre aims to escape.[24]

D: MacIntyre and Relativism.

Before venturing into this minefield of a subject, it is necessary to be quite clear about what relativism is. Roger Scruton provides an excellent definition: "The view that ideals and values do not have universal validity, but are valid only in relation to particular social and historical conditions. . . The relativist might think that moral judgements are objective while denying that they are universal"[25]. Firstly, it can be shown that MacIntyre either deliberately or unintentionally misinterprets and misrepresents relativism. Secondly, it can be illustrated that despite his criticism of relativism, MacIntyre's historicity is relativistic, and without this element, his theses must rely upon the kind of ahistorical argument indicated by Graham above.

MacIntyre makes two main points in his characterisation of relativism; points which he believes convincingly undermine the relativist's position. In each case, however, he

inadvertently invokes universalistic assumptions, thus unwittingly strengthening the relativist stance while providing support for the argument that he is himself a relativist because he cannot criticise relativism without using means which, as an historicist, are unavailable to him.. He begins his polemic with the criticism that relativism is self-referential:

> . . . by denying to all doctrines whatsoever the predicates 'is true' and 'is false', unless these are radically reinterpreted to mean no more than 'seems true to such and such persons', turns the interesting assertion that relativism is true into the uninteresting assertion that relativism seems true to relativists.[26]

While this criticism, superficially at least, has an air of immediate validity, it does nothing to damage the relativist case. It only becomes problematic if relativists feel the need to 'prove' their claims to the rest of the world and/or see relativist thought as a prescriptive way forward for politics and world peace, for example. However, this is not true relativism, but remains very much within the Enlightenment project of searching for universal answers. For relativism to be true to itself, it might be, as MacIntyre says, uninteresting, in that it can say little more than 'relativism seems true to relativists', but anything more would be antithetical to a coherent relativist theory.

MacIntyre attempts to reinforce his position by arguing that relativism can be transcended, that it is contingent, and not a necessary social condition. The relativist's standpoint, he states, amounts to the view that the superiority of rival intellectual traditions is decided by arbitrary differentials in the power they have to be persuasive, and not by the degree to which they reflect the truth. Yet, says MacIntyre, this is not always the case because a tradition of rationality, although historically constituted, will be able to recognise the truth of certain concepts (from alien traditions) which are able to solve their own problematics:

> . . . the key concepts embodied in rational theory and practice within any tradition that has a developed problematic, including the concepts of truth and rational justification, cannot be defined exclusively in terms of or collapsed into those conceptions of them that are presently at home within the modes of theory and of practice of the particular conceptual scheme of

that tradition or even some idealized version of those conceptions: the Platonic distinction between 'is true' and 'seems true to such and such persons' turns out within such traditions to survive the recognition of the truth in relativism.[27]

Thus MacIntyre is attempting, it seems, to find a 'half-way house' between universalism and relativism, claiming that there exist certain concepts the truth of which will be recognised by traditions of thought in times of epistemological crisis. However, the fact that certain intellectual traditions are capable of adopting new concepts from an alien tradition in order to solve their own 'problematics' does not undermine the relativist's argument. For a start, the 'problematic' to which MacIntyre refers is the product of a certain conception of rationality which has developed within a tradition. If a new concept is adopted to overcome the perceived problem, it is interpreted using the epistemological ontology of the adopting tradition. Thus it is conceivable that two differing traditions of thought will adopt a concept from a third tradition in order to solve their specific, and differing, perceived 'problematics', yet still remain distinct in their rationalities. MacIntyre argues that the adoption of concepts from alien traditions is not simply an *interpretation* of those new concepts by the adopting tradition. Yet it is difficult to see what else it could be. Whatever terminology is used for the perception of the new problem-solving concept; recognition, understanding, interpretation and so on, it still remains the case that *a* method of cognition is in use, and as MacIntyre and others have pointed out elsewhere, this method, or the criteria applied to the use of this method, is the result of specific temporal and spatial influences, and can be nothing but.

Some may argue that if this is the central thesis of the relativists' argument, they are not saying very much - perhaps stating the obvious to the point of being tautologous. Yet what must be borne in mind is the alternative to the relativist's position; that is, that above and beyond 'seems true to such and such persons' exists an 'is true'. Now, while the

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prevailing political thought of a tradition may rationalise in a way which presupposes a *belief* in the 'is true', it does not follow that there *is* anything above and beyond the 'seems true to such and such persons'. MacIntyre, however, seems to be implying that the willingness of intellectual traditions to adopt concepts from alien traditions in order to solve their own epistemological problems, means that not only do certain traditions *believe* in the 'is true', but that there *is* an 'is true'. Yet relativists are surely not disputing that people believe in the 'is true', but simply the 'is true'.

Is MacIntyre a relativist? Should he be? His position needs to be clarified. Throughout his analysis of relativism he has assumed the existence of universal truths, from the stand he takes on relativism, to actually telling us how universal truths are discovered. All of his criticisms of relativism, however, fail without exception. Why is this? It is because he is unwilling to provide us with a conception of the good; he will not tell us what the 'truth' is. So although he clearly states that there are some concepts which are true for all rational traditions of thought; that is, those traditions which properly understand their own problematics, he will not describe these concepts to us except to say that they are *not* contingent upon historical factors. However, his very thesis rests upon the historically contingent nature of rationality, the belief that while truths can be objectively valid within the epistemological structure of a particular tradition of thought, they cannot be universal - he even describes relativism itself as a contingent social condition. His attempt to combine these two logically opposed assertions is thus misconceived and often results in direct contradictions, ultimately because his historicity, his 'tradition-based enquiry', does not sit well with his desire to produce a solution to what he sees as the contemporary chaos caused by the moral incommensurability of rival traditions.

It is the historicity which is the most convincing aspect of MacIntyre's philosophy, based, it seems, on true insight; rather than his argument for the existence of an 'is true', which

appears to be the result of his desire to find an 'is true', and not due to any perception of the actual existence of an 'is true'. Historicism, however, tends to be relativistic in nature, especially bearing in mind Scruton's definition above, and MacIntyre's stated reasons for the necessity of tradition-based enquiry. So if MacIntyre were to remain true to his historicity, on one level, at least, he could be labelled a thorough-going relativist; we might even say that this is the only way for his thought to maintain a degree of consistency.

There is a further difficulty with this analysis, however, which can be expressed as follows:

i) If MacIntyre's view of traditions is a tradition-based view, then this cannot exist with an awareness of its own contingency, that is, he must think that he is telling the truth. In doing so, he is assuming an independent conceptual grasp of what a tradition is, as discussed above;

ii) If, however, he *does* recognise the contingency of such a view, then he must be a relativist;

iii) In recognizing the contingency of such a view, he must be standing outside of the tradition-based view from which he forms his view of traditions. This means that he must be relying upon a-historical assumptions.

This kind of critique is akin to that made of the problems faced by Derrida in *Cinders*, and to Rorty's emotivism. For MacIntyre, it seems even more damning because his starting-point seems to contain a self-awareness missing in the other thinkers discussed. What it means, in his case, is that, as Graham points out, "the fusion of history and philosophy to which MacIntyre aspires must be abandoned"28.

In MacIntyre's own view, however, there are very good reasons for going to such lengths to denounce relativism. He believes that relativist theory will inevitably result in moral anarchy, emotivism, incommensurability and nihilism: to him it is the bête noire of political

philosophy. In this he is mistaken.

E: Conclusion: Theory and Practice.

MacIntyre's fear of relativism results from two interrelated mistaken assumptions. The first

is the belief that moral philosophy should be determined by its application; and the second,

that theory and practice are causally linked. Although these assumptions are implicit

throughout his work, they are rarely specifically expressed, and at no point does MacIntyre

seem aware of their contentious nature. It is absolutely essential, however, to make explicit

how these assumptions relate to the wider context of his thesis, for they are at the very

heart of the problematic stance that he, along with many other contemporary thinkers,

takes. It can be demonstrated, what is more, that the separation of theory and practice could

be the solution to these problems.

Firstly, then, at the beginning of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre alludes to his beliefs regarding the

relation between theory and its application:

> A moral philosophy - and emotivism is no exception - characteristically
> presupposes a sociology. . . [B]ut at least since Moore the dominant narrow
> conception of moral philosophy has ensured that moral philosophers could
> ignore this task; as notably do the proponents of emotivism. We therefore
> must perform it for them.[29]

In the first sentence, MacIntyre seems to be implying that philosophy is necessarily

determined by a description of, and a prescription for, society. However, his use of the

word 'task' implies a belief that it is the *duty* of philosophers to shape their rational

investigations according to the effect they will have on society; in other words,

pragmatism. These two elements are contradictory; the implication of the former being that

practical considerations influence any philosophy whether the theoretician is aware or not;

and the latter being that philosophers have managed to produce theories which have ignored

this necessary part of their work. This constant juxtaposition of the 'is' and the 'should be'

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is not just a frustrating distraction, but is instead a central part of the confusion at the foundation of MacIntyre's thesis.

Secondly, regarding the causal link between theory and practice, MacIntyre begins by making the fairly uncontentious claim that our social history and the history of philosophy are in part determined by the same historical influences: "I am now suggesting that the roots of some of the problems which now engage the specialised attention of academic philosophers and the roots of some of the problems central to our everyday social and practical lives are one and the same"[30]. But more specifically, he continually implies that there is a one-way causal relationship between philosophical assumptions and societal actualities. This means, for MacIntyre, that what he believes to be the current moral chaos is the result of the Nietzschean criticism of Aristotle. That is, combined with his argument that philosophy should be determined by its practical application, he is concluding that contemporary 'emotivism' is the result of Nietzschean nihilism.

In *Three Rival Versions* MacIntyre explains this causal link through a description of how tradition fuses historical understanding and normative judgement, that is, how rationality causes people to act in one way rather than another:

> [B]ecause at any particular moment the rationality of a craft is justified by its history so far, which has made it what it is in that specific time, place, and set of historical circumstances, such rationality is inseparable from the tradition through which it was achieved. To share in the rationality of a craft requires sharing in the contingencies of its history, understanding its story as one's own, and finding a place for oneself as a character in the enacted dramatic narrative which is that story so far.[31]

The difficulties in this quote seem to capture the theory/practice confusion. Firstly, we must note that MacIntyre has deviated from the more straightforward assertion that philosophical problems and societal problems have the same causes. Rather, he is describing the causal relation between rationality (in terms of a tradition of enquiry) and our everyday practices. The link is provided by a consciousness, in the individual, of that rationality. Now, not

only does the requirement of consciousness of one's contingency have problems, as we saw in Rorty and as will be discussed with reference to MacIntyre in the next section, but more importantly, this further requires that the individual cannot act without the kind of historical knowledge described by MacIntyre. It also implies there is *one* description of history and tradition; there is no room in this analysis for conflicting interpretations of history and rationality.

Similarly, MacIntyre sees relativism as raising questions for 'ordinary agents', and as having the characteristic structure of philosophical problems. He illustrates his belief in the causal nature of theory in his argument that it is by readjusting our academic assumptions that the contemporary societal moral chaos can be resolved. In other words, his attempt at discrediting relativism and emotivism, and restating an Aristotelian teleology, will result, he hopes, in ridding society of what he believes to be a destructive moral anarchy.

Evidence can be found within MacIntyre's own work to support the view that philosophical theory does not inform cultural practice in the way he has suggested. For a start, his thoughts on this matter seem to be clouded by the same nostalgic historicity which produces his overly coherent view of traditions. That is, that the causal links between theory and practice appear far stronger in retrospect - it might be the case, for example, that in a couple of hundred years time contemporary theory will be attributed a homogeneity which has never existed. So while MacIntyre uses examples from the past to support his argument that a specific moral philosophy produces a specific moral culture, he has difficulty in describing exactly how Nietzschean analysis has produced an emotivist society.

While MacIntyre clearly states that it is the failure of the Enlightenment philosophical project (exemplified in existentialism) which has produced the moral problems of the

modern world, he notices that everyone continues to speak as if this project has succeeded. Thus he is in the difficult position of attempting to maintain his thesis that current moral experience is caused by recent postmodern moral theory, while explaining why people act and talk as if the foundational truths of the Enlightenment are still valid. He tries to do this by separating the 'meaning' of a word from its 'use':

> . . . almost everyone, philosopher and non-philosopher alike continues to write and to speak as if one of these projects had succeeded. And hence derives one of the features of contemporary moral discourse which I noticed at the outset, the gap between the meaning of moral expressions and the ways in which they are put to use. For the meaning is and remains such as would have been warranted only if at least one of the philosophical projects had been successful; but the use, the emotivist use, is precisely what one would expect if the philosophical projects had all failed.[32]

This separation of the meaning of a word from its use entails some incorrect assumptions. At the risk of stating the obvious, it entails that a word does have a meaning separate from and prior to any use which it might have. Where, then, do words come from? Do they fall, ready formed, from the sky, waiting to be discovered and put to their correct use? MacIntyre would reply that of course they do not, they are constituted historically. But surely it is the case that the meaning of a word is determined solely by its use. Thus when MacIntyre states that the meaning of words remains such as if the Enlightenment project had been successful, this can only be if people are using them as such; the 'meaning' can have no other role to play. And if Enlightenment terminology is still in use, then perhaps 'emotivism' only exists as a concept in the academic circles of contemporary philosophy.

It is not, however, simply the case that emotivist theory has not yet filtered through to a mainstream cultural ontology. Rather, it can be shown that current incommensurability is not due to any Nietzschean revelation, but is instead part of the liberal democratic tradition, and as such, very much within the Enlightenment framework. Furthermore, it is the case that this is necessarily true, and relies upon the fact that at both the societal and the

individual level, the recognition of the truth in Nietzsche's nihilism by the academic world

cannot be incorporated into a practical ontology.

PART II - THE SELF

A: Introduction.

MacIntyre describes the nature of the self in historically contingent terms, arguing that since secularisation, human nature has lost its teleology. Taken together with the individualistic notion of the self, he argues, this has produced emotivism. The problem with such an outlook in practical terms, he goes on, is that it means that people are alienated, that they have no allegiance to any particular tradition which could provide them with reasons for thinking and acting in one way rather than another.

MacIntyre believes that a revival of Thomist Aristotelianism can restore a *telos* to human nature through practice-based virtues. There are three main difficulties with this thesis. Firstly, it contains a certain circularity; a human telos is to be discovered through practices, but for practices to be meaningful in the way MacIntyre describes, they must already be teleologically defined. Secondly, MacIntyre's general confusion of theory and practice means that he has to accept (if he is to remain consistent) that an emotivist, non-Aristotelian self can, and does, exist. This, however, makes it difficult to see how we could produce teleological beliefs where none existed before. Finally, it can be shown not only that the purely emotivist self cannot exist, but that MacIntyre's causal link between the failure of Enlightenment rationality and the supposed existence of emotivist human nature, is unfounded.

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B: The Emotivist Self.

MacIntyre believes that the history of philosophy has paved the way for the emotivist self:

> What I am now going to suggest is that the key episodes in the social history which transformed, fragmented, and if my extreme view is correct, largely displaced morality - and so created the possibility of the emotivist self with its characteristic form of relationships and modes of utterance - were episodes in the history of philosophy, that it is only in the light of that history that we can now understand how the idiosyncrasies of everyday contemporary moral discourse came to be and thus how the emotivist self was able to find a means of expression.[33]

MacIntyre begins his historical analysis with Aristotle, pointing to the fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be, and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature. Ethics, he argues, is the science which enables man to make the transition from the former to the latter. In this way ethics must contain some account of the essence of man, and above all some account of the human telos. This distinction remained, MacIntyre points out, in the theistic period, whereby 'man's essential nature' was understood in religious terms. So in this period, to say what someone ought to do is to say what course of action will lead toward a man's true end, "and to say what the law, ordained by God, and comprehended by reason, enjoins." However, the secular rejection of Protestant and Catholic theology, and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotle, had the joint effect of eliminating any notion of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-telos.

The eighteenth-century moral philosophers replaced the teleological view of man with a description of human nature as it is (rather than as it should or could be), and from this attempted to deduce the moral injunctions which were originally at home in the ancient and medieval teleological view. This, says MacIntyre, was inevitably doomed from the start, for without the teleological view of man, morality became foundationless. At the same time, 'the individual' became the most fundamental category of social thought and practice,

separate and prior to membership in any particular social and political order. The combination of these two developments, argues Macintyre, produced the emotivist self.

MacIntyre describes emotivism as the argument that any moral statement simply reflects the approval of an action or thought; that people view their own principled commitments as contingent choices: "One way of framing my contention that morality is not what it once was is just to say that to a large degree people now think, talk, and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical stand-point may be. Emotivism has become embedded in our culture."[34] So, for MacIntyre, emotivism is not simply the theoretical position which resulted from the Nietzschean critique; it has a contemporary manifestation in everyday ontologies whereby the individual conceives of himself as sovereign in his moral authority.

The emotivist 'post-Enlightenment person' responds to the failure of the Enlightenment to provide neutral, impersonal tradition-independent standards of rational judgement by concluding, states MacIntyre, that no set of beliefs proposed for acceptance is therefore justifiable. The everyday world is to be treated as one of pragmatic necessities. Every scheme of overall belief which extends beyond the realm of pragmatic necessity is equally unjustified. There is no such scheme of belief within which such an individual is able to find him or herself at home, and the imaginative assumption of beliefs not actually held is not, and cannot be, for the purpose of investigating the rationality of that scheme, for it has already been concluded that all such schemes fail.

> Such an individual therefore views the social and cultural order, the order of traditions, as a series of falsifying masquerades. He or she can belong to no community of discourse, for the ties of language which he or she speaks to any presupposed scheme of belief are as loose as it is possible to make them. So the natural languages of persons thus alienated are the internationalised languages of modernity, the languages of everywhere and of nowhere.[35]

There are some people, argues MacIntyre, who are able to inhabit a tradition despite the recognition of themselves as imprisoned by a set of beliefs which lack justification. Such a transformation would require this alienated self to find a 'language-in-use', a kind of working hypothesis, which would enable it to enter into dialogue with some tradition of enquiry. This kind of self can then express standards of rational enquiry as something other than expressions of will and preference. However, as MacIntyre points out, this latter type of self is equally estranged from and uninformed by any such set of dispositions, sentiments, thoughts, or language-in-use, and simply sees such a facade as a pragmatic necessity.

MacIntyre states that most people do not live at or even near such points of extremity, but neither are they able to give their allegiance to a particular tradition.

> Instead they tend to live betwixt and between, accepting usually unquestioningly the assumptions of the dominant liberal-individualist forms of public life, but drawing in different areas of their lives upon a variety of tradition-generated resources of thought and action, transmitted from a variety of familial, religious, educational, and other social and cultural sources.[36]

This results, says MacIntyre, in a self which has too many half-convictions, with no means by which to evaluate them systematically, so that it brings to encounters with rival traditions "a fundamental incoherence which is too disturbing to be admitted to self-conscious awareness except on the rarest of occasions."[37]

C: MacIntyre's Solution.

The answer to the problem, then, is to restate Aristotle through a Thomist approach. By this, MacIntyre means that we need a virtue-centred theory of ethics, and necessary for this is a concept of the human telos.

> . . . unless there is a telos which transcends the limited goods of practices
> by constituting the good of a whole human life, the good of a human life
> conceived as a unity, it will *both* be the case that a certain arbitrariness will
> invade the moral life *and* that we shall be unable to specify the context of
> certain virtues adequately.[38]

The difficulty, however, is that MacIntyre does not tell us what the virtues are, or even

how we could construct a teleology from which we could derive a set of virtues. He

mentions the need for man to have a 'narrative unity' to his life, and implies that it would

be possible to deduce the virtues from this. But as Schneewind points out, if every act done

for a reason is part of a unified narrative, then every human life already has a unity; if it

does not, then we are left still looking for a telos from which to write the narrative. Again,

MacIntyre's thought seems to be faced either with circularity or a choice between

Enlightenment foundationalism and the relativistic approach which he is so determined to

avoid.

> The reason is that the notion of the good here, like the notion of narrative
> unity, is too weak to provide any distinctive ground for the virtues. We may
> agree with MacIntyre that we seek a good we do not fully understand and
> learn more about it as we go. But this does not distinguish his view from
> that of every good bourgeois moralist from Butler to Rawls.[39]

Frankena, too, says that he cannot find any clear conception of the good or telos in

MacIntytre, and notices that this is more than just an omission on MacIntyre's part. Rather,

MacIntyre's statement that " . . . the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the

good life of man"[40] implies that human life is a kind of indefinite pursuit of a grail not

definable in advance. It seems that MacIntyre wants to give human nature a teleology

without losing the sense of agency that it has found since ancient times. So even though

MacIntyre sees the individual's moral starting point as constituted by her tradition and

socialization, the problem arises because he is not prepared to insist that the individual must

sustain and continue every inherited communal feature of her identity. The result, as

Schneewind notices, is that

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> . . . [it is difficult to see how this view of the self] provides an account of
> the virtues which an emotivist self could not accept or how it enables
> MacIntyre to show that the virtues are prior to moral rules. . . Once again,
> MacIntyre's position collapses into that which he repudiates as being at the
> core of modernity.[41]

That MacIntyre's prescription for the self should end up resembling emotivism is not a

coincidence; it is a reflection of the tensions inherent in contemporary philosophy. Through

Nietzsche and the existentialist critique, philosophy has burned its bridges. We can no

more reinstate Aristotle, or God, than we can regain our childhood belief in Father

Christmas. We have lost our innocence, we are having an existential crisis, and we are

suffering the necessary angst which goes with it. But this is not the same as emotivism.

D: The Impossibility of the Emotivist Self.

The recognition of the failure of the Enlightenment attempt to provide philosophy with

foundational truths from which to derive moral rules, does not translate to an emotivist

psychology or societal outlook. Evidence that an emotivist self is impossible can be found,

firstly, in MacIntyre's own work: "Up to the present in everyday discourse the habit of

speaking of moral judgements as true or false persists; but the question of what it is in

virtue of which a particular moral judgement is true or false has come to lack any clear

answer."[42] 'Lack any clear answer', that is, in the academic world of philosophy. The fact

that people still talk in terms of true and false (and they can but do so) is an indication that

the world at large remains unaffected by the failure of the Enlightenment philosophical

project. In other words, individual psychology is such that it is necessary to assume the

existence of objective and external truths, and not simply in terms of some kind of

'working hypothesis', in the way MacIntyre ascribes to the emotivist self, but as an

inescapable and absolute inability to suspend belief.

MacIntyre himself provides further support for this argument in his discussion regarding the fact that human desires always presuppose a hierarchy of norms, and can never be taken to represent a neutral, value-free standpoint. In every culture, he says, emotions and desires are norm governed, and thus to exhibit a particular pattern of emotions and desires is always to reveal a commitment to one distinctive and moral position rather than another. This is because the justifying norms which govern both emotions and desires embody a rank ordering of goods and evils.

> Hence at any particular stage in the historical development of any particular culture the established patterns of emotion, desire, satisfaction, and preference will only be adequately understood if they are understood as giving expression to some distinctive moral and evaluative position. Psychologies thus understood express and presuppose moralities.[43]

What MacIntyre seems to fail to realise is that this has always been the case and always will be, irrespective of whether the philosophical tradition of the time believes itself to have discovered some truths with which to support the 'truths' which are presupposed in a moral and evaluative position. To put it another way, the contemporary philosophical view that we have nothing, no fundamental truths, to support our belief systems, and what is more we never have had, bears *no* causal relation to the necessary practice of assuming that absolute truths exist.

E: Conclusion.

The confusions inherent in MacIntyre's thesis on the self arise from the degree to which he believes theory and practice are interlinked. Thus he feels the need to respond to Nietzsche's conclusions (which he sees as producing the emotivist self) with a remedy for the contemporary alienated individual. At the same time, he convincingly describes

individual psychology as necessarily constituted by a presupposition that absolute truths

and a hierarchical ordering of goods, exists. Instead of taking this latter insight and using it

against those contemporary philosophers such as Rorty who take Nietzsche's conclusions

as a starting point for the *prescription* for an emotivist self, he begins with the assumption

that the emotivist self widely exists and needs a cure.

These criticisms are summed up very well by Charles Taylor:

> If one thinks that the Aristotelian meta-ethic in fact offers the inescapable
> categories for anyone's moral thought, then one will see the rival package of
> views - say disengaged freedom, plus the meta-ethics of the fact/value
> dichotomy - as an unviable basis for an alternative life-form. In fact, people
> who aspire to live by this alternative will be deluding themselves . . . They
> will always be in truth more 'Aristotelian' than they believe, surreptitiously
> relying on notions like 'virtue' and 'the good life', even when they
> repudiate them on the level of theory. On the other hand, the more one
> thinks that the Aristotelian forms can be escaped, the more one will think
> that the modern package offers the basis for a coherent viable alternative.[44]

As Taylor points out, MacIntyre leans toward the second view, that 'Aristotelian forms can

be escaped', and this is why he interprets contemporary societies in terms set by emotivist

theories. This means that MacIntyre's conception of the self is susceptible to the same

criticisms as that of Rorty. It also makes it difficult to see how we could suddenly conjure

up teleological beliefs where none existed before. Taylor's position, however, is the more

convincing one, that we are far more 'Aristotelian' than we allow, although he notes that if

we do perceive ourselves in emotivistic, atomistic terms, that would no doubt effect our

practices, but even so, "our way of life never sinks to the full horror that would attend it (I

believe) if we could be truly consistent Benthamites, for instance"[45].

To this I would add that while our self-perception does, no doubt, make a practical

difference to society, this self-perception comes from society, and not from anything

Taylor or MacIntyre have to say. So the important point is that the failure of Enlightenment

rationality does not (and cannot) produce an emotivist society. Not only is it irrelevant in

practical terms, it is logically inconsistent to say that the inability of the Enlightenment to provide us with a meta-ethics (or meta-theory of any kind) then leads to a specific description (or prescription) regarding human nature. What MacIntyre fails to do then, is to embrace the apparent contradiction between contemporary emotivist theory and contemporary non-emotivist practice. One of the reasons that he is unable to do this results from his belief that contemporary liberal democracy embodies an emotivist culture.

PART III - POLITICS AND SOCIETY

A: Introduction.

MacIntyre switches between a sociological analysis of what he believes to be contemporary moral chaos, and a theoretical discussion and critique of emotivism. This in turn means that he confuses liberal theory with liberal practice, a confusion which necessarily has implications for his prescriptions for modern society. His solution, to revive a notion of practice-based justice, fails to remain coherent without invoking ahistorical assumptions which are unavailable to him. In fact, Aristotle and Aquinas did not have the kind of historical concept of justice which MacIntyre attributes to them, making their moral and political theses unsuitable for performing the tasks for which he uses them.

More generally, it can be shown that criteria external to practices are necessary for any concept of justice, and in particular, for a concept of justice as desert. This means that liberalism too contains substantive moral elements, and cannot coherently rest on a merely procedural notion of justice. Once we have performed this kind of 'levelling' of liberalism with other traditions in regard to procedural/substantive notions of ethics, we can compare the specific substantive elements of liberalism with those of Thomism. The result of this comparison indicates that liberalism is better suited than Thomism to MacIntyre's desire for justice as desert.

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B: Emotivist Culture.

The failure of the Enlightenment to provide independent standards of debate in the public realm, states MacIntyre, has produced an emotivist culture, by which he means that moral debates are unsettlable and consensus is impossible. Modern liberal individualism and emotivist culture are one and the same, and we still, argues MacIntyre, "lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view."[46] The result of this is that society is rent by controversies.

For MacIntyre, moral philosophy is historically embodied in society, and this means that in his discussion of contemporary moral debate, he is advancing both a philosophical narrative and a historical sociology of modernity. The public moral discourse of modern societies, he argues, is characterised by interminable political debate. With regards to abortion, for example, the debate has become polarized, with no possibility of rational determination of the issues. This lack of *a priori* criteria means, he argues, that protests on major issues results in rival parties addressing only those who share similar opinions because there are no 'objective' standards to which rival groups can appeal for arbitration and judgement.[47]

MacIntyre argues that such incommensurability arises in liberal societies because people act as if emotivism were true. He describes liberalism as aiming to prioritise authentic choice and autonomy by justifying certain absolute rights or principles which will promote these values. Yet these values, he states, cannot be rationally grounded, and therefore the concept of rights is merely a means to these ends. It is due to this lack of justification for emotivist values that incommensurability is the inevitable outcome.

Despite what appears to be a sociological explanation of 'moral chaos', MacIntyre is

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relying upon a theoretical analysis and critique of emotivism. He criticises Rawls and Nozick, for example, because neither of them understand justice in terms of *deserts*; that is, they both ignore the constructs of social norms; "Individuals are thus in both accounts primary and society secondary, and the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them."[48] It is necessary to note that MacIntyre is criticising this account of justice as though it were mistaken, yet he still attempts to make use of it as though it were evidence that we live in an emotivist society. However, we must begin by assuming that his view of contemporary society is correct in order to assess the solutions he proposes to the problems he perceives.

C: MacIntyre's Solutions.

What we need then, says MacIntyre, are impersonal standards of judgement which can be appealed to in order to remove arbitrary exercises of power - "tyrannical power within communities and imperialist power between communities". These can be found, he believes, through two things: Firstly, through a revival of Thomist Aristotelianism which will enable a discovery of new teleologies from practice-based virtues; and secondly, through a method of 'tradition-based enquiry', whereby rival traditions can adopt concepts from each other to solve their own problematics. Both of these approaches have difficulties. The problems with the first centre on the need for MacIntyre to avoid invoking ahistorical, transcendental assumptions in his prescription for teleological virtues. This leads him to misinterpret Aristotle and Aquinas, and results in a failure to distinguish between good and evil practices without resorting to the use of substantive argument. The difficulties with the second set of prescriptions arise mainly from practical difficulties, especially in light of MacIntyre's description of the moral chaos suffered by contemporary society.

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Janet Coleman rightly points out that MacIntyre distorts "Aristotle and Aquinas in order to address what he sees as certain liberal dilemmas"[49]. In general terms, she argues that, rather than combining Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian theology in a satisfying way (which is MacIntyre's interpretation), Aquinas held an incoherent position which, although it attempted to subsume the then current Platonism of Augustine's theology within Aristotelianism, resulted in a position which was actually incompatible with Platonism. The result of MacIntyre's glossing over these details is that he gives an overly unified view of Thomism as an answer to liberal problems.

More specifically, Coleman points out that both Aristotle and Aquinas saw definitions as mirroring nature, and that for them, these were timeless and universal. Aquinas, for example, clearly states that "if one lives in a society whose customs and traditions are not in accord with what a reasonable nature would consider appropriate, then by deliberating a person who is accustomed to do something can, indeed should, act against custom and tradition"[50]. This directly contradicts MacIntyre's interpretation of virtues and the human good being determined solely within and through practices, as Coleman notes:

> Traditions for a Thomist or an Aristotelian do not constitute practices as definitions; traditions are subordinate to definitions, because traditions or cultures are bad or good realizers in practice of the definition, which is itself a universal, is timeless and stands as a conventionally uttered representation of human universal conceptions concerning peculiarly human behaviour.[51]

To a certain extent, perhaps we can disregard the number of debates surrounding MacIntyre's interpretation, or misinterpretation, of Aristotle and Aquinas. What is important is whether MacIntyre himself can use the concept of practice-based virtues as a way of solving what he perceives to be the problems in liberal society. Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey argue that without some kind of external, substantive criteria [of the sort, perhaps, that Coleman says we find in a correct interpretation of Aristotle and Aquinas]

MacIntyre has no way of distinguishing evil practices:

> MacIntyre . . . defines virtue as the exercise of what is necessary to attain goods internal to practices. Truth, courage and justice are necessary if we are genuinely to enter into a relationship with past and present practitioners [*After Virtue* p194]. The integrity of a practice requires the exercise of the virtues [*After Virtue* p195]. Conversely, the exercise of virtue is bound up with the existence and moral value of practices. This analysis obviously makes practices, as such, by definition good.[52]

This would mean that in MacIntyre's own terms, torture, for example, *must* count as a practice, and as long as it is carried out well, causing maximum amount of pain while keeping the victim alive, then it is a good practice. The only way MacIntyre could escape this conclusion, as Frazer and Lacey point out, is by appeal to either substantive or procedural criteria. MacIntyre himself has already ruled out the use of the substantive, however, in his insistence of practices and traditions as the sole source of virtues. They argue that he is more likely to rely upon procedural rules, especially in light of "his scepticism about whether apparently evil practices really are practices". The problem with this, they argue, is that there exist regimes which embrace procedural rules but nevertheless engage in what would be considered evil practices. To this I would add the more fundamental critique of procedural criteria, which MacIntyre notices himself in relation to the covert hierarchy of values in liberalism, and that is that the procedural inevitably collapses into the substantive as soon as we question the source or outcome of application of the procedure concerned.

MacIntyre has recently tried to counter some of these criticisms. In reply to Frazer and Lacey, he simply states that the "conception of justice and of other virtues . . . can be invoked against deformation and prejudice" in order to define evil practices[53]. This is based on his accompanying statement that there are goods external to practices, but that these goods are themselves determined by practices. His point is that the virtues confirmed *within* practices can be extrapolated for judging *between* practices, and people do this when they critically reflect upon whether a practice is a good one: "Nothing can claim exemption

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from reflective critique, but *well-founded* reflective critique can never be disengaged from those contexts of practice from within which it acquires its point and purpose"[54] (*italics added*). This defence is problematic. The distinction between 'well-founded' reflective critique and unfounded reflective critique rests upon assumptions which should be unavailable to MacIntyre. Let us assume, for example, that people must inevitably make references to external, transcendental criteria in order to judge and criticise practices. MacIntyre would argue that this kind of reflective critique is *not* well-founded, and would therefore exclude it from his description of practices and traditions and how they develop. But, as with Derrida's problems in *Cinders*, MacIntyre can only maintain the distinction between well-founded reflective critique and unfounded reflective critique by insisting on a distinction between the real and people's perception of the real. And this in turn implies that there is a truth, and a corresponding good, outside of, and pre-existing, MacIntyre's 'practice-based virtues'.

MacIntyre does, however, allude very briefly to a couple of practical proposals aimed at removing the lack of consensus in society. At the end of *After Virtue*, he states:

> What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community
> within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained
> through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition
> of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are
> not entirely without hope.[55]

Taken together with MacIntyre's emphasis on tradition, the implication of the above statement seems to be a prescription for small based societies which possess a coherent set of beliefs which have developed historically, and a set of laws which reflect the belief systems in place. Without interruption from traditions which possess rival ontologies and rationalities, these 'local forms of community' could then maintain their norms and conceptual structures in accordance with some kind of epistemological purity. A similar suggestion is made at the end of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, where MacIntyre briefly discusses the idea of a 'postliberal university' system in which universities are

organised according to traditions of enquiry, kept pure by exclusive membership. These universities would be able to enter into debate with each other in order to solve internal epistemological problematics and to attempt to work out controversial issues between them, in a way akin to the method of 'tradition-based enquiry' he previously described.

Apart from the practical difficulties of putting such a system into place (MacIntyre, remember, believes that we are now living in an emotivist society), the effect of achieving this goal would be very much at odds with his desire to rid society of controversy. These small communities would be constantly at war with each other, and there would certainly be no basis for communication or understanding between them. Thus it seems that these vague proposals directly contradict the goal of the tradition-based method MacIntyre puts forward for arriving at impersonal standards of judgement in order to remove the arbitrary use of power. As Horton and Mendus point out,

> [O]ne of the deepest difficulties with the argument of *After Virtue* is that the very extent of its critique of the modern world seems to cast doubt on the possibility of any realistic revival under the conditions of modernity of the Aristotelianism which MacIntyre advocates. His reference to 'the construction of local forms of community' and the need 'for another - doubtless very different St. Benedict' seem little more than whistling in the dark to keep the spirits up when set against his coruscating critique of modernity.[56]

These criticisms assume, however, that MacIntyre's own description of the state of contemporary society is accurate. If his description of modernity as emotivist is in fact exaggerated and mistaken, it could be that his prescriptions are rather closer to the liberal status quo than he would dare to imagine.

D: The Problem With MacIntyre.

The difficulties raised by MacIntyre's view that there exists a direct causal relation between theory and practice permeate all aspects of his thought. Regarding politics and society, it appears that he hopes for a kind of 'supra-traditional' set of standards which can be appealed to in order to resolve internal and external conflicts. Without such a set of standards, he argues, the superiority of rival traditions is decided by their power relations, and not by any real ability to provide concepts which could solve what he calls 'problematics'. However, his historicism, his recognition of the inevitably contingent nature of all value systems, implies that the foundationalism which he recommends is perceived not as a search for ultimate truth, but as a pragmatic necessity. Yet if we (as academics) believe that there are *no* neutral and universal truths, then even if a tradition *believes* that it has a superior rationality, its success or failure at convincing others cannot be due to any possession of 'the truth'. In other words, while MacIntyre himself sees values as contingent, he wants society at large to accept them as absolute. The two suggestions he makes for achieving this end - tradition-based enquiry and the construction of local forms of community - are idealistic and aimed at rectifying a problem which does not exist.

A society, or a culture, cannot be emotivist in the same way that an individual cannot be emotivist. An individual is socialised, his desires are norm-governed, and every thought or communication with his fellow man expresses a hierarchy of goods which necessarily presuppose a belief in some fundamental truths. This 'inevitability' can be understood in socio-political terms. Societies are not born, they have a tradition. They could not become emotivist unless they become anarchic, and then they are no longer societies. Laws have to be made, and these necessarily reflect values of some kind, and these in turn inevitably presuppose truths. Decisions cannot be made without reference to something, some list of

priorities.

While the main thrust of MacIntyre's argument centres on his claim that contemporary liberal individualist society suffers from moral chaos and incommensurability due to a lack of justifiable values, he inadvertently provides evidence that this is not the case. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he criticises liberal society for its claims to neutrality when in fact, as he correctly points out, it embodies a specific set of well-defined values.

> The principles which inform such practical reasoning and the theory and practice of justice within such a polity are not neutral with respect to rival and conflicting theories of the human good. Where they are in force they impose a particular conception of the good life of practical reasoning, and of justice upon those who willingly or unwillingly accept the liberal procedures and the liberal terms of debate. The overriding good of liberalism is no more and no less than the continued sustenance of the liberal social and political order.[57]

MacIntyre's point is that the values inherent in liberal society are covert, that they hide behind a declaration of neutrality. The liberal claim, he says, is that all questions regarding the human good have an equal right to be expressed, that hierarchies are not established, and that liberalism itself stands outside of traditions. This, he argues, is a fraudulent claim:

> Like other traditions, liberalism has internal to it its own standards of rational justification. Like other traditions, liberalism has its own set of authoritative texts and its disputes over their interpretation. Like other traditions, liberalism expresses itself socially through a particular kind of hierarchy.[58]

The sense, then, in which liberal society is emotivist, he argues, is the common belief that it is not a tradition in the way that other societies are, that values and hierarchies are constantly open to question, resulting in incommensurability.

There are two criticisms which can be made of MacIntyre's analysis. Firstly, the fact that contemporary liberal society *does* have a specific set of values, whether its members are aware of them or not, means that it cannot be emotivist in the way that MacIntyre describes emotivism. That is, in the public realm there exists hierarchically ordered standards which

can be appealed to in debate, for making laws, upholding justice, making policy decisions and so on. Secondly, that a Thomist revival would be closer to liberalism than MacIntyre realises; and more than this, liberalism might suit MacIntyre's purposes better than Thomism.

The first problem arises from MacIntyre's separation of the meaning of a word from its use, for he relies upon this distinction in his argument that we use foundational Enlightenment words and concepts in an emotivist way, and that this means that we fail to perceive the incommensurability in the contemporary culture[59]. As was noted earlier, MacIntyre fails to coherently maintain this dichotomy; there is no way in which meaning and use can be radically discrepant in the way his diagnosis presupposes. As Stephen Mulhall points out, "In short, the claim to rationality in morals which MacIntyre allowed to be part of the meaning in moral terms is one which the practice of making moral judgements does in fact meet"[60]. In other words, without the separation of the meaning of a word from its use, we have to take societal references to Enlightenment morality to mean what they say. This then means that MacIntyre's criticism of liberal societies as emotivist is undermined, and his argument in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* that liberalism contains a covert hierarchy of goods should be replaced with a recognition of liberalism as a genuine moral tradition. Mulhall rightly notes that

> MacIntyre's objection to liberalism ought not to be the methodological claim that it is conceptually incoherent, because that claim does not stand up to scrutiny; it should rather be that liberalism is a substantial and powerful moral tradition which we have substantive and powerful reasons for rejecting as undesirable or objectionable.[61]

If we look, for example, at MacIntyre's proposal for a postliberal university system, we find a pluralism in his recognition of the legitimacy of rival traditions, and if the above criticism is taken into account, we can see how liberalism must be included among them if he is to remain coherent.

More than this, however, the very nature of MacIntyre's prescriptions bring his suggested structure close to liberalism itself. This can be demonstrated with a three-part argument. In the first place, it can be shown that Thomism is procedural in the same way that MacIntyre critically describes liberalism as being procedural. Next, it can be shown that despite this, both Thomism and liberalism ultimately rely upon substantive elements. Finally, a comparison of the two indicates that the substantive elements of liberalism are closer to MacIntyrean ideals than those of Thomism.

In *After Virtue*, a revival of Aristotle is proposed in order to reinstate a notion of practice-based virtues to counter what MacIntyre sees as the moral chaos of contemporary society. When MacIntyre replaces Aristotle with Aquinas in the following two books, however, he glosses over their differences, and in particular, the fact that in Aquinas practices no longer occupy a central place. Rather, he fails to notice that with Aquinas, justice is procedural and is achieved through conformity to natural and human law. As David Miller notes, this then means that "the Thomist account to which MacIntyre eventually gives his blessing is in several respects closer than the Aristotelian account to the liberal view of justice that he rejects, especially in its Lockean and Kantian incarnations"[62].

Now to the second part of the argument: both liberalism and Thomism ultimately rely on the substantive rather than the merely procedural. Charles Taylor correctly states that procedural notions of ethics are incoherent, and that "to be made coherent they require restatement in substantive form"[63]. This becomes obvious, he argues, when we ask why we should obey the procedures, according to what criteria are the procedures 'good'. The answer will necessarily embody some conception of human nature and the good. In liberalism, we can find this in the hierarchy of values pointed to by MacIntyre himself in *Whose Justice?*, and in Thomism in God's eternal law, embodied in the whole universe. With this conflation of the procedural with the substantive, we can again see a levelling

between MacIntyre's description of liberalism and alternative traditions of enquiry, meaning that a critique which places them in opposition loses its force.

Central to MacIntyre's conception of justice is his notion of *desert*. He argues that virtues, and their corresponding deserts, can be discovered internally within practices to which they relate. As is demonstrated above and throughout this chapter, however, there must be an external set of criteria by which practices (and therefore deserts) can be judged just. That is, desert is a principle of substantive justice which cannot be properly defined internally to practices, and this applies as much to liberalism as to Thomism. As Miller points out, "MacIntyre's decline-and-fall-of-the-practices thesis is at best a gross exaggeration, and it follows that there are many contemporary forms of human activity within which different form of criteria apply"[64]. In particular, liberal societies maintain a meritocratic system of deserts based on market principles. Of course, it is a contentious issue whether liberal societies are as meritocratic as they like to think they are, but the point here is that the concept of desert has flourished in modern market societies.

This brings us to the final stage of the argument. In Aquinas, we find the notion of justice as desert displaced by a hierarchy of natural inequality, an organic conception of society in which every well-defined part, or class, serves the whole. There is no need for the MacIntyrean notion of discovering justice, and corresponding desert, through practices, because Aquinas believed that the natural law will generate human laws which specify what is just. Aquinas does, with Aristotle, recognise that differing social or political arrangements exist, but these determine only the *means* to achieve justice, and justice itself is determined universally by the natural law.

There are two reasons, then, why liberalism is better suited to MacIntyre's purposes than Thomism. Firstly, we can see how the *a priori* concept of justice and deserts in Thomism

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makes it unsuitable for the task MacIntyre gives it, while the free-market principles in modern liberal societies apportion desert irrespective of the social standing of the recipient: a dollar is a dollar, whoever's pocket it is in. Secondly, it is difficult to see how Thomism could be revived in modern society, where the necessary social structures and values no longer exist: "[MacIntyre] is committing himself to the revival of a form of life which is categorically, and not merely contingently, excluded by the structures of the modern world"[65]. Once these misdescriptions of contemporary liberalism and Thomism have been taken into account, along with the criticism that justice can only be described in terms which are external to practices, one can begin to see how the type of society MacIntyre wants is not so far from the one he has got.

E: Conclusion.

MacIntyre's work is full of contradictions. Ernest Gellner hits the nail on the head when he says "what distinguishes Professor MacIntyre is not the number of beliefs he has doubted, but the number of beliefs he has embraced. His capacity for doubt we share or surpass; it is his capacity for faith which is distinctive and perhaps unrivalled"[66]. MacIntyre's starting point, it will be remembered, is that the Enlightenment *had* to fail because there is *no* neutral ground, "no place for appeals to a practical-rationality-as-such or a practical-justice-as-such to which all rational persons would by their very rationality be compelled to give their allegiance"[67]. Nevertheless, he still wishes to find impersonal standards of judgement which can be appealed to in order to remove arbitrary exercises of power - 'tyrannical power within communities and imperialist power between communities'. To this end, he believes that tradition-based enquiry is capable of providing "the kind of debate from which one party can emerge as undoubtedly rationally superior"[68].

MacIntyre's attempt to bridge what seems an infinite logical gap rests upon his thesis that a revival of practice-based virtues can provide human nature with a teleology. As has been demonstrated, however, such practices necessarily already presuppose a concept of justice-as-such and rationality-as-such. There is also the more general problem of the endless confusion of theory and practice which underlies all of MacIntyre's thought. He seems to think that by readjusting our academic assumptions about the nature of the self we can bring about a real change in the way people think and the way societies operate. One can imagine the headlines now: "Philosophers discover that we have a teleology after all"! But does MacIntyre believe that human nature *does* have a teleology? His entire critique is based upon the assumption that we do not. Politically, however, he thinks that it would be useful if people were to have a teleological view of themselves, or at least to presuppose that they do through references to *a priori* truths to which they appeal for moral and practical guidance.

However, as MacIntyre himself has noted, and as has been shown to be an inevitable human practice, people *do* make references to such 'truths'. And MacIntyre is in no position to make a distinction between references to truth which are well-founded and those which are unfounded, for this would both contradict his critique of the Enlightenment, and make his desire for practice-based justice redundant because its reliability at discovering what is just would be questionable.

With this in mind, it is difficult to see how MacIntyre could be in a position to criticise liberal societies. Regarding his idea of the postliberal university system, for example, Horton and Mendus point out the following:

> On the one hand, his recognition that there is a variety of traditions in the modern world, each with legitimate claims to serious investigation, intimates a pluralism which, if not straightforwardly liberal, is at least an embodiment of mutual toleration between proponents of different traditions. On the other hand, his insistence on the role of authority within traditions and his apparent acceptance of the idea that the guardians of a tradition can,

for example, legitimately exclude from their own universities those who do not share the basic assumptions of their tradition seem potentially more authoritarian and socially divisive.[69]

I would add to this that even the idea of exclusion is not incompatible with liberal societies. Once it has been recognised that liberal societies are not, and cannot be, emotivist, but instead embody a hierarchy of values, their laws and social policies can be seen to protect such values and exclude those which threaten them. More than this, 'tradition-based enquiry' requires a liberal base; it necessitates a type of outlook which is hard to conceive of existing in a non-liberal society.

Ultimately, MacIntyre's understanding of traditions must itself be a tradition-based view, and the likelihood is that the specific tradition within which this view of traditions developed was a liberal one. For evidence, we do not simply have to rely on some biographical description of MacIntyre; we can look to the pluralist notions of tolerance and empathy as an indication of the liberal nature of his tradition-based enquiry. The difficulty is, however, how such a concept could exist and operate outside of liberal societies. From this, the 'rationally superior' standpoint for which MacIntyre is searching would inevitably be the liberal one.

CONCLUSION.

The central argument which has been proposed here, as set out in the introduction, has centred on the inevitability of invoking transcendental assumptions in postmodern discourse, and how this necessarily produces difficulties for any political stance which presents itself as an extrapolation of such philosophical insights. This now needs to be looked at in more detail, and in particular, leads us to the question of what this means for the future of contemporary political philosophy. These conclusions emerged from the themes and problematics analysed, so firstly, it would be useful to provide a comparative summary of these.

What characterises these thinkers is their anti-Enlightenment starting point. As was noted in the introduction, however, this is an almost symbolic representation of the Enlightenment, and is applied more generally to encompass the Western philosophical tradition. This is less vague if we note that at many points the Enlightenment appears to be presented as the offspring of the Western tradition, with Plato as the father. This symbolism arises, therefore, because the postmodern debate tends to characterise the Enlightenment in terms of its fundamental, underlying ethos of objectivity and transcendentalism, rather than of its specific manifestations.

In Foucault's early work, this critique contains two main elements. Firstly, he criticises humanist values as repressive because truth and rationality have been taken to be transcendental categories and then arbitrarily installed through institutions. Secondly, he rejects the holism inherent in Enlightenment rationality; the fact that it imposed unity and universalism, thereby excluding all 'others' in order to maintain a progressive, teleological view of history. His argument is that once the notion of transcendental, ideal forms has been removed, there exists no goal to work towards, nothing by which truths and concepts can be measured, and that therefore the authority of such repression is thwarted.

Derrida recognises that such an insight has broader implications, and therefore directs his critique at the Western tradition in general. He points to the fundamental error in the history of Western philosophy, the belief that there is something present behind the concept, and that this can be reached. Contrary to this, Derrida demonstrates how the point of arrival at 'reality' will always be deferred by another sign, and that this means that the essence behind the idea can never be appropriated. Through his analysis of, in particular, Saussure and Heidegger, Derrida also notes how the Western tradition's search for certitude and timeless truths has necessarily excluded specific 'others'. What he notices, however, is that these thinkers - and Foucault too - replicate this project by taking a position which is necessarily external to reason itself.

Rorty's critique is similar. He argues that, ever since Plato, philosophy's central concern has been to provide a general theory of representation, and that this has been based on the fundamental confusion that language can mirror nature. In opposition to these correspondence theories of truth, he argues that since truth is a property of sentences, and since sentences are made by human beings, so are truths. Furthermore, whereas epistemology assumes that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable, Rorty insists that the contingent nature of starting-points means that incommensurability is inevitable and that therefore to search for accurate representations of 'reality' is a waste of time.

MacIntyre begins with a similar critique to that of the others. Although he realises that there can be no *a priori* argument that a neutral stance or universal standpoint cannot exist, the Enlightenment's failure, and in particular that of liberalism, to provide a neutral, independent set of criteria by which to judge, is 'the strongest reason we can actually have for asserting that there is no such neutral ground'. Secondly, like Foucault, MacIntyre criticises the Enlightenment's humanist values. The idea that morality could be deduced

from 'true' statements about human nature eliminated, he argues, the Aristotelian notion of 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-telos'. This is where MacIntyre differs from the other thinkers under analysis. In general terms, they argue that the effect of the Enlightenment, and the Western tradition in general, has been one of repression, and that now that we can show how so-called 'objective' truths are unfounded, we can be free of the foundationalist, exclusionist practices that this entails. MacIntyre, on the other hand, believes that because the Enlightenment project failed so miserably, society is now suffering from the subsequent incommensurability which follows from this.

Difficulties begin to emerge with these thinkers when they turn to proposing solutions. Foucault puts forward archaeology as highlighting discontinuity over continuity, and thereby enabling a project of pure description of discursive events in their specificity. Once the discursive field is freed from the constraints of metanarratives, he argues, one can distinguish rules of discursive formation which gain their authority from the status of those who offer it, rather than from any pre-ordained truths representing a progressive, teleological rationality.

The criticisms which can be made of Foucault's reactionary solution to his critique of the Enlightenment demonstrate his inability to provide a method which escapes the transcendental/relativistic dichotomy. The very project of a 'pure description of discursive events', for example, has a transcendental ring to it, and fails to recognise that archaeology must necessarily have limits, and therefore exclude and categorise. His 'rules of discursive formation' have also been criticised for their fatalistic and tautologous implications. That is, with such rules as the sole origin of discursive events, and changes in discursive formations applying, it seems, only to a singular historical event, the notion of a rule is emptied of all content. Along with this Foucault makes truth relative to an *episteme* in order to be able to describe meaning in its specificity. The incoherency of this relativistic

position, it was demonstrated, arises not from problems with relativism itself, but rather due to the transcendentalism inherent both in the archaeological method, and Foucault's argument in favour of resistance.

Foucault's introduction of genealogy, and a concept of power as a more positive phenomenon underlying all social relations, enables him to explain changes in the history of discourse that are merely described by archaeology. However, the fundamental criticisms remain the same: the very projects of archaeology and genealogy, that is, to analyse, categorise and explain, are at odds with his anti-Enlightenment stance. In particular, Foucault wishes to provide us with a reason to resist, and it his desire to present the reasons for doing so as the natural upshot of his critique of the Enlightenment which produces the fundamental tensions within his work.

Derrida proposes his concept of *differance* as a description of how a sign comes to occupy a certain position in a system of signifiers. Unlike traditional semiology, which understands the sign as constituted by its relation to the signified, Derrida argues that its significance is derived through its position in a referential structure of other signs - its difference to other signs. Again, we find that Derrida too is unable to maintain a position which avoids contradicting his original critique, and is forced into the transcendental/nihilistic dichotomy. More interestingly, however, the level at which Derridean analysis operates allows us to make a further observation, and that is that even this dichotomy itself relies upon transcendental assumptions. Once this point has been fully taken on board, the critique of the postmodern position as nihilistic immediately crumbles.

More specifically, there are a couple of criticisms of differance, and a couple of criticisms of deconstruction, which lead to the above observation, as was summarised in the discussion of Derrida's *Cinders*. Firstly, it was shown that Derrida's 'system of differance'

has a transcendental quality - it does not interact with any ontological or cultural influences. This is because he is unable to describe the non-linguistic aspects of the process in more explicit terms without the danger of citing a non-linguistic 'origin' of differance. Secondly, it was noted that Derrida insists upon the binary nature of differance; for every sign there is *one* excluded 'other'. This is what gives Derrida's *description* of differance its critical edge. He implies that by temporarily reversing the privilege of the binary pair, we will achieve some kind of equalisation or naturalisation. However, the chapter pointed out that there must be an infinite number of excluded others for every sign which makes its way into our conceptual vocabulary. If from this, we then recognise that such exclusion is a function of meaning, the critical aspect of differance becomes groundless.

Derrida's project of deconstruction, then, initially gives precedence to the 'other' in order to overturn (but not reverse) hierarchies and thereby liberate all concepts from the dominant force which has organised the logocentric hierarchy. The problems with the deconstructive task emanate from the confusions inherent in Derrida's concept of differance. Firstly, by speaking of the *one* excluded other, he is unwittingly drawn into the predominant logic of existing hierarchies, and is therefore assuming a transcendental standpoint because he always already has a preconceived notion of what *the* 'other' is. Alternatively, if we were to re-write differance and deconstruction in a way which recognised the infinite possibility of heterogeneous others, and therefore avoided this transcendentalism, deconstruction would be nihilistic as it would expose the *absolute* arbitrariness of all concepts and hierarchies. This adds further weight to the argument that there exists no 'middle way' between some kind of transcendentalism on the one hand, and nihilism on the other.

However, as was demonstrated in the discussion of Derrida's *Cinders*, there is an *inevitable* reliance on transcendental notions. If he maintains the distinction between signifier and signified, he starts to appear as if he has an idealised view of signifieds as

some kind of unreachable Platonic Forms. If, however, he is asserting that the totality of meaning and reality is to be found in the signifier, then the transcendental significance previously attached to the signified in traditional Western thought is simply transferred to the sign.

Rorty has the same problems as Derrida. Further analysis of Rorty's argument that truth is a human creation showed that he too is trapped within either a correspondence theory of truth or linguistic idealism. Rorty wants to maintain a distinction between 'the world being out there' and 'truth being out there'. It was demonstrated, however, that he can only do this by maintaining the distinction between signifier and signified, and thus lands himself in the same difficulties as Derrida.

The answer is to recognise the inevitable act of relying upon transcendental truths. It is because Rorty confuses ontological transcendentals with epistemological transcendentals that he feels the need to place these two in opposition to an anti-transcendental position which inevitably collapses into relativism and nihilism. Therefore, it can be illustrated that the critique of the Enlightenment and the Western philosophical tradition in general, will be forced into the transcendental/nihilistic dichotomy, but that this dichotomy is itself dependent upon transcendental assumptions of some kind, as was seen most clearly with Derridean semiotics.

In MacIntyre, the contradictions are more immediately observable. Despite his critique of Enlightenment rationality, he believes that we can reinstate an Aristotelian teleology and a form of tradition-based enquiry which will provide a superior universal rationality by which traditions can be judged. His difficulties arise, therefore, from his argument, contra Enlightenment, that there are no neutral, independent criteria, and his desire to overcome what he perceives to be the moral incommensurability which emanates from this. His

proposal is that through tradition-based enquiry we can discover a universal rationality and truth based on a thorough-going historicity as opposed to the kind of objective truths for which the Enlightenment project searched. Yet again, however, it was found that he fails to escape the dichotomy between transcendentalism on the one hand, and relativism and nihilism on the other.

In particular, this was demonstrated with a discussion of MacIntyre's own standpoint in relation to tradition-based analysis. Firstly, if his view of traditions is itself a tradition-based view, then this cannot coherently exist with an awareness of its own historicity or contingency, that is, it is already constituted by specific, spatio-temporal criteria of which MacIntyre seems unaware. This lack of awareness means that he is assuming an independent, transcendental conceptual grasp of what a tradition is. Alternatively, if he *does* recognise the contingency of his own view of traditions, then he must be a relativist. Yet in recognising the contingency of his own view of traditions, he must nevertheless be standing outside of the tradition based view from which he forms his view of traditions. This means that, either way, he must be relying upon transcendental, a-historical assumptions.

The result of these observations is that while the critique of Enlightenment rationality and the Western tradition in general is convincing - there is no access to transcendental truths - there nevertheless remains the inevitable dependency upon transcendental assumptions. This is clarified in the analyses of the extrapolations of the postmodern critique for the self and politics.

Foucault's initial concept of the self emerges from his argument that madness is culturally constituted through the labelling of behaviour which cannot be subsumed within the dominant conception of rationality. It was demonstrated, however, that in seeing madness

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as containing a transgressive and emancipatory force, he presents an essentialist view of the self. There is a permanent tension in Foucault's work, and with regard to human nature this is manifested through his need for a constituted view of the self as part and parcel of his critique of the Enlightenment on the one hand, and an essentialist notion of the self to support and make possible his project of resistance and emancipation, on the other.

In his genealogical work, Foucault uses the concept of biopower to replace the subject with the body, thereby avoiding essentialism, but consequently excluding the sense of agency which he requires for resistance. In response to these criticisms of his earlier work, his later books describe an 'ethics of the self', in which liberty is achieved through the act of creating oneself and resisting the individualising effects of 'governmentality'. However, it was argued that Foucault cannot distinguish between a strong, powerful, but invisible code of normalisation (which he says exists in contemporary Western societies), and a society in which individuals feel that they form themselves unaffected by an invisible moral code. To do so, he would have to either state that individuals are constituted by external forces in *both* types of society (thereby losing any sense of agency), *or* that in one of the societies, individuals are suffering from a form of 'false-consciousness'. Both alternatives, however, invoke essentialist assumptions about an 'authentic' self which are unavailable to him.

Derrida's starting point is that the subject has been defined and redefined, and that these definitions depend upon external influences rather than any formal identity of the subject. He argues that differance is a condition of self-consciousness such that reflection involves a signification which permanently defers contact with a signified self. By redescribing subjectivity as an effect of differance, Derrida aims to erase the prescriptivity which accompanies the notion of formal identity and therefore emancipate the self. However, the separation of the speaking subject (constituted through a system of signifiers) from the signified *being*, ultimately idealises being, giving it the same transcendental quality

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observed in the Derridean semiology of *Cinders*. That is, Derrida's critique of the transcendental signified (in this case 'being') must ultimately rely upon the transcendental notion of a lost origin. However, the project of deconstruction would lose its emancipatory force if it were not for this covert assumption that human nature is somehow being distorted and repressed by the prevailing hierarchies.

Derrida implies that readjusting our academic assumptions regarding what it is to be human can have a desirable, emancipatory effect upon our everyday practices. At the semiological level, it has been shown that we cannot rid ourselves of the transcendentalism of which Derrida is so critical. But neither is this possible at the practical level, for as soon as we try to take on board Derrida's concept of the subject, we instantly refute it by thinking it. In other words, self-reflection necessarily involves a form of objectivisation of the self which, unfortunately for Derrida's idealised notion of emancipation, inevitably carries a prescriptivity.

Rorty's critique means that he sees the self as in some sense determined by specific temporal and spatial influences, but his prescription for embracing this type of contingency means that he takes an existentialist view of the possibility of human nature as self-constituting, or 'edifying'. Rorty describes the 'ironist' as someone who recognises her contingency and is therefore aware that the terms in which she describes herself are subject to change. The opposite of irony, he states, is common sense, or the metaphysician's viewpoint that the terms in his own vocabulary refer to something which has a real essence. The difficulties with this position are akin to those with Derrida's. Rorty assumes that an awareness of our contingency means that we are able to fully describe ourselves and the elements which constitute us. However, this would necessitate the ability to transcend oneself, and also implies that there is a non-contingent 'core' of which to be aware.

MacIntyre's description of the self is couched in historically contingent terms, arguing that the contemporary self is an emotivist one. However, far from seeing this as inevitable, he believes that reinstating an Aristotelian teleology will help to cure the ills of modern society. MacIntyre's concept of the self is open to many of the criticisms aimed at the previous thinkers, but in particular, it was demonstrated that his description of the contemporary self as escaping Aristotelian forms makes it difficult for him to explain why or how teleological beliefs can suddenly be embraced where none existed before. Ultimately, however, his incoherency arises from a confusion of theory and practice, and the fact that the contemporary view that we have no transcendental truths with which to support our belief systems (and never have had) bears *no* causal relation to the timeless and inevitable practice of assuming that absolute truths exist.

In all four cases, then, two main arguments were put forward. Firstly, it was demonstrated that any emancipatory prescriptions for the self necessarily rely upon transcendental notions of the good, and upon essentialist notions of human nature. Secondly, it was argued that not only would this 'emancipation' from *a priori* notions of truth be undesirable for individuals, it would be impossible. This was shown, in particular, with reference to Derrida's parallel of the self and semiology, and Rorty's ironist and his description of *The Pragmatist's Progress*. For MacIntyre, this meant that his starting point - that we live in an emotivist society, rent by controversies due to the Enlightenment's inability to provide us with some transcendental truths - was misconceived from the start; the solution he was looking for was based on a misconception of the problem. That is not to say that such transcendental truths exist, of course, but simply that both at the philosophical and the everyday level, we talk and think in such a way that they do. Similar tensions, arising from the extrapolation of practical applications from the postmodern insights into truth, pervade their descriptions of, and prescriptions for, politics and society.

Foucault's early work on exclusion and domination relies upon the structuralist methods of archaeology and genealogy. Despite his attempts to reinterpret domination as normalisation, he himself later recognised that this stage of his work still tended to rely upon a unidirectional concept of power which is unable to explain or prescribe resistance and social change. His later work introduces the notion of 'governmentality', by which he means the tendency of Western societies to 'totalise' and 'individualise' in their aim to govern 'all and each'. That is, the concept of the individual has become totalistic through large-scale normalisation, resulting in the predominant notion of liberty which in fact re-subjects people as they conform to it.

Although this later work describes power as subjectivising as well as objectivising, constituted through an 'agonistic struggle' between individuals rather than pure domination, there nevertheless remains epistemological difficulties regarding both his descriptive analysis and his prescriptions for change. As Habermas and others have argued, Foucault's comparative analysis of power relations requires a transcendental viewpoint which is unavailable to him, and this also accounts for his failure to provide a coherent reason to resist. Finally, it was shown that he implicitly draws on the specifically liberal forms of normative judgement at which his initial critique was aimed. A close analysis of his work indicates a disenchantment with the gap between liberal ideals and liberal democratic practice, such that his project can be understood as an attempt to perfect and overcome the incoherencies inherent in liberal democracy.

As with Foucault and the others, Derrida is not in any position to extrapolate any political implications from his philosophical insights if he is to remain at all consistent. His concept of *differance* implies that any political stance which believes itself to be based on a 'truer' understanding of man and society is always mistaken. Deconstruction aims to disrupt the concept of the concept and the prescriptivity that goes with it. This is because the concept

as such implies the existence of an origin, a signified, always already defining 'truth' and therefore prescribing that this truth be represented as closely as possible. However, Derrida's insistence on the binary nature of differance covertly introduces an emancipatory critique whereby the restoration of balance to the previously downgraded 'other' is presented as natural.

On the political front, this celebration of the marginal translates to a deconstruction of liberal democracy and a reinterpretation of Marx. Derrida abstracts from Marxism what he calls its 'spirit', by which he means the hope for emancipation through permanent critique. His application of this critique, however, centres on the gap between liberal democratic ideals and liberal democratic practice, and his notion of the 'spirit of Marxism' (which can be used interchangeably with 'deconstruction') aims to bring the practice closer to the ideal. Nowhere, however, does Derrida question the legitimacy or desirability of this ideal, and this results in a replication of the transcendentalism at which his critique was aimed.

Rorty's politics contains similar contradictory elements to the other thinkers. On the one hand, he wants to make his prescriptions for society the outcome of his attack on traditional philosophy, while on the other, he feels the need to privilege certain concepts such as freedom and democracy. The failure of Rorty's separation of public consensus and private contingency to overcome this basic contradiction indicates that the validity of the liberal position is questionable unless we can disprove his critique of the correspondence theory of truth. In other words, the fundamental incompatibility of this critique and his prescriptions for a liberal society demonstrates not only an incoherency in postmodern attempts to extrapolate political implications from philosophical insights, but also indicates that if we take the postmodern critique of traditional philosophy seriously, we will have a hard time justifying the basis for liberal democracy.

MacIntyre somewhat reverses the position of the other thinkers under analysis, nevertheless exhibiting similar contradictions. He believes that the inevitable failure of the Enlightenment to provide transcendental truths has been manifested as moral incommensurability in contemporary society. He is, however, critical of this failure, and argues that we need impersonal standards of judgement to appeal to in order to remove arbitrary exercises of power. The difficulty, then, is if we are to take his postmodern stance seriously, any so-called 'impersonal standards' must also be arbitrary.

These problems were made explicit in the analysis of how MacIntyre thinks these impersonal standards can be discovered. His proposed solutions - practice-based virtues and tradition-based enquiry - therefore exhibit a necessity to resort to substantive or procedural criteria, both of which he has explicitly rejected. Finally, it was shown that while MacIntyre rightly points out that liberalism contains a covert hierarchy of goods which undermines its claimed neutrality, it is impossible to differentiate liberal democracy from the kind of society he prescribes unless he contradicts his notion of tradition-based values, thus invoking transcendental assumptions.

Mark Lilla distinguishes between French and Anglo-American political philosophies, arguing that

> . . . compared to Anglo-American political philosophy, which takes liberalism to be a natural fact or a historical given, rarely asking questions about its social and historical preconditions, French investigations into their own political past have the advantage of raising general questions about the circumstances in which all liberal societies flourish or decline.[1]

While I agree that the French philosophers I have chosen are perceptive about the *a priori* nature of American political and philosophical assumptions (as indeed is MacIntyre), they still fail to be perceptive about their own. In all of the thinkers under analysis there seems to be a sense in which liberal assumptions are inescapable, especially in their later works. This could be because, in comparison to the postmodern critique of the Western

philosophical tradition, the differences between liberal values and, say, Marxist values, are minor. It could also be because, more specifically, the differences between Anglo-American liberal values and society, and the pluralistic, albeit conflictual, liberal actuality of post-war France, is minimal. It might even be that the failure of the French Revolution and the events of 1968 to achieve certain ideals has produced a disappointment in French intellectuals that can only be expressed, in the current political climate, as a desire to appropriate liberal ideals more closely. For whatever reason, there appears to be an almost inevitable magnetism between my French thinkers and the liberal ideal which is more than an *absence* of political values brought about by their critique of the Enlightenment.

In all of the themes discussed - Rationality, The Self, Politics and Society - it was demonstrated how transcendental assumptions of some kind are necessarily invoked. This meant that the postmodern critique cannot be translated to a prescription for the self or politics. However, as we saw with Derridean semiology, it also has implications for the postmodern critique of Western rationality. In relation to this, I would like to consider two questions. Firstly, how does the fact that we necessarily presuppose some transcendental assumptions affect the postmodern critique of correspondence theories of truth? Secondly, does my position on this reduce to tautology or triviality?

The first question centres on the fact that exclusion is a function of meaning. While the postmodern stance rightly points out that foundational, neutral, transcendental, objectivist, essentialist (these terms are often used interchangeably in relation to the critique of Western rationality) truths are inevitably exclusionist, they fail to recognise that the notion of contingency is equally exclusionist. So while they can rightly expose specific truths and goods as arbitrary, they can only do this by maintaining a notion of *that which truths are arbitrary in relation to*. This then replicates the outlook which they aim to criticise.

Now, we could say that despite this, they do not necessarily have to have a notion of those signified truths in any specific sense. That is, they could say, like me, that although we necessarily invoke transcendental assumptions, these assumptions do not rely upon the existence of any actual transcendental truths of the kind that Plato believed in. But this is not what they in fact do. Instead, they use their understanding of the arbitrary nature of truths to point to specific 'others' that they feel have been ignored or downgraded. And, as we observed, these others tended to be such that would bring liberal practice closer to the liberal ideal. The significance of this rests on the fact that the postmodern stance is itself a contingent one, emanating from concerns of equality and freedom. My position, on the contrary, is that there are an infinite number of heterogenous excluded others, existing, in the main, beyond our thoughts and comprehension.

The problem with my position is that it is one of indifference. It cannot provide any reason to criticise or overturn traditional notions of truth. The knowledge that the truths with which we operate are arbitrary, cannot translate to a prescription for changing them. This brings us to the second question, for nor can that knowledge provide us with a reason for not changing them. This seems to imply that my own critique must be self-refuting, and removes the possibility of criticising the postmodern viewpoint in the same way that Derrida's concept of *differance* lost its critical edge once it was realised that its binary nature should be replaced with an acknowledgement of infinite heterogenous others.

However, my contention that transcendental truths are necessarily invoked or relied upon, both at the level of theory and in everyday life, also provides the ammunition which is needed to criticise theses that fail to take account of this. This failure, demonstrated in all of the thinkers in question, manifests itself in the prescriptions they make for the self and politics. Even with MacIntyre it was shown that he fails to recognise that such assumptions must exist prior to the practices through which he thinks virtues can be discovered, and

prior to the tradition-based enquiry by which he thinks a superior rationality can be found.

Following this, my two main arguments - i) that there is no access to transcendental truths, if, indeed, any such truths exist, and ii) that we nevertheless inadvertently rely upon the assumption that there are - raise questions for the relationship between theory and practice, and for the role of the political philosopher. All four thinkers exhibited the belief in a one-way causal relationship between philosophical enquiry and contemporary society, a belief which my analysis demonstrated to be both improbable and logically inconsistent. This also indicates that a certain idealism still exists in political philosophy, that is, these philosophers think that if we theorise rationality carefully and 'correctly' we will be provided with insights that can be used for practical improvements for the self, politics and society.

Bearing in mind the transcendental assumptions which are inevitably invoked in the postmodern critique of traditional Western philosophy, perhaps the search for emancipation can only continue if that critique is disregarded. Or, perhaps like the atom bomb, we cannot simply un-invent this weapon. Either way, a bit of humility would not go amiss, for surely one day postmodernism will be consigned a place amongst the other past and future 'isms' of political philosophy.

The Emperor's New Clothes:

"In the old days we weren't afraid to shout out, 'You're naked you silly arse. You're stark-bollock naked.' Today you only have to fart in the presence of a dark-haired girl from the *Sunday Times*, whose father is either a sacked politician or a minor poet like myself, and you'll be puffed and profiled as the new Thackeray."

(Stephen Fry, *The Hippopotamus*, Quality Paperbacks Direct, London, 1994.)

NOTES.

INTRODUCTION.

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2. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, p4.

3.. R. Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida - The Other Side of Reason*, Unwin & Hyman Ltd., London, 1990, p90.

4. J. Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination,* trans. B. Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

5. R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p62.

6. J. Derrida in C.V. McDonald's 'Choreographies: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', *Diacritics*, 1982, Vol 12, No 2, Summer, pp66-76.

CHAPTER 1: MICHEL FOUCAULT.

1. See Lois McNay's categorisation of Foucault's work into four phases in *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, p4, pp10-11.

2. What is commonly referred to as Foucault's 'early work' centres mainly on *Madness and Civilization* (first published in 1961); *Mental Illness and Psychology* (first published in 1962); and *The Birth of the Clinic* (first published in 1963).

3. The work done in Foucault's 'archaeological' phase includes *The Order of Things* (first published in 1966); *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (first published in 1969); with *The Order of Discourse* (first published in 1971) beginning to mark a change in direction toward genealogy.

4. Foucault's genealogical work is generally understood as being introduced in *The Order of Discourse* (first published in 1971); and becoming central in the following major works: *Discipline and Punish:The Birth of the Prison* (first published in 1975); and *Volume I* of *The History of Sexuality* (first published in 1976).

5. This last stage of Foucault's work is characterised by *The Use of Pleasure: Vol II of The History of Sexuality* (first published in 1984); *The Care of the Self: Vol III of The History of Sexuality* (first published in 1984); and *What is Enlightenment?* (published in Rabinow's 'The Foucault Reader' in 1984), along with other articles, interviews and lectures of this period (see BIBLIOGRAPHY).

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7. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p239.

8. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p9.

9. ibid., p5.

10. ibid., p22.

11. ibid., p22.

12. ibid., p73.

13. ibid., p167.

14. ibid., p27.

15. ibid., p28.

16. ibid., p45.

17. ibid., p51.

18. ibid., p89.

19. ibid., pp104-5.

20. R. Machado, 'Archaeology and Epistemology' in T.J. Armstrong (trans. ed.), *'Michel Foucault Philosopher'*, p4.

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23. M. Frank, 'On Foucault's Concept of Discourse', in Armstrong, ibid., p113.

24. D. Freundlieb, 'Foucault's Theory of Discourse and Human Agency', in Jones & Porter (eds.), *Reassessing Foucault*, p162.

25. M. Philp, 'Michel Foucault' in Q. Skinner, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences,* p70.

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28. ibid., p269.

29. ibid., p279.

30. Nancy Fraser, *Foucault on Modern Power*, p238.

31. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p28.

32. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization,* p40.

33. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p34.

34. Foucault, *Orders of Discourse*, p46.

35. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p184.

36. Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth', (in *Political Theory,* vol21, No 2, May 1993, pp198-228) p204.

37. Janicaud, op.cit., p288.

38. J. Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, pp65-66.

39. N. Brenner, *Foucault's New Functionalism*, p679.

40. Simons, op.cit., p83.

41. L. McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, p102.

42. ibid., p165.

43. Brenner, op.cit., p699.

44. Foucault, 'Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: An Interview with Michel Foucault', (trans. J.O'Higgins, *Salmagundi* 58/59, Fall 82/Winter 83) p16.

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47. G. Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, p284.

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CHAPTER 2: JACQUES DERRIDA.

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13. Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, p129.

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