BEYOND LIBERAL DISCOURSE:

META-IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY AND NARRATIVE ALTERNATIVES

by

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This project presents a critical engagement with the concept of ideology. It advances the view that political ideologies can be regarded as distinctive narrative styles and as such can be analyzed in their peculiar discursive formations. It specifically concentrates on liberalism, which I regard as the dominant ideology in much of "the West" today. My study contributes to the scholarship at the intersection between contemporary political theory, theories of language, and comparative politics.

By employing simple instruments of semiotics I show how the discourse of liberalism organizes the production and deployment of political meaning. In particular, I argue that a critical engagement with the texts of thinkers ranging from John Locke to John Stuart Mill and John Rawls can contribute to unveiling the deep structures of liberal discourse. I maintain that these structures constitute liberalism as a "grammar" which operates by organizing political content around key concepts like individual agency, rationality, and anthropocentrism. Crucially, liberalism also acts as a "meta-ideology" capable of expressing alternative positions through its versatile grammatical infrastructure. I analyze contemporary theorists like Will Kymlicka, Robert Putnam, and Philip Pettit, and

argue that they engage in similar intellectual projects, incorporating elements of communitarianism and republicanism in a liberal framework.

In the second part of my dissertation I inquire into the possibility of alternative meta-ideological constellations. In particular, I focus on the contribution of Jean-Luc Nancy: I argue that his characterization of "being-in-common" as the fundamental position of existence can replace the liberal tenet of individualism as the basic assumption on human nature. Finally, I ground these abstract reflections in the concrete reality of the community of Badolato, in southern Italy, where locals and immigrants alike seem to understand and organize their relationality outside of a paradigm of liberal toleration. I present the results of the ethnographic research that I conducted in Badolato and I characterize that experience of encounter with the other as an example of the practices of hospitality envisioned by the late Jacques Derrida.

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To my loving parents Nino and Maria.

And to the memory of my first friend Giuseppe Bilotti:
there is no good reason in the world for why I am here today and he is not.

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CHAPTER I

A PRELIMINARY INTRODUCTION TO IDEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

As the ideological debris of the twentieth century still clutters the political atmosphere of the twenty-first, the abrasion of different clusters of meaning is likely to recombine sense in new units, and to incline old ones in new ways. Faced with the seemingly chaotic friction of ideas in politics, the uninquisitive observer is tempted to quickly declare their irrelevance, or to predicate their essential immutability in the face of apparent clashes. It is the task of the patient meteorologist of meaning, however, to study the formation of nebulas of sense, their mutual interrelations, and the processes by which they eventually precipitate in phenomena of political action. Inscribing both the subject and the object of its studies in the same world of indeterminacy, a science of ideas would reject the very pretense of an objective knowledge. It would conduct its investigation with no illusion of neutrality and no delusion of ever accessing the ultimate source of an unencumbered truth.

In this chapter I start delineating the contours of such a mode of inquiry, as I envision it. The contemporary field of the political appears to pullulate in particular with liberal ideas; though I argue that non-liberal ideas can germinate from this same humus, I start by orienting my inquiry toward the object of liberalism. Because ideas in politics are typically organized in more or less stable patterns of descriptive, normative, and action-oriented propositions, I premise my analysis with a brief introduction to the history and the development of the concept of ideology. In particular, I approach the study of ideology without evoking the abstract categories of truth and falsity as they pertain to the external world of politics; instead, I concentrate on the dimension of meaning as the internal matter

of which ideas are constituted. After this preliminary discussion, I draw attention to the field of semiotics, and to the productive intersection between the study of systems of signification, and the study of political ideologies as systems of ideas. I argue that borrowing simple interpretive tools from semiotics, and adapting them for their specific purposes can sustain the effort of political theorists in their quest for an accurate understanding of the processes that govern the functions and mutable configurations of ideas in politics.

My intervention in the current debates on the study of ideology emphasizes the extent to which political ideologies can be productively regarded as analogous to "languages" (and to systems of signification more generally). This, in turn, prompts a reflection on the kind of analysis that can be fruitfully applied to ideological discourses. In this spirit, an overview of the various claims that have historically emerged on the definition, scope, and validity of the notion of "ideology" can be helpful in illustrating the genealogy of the position which is currently prevalent in political theory, and which concentrates on how different ideologies organize meaning in the political field. Michael Freeden, one of the most distinguished contemporary scholars of ideology, characterizes his approach as "morphological," and defines ideologies as "combinations of political concepts organized in a particular way."[1] Each ideology, then, displays a peculiar structure with certain concepts at its core, complemented by adjacent and peripheral concepts.[2] The field of political meaning would thus appear to be first parceled into discrete units (concepts like equality, liberty, community, order, etc.) which would then be arranged differently by different ideologies, like furniture in a room, to borrow the metaphor that Freeden repeatedly uses:

> Ideologies may be likened to rooms that contain various units of furniture in proximity to each other. Two important, if obvious, observations need to be kept in mind: (1) rooms may be distinguished by the kinds and combinations of units of furniture they accommodate (kitchens will have sinks and cookers; studies will have desks and bookshelves; (2) the same type of room will appear in an infinite variety of

[1] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1996), p. 75

[2] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 77

> furniture combinations (there are hundreds of different don's studies in Oxford). This is precisely the position with regards to ideologies. Though it is impossible to give a clear-cut definition of liberalism, it is empirically ascertainable that liberalism has always contained such units as liberty, human rationality, and individualism. Subtract one of them from the liberal configuration and profound question marks begin to appear. Subtract a second and it is no longer liberalism.3

According to Freeden, then, there exist "liberal rooms," for instance, in which there are certain pieces of "ideological furniture" (core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts) arranged in a variety of ways. Upon entering two such rooms, an observer would be able to recognize their distinctly liberal character despite their not being identical; upon comparing two pieces of discourses which exhibited different core concepts and different morphologies, on the other hand, an observer would categorize them as different ideologies, like entering a kitchen and a bedroom would immediately suggest more differences than similarities. This is a very perceptive way of thinking about ideologies, as it highlights the fact that their morphologies are both flexible (various forms of liberalism can produce rather dissimilar instances of liberal discourse), and not infinitely elastic (after a while, an ideological configuration ceases to be classifiable as liberal, and it breaks off into something else). Nevertheless, in keeping with Freeden's metaphor, if different bedrooms arrange the same basic pieces of furniture (beds, nightstands, dressers, etc.) in different combinations (and sometimes also add idiosyncratic elements), it is also true that a bedroom and a living room, while containing different objects, might share a similar ambiance. A rococo style bedroom might be more "like" a rococo living room than a Bauhaus bedroom. Something intangible, and yet very real and easy to perceive characterizes two different rooms as similar in style. How are two otherwise different rooms "alike" in certain key aspects? Out of the metaphor, can two pieces of different ideological discourses exhibit some level of similarity despite the fact that they organize different units of political content, in different configurations? Is there anything like "style" that can cut through the content of different ideologies? I argue that

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[3] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 86

there is, and that the mode of expression that informs different instances of ideological discourse is a crucial component in the study of ideology.

Most of the theorists who engage in the project of studying ideologies as systems for the production and deployment of meaning, however, concentrate their analyses on the level of content; I argue that the modalities employed for the expression of that content are of paramount importance in explaining what kind of content gets articulated and how (and, concurrently, what content remains excluded from political discourse). In other words, while debates on the truth or falsehood of ideology have mostly subsided in contemporary political theory, the turn toward semantics has remained substantially oblivious to the syntactic aspects of ideologies. Considering ideologies as more or less stable configurations of political concepts, the morphological approach focuses on how, and how cogently determinate units of meaning fit with each other in the economy of a given discourse, like pieces of furniture in a room. I, on the other hand, propose to supplement this analysis with a more careful consideration of the role of combinatory rules akin to those of grammar in shaping the morphology of ideological discourse. Like words follow each other in a sentence according to patterns that owe both to the meaning of those words and to the grammatical functions that they absolve, so in the articulation of ideological discourse different concepts are concatenated because of both their specific content and because of the underlying grammatical structure that preexists their actual usage.

In characterizing the mode of expression of an ideology as a "grammar" I draw inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's discussion of language and politics. "How many forms of grammar can there be?," he asks, and he answers "Several, certainly."[4] On the one hand, Gramsci identifies "the grammar 'immanent' in language itself, by which one speaks

[4] Antonio Gramsci, "How Many Forms of Grammar Can There Be?," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York University Press, New York: 2000), p. 353

'according to grammar' without knowing it, as Moliere's character produced prose without knowing it."[5] On the other hand, he observes:

> Besides the 'immanent grammar' in every language, there is also in reality (i.e., even if not written) a 'normative' grammar (or more than one). This is made up of reciprocal monitoring, reciprocal teaching and reciprocal 'censorship' expressed in such questions as 'What did you mean to say?', 'What do you mean?', 'Make yourself clearer', etc., and in mimicry and teasing. This whole complex of actions and restrictions come together to create a grammatical conformism, to establish 'norms' or judgments of correctness and incorrectness. But this 'spontaneous' expression of grammatical conformity is necessarily disconnected, discontinuous and limited to local social strata or social centers. (A peasant who moves to the city ends up conforming to urban speech through the pressure of the city environment. In the country, people try to imitate urban speech; the subaltern classes try to speak like the dominant classes and the intellectuals, etc.)[6]

For Gramsci, normative grammar acts in conjunction with the ideological domination of the ruling class. On the one hand, he notes, there can be virtually as many "spontaneous" immanent grammars as there are speakers of a language; on the other hand, this virtual fragmentation is compensated by the actual "movements of unification" operated by normative grammar, with the end result of "creat[ing] a unitary national linguistic conformism."[7] Bernard Susser has also commented on the interplay of constraints and creative possibilities that regarding grammar as a political object entails:

> Grammar is, paradoxically, identical with the spontaneous will of the grammatical speaker. Simultaneously, however, grammar is a framework that controls his will, it permits great freedom for change and choice but is itself not freely chosen or easily

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[5] Antonio Gramsci, "How Many Forms of Grammar Can There Be?," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 353

[6] Antonio Gramsci, "How Many Forms of Grammar Can There Be?," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 354

[7] Antonio Gramsci, "How Many Forms of Grammar Can There Be?," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 354

> changed. Grammar, then, highlights both the creative will of the speaker within the framework and the constraining force of the framework on the speaker's will.[8]

Grammar preexists and shapes individual speech acts; yet it allows (and enables) a virtually infinite number of speech acts to happen; over time, the accumulation of speech acts also affects the codification of grammatical rules, confirming or slowly changing them. Likewise, a certain mode of expression allows the articulation of political content consistent within the morphology of a given ideology; and yet it is not neutral with regards to how that content gets expressed. Susser's analysis focuses on how a peculiar modernist sensibility enables ideologies to negotiate the tension between the claim that "value, meaning, significance […] are conventional constructs with only relative validity;" and the claim that "the world is fundamentally knowable."[9] On the other hand, I intend to apply the concept of grammar to the study of ideologies in a more intuitive way. I consider ideology as a peculiar style of discourse, and as such I argue that it is amenable to textual analysis; hence, I argue, focusing simply on the level of content, as Freeden seems to do, overlooks the ways in which the mode of expression structures, organizes, and affects that content. In this sense I will refer to "the grammar of liberalism," "the grammar of socialism," "the grammar of conservatism," etc., rather than to a more abstract "grammar of modern ideology." In my analysis, each ideology does not only exhibit morphological regularities at the level of content, but is also characterized by a certain recurrent mode of expression. In particular, I will concentrate on the grammar of liberalism, which I regard as the hegemonic mode of expression which sustains the hegemonic ideological constellation in much of "the West" today. As I will point out, the commitment of liberalism to the value of the individual relies crucially on a grammar characterized by the primacy of the subject over the verb. In the primacy of the subject-verb formation I identify the premise of the success of liberalism. Moreover, I argue that the mode of expression does not necessarily predetermine the

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[8] Bernard Susser, *The Grammar of Modern Ideology* (Routledge, London and New York: 1988), p. 5

[9] Bernard Susser, *The Grammar of Modern Ideology*, p. 91

content of a certain piece of ideological discourse. Certain grammars may be flexible enough to accommodate and express concepts that are typical of different ideologies. In this vein I follow Noam Chomsky's groundbreaking work on linguistics: "the notion 'grammatical,'" he argues, "cannot be identified with 'meaningful' or 'significant' in any semantic sense."[10] Separating the judgment on grammatical correctness from any considerations on the semantic value of a statement, Chomsky points to the existence of certain linguistic structures that cannot be reduced to the content of which they allow the expression. Much like, in his famous example, it is perfectly grammatical, and yet nonsensical to claim that "colorless green ideas sleep furiously," likewise I argue that a statement might be "grammatical" from the perspective of an ideology, and yet express content that does not conform to the political universe envisioned by that ideology.

In general, political ideas seem to be caught in a web of mutual presuppositions that is not fully accounted for by the ramifications of their content. In both everyday language and in political ideologies, ideas are not simply juxtaposed based on the contiguity of their meaning, but are typically organized in formations that express meaning according to certain predictable patterns. In turn, I argue, these predictable patterns for the organization of meaning (which are typically regarded as grammatical rules), are not neutral in relation to content, but affect the value and interaction of ideas as well. Yet, I observe, the intrinsically political nature of grammar (and of language by extension) has often gone underappreciated by canonical political theorists; to the extent that the "linguistic turn" in contemporary political theory has called attention to it, the analysis has often lacked methodological accuracy. Consider, for instance, one of the most influential claims in the history of Western political theory: Man is by nature a political animal. If it has been said, influentially, that "the European philosophical tradition […] consists of a series of footnotes to Plato," it might be equally legitimate to affirm that Aristotle's assertion has provided political theory with an

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[10] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, New York: 2002) [1957], p. 15

ideal justification for its own intellectual enterprise, and at the same time with a minimal unit of sense to engage in an unending process of critical interpretation and re-signification.

In exploding the manifold possibilities of sense entailed by the qualification of "man" as a political animal, an assortment of diverse thinkers over the centuries has called into question the more or less explicitly exclusionary character of that category. And so "men," regardless of their status and census, have gradually been recognized as legitimate candidates for that position as political animals. Additionally, the women's movement has fought some of its most successful struggles to discard the assumption of masculinity contained in the definition of the political animal, later supplemented by a critical reflection on heteronormativity that has attempted, among other things, to establish "humans" as political animals. Much less successfully, also some of the qualifying attributes for being regarded as fully human have been disputed, advancing the notion that even "defective" human beings (lacking conventional rationality, for instance) deserve the right to be political animals; and some rights traditionally ascribed only to humans have also been advocated for animals, on the presumption that the capacity for suffering and not rationality should be the defining criterion.

In an orthogonal movement of problematization, the "nature" of the "political" has been subjected to increasing scrutiny as well by different political approaches. On the one hand, republicanism has delved into the notion that a profound engagement with politics manifests an essential characteristic of humans and sublimates their true nature. On the other hand, liberalism has critically redefined the nature of humans as political animals, claiming that that trait does arise from the state of nature, but that it typically corresponds to an instrumental concern for the defense and advancement of largely pre-political individual interests. Marxism, then, has unabashedly protested the irrelevance of the political, summoning all the revolutionary energies of the proletariat for the struggle in the social realm, against the injustice of the dominant relations of production. Postmodernism, finally, has contributed to the ongoing debate on the nature of humans as political animals by challenging the idea of "nature" itself, and by calling for the multiplication of the sites of

struggle in ways that politicize what was traditionally understood to be outside the political, ultimately blurring the line(s) between the political and the non-political.

Considerably less developed has been, however, the critical engagement of canonical political theory with another aspect of Aristotle's axiom. Long ignored as inert matter, the grammar of a phrase like "man is by nature a political animal" already constitutes a universe of meaning before its syntactic elements are invested with semantic value. Grammar, in other words, subtends a net in which meaning gets caught and organized. While the content that different ideological claims articulate constitutes the most obvious object of political analysis, I argue that the grammar that characterizes and distinguishes different ideological discourses is endowed with political significance at a deeper level. A committed Marxist literary critic like Terry Eagleton, on the other hand, would reject the claim that grammar is intrinsically political. Postulating a distinction between "language" and its "context," Eagleton maintains that it is the latter to make certain uses of the former "ideological," whereas certain other uses remain "non-ideological." "You could not decide," he affirms "whether a statement was ideological or not by inspecting it in isolation from its discursive context," as he explains that "[i]deology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes."[11] Language somehow appears to exist outside of its context, and in this abstract space it has the potentiality of either being or not being ideological: "the same piece of language might be ideological in one context and not in another."[12]

Eagleton's point is convincing, at one level. Context is indeed an irreducible element in assessing the meaning of any utterance, as even envisioning the existence of language, let alone meaning, is problematic, without context. And he is right in observing that decoding certain statements as ideological is crucially influenced by the context in which they are inserted. "'Have you put the cat out yet?'" he explains "could be an ideological utterance, if

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[11] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (Verso, London: 1991), p. 9

[12] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 9

(for example) it carried the unspoken implication: 'Or are you being your usual shiftless proletarian self?'"[13] However, I disagree with the conclusion that he reaches about language being devoid of any ideological content that is not a direct function of context. I argue, on the other hand, that a different, deeper level, language possesses certain characteristics that prefigure and delimit the ideological content that its concrete usages will be able to express. The deep structures of language, its grammar, the rules that preside over the allocation of meaning, do not constitute a neutral universe of sense, but portend a system of signification which is always already saturated with ideological content, and yet capable of accommodating a surplus of content.

In particular, my argument is that the grammar of liberalism is especially versatile, and that it can express non-liberal ideas thus proffering its own expressive infrastructure to other ideologies. Unlike Chomsky's "colorless green ideas," though, the non-liberal ideas that a liberal grammar can express continuously expand, redraw, and reshape the boundaries of what that ideology can meaningfully say. While the first utterance of a political concept incompatible with the semantic universe of liberalism can sound as nonsensical as the idea of "sleeping furiously," liberal grammar is often capable to metabolize non-sense into sense, to discipline indocile ideas into docile ones. To the extent that the grammar of liberalism is indeed able to express non-liberal ideas, as I maintain, it does so by subtly changing them, and yet without making them fully reducible to a liberal core. At the same time, insofar as grammar is depoliticized, or at any rate assumed to be extra-political, the liberal incorporation of extra-liberal content fails to be recognized as a genuinely political phenomenon. On the contrary, I note how many scholars who engage the content of liberalism critically, still rely on its grammar to advance their arguments. I maintain that this is problematic as it hinders the development of a comprehensive alternative to the currently hegemonic discourse. Semiotics, I argue, can provide political theorists with appropriate

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[13] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 9

instruments for studying how political ideologies organize the field of political meaning, and in particular how the grammar of liberalism succeeds at expressing different ideas.

Ideas in Action: Toward a Definition of Ideology

Before proceeding further, three orders of questions appear especially urgent at this point. First: why would the study of politics critically hinge on a study of ideas? Second: what is it that we are studying, in particular, when we study ideas in politics? And third: how can the role of ideas in politics be evaluated? Here I will briefly outline some reasons for defending an ideational approach to the analysis of political matters. Then I will sketch a tentative definition of ideology as the primary object of this investigation. Finally, advancing an argument about the mode and value of studying ideas in politics constitutes the overarching goal of this dissertation. By claiming that ideas matter in politics, and that the study of their dynamics can be approached as a systematic enterprise, I intend to contribute to the delineation of a more solid understanding of the complex articulations of meaning of which we often perceive only the most superficial manifestations. Beneath a surface in which ideas might appear volatile under the impetus of causative agents variously defined as interests, structures, or institutions, I argue that in a realm of pure potentiality there exist discernible configurations of sense that determine the morphology of ideas and their interrelations inasmuch as they emerge in actuality.

That ideas in politics should not be regarded as either irrelevant or immutable sounds intuitively like an unfalsifiable truism. The idea that ideas can indeed be regarded as inconsequential would be in itself a tremendously powerful idea in shaping a peculiar conception of the political, and even in affecting concrete political behavior. Likewise, claiming that ideas are fixed (either because of their immanent essence; or because they have finally reached their *tèlos*) would be a departure from a well established line of thinking about the historical reality of politics, and as such a "new" idea in its own right. Yet, despite these

immediate objections, both the thesis of the irrelevance of ideas in politics, and that of their immutability have exercised an uncanny fascination over generations of scholars, and still maintain a peculiar appeal among those who long for simpler ways to make sense of their political experience in the world (hence relying on ideas, incidentally).

Here I concentrate my study on the issue of *how* ideas matter, and how it is possible for an analyst of political phenomena to understand that. Before undertaking this endeavor, however, I should like to provide a basic outline of "ideology," in order to reduce the ambiguities about this frame for understanding the functions and operations of ideas in politics. The disagreements that dominate the contemporary scholarship have led David McLellan to proclaim that "ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social science."[14] Terry Eagleton has glossed that "[t]he word 'ideology' […] is a text, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands; it is traced through by divergent histories."[15]

In the most restrictive sense, some critics like Frederick Watkins voice the widespread distrust of ideologies, indicting them as simplistic political projects grounded in extremism and utopianism, prone to militancy, and not immune to violence.[16] David Ingersoll and Richard Matthews, on the other hand, define ideology less dismissively, and propose a tripartite scheme that includes: an assessment of the status quo; a view of a desirable future; and, crucially, a plan of action for implementing the changes that are envisioned.[17] Similarly, Freeden has noted that ideologies "straddle the worlds of political thought and political action, for one of their central functions is to connect the two."[18] Terrell Carver, then,

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[14] David McLellan, *Ideology* (Open University Press, Houston: 1995), p. 1

[15] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (Verso, London: 1991), p. 1

[16] Frederick Watkins, *The Age of Ideology: Political Thought, 1950 to the Present* (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ: 1964)

[17] D. Ingersoll and R. Matthews, *The Philosophic Roots of Modern Ideology* (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ: 1991)

[18] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 76

defends a looser understanding of ideology, characterizing it as "an agenda of things to discuss, questions to ask, hypotheses to make."[19]

Moreover, as the reach of the concept of political ideology extends well beyond the field of political science, the debates over its definition also stimulate contributions from different corners of the social sciences. Clifford Geertz, for instance, has argued for an understanding of ideology as a system of symbols, through which a given culture attributes meaning and order to the world.[20] Paul Ricoeur linked ideology to national identity, rooting it in the creation of certain "foundational myths" and in their deployment for fostering a sense of community.[21] Paulo Freire emphasized the role of ideology in the social construction of categories like gender, race, ethnicity, or class, and the necessity of education for a critical engagement with it.[22]

It is indicative that this second set of accounts of ideology, eccentric from the perspective of canonical political science, introduces a peculiar element that was not at the forefront of the first set of definitions. Whether they are understood as systems of symbols, as originating from common foundational myths, or as crucially engaged in the processes of social construction of reality, ideologies function by telling stories. This narrative approach is especially clear in Lyman Sargent's contention that: "[i]deologies are stories about the world we live in and our place in that world […] When we read a story, we often suspend our disbelief in it, and while we are still reading the story […] the story is real."[23] This accent on

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[19] Terrell Carver, "Ideology: The Career of a Concept," in Terrence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader,* 6th ed. (Pearson Longman, New York: 2006), p. 9

[20] Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in D. Apter, ed. by, *Ideology and Discontent* (Free Press of Glencoe, New York: 1964)

[21] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (Columbia University Press, New York: 1985)

[22] Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, *Ideology Matters* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: 2002)

[23] Lyman Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis* (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, Belmont, CA: 2009), p. 3

the effects of sense (effects of reality, in particular) that the narrative character of ideology elicits, combined with a clear analysis of the tripartite structure of the meaning that ideology organizes, inclines toward a more satisfactory definition of ideology. This is in turn supplemented by Freeden's morphological analysis of ideology. An ideology is for Freeden a distinctive configuration of political concepts, a network in which different concepts entertain specific relations with each other, and through these relations are given relative value and meaning. Furthermore, he argues:

> Ideologies […] aim at cementing the word-concept relationship. By determining the meaning of a concept thy can then attach a single meaning to a political term. Ultimately, ideologies are configurations of decontested meanings of political concepts […]. 'This is what liberty means, and that is what justice means,' [an ideology] asserts.[24]

Deconstestation, then is the characteristic function of ideologies: anchoring the political meaning of certain key concepts, they organize the surrounding and fluid universe of politics on the basis of those fixed elements. Ernesto Laclau defines this operation as "closure," and notices that it is "impossible but at the same time necessary; impossible because of the constitutive dislocation which lies at the heart of any structural arrangement, necessary, because without that fictitious fixing of meaning there would be no meaning at all."[25] This fundamental aporia of meaning calls into question the punctual correspondence of signifiers and signifieds, and radically redefines systems of signification away from the characteristics of fixity and immutability that early structuralists had attributed to them. Incorporating Freeden's morphological focus with the aspects outlined above, I would like to propose a working definition of ideology that takes into account its narrative, structural, and semantic dimensions. An ideology:

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[24] M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 76

[25] E. Laclau, "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," in *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Vol. 1 Issue 3

1) Tells a story about the world of politics;
2) This story is structured around a tension between the status quo and a better future, and this tension is resolved through political action;
3) Meaning is organized in this story according to a specific grammatical configuration.

While this quick sketch certainly cannot aspire to capture all the complexities of an essentially contested concept like ideology, I argue that it presents the advantage of avoiding the flatness of some other definitions by placing the object of study in a three-dimensional space. Highlighting the narrative character of ideology allows the critic to study it as a distinctive genre, thus making use of interpretive instruments developed in other disciplines. Keeping the focus on the descriptive, normative, and action-oriented elements prevents the analyst from losing sight of the political specificities of an ideology. Finally, considering the allocation of meaning and the distinctive systems of values that ensue permits a critical assessment of the modalities in which different ideologies impact politics, and their relative degrees of success at that. This third dimension, in particular, is the level at which I wish to concentrate my analysis. I regard the specific configurations of meaning that are characteristic of each ideology as akin to "grammars." In this sense, a "liberal grammar" can express non-liberal content; without concentrating on the grammar itself, the power of a certain mode of expression to channel and delineate political content remains unacknowledged. Being cognizant of the grammatical aspect, on the other hand, exposes the peculiar patterns for the production of meaning that a mode of expression establishes.

Taken together, the three components of my definition of ideology constitute a convenient vantage point from which to defend the constitutive role of ideas in the political sphere. If ideas are, with various rationales and to different ends, expunged from politics, a call for direct, unmediated action is likely to occur. Divorcing by decree the cognitive from the performative (despite the indissoluble mutuality of their relations), figures as diverse as scientific socialists and liberal-bourgeois pragmatists have declared the battle of ideas passé, and have concentrated their efforts on action. Dispensing with ideas in the exercise of politics, these positions have typically also discredited the study of ideas in politics. "Critique

of ideology" became the stock phrase utilized by self-defined free-thinking theorists eager to mark their difference from obtuse, unrefined zealots trapped in their closed systems of thought. Rescuing "the real" from "the ideological," some thinkers saluted the coming of a post-ideological era as one in which the real exigency of action would emerge unfettered by distortive mental schemes.

The mystification that a purer form of political action can exist somewhere outside the reach of mystifying ideas and ideologies, however, hardly goes unquestioned. Without responding to the maladroit actionism of "critics of ideology" with an equally apodictic belief in a rigid form of ideational causality, it is possible to value the role of ideas in politics and to elaborate a method for the systematic study of their configurations in the space of the political, a space neither insulated from action, nor ultimately reducible to it. Slavoj Žižek is provocatively clear in his scandalous "plea for Leninist intolerance":

> One is therefore tempted to turn around Marx's eleventh thesis: the first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to directly intervene and change things […] but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates. If, today, one follows a direct call to act, this act will not be performed in an empty space; it will be an act within the hegemonic ideological coordinates […][26]

Political action never happens in a void: its space is always already defined by ideas that constitute at the same time the conditions of thinkability of action, and its boundaries. Action has in itself the potential to act on the same system of ideas in which it takes place; but in order to do so, it needs to challenge at the margins the very conditions of its own thinkability: it needs to redraw the extant boundaries between organized sense and non-sense. Short of this radical engagement with ideas, with all the power that a political actor can deploy, what can be done is to a large extent pre-determined by what can be thought beforehand. Recuperating the language of ideology and ideological hegemony from the dustbin of history to which it had been consigned, then, Žižek, among others, presents the

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[26] Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 28, no. 2 (Winter 2002), p. 545

contemporary scholars of ideology with the fascinating task of engaging with an object of study that requires political theorists to open up to a repertoire of linguistic and semiotic analysis to which vast sectors of the discipline have often looked with diffidence in the past.

To establish that ideas matter, in fact, is far from understanding how they do so. In this project I claim that semiotics can provide an aperture into that alleged black box of political theory. A necessary premise to this investigation is that the relevant object of study are not single ideas (to the dubious extent that such a thing is even thinkable), but more or less organized systems of ideas. Never does a single idea matter in politics: ideas are always found in relation to each other; or rather: a fluid, multi-dimensional space of ideas is segmented into discrete entities as the necessary and necessarily inadequate simplification of an irreducibly complex matter. Much like words in a language are never fully present to themselves one at a time, but rather always carry within themselves the traces of each other's absences, so are ideas in politics always caught in webs of mutual inter-definitions and deferrals. Much like in Saussure's language there are only differences, so ideas too negotiate their boundaries with each other and continuously reshape the space of the political that constitutes both their substantial essence, and their interstitial outside.

Studying systems of ideas is, crucially, studying the combinatory rules that preside over their interactions. A topography of sense needs to be conceived in order to envision the roads, obstacles, detours, cliffs, bridges, even "secret passages" that connect ideas to each other (and self-reflexively to themselves) in a given system. How sense flows and organizes itself within the system of ideas that we call political ideologies is the question that I consider in this work. In order to draw a map of sense I will employ a conceptual framework and some basic tools derived from the discipline that studies signification, the process by which sense is segmented into signs and as such it is made expendable in languages. A recourse to semiotics carries with it the challenge of introducing a terminology and a style of thinking to which canonical political theory has remained largely impermeable; but at the same it also suggests the possibility of achieving a greater clarity in understanding the working of ideas, dispelling the misconception that rigor and intellectual discipline can only be achieved at the

expenses of applying to the study of politics quantitative methodologies developed in realms of knowledge too distant from it. The promise of this project amounts not only to the vindication of qualitative research in general, but to a specific contribution to contemporary political theory.

IDEOLOGY: SEMANTIC, NOT APOPHANTIC

In the introduction to this chapter I have exposed some basic reasons for regarding ideas as a primary focus of attention in the study of politics. Analyzing political ideas in their specificity as ideas, without dissolving them into other explanatory factors (interests, structures, institutions), is one of the fundamental tasks of political theory, and one of the preconditions for its defense as a vital contributor to the conversation of political science. Moreover, I have argued, elements of semiotic analysis can facilitate the advancement of a clearer understanding of the roles, functions, and peculiarities of political ideology as the characteristic mode of organizing ideas in politics. Here I will start by briefly recounting some of the main approaches and some of the most enduring debates around the concept of ideology.

In order to facilitate the navigation through a profoundly complex subject matter, I shall start by organizing the discussion on a continuum stretching from positions maintaining the "falsity" of ideology to positions emphasizing its "reality." In a somewhat similar fashion, Nancy Hirschmann identifies two dimensions that have historically defined the debate on social construction: the level of "ideological misinterpretation," intuitively familiar for most people and not uncommon even among theorists; and that of "materialization," corresponding to the belief that "how we think about, talk about, interpret, and understand

social phenomena produces material effects on the phenomena themselves."[27] Lamenting the inadequacy of both these positions, Hirschmann also proposes a third level of social construction, that she calls "the discursive construction of social meaning:" this move out of an otherwise inescapable logical impasse proves very fruitful for the concrete analysis of the workings of ideological discourses.[28] The discursive construction of social meaning, in fact, amounts to a process of signification: an investment of sense is needed in order to actualize the pure potentiality of social meaning. Signs are constructed through discourse as signifiers are devised that correspond to given signifieds. While this correspondence is never as fixed and immutable as early structuralists maintained, that through signs content is invested with sense and organized, and not only rendered manifest through expression, remains a seminal intuition for the study of systems of meaning more generally.

Approaching ideologies as systems for the organization of political meaning in discourse first requires an engagement with the meaning of "ideology" itself. Philologically, that points to Antoine Destutt de Tracy's usage of the term as its first recorded occurrence. In the intellectual milieu of the French Enlightenment, Destutt de Tracy "sought to establish ideals of thought and action on an empirically verifiable basis, from which both the criticism of ideas and a science of ideas would emerge."[29] While the strong positivistic overtones of this enterprise tend to discredit it with much of the contemporary epistemological sensibility, some of its elements are not to be dismissed altogether. In particular, the ambition to systematize the study of ideas, and of political ideas in particular (a hopelessly disorderly universe by most accounts), provides an ideal aspiration that, when purged of its rationalistic hubris, can usefully orient the scholarly treatment of ideology.

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[27] Nancy Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2003), pp. 78-79

[28] N. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty,* p. 81

[29] M. Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2003), p. 4

Over the last two centuries the intellectual status of ideology has been at the center of countless debates among political thinkers and cultural analysts, and different positions on how to approach its academic study have emerged. In particular, to Marx's early marginalization of ideology, as a purely derivative and superstructural category, other theorists have responded, both within and without the traditions of Marxism. Ideology has gradually become an object of study in its own right, as its dismissal as "false consciousness" and epiphenomenon has evolved into a full appreciation of its importance and even materiality. As the question on the falsity or truth of ideology seems to have receded, then, the focus must shift to the study of its actual mechanisms, and in particular it must concentrate on ideology's capacity of eliciting effects of sense that can determine political action.

For the purpose of presenting the vast array of positions that have historically emerged on the subject of ideology, here I propose a categorical distinction originally elaborated by Aristotle in *De Interpretatione*. In his systematic discussion of linguistic elements, Aristotle distinguishes between "*phásis* ("what is said") and *katáphasis* (an "affirmation")."[30] To this opposition corresponds the opposition between meaning and truth conditions: only *katáphasis* can be discussed as being true or false, whereas *phásis* is not concerned with this question, and it can only be considered in the definition of its meaning.[31] As an example, Aristotle speaks of names taken on their own (a "cat" cannot be said to be either true or false, but what a cat is can certainly be discussed) as opposed to propositions (that "the cat is on the mat" can be contextually true or false). To the first category of linguistic statements (those in which questions of meaning are pertinent) "semantic" judgment can be attached; to the second category (in which questions of truth and falsehood are relevant) "apophantic" judgments can be referred. Moreover, semantic judgments are "governed by rules which are very different from those of referentiality:" in Aristotle's example, the *tragélaphos*, a

[30] G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1993), p. 76

[31] G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity,* p. 76

monstrous creature half goat and half stag, cannot be stated to be true or false, but judgment on what it means can be passed nonetheless.[32]

In this sense, then, the status of ideology resembles closely that of Aristotle's *tragélaphos*. Ideologies typically organize pieces of discourse into more or less coherent wholes. They take certain descriptions of reality and juxtapose them to accounts of alternative and yet possible allocations of resources, values, power, or other political fungibles; crucially, then they also point to concrete ways for implementing the changes that they envision. Each of these elements is rarely found disjointed from the others in actual examples of ideological discourse, but these different rhetorical styles (respectively: descriptive, normative, and action-oriented) can be generally identified.

A normative claim cannot, by its very nature, be regarded as true or false: it pertains to reality as it ought to be, not as it is. Action-oriented statements are also neither true nor false: they aim at the production of effects of sense that in turn stimulate intervention on the world; as such, they point to reality as it becomes (or can become), not as it is or it is not. Strictly speaking, then, apophantic judgments could only apply to the descriptive element of ideology. However, since the latter cannot be understood as a stand-alone piece, but only acquires meaning from its relations to the normative and action-oriented components, considering it under the rubric of truth-falsehood, would miss the point of its specificity. Within the conceptual economy of an ideology, descriptive claims are clearly functional to the normative and action-oriented edifice that they need to sustain. They don't need to be either true or false: they need to be solid enough so that the project will not collapse. Such solidity is given on the one hand by the verisimilitude of the description: if it is patently fabricated, it also disqualifies the claims that rest on it. On the other hand, and most crucially, the value of the descriptive element in an ideology does not lie in its correspondence to some metaphysical, external notion of "truth," but in how "true" it is to its normative and action-oriented counterparts. In other words, I argue that the study of

[32] G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity,* p. 76

ideology needs to concentrate on how well its elements hold with each other, and not how accurately one of those elements captures the intrinsic truth of the world. Yet, for a long time, apophantic themes have been prominent in most debates. I will now briefly recount the development of these debates; then, in the following section I will turn to a possible outline for a semantic study of ideology.

The classic apophantic statement was formulated by Marx in *The German Ideology*. There Marx famously affirmed the fundamental falsity of ideology as a legitimate object of analysis, and dismissed it as the immaterial by-product of the real, material conditions of production:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to the mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people.[33]

He also specified the dynamics by which certain ideas emerge as dominant in a given society, confirming an attitude scarcely interested in assessing their "meaning," and more immediately concerned with discrediting their claims to truth.

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. [….] The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.[34]

Whereas the phrase and the very concept of "false consciousness" are to be imputed more to orthodox Marxism (as codified primarily by Engels) than to Marx himself, it is undeniable

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[33] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology,* in R. Tucker, ed. by *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York: 1978), p. 154

[34] K. Marx, *The German Ideology,* pp. 172-3. Emphasis in the original.

that the emphasis placed on the economic factor paved the way for this oversimplification. Confronted with the incongruence between objective class conditions and inconsequential class consciousness, Marxist thinkers liquidated the latter as plainly mistaken, and elaborated the category of false consciousness as an umbrella term to explain the "error." As Chantal Mouffe has observed, "the economistic problematic of ideology" entailed both a dismissal of superstructures as epiphenomena of the structure, and an acknowledgment of their possible efficacy.[35] Similarly, McLellan sums up Marx's pejorative treatment of ideology as being comprised of two main elements:

> [F]irst, ideology was connected with idealism which, as a philosophic outlook, was unfavourably contrasted with materialism: any correct view of the world had to be, in some sense, a materialist view. Second, ideology was connected with the uneven distribution of resources and power in society: if the social and economic arrangements were suspect then so was the ideology that was part of them.[36]

Faced with these largely contradictory claims, Marxist theory was in need of creative rethinking and disambiguation. As Mouffe points out, within the tradition of Marxism, "Antonio Gramsci must surely be the first to have undertaken a complete and radical critique of economism."[37] While the second of the two points identified by McLellan remains a central aspect of all Marxist thinking on ideology, the first critique is crucially relaxed in Gramsci's reflection. Responding mostly to the codification of orthodox Marxism, as well as to the elaborations of revisionism and revolutionary syndicalism, Gramsci explicitly denounces as an error the reduction of ideology to a purely negative or trivial concept.[38] Instead, he distinguishes between "historically organic ideologies" and "ideologies

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[35] Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London: 1979), p. 169

[36] D. McLellan, *Ideology*, p. 9

[37] C. Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory,* pp. 169-170

[38] see E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Verso, London: 1985)

that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or "willed"."[39] Rather than being just the passive, inert perspiration of the material conditions of production, "[t]o the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organise" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc."[40]

In this sense, then, Gramsci radically redefines the significance of ideology within a Marxist paradigm. Lenin too, in *What Is To Be Done?,* had vigorously questioned the reductionist economicism of early scientific socialists, countering that the social reality of Russia required an active role for intellectuals in mobilizing ideas, and ultimately forming the party into a revolutionary vanguard. With Gramsci, in particular, not only is the alleged falsity of ideology contested, but ideology itself becomes a productive force in turn, both in preserving the structures of the status quo, and in potentially challenging them. In keeping with the metaphor of strategy, whereas for Lenin ideas acted as a "vanguard," in Gramsci's "war of position" the ideological battleground is the primary site of contestation. Moreover, Gramsci affirms an almost tangible materiality of an "ideological structure," embodied in agencies like the press, "its most dynamic part," but also: "libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of the streets."[41] As Laclau and Mouffe observe:

> Ideology is not identified with a 'system of ideas' or with the 'false consciousness' of social agents; it is instead an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles. […] In fact, through the concepts of historical bloc and of

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[39] Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks,* in M. Durham and D. Kellner, ed. by, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford: 2001, 2006), p. 15

[40] A. Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks,* p. 15

[41] Antonio Gramsci, "Cultural Themes: Ideological Material," in M. Durham and D. Kellner, ed. by, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford: 2001, 2006)

> ideology as organic cement, a new totalizing category takes us beyond the old base/superstructure distinction.[42]

Central to Gramsci's political thought is the concept of hegemony, intended as the moral and intellectual leadership that emanates from a class, but that at the same time transcends the old strategy of "class alliances" and purports to become the "collective will" of a "historical bloc".[43] This result can only be achieved through a patient "war of position" aimed at the constitution of a new historical bloc, i.e.: the capillary penetration of society and the proposal of a counter-hegemony capable of insinuating itself within the system of the dominant values, and ultimately capable of replacing it. This process, and the political finesse of the project, are clearly explicated by Mouffe:

> [A] class is hegemonic when it has managed to articulate to its discourse the overwhelming majority of ideological elements characteristic of a given social formation, in particular the national-popular elements which allow it to become the class expressing the national interest. A class's hegemony is, therefore, a more complex phenomenon than simple political leadership [which depends on] the creation of a unified coherent ideological discourse which will be the product of the articulation to its value system of the ideological elements existing within a determinate historical conjuncture of the society in question.[44]

Gramsci's contributions, then, include both the formulation of the concept of hegemony, with a strategy to achieve it, and also the full appreciation of the productive and material aspects of ideology. A paradigmatic shift is inaugurated by Gramsci, from a purely apophantic indictment of "false consciousness," toward the semantic distinction between "historically organic ideologies" and those that are "arbitrary, rationalistic, or 'willed'." The theme of the materiality of ideology, as opposed to its truth or falsehood, is also central in Louis Althusser's reflection. In Mouffe's account, Althusser's structuralist position:

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[42] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Verso, London: 1985), p. 67

[43] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* pp. 66-67

[44] C. Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London: 1979), p. 195

> understan[ds] by ideology a practice producing subjects. The subject is not the originating source of consciousness, the expression of the irruption of a subjective principle into objective historical processes, but the product of a specific practice operating through the mechanism of interpellation.[45]

For Althusser the materiality of ideology is embodied in the Ideological State Apparatuses: "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions," such as the religious, the educational, the family, the legal, the political, the trade-union, the communications, the cultural Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA).[46] Alongside the Repressive State Apparatuses, such as the army or the police, these ISAs ensure the societal function of the reproduction of labor-power, both in is skills and, crucially, in its submission to the ruling order, to the ruling ideology.

To this state-centric conception of Althusser reacts Michel Foucault. For Foucault the reproduction of the structures of power in society always happens from below, without any central point of origin, in a complex web of interrelations. However, as Slavoj Žižek observes, "one can never arrive at Power this way – the abyss that separates micro-procedures from the spectre of Power remains unbridgeable."[47] Foucault, nevertheless, has other reasons too to reject the very notion of ideology, and to prefer speaking of "discourse." Among these one is especially relevant in this context:

> The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of, for three reasons. The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse that falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category,

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[45] C. Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory,* p. 171

[46] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," [1969] in S. Žižek, ed. by, *Mapping Ideology* (Verso, London: 1994), pp. 110-111

[47] S. Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in S. Žižek, ed. by, *Mapping Ideology* (Verso, London: 1994), p. 13

> but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.[48]

Foucault's position is clear here. Especially the last sentence seems to complete the expulsion of any apophantic overtones in the debate on ideology, together with distancing Foucault from the Marxist tradition. In spite of his discomfort with the concept, and of his rejection of the very term, Foucault's contribution expresses the fundamental crux of the contemporary discussion on ideology. Moving from "truth" to the "effects of truth" produced by and through language critically reframes the study of ideology as a project of discourse analysis. The analysis of ideological discourse, then, needs to remain attuned to the specificity of this particular "genre," but at the same time it can borrow from the repertoires of practices developed in the fields of literary interpretation.

On the one hand, this has inspired a cultural anthropologist like Arjun Appadurai. Without attempting to solve the Gordian knot of the inner nature of ideology, Appadurai focuses on the workings of ideological forces in action, bracketing more intricate definitional questions. In his study on the contemporary global dynamics of cultural homogeneization and cultural heterogeneization, he introduces the vocabulary of ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes.[49] According to the author:

> The suffix –scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes […] These terms […] also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements […].[50]

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[48] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge* (Pantheon Books, New York: 1980), p. 118

[49] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Public Culture,* 2:2 (1990), in M. Durham and D. Kellner, ed. by, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford: 2001, 2006), p. 589

[50] A. Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference," p. 589

Considering cultural elements through the lens of these landscapes presents the advantage of offering a view that is at the same time general enough to allow interrelations to be observed, but without projecting an overarching sense of unity that might be unwarranted, especially in the contemporary conditions of disjuncture. Between Althusser's structuralism and Foucault's radical refusal to acknowledge any overarching structure of society, Appadurai seems to present a third position that, while probably closer to Foucault, still makes it possible to consider the ideological elements at work in society, as well as the real displacements and syncretic recombination that happen at the encounter of different cultural and ideological systems. More precisely, ideoscapes are:

> concatenation of images [and] they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. These ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation and the master term democracy. […] But the diaspora of these terms and images across the world, especially since the nineteenth century, has loosened the internal coherence that held them together in the Euro-American master narrative and provided instead a loosely structured synopticon of politics, in which different nation-states, as part of their evolution, have organized their political cultures around different keywords.[51]

As Appadurai notices, thinking in terms of ideoscapes requires placing a special attention on the semantics of ideological elements. In fact, as the local adaptation, cultural contamination and political appropriation of ideas, terms, images that are the basic components of ideologies becomes a more frequent phenomenon, it is all the more important to be sensitive to the polysemic possibilities of meaning encompassed by those elements. While most of these possibilities might remain latent in a given context, being cognizant of their existence may render us more intelligent of the real functioning of ideologies on the ground.

Most importantly, the concept of ideoscapes points to the plural, diverse character of ideologies. Rather than thinking of ideologies as discrete objects, endowed with definite

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[51] A. Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference," p. 591

boundaries and a clear "outside," Appadurai's formulation accounts for the idiosyncratic patterns of continuities and discontinuities that can be observed in political landscapes. Ideoscapes, in fact, do not dissolve political ideas in a world of pure indeterminacy, but recognize the clusters that form, contingently and sometimes ephemerally in different political, historical, and cultural contexts. Despite his rejection of the category of "ideology," Foucault's analysis of the variations that characterize the discursive formations of liberalism and neoliberalism are illustrative on this subject.

Foucault identifies neoliberalism as a distinctly new phenomenon in the development of an art of governing, both society and the self. The genealogy of this art of government points to a first discontinuity around the middle of the eighteenth century, when liberalism supplants the notion of *raison d'État* as the organizing principle of the state. According to Foucault this corresponds to a shift from the goal of managing social, economic, and even cultural forces so as to ensure the state's unlimited growth, to the idea of limiting the exercise of power in government.[52] "Frugal government," though, is for Foucault "not something other than *raison d'État,* an element external to and in contradictions with *raison d'État,* but rather its point of inflection in the curve of its development."[53] The liberal principle of limited government, while proclaiming the retreat of an overly intrusive state, at the same time produces a number of new governmental practices. These changes center primarily on the role of the market as a "site of truth":

> In the middle of the eighteenth century the market no longer appeared as, or rather no longer had to be a site of jurisdiction. On the one hand, the market appeared as something that obeyed and had to obey "natural," that is to say, spontaneous mechanisms […] On the other hand – and this is the second sense in which the market becomes a site of truth – […] when you allow the market to function by itself

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[52] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979,* ed. by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Palgrave MacMillan, New York: 2008), p. 27

[53] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics,* p. 28

> according to its nature, according to its natural truth […] it permits the formation of a certain price which will be called, metaphorically, the true price […][54]

The market gets constituted as a mechanism for the production of truth. State intervention on the market would distort this truth, and as such it has to be limited to a minimum. This principle of political economy becomes the cornerstone of what Appadurai might term the ideoscape of liberalism for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the liberal discourse of limited government also justifies the concrete practices that Foucault calls by the collective name of "governmentality." Linking together power techniques (government) and modes of thought (mentality), Foucault emphasizes his idea about the mutual constitution of power and knowledge. As one commentator has noted: "On the one hand, the term pin-points a specific form of *representation*; government defines a discursive field in which exercising power is 'rationalized' […] On the other hand, it also structures specific forms of intervention."[55]

These interventions, the deployment of the power of the state, become especially relevant at the inception of what Foucault identifies as a new phase in the development of the discourse of liberalism. Reacting to both external shocks, and its own internal congestions, the ideoscape of liberalism morphs in the twentieth century and spurs the formation of the distinctive discursive formation of neoliberalism. In what Foucault indicates as a German variant of this phenomenon, the traditional liberal commitment to the market as a natural entity, to be left alone by the state as much as possible, gives in to the belief that market mechanisms in general, and competition in particular can only function only inasmuch as they are actively promoted by the practice of government.[56] Rather than being mutually exclusive, "the state" and "the market" are mutually constitutive, and their

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[54] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics,* p. 31

[55] Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality," in *Economy and Society,* vol. 30, no. 2, May 2001, p. 191

[56] See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics,* Lecture of 7 February 1979, pp. 101-128

joint mode of operation relies on a peculiar art of government, both at the level of society, and of the individual. The state must intervene on society to create the conditions for efficient markets; in the context of the German reconstruction effort after the Second World War this amounts to the principle of *Gesellscchaftspolitik,* a comprehensive scheme of social policies that the state assumes as its fundamental task: "the object of governmental action is what the Germans call 'die soziale Umwelt': the social environment."[57] The ideoscape that had been centered on the principle of limited government now gets restructured in order to justify a strongly interventionist state.

Whereas the European version of neoliberalism is strongly statist, its American counterpart is characteristically inimical to the very idea of an interventionist state. Though the category of "neoliberalism" is typically taken today to refer to just the (Anglo-)American experience, or to (attempted) replicas of it around the world, Foucault traces the independent genealogy of a European variant. In Thomas Lemke's analysis: "Whereas the *Ordo*-liberals in West Germany pursued the idea of governing society in the name of the economy, the US neo-liberals attempt to re-define the social sphere as a form of the economic domain."[58] The economic sphere becomes the model itself of rationality and of conduct: *homo oeconomicus* is understood to be both a comprehensive descriptive representation and a normative goal.[59] However, crucially, this process of marketization of society does not amount to a rejection of the state on anarchist grounds. As Maurizio Lazzarato has pointed out: "Only the social, civil society, the nation, the state, etc., can provide the territorial limits, the boundaries of 'community' and the social bonds that the economy lacks."[60]Without these social bonds the mere interaction of pre-political individuals

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[57] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics,* p. 146

[58] Thomas Lemke, ""The Birth of Bio-politics'," p. 197

[59] See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitic,* Lecture of 28 March 1979, pp. 267-289

[60] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity, and the Reconstitution of the Social," in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 26, no. 6, November 2009, p. 129

cannot ensure the functioning of the economy; it is the role of the state to constitute those individuals as members of an "enterprise society."

In both its German and American configurations, neoliberalism is clearly distinct from the liberalism of "frugal government." Moreover, though the neoliberal state is an interventionist one, it is so in the pursuit of social values significantly different from, if not diametrically opposed to, the principles of welfare liberalism that I have briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In light of so much variation, the question might be raised of whether or not it even makes sense to qualify all these positions as "liberal" in some sense. In other words, when does an ideoscape cease to be identifiable as such, and it becomes something else? This is a central question in the study of ideology, as it pertains to the mechanisms for the production, allocation, and contestation of political meaning that define the political field of an ideoscape. Though I regard Appadurai's terminological innovation as a conceptual advancement over the old vocabulary of ideology, I prefer referring to the object of my study as "ideological discourse." In fact, I believe that placing the emphasis more explicitly on discourse illuminates a distinctive aspect of my analysis. There is something about the linguistic structure of specific ideological configurations that explains both their elasticity with regards to the semantic ground that they can cover, and their specificity with regards to how they articulate and express a variety of political views. This dimension points to what I have introduced above as the "grammar" of ideology. In the next chapter I will present some instruments for analyzing ideological discourse in both its semantic and syntactic dimensions.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have introduced the object of my study. My main argument is that ideology can be fruitfully regarded as a peculiar narrative genre. In my analysis ideological discourses are characterized by the recurrence of certain characteristics, both semantic and

syntactic. However, while the study of the morphology of different ideologies at the level of content has been systematically pursued by a line of thinkers of which Michael Freeden is the most illustrious contemporary exponent, I argue that the grammatical structure that ideologies exhibit has not received an adequate amount of attention. Semiotics, I contend, can significantly contribute to the analysis of how systems of ideas operate in the field of politics.

I identify three main elements of ideology, or rather three different angles from which ideology can be studied; taken together these three elements define the boundaries of my analysis. First, at a very intuitive level, an ideology tells a story about politics; as such, an ideological text can be studied as a distinctive narrative genre, with its own peculiar narrative formulas. Secondly, the standard narrative formula of ideology is centered around a tension between a status quo, which is described as unsatisfactory, for some reason, and an alternative future, which is instead normatively qualified as desirable. Connecting the descriptive and normative elements there is the action-oriented characteristics of ideology: in order for the transition to happen, the change needs to be effected by certain forces (individual agents, classes, divine intervention, etc.). Finally, the third element of my definition is that, along with the different semantic investments that distinguish different ideologies, it is also important to pay attention to the regularities with which meaning is configured by various ideological discourses. In other words: liberalism, socialism, and conservatism differ from each other for the story that they tell to justify the welfare state. But they also differ from each other for how they tell their story: who/what operates the relevant transformation of the status quo, and how that process is narrativized.

Historically, though, the critique of ideology has been more concerned with the question of whether ideologies faithfully represent the reality of politics, or unavoidably distort it. A standard position within the tradition of Marxism has been that of indicting ideology as false and/or irrelevant (to the extent that those two things are not contradictory). Gramsci's intervention clearly rescued ideology from irrelevance, and introduced a distinction between "historically organic" (hence "true"), "arbitrary, rationalistic, or 'willed'"

(hence "false") ideologies. Moreover, Gramsci emphasized the materiality of ideology, a theme that was then critically developed by Althusser and his analysis of Ideological State Apparatuses. This structuralist, state-centric view of ideology was then contested by Foucault: questioning the very category of ideology, Foucault calls for a shift from an abstract notion of "truth" to the actual "effects of truth" produced in discourse. I regard this move as fundamental in defining my own intervention: I propose to study the specific mechanisms for the production of "effects of truth" that characterize what Appadurai aptly terms ideoscapes, unsettled conglomerations of ideas that define a political landscape within given cultural and historical coordinates.

In conclusion, I argue that, moving beyond the classic question of whether ideologies are "true" or "false," a pertinent question to ask about ideologies today is about how they organize political meaning. To the extent that different ideologies can be studied as distinct narrative styles, attention must be paid not only to the political story that they tell, but also to how they convey meaning in telling that story. I argue that, by systematizing the study of what I have termed the "grammar" of specific ideologies, it is also possible to expose deep homologies among seemingly incongruous political arguments. As I have noted above, commenting on Freeden's metaphor, much like different rooms can perform different functions (a bedroom, a living room, etc.), and yet be similar with regards to their style or ambiance (rococo, Bauhaus, etc.), I argue that different ideological positions can also exhibit patterns of similarity with regards to their deep expressive structure. In Chapter III, in particular, I will construct a possible account of the deep grammar of liberalism, by looking at the work of some key liberal thinkers. In Chapter IV, then, I will use that basic sketch toward the definition of a liberal grammar to study political arguments that originate from outside the core of a liberal ideology, and yet seem to conform to the deep expressive structures of liberalism.

Before engaging in the analysis of actual examples of ideological discourse, I present some general considerations on what I regard as a fruitful way to approach the question of how ideologies should be studied as narrative objects. Typically ideologies organize, create

and contest political meaning by attempting to produce effects of truth and motivate their selected target to action. How exactly are these effects of truth produced? How can they be study in the specific narrative genre of political ideologies? In order to address these questions I now turn to Chapter II and to an illustration of some of the ways in which semiotics can contribute to the study of ideology.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SEMIOTICS TO THE STUDY OF IDEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I have introduced political ideology as a specific style of discourse characterized by certain structural features. In particular, I have identified three elements for a possible definition: 1) an ideology tells a story about politics; 2) the story moves from the description of an unsatisfactory status quo, and envisions a desirable future, to be reached via the deployment of political action; 3) the narration arranges meaning in certain recurrent configurations. Two general considerations follow from this. First, regarding ideology as a narrative genre suggests that the critique of ideology should be less concerned with the correspondence between the narration and some extra-discursive truth, and more poignantly aimed at unveiling the effects of truth produced within the narration itself. Secondly, focusing on the peculiar configurations of meaning of different ideological discourses renders pertinent, or even necessary, the analysis of the "grammar" of different ideologies, irreducible to, if not quite independent from, the semantic investment in actual political values.

In this chapter I argue that semiotics can provide analytical instruments useful for addressing these two questions: 1) How are effects of truth produced within ideological discourse? 2) How can the grammar of ideology be studied as a political construct? Here I will present some basic concepts of semiotics that I will then employ in the next chapters as I analyze pieces of ideological discourse. Redefining the question of ideology away from traditional apophantic concerns to frame it as an investigation of how sense is made available for political discourse requires a vocabulary and a mode of analysis that integrate and

complement the repertoire of canonical political theory. Studying concrete ideologies as mechanisms for the allocation, production and contestation of political meaning and value underscores the necessity for a general theory of how human beings come to terms with the complexity of the real and enter in a relation with it and with each other. Crucially, this involves elaborating a shared system for apportioning sense to discrete units, and organizing the relations between them. This process can be referred to as signification, or semiosis: "the operation which, by establishing a relationship of mutual presupposition […] between the signified and the signifier (F. de Saussure), produces signs."[61]

The notion of "sign" was defined by Medieval logicians according to the formula *aliquid pro aliquo:* something (which stands) for something (else), an entity used in lieu of the object it refers to. Augustine explained: "a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself."[62] This dyadic model (the sign vehicle and its referent) was understood by Thomas Hobbes as an instance of causation: "When a man hath *so often* observed like antecedents to be followed by like consequents, that *whensoever* he seeth the antecedent, he looketh again for the consequent; or when he seeth the consequent, maketh account there hath been the like antecedent; then he calleth both the antecedent and the consequent *signs* of one another, as clouds are signs of rain to come, and rain of clouds past."[63] *Real* clouds (the observed referent) are a sign of rain *to come* (the idea of rain evoked in the observer), much like for Augustine "a thing" brings to mind "something else." In both cases, the *aliquid pro aliquo* relation includes referents (objects of the real world) as its components.

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[61] Algirdas J. Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire Raisonné de la Théorie du Langage* (Hachette, Paris: 1979), p. 339. My translation.

[62] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana,* 2.1.1, cited in W. Noth, *A Handbook of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1990), p. 85

[63] Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1640: 4.9), cited in W. Noth, *A Handbook of Semiotics,* p. 86

This referential account of the sign is critically revised by John Locke, who in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* proposes a two-stage model of signification. First, ideas are developed as signs of things, Locke explains: "For, since the things the mind contemplates are none of them, beside itself, present to the understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are *ideas*." But then, in order to communicate these ideas, words are needed as the signs of those very ideas: "Words […] stand for nothing but the *ideas in the mind of him that uses them*."[64] This theory of the sign presents several shortcomings and limitations (I will discuss some of them, as well as the genuinely political implications of Locke's general theory of language in Chapter III); however it also introduces the fundamental conception that signs, understood as the relation between words and ideas, exist in a sphere separate from that of referents. This intuition is crucially developed in 1916 by Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course de Linguistique Générale* espouses a theory of the sign as a double entity, constituted by the relation between "a concept" (the signified) and "a sound-image" (the signifier).[65] Having expunged the referent from the sign relation, Saussure famously declares "the bond between the signifier and the signified" to be "arbitrary."[66] Contrary to the necessary relation that Hobbes had envisioned between "clouds" and "rain to come," this notion of arbitrariness between the *aliquid* and the *aliquo* locates phenomena of signification in the realm of convention, not nature.

Moreover, Saussure shifts the emphasis from sign to signs, from singular to plural, from part to whole, from parole to langue: if the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary, that alone cannot explain the value of the sign that results from their combination. Before the process of signification takes place, no ties of presuppositions link any two particular portions of "the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas" and "the equally vague plane of

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[64] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690, IV.21.4; and III.2.2.), cited in W. Noth, *A Handbook of Semiotics,* p. 87

[65] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (McGraw-Hill, New York: 1959) pp. 66-67

[66] F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* p. 67

sounds."[67] Nothing in the sound-image /freedom/ evokes the concept that will be associated to it. The meaning of each sign, on the contrary, depends on its interrelations with other signs within language, defined as: "a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others."[68] Semiotics, as envisioned by Saussure, is the field of inquiry which studies both the production of individual signs, and the functioning of the complex codes that operate as systems of signs.

If ideology is regarded as a system in which units of political meaning ("signs" like freedom, justice, equality, the individual, community, etc.) acquire sense from each other and from their concrete usages by human beings in their function as political actors (in descriptive, normative, and action-oriented articulations), then semiotics can offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of how political meaning is continuously recombined and deployed in concrete acts and practices of discourse. Much like different languages (English, Latin, Korean) connect "jumbled ideas" and "vague sounds" differently, thus creating signs that acquire value from each other, within a system, so different ideologies (liberalism, socialism, feminism) also configure their expressive and semantic space differently. Sometimes they connect the same signifier to different signifieds (how liberalism and socialism intend "equality" differently, for instance); sometimes they introduce new significations into the political (the emphasis placed by feminism on "patriarchy," for instance); sometimes they arrange the relations of interdependence among signs differently (how liberalism endows the "individual" with "freedom" and "reason," and then configures the "private" as the realm of "freedom," and the "public" as a sphere of "reason," for instance).

As I point out in chapter I, Michael Freeden's morphological approach to ideology is certainly insightful in highlighting how the (arbitrary) word-concept relation gets "cemented"

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[67] F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* p. 112

[68] F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* p. 114

through processes of decontestation. Here I propose to develop and integrate that intuition by shifting the focus from the decontestation of single word-concept relations ("*this* is what 'freedom' means") to a study of how in concrete examples of ideological discourse different ideas gain value from each other and hold together like grammatical functions in everyday speech (for instance, the idea of "equality of opportunity" might be predicated upon the idea of "justice as meritocracy," which in turn is predicated on the idea of "individual freedom"). Semiotics, I argue, provides a formidable repertoire of analytical tools that the study of ideological discourse may fruitfully adjust to its specific needs and employ toward its distinctive investigative goals.

Semiotics also contributes to this study by providing a possible framing of ideology as a discursive phenomenon. Umberto Eco declares his purpose to show: "in what sense many of the discussions about 'ideology' and 'ideological discourse' come within the scope of a semiotically oriented rhetoric and how the entire problem of ideology can be studied from a semiotic point of view."[69] Technically, classical rhetoric distinguished itself from other styles of discourse because of its reliance not on apodictic syllogisms deduced from 'first principles,' but on *enthymemes,* "i.e. syllogisms that [...] moved from probable premises, [...] to *emotionally* and *pragmatically* influence the listener."[70] Such distinction was not merely an operational one, but also, fundamentally, a definitional feature, an element on which rhetoric based its self-awareness.

This instrumental conception of discourse (influencing the listener both emotionally and pragmatically) was irreconcilable with Plato's idealism. For Plato, in fact, language "carves nature at its joints:" any other usage of the faculty of speech contravenes its fundamental ergon and as such it is to be condemned as false and misleading.[71] Moreover, in the *Cratylus,* Plato defends the view that language is intrinsically natural and necessary,

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[69] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1976), p. 277

[70] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 277 Emphasis in the original.

[71] Plato, *Phaedrus* 265d-266a

against conventionalism and the idea that it amounts merely to a system of arbitrary signs.[72] In the *Apology,* more concretely, Socrates famously defends himself from the accusation of making "the weaker argument defeat the stronger," pointing to the Sophists as the real perpetrators of the offense of rhetoric.[73] Among the latter, Gorgias emerges as one of the clearest advocates of a view of language as an entity independent of nature, and endowed with performative force in its own right, for "[s]peech is a powerful lord that with the smallest and most invisible body accomplishes most godlike works."[74]

Contra both Plato's indictment of rhetoric, and the Sophists' fascination with it, Aristotle specifies that "[rhetoric's] function [*ergon*] is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case;" it is then the rhetorician's task to elaborate the appropriate communicative strategy to elicit the desired effects of sense.[75] Moreover, rhetoric is not concerned with what is certain, necessary, but it pertains to the realm of *dynamis,* the potentiality that needs an efficient cause to be actualized: "we debate about things that admit two possibilities […] Thus, it is necessary for an enthymeme and a paradigm to be concerned with things that are for the most part capable of being other than they are."[76] Rhetoric, in other words, is classically founded on the explicit recognition of the probable, not certain character of its premises, and consequently on the admission that its conclusions depended heavily on certain semantic choices operated within the confines of the semantic space opened by the non unambiguous premises.

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[72] for a critique of Plato's position in the *Cratylus* see: G. Genette, *Mimologique: Voyage en Cratylie* (Éditions du Seuil, Paris: 1976)

[73] Plato, *The Apology*, in M. Cohen and N Fermon, ed. by *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ: 1996), p. 20

[74] Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen,* in G.A. Kennedy, tr. by, *Aristotle, On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2007), p. 253

[75] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* in G.A. Kennedy, tr. by, *Aristotle, On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2007), p. 36

[76] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* in G.A. Kennedy, tr. by, *Aristotle, On Rhetoric,* pp. 37, 41

Ideology, on the contrary, omits to acknowledge its limits as a truth-oriented style of discourse, when it does not actively seek to conceal them. As Eco clearly puts it:

> I mean by ideological discourse a mode of argument that, while using probable premises and considering only a partial section of a given semantic field, pretends to develop a 'true' argument, thus covering up the contradictory nature of the Global Semantic System and presenting its own point of view as the only possible conclusion (whether this attitude is deliberately and cynically adopted by a sender in order to deceive a naïve addressee, or whether the sender is simply the victim of his own one-sidedness).[77]

Ideology, then, starts from "probable premises," then activates only some of their semantic properties, and finally reach conclusions that it presents as "true." In constructing and justifying this narrative edifice, ideological discourse relies on certain devices aimed at the production of effects of truth. Here I will briefly present some of these devices that I will then identify and critically assess in the following chapters. In particular, I will briefly illustrate how semiotics might refine the classical understanding of rhetoric through the use of categories like overcoding and abduction. Then I will introduce the actantial model as an alternative to both the subject-centric assumptions of mainstream grammar and the centrality of a certain idea of individualism in contemporary politics. Finally, I will discuss the semiotic square as a powerful instrument for mapping the field of interrelations among different terms in a system of signification.

TAKING MEANING AND MAKING IT STICK: ABDUCTION AND OVERCODING

The semiotic categories of abduction and overcoding are prime examples of how ideological discourse relies on certain narrative devices to produce its effects of truth. Eco, in fact, further defines ideology as "a message which starts with a factual description, and then

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[77] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* p. 278

tries to justify it theoretically, gradually being accepted by society through a process of overcoding."[78] Overcoding, in turn, is defined as the operation by which "on the basis of a pre-established rule, a new rule [is] proposed which govern[s] a rarer application of the previous rule."[79] This is a specification of a concept that Eco derives from Charles Sanders Peirce, that of 'abduction.'

Alongside the familiar categories of deduction and induction, abduction too provides a pattern of logic operations aimed at the elaboration of inferences.[80] In the case of deduction, given a rule and a case, a result is deduced, the classic formula being the syllogism: All men are mortal (rule); Socrates is a man (case); Socrates is mortal (result – always certain). Deductive reasoning, though, is not productive of new knowledge, as its operation is limited to the application of an already established general rule to a specific case. As such, deductions are rarely of use in the realm of political ideology that organizes discourse about essentially contested concepts, for which no rules hold self-evidently, and incontestably true.

In the case of induction, on the other hand, given a case and a result, a *probable* rule is inferred. Consider the traditional conservative defense of prudence: the French Revolution was inspired by abstract reason (case); the French Revolution had undesirable effects (result); all political change inspired by abstract reason leads to undesirable effect (rule – never certain). The probability of the rule that is derived is directly correlated to the number of observed cases, a principle expressed by Edmund Burke in his vindication of prejudice against the attacks of the "enlightened age": "we cherish [prejudices] to a very considerable degree […] and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them."[81] Unlike deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, is frequently used

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[78] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* p. 290

[79] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* p. 133

[80] see U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* p. 131

[81] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France [1790]* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1993), p. 87

in political argumentation; however, the "rules" that it produces, and that might then become the bases for further deductions, are never certain, and as such they can be easily contested.

In the case of abduction, finally, given a rule and a result, a probable case is inferred. For instance: All Frenchwomen speak French (rule); these women speak French (result); these women are French (case – never certain). It is evident that abduction does not provide the kind of certain conclusions that deduction guarantees. Also, unlike induction, abduction cannot hope to increase the probability of its inferences through the accumulation of different cases. Far from solving the problems of either, abduction would seem to combine the shortcomings of both. However, abductive reasoning is the typical method by which human beings make sense of the world around them. Abduction is both contextual (the example above, for instance, would sound quite different in Paris or in Quebec City) and intuitive (out of many possible hypotheses, it chooses one without a necessary logical justification). Political discourse abounds with these kinds of (probable) inferences. The heuristic character of abductive inferences, though, has tended to disqualify them with ideologies preoccupied with providing absolute rational force to their argumentation. Scientific socialists, for instance, would characterize their project as a chain of necessary, not probable inferences; likewise, as I will show in chapter III, Victorian liberalism insists on the superiority of the inductive method as the only mode for the acquisition of knowledge truly compatible with reason and science. Nevertheless, leaving aside such normative concerns, recognizing and understanding the functioning of abduction is an important element in an analysis of how effects of truth are produced within ideological discourse.

The discursive style of ideology makes use of abduction primarily by charging certain statements (which can be easily decoded at one level of signification) with extra meaning (which requires the activation of specific effects of truth). In the case of overcoding, the probable inference is that of a surplus of meaning that is circumstantially associated to a message that is already literally understood through a certain code. For instance, in the case of slang, overcoding enables us to understand a message beyond (and sometimes regardless

of) its literal meaning. When overcoding is successful and established over time and over a definite community of speakers, certain ready-made expressions, sequential linkings of concepts and ideas, or simply recurrent portions of discourse acquire the power of immediately evoking certain signifieds, which in turn are associated with certain emotional states, either euphoric or dysphoric. In the context of American Cold War propaganda, the phrase "the Free World" meant something more specific than that same phrase would have meant in the context of the 19th century, for instance: it carried with it the extra meaning of liberal-democratic, capitalistic, anti-Soviet, and ultimately morally good and desirable. This linkage of cognitive and emotional elements is one of the most important finalities that ideologies possess. In order to achieve these effects of sense, ideologies resort to the devices already recognized in rhetoric.

To the extent that rhetoric pertains to the organization and delivery of persuasive argumentation, unlike other narrative styles (i.e.: the ideal type of "science") it is concerned with the aesthetic dimension of language. This is manifested primarily through the use of the various rhetorical figures, whose function is both hedonistic, stimulating in the addressee the pleasure of being addressed with a certain style of discourse; and at the same time instrumental for the very first requirement of any persuasive discourse: that the attention of the receiver be gained and maintained.

A fundamental characteristic of rhetorical figures should consequently be their novelty and originality. However, due to the accumulation of such tropes over the centuries, a more or less codified canon has been established that correspond to the model of "good writing" or "good public speaking." Such triteness and predictability are often associated with rhetoric today. Rhetoric can then be considered as "the result of a millenary overcoding that has in some cases produced catachreses, that is, figures of speech so strictly coded that the entity for which they stood has definitely lost its sign-vehicle, as in the case of the /table's legs/."[82] Nonetheless, the possibility of new overcoding always remains, and it constitutes a

[82] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* p. 279

powerful instrument of ideological discourse. The phrase "states' rights," for instance, became in the context of Jim Crow America a (thinly veiled) reference to the goal of maintaining racial segregation, and as such it enabled the advancement of a certain agenda more effectively than an explicit appeal to racist attitudes could have done. Likewise, the articulation of a "pro-choice" position enables its advocates to deflect accusations of regarding abortion as a goal in and of itself, while at the same time signaling, through a process of contextual overcoding, the objective of defending/promoting the right of women to choose (whether or not to carry on a pregnancy).

Though the aesthetic dimension of discourse is the most immediately recognizable element of rhetoric (and of ideology), it is only the outer layer of a more complex narrative construct. Before being expressed, more or less pleasantly, more or less persuasively, political ideas need to be "determined," in the sense that the virtually infinite chain of their semantic associations needs to be given boundaries. In other words, for each unit of meaning a privileged path is identified out of the semantic web that surrounds it. For instance, for a concept like /industrialization/ all the attributes and effects generally deemed to be positive would be selected by what ecologists refer to as the macro-ideology of industrialism, while the same discourse would gloss over negative attributes and effects that could be just as validly associated to that concept.

This effect of truth, a rhetorical device that organizes the semantic field for the purposes of promoting a specific truth, is akin to the process of decontestation discussed by Freeden. Consider the meaning of /freedom/ within an ideology of liberalism. Out of the polysemous potentiality that it might evokes, liberal discourse privileges the associations with attributes that are generally considered positive, desirable in a certain political culture. Freedom, therefore, typically comes to imply a sense of *opportunity, openness,* even *choice*. The negative connotation of /freedom/ as lack, for instance, though it is an equally valid portion of the semantic space of the concept, is instead typically silenced in liberal discourse. So, that economic freedom might involve the lack of economic security is something that free market advocates in the tradition of classical liberalism generally do not acknowledge as an

implication of /freedom/, but as a function of some other factor external to the notion itself of /freedom/. At the same time, the opportunities that arise when states do not intervene on the economy, for instance, are emphatically advertised as a result of, or rather coterminous with /freedom/. Ideological discourse relies on processes of overcoding to charge certain concepts with extra meaning, so that only the desired effects of truth will be activated.

Basic concepts of discourse analysis like abduction and overcoding can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of the specific style of discourse employed by political ideologies. So, for instance, a neoliberal discourse on the value of the free market might choose to organize its argument from the premise of the inefficiency of welfare state expenditures. From this starting point (descriptive) it would then conclude that the provision of welfare state services should be minimized (action-oriented), and that the free market would allocate scarce resources more efficiently (normative). In doing so, the complementary premise that welfare state expenditures are only inefficient under certain conditions, and the contradictory premise that free market expenditures might be just as inefficient are excluded from consideration. In general, by employing the discursive strategies of abduction and overcoding, a political ideology takes a portion of meaning from the semantic field, and makes it stick as true, often to the deliberate exclusion of alternative interpretations.

Rethinking Agency Beyond Individual Agents: The Actantial Model

The notions of abduction and overcoding can illustrate how ideological discourse selects and activates specific portions of a given semantic field. In the case of a political ideology this is relevant because it defines the role that certain concepts with their implications (whether activated or deactivated) play in the overall economy of argumentation. Semiotic analysis helps to deconstruct the communicative strategies through which ideological discourse produces these effects of truth. At a more fundamental level, however, the most basic aspect of the development of a narrative pertains to the allocation

of agency within the system of a given semantic field. Who/what gets the story going, moving from premises to conclusions? Is an impersonal force (destiny, biology, divine justice) capable of determining action, or can only human beings do that? Is human agency necessarily located at the level of the individual, or can action be explained as the function of entities greater than, and irreducible to, aggregations of individuals? Can action be explained not by invoking a unified acting consciousness (the stylization of the individual), but by considering the various facets that coexist in it, not always harmoniously?

Different ideologies answer those questions differently, more or less explicitly. Consider, for instance, how various forms of feminism tell stories that indict biology, social structures, or specific institutions as the culprit for the disadvantaged condition of women. In general, analyzing a narrative text typically requires identifying certain states of the world that are described, the actions that take place during the narration, and the agents that perform those actions. Moreover, the style of the narration may be more or less explicitly disseminated with axiological markers: from a harmonious past into a corrupted present-future (in a narrative of decline), or from a brutish past into an enlightened present-future (in a narrative of progress), for instance.

Liberal grammar, I argue, employs a model in which action is unequivocally understood as being performed by individual agents, whether singularly or in aggregation. Before even articulating their claims on the ontological and normative value of individualism, liberal thinkers employ a language that establishes the individual as the fundamental unit of action. This constitutes a meta-ideological dimension of liberal discourse, for it configures its hegemony beyond the confines of liberal ideology. This is, however, one model for the allocation of agency among several possible alternatives. Understanding the meta-ideological success of liberalism, I argue, requires explaining it in relation to competing grammatical models.

The conception of agency inherent to both the political project of liberalism, and to its meta-ideological articulations is critically engaged by Judith Butler. In discussing the performative dimension of language, Butler notes how neither identity nor the (gendered)

body preexist it, but they are both created in and through language. Nevertheless, since grammar is typically understood as a pre-political, a-political matter, the effects that the structures of language produce are also misrepresented as natural. In Butler's analysis, then:

> It is […] clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a 'we' or an 'I' that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior. More appropriate, I suggest, would be a vocabulary that resists the substance metaphysics of subject-verb formations and relies instead on an ontology of present participles.[83]

Contra the expressive assumptions of a liberal meta-ideology, Butler exposes the distorting, performative character of language. In the *Genealogy of Morals* Friedrich Nietzsche had also lamented the distortions to "Truth" that the superficial structures of language entail. In his famous example, saying that "the lightning flashes" suggests an entity (the lightning) that preexists and causes the flashing, whereas, in fact, subject and action are coterminous in this example. In Nietzsche's famous words, "there is no doer behind the deed, the deed is everything." Moreover, the very construction of the subject is largely a function of language, a process that Nietzsche calls "inpsychation."[84] Exposing the inherently paradoxical nature of *"the right to make promises"* contra the power of *forgetfulness,* he observes that such an entitlement presupposes that:

> [A] human being must necessarily have first himself become something one could predict, something bound by regular rules, even in the way he imagined himself to himself, so that finally he is able to act like someone who makes promises—he can make himself into a pledge for the future![85]

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[83] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Theater Journal,* Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec. 1988), p. 521

[84] Walter Kaufmann, ed. by, *On The Genealogy of Morals And Ecce Homo* (Vintage Books, New York: 1989), p. 57

[85] For this section of the Second Essay of Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie Der Moral* I rely on Prof. Ian Johnston's translation, available at: http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm.

Engaging in the peculiar illocutionary act that promising is requires making oneself into "a pledge for the future." That pledge, in turn, is renewed not only each time that a promise is made, but also each time that normal linguistic activity is performed, for language in turn rests on the meta-linguistic promise that sense be bound by certain predictable "regular rules." Bound by those rules, and largely defined by them, is not only the "I" that inhabits contingent speech acts, but also the "I" that is continuously constructed and reconstructed by the iterative activity of enunciation. Both Nietzsche and Butler are aware of the effects of truth that are produced by the rules of subject-centric grammar; Butler, in particular, also envisages alternative linguistic structures, as she calls for "an ontology of present participles." What would those linguistic structures look like? To what, exactly, should they be alternative? In order to try and clarify what these questions entail, I will give two examples of how different grammatical formulations may affect the universes of meaning that are evoked.

First, consider the statement: "I am a vegetarian." A stable subject (I) declares something about herself, attaches to its self an enduring quality (being vegetarian) that comes with certain semantic implications, or at least presuppositions (e.g.: abstaining from eating meat for moral or religious reasons). Consider now the statement: "I am not eating meat." Though the two formulations cover much of the same semantic ground, the latter assumes much less about the subject and her connection to the action of not eating meat. The emphasis in this second formulation switches toward the action, of which the subject is but a contingent agent, whereas in the first formulation it clearly remains with the subject and her attributes.

At this point it is important to point out that there is a crucial difference between the superficial *form* of the present participle and the deeper "*ontology* of present participles" that Butler invokes. Consider a second example, taken from the TV show *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. In the second season episode "Trick or Treat," Larry David is shown in front of a theater, humming a Wagner tune, when a man also waiting to see a film yells: "You know what you are? You are a self-loathing Jew!" To which Larry promptly responds: "Hey I may loathe

myself, but it has nothing to do with the fact that I'm Jewish!" In the first formulation Larry *is* something that gets indicated by the ready-made semantic unit of the "self-loathing Jew,' a trope to which he is accused of conforming. In his retort, on the other hand, Larry deconstructs that very trope, disentangling the "self-loathing" and "Jewish" elements of his being. The identity of the subject thus gets destabilized, Larry's self dissolved in a series of traits that are only contingently associated in his person. In this second ontology the subject is not an entity endowed with necessary immanence, but rather a "bundle" of present participles. The actions that they narrativize constitute and continuously reconstitute the subject, rather than descending from it.

If these intuitions about the role of grammar in shaping our universes of sense are taken seriously, investigating them systematically proves a fruitful enterprise for the scholar of political ideologies as well. If, before even expressing their distinctive political concepts, different forms of ideological discourse already establish their narrative styles, and if these carry hidden political implications, unveiling them can crucially contribute to the project of a comprehensive analysis of ideology. Here I will try and address these questions by first considering the dominant linguistic structures of a liberal meta-ideology, and then reflecting on how different claims about agency may inform different discursive configurations. In particular, I will introduce Algirdas Greimas' opposition between the level of a superficial grammar and the deeper structures of language.[86]

On the surface of grammar it may be noticed that the central role of the subject in organizing sense corresponds to the liberal assumption of the individual as the protagonist of action. At a deeper level, however, Greimas identifies an "actantial model" in which action itself becomes the focal point of the narration, and the actant is defined in purely syntactic terms, as the entity that occupies a certain position with regards to the act, before any semantic investment is made.[87] If Greimas is correct in exposing the "subject" as a

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[86] Algirdas J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1987)

contingent construct of grammar, this might constitute a formidable platform for launching a critique of the meta-ideological hegemony of the "individual," for it would seem that the latter is continuously reinforced and reaffirmed by the former. In other words, if at least part of the success of the narrative style of liberalism is explained as a function of the structural correspondence between the individual and the subject, deconstructing the latter might also help relativize the former, potentially opening up the space for alternative meta-ideological formations.

Greimas starts by discussing the structure of narration as the concatenation of enunciates. An enunciate was classically understood as being composed, fundamentally, of two parts: theme and rheme. The theme is the thing being talked about, whereas the rheme is what is noted about it. Alternative formulations of the same structure oppose topic and comment or, in more quotidian parlance, subject and predicate. As Marsciani and Zinna point out, this basic opposition, already illustrated by Plato in the *Sophist,* survives in the contemporary linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky.[88] Moreover, this binary formula presides over the implicit syntactic structure of liberalism, the style of political discourse that more decidedly invests into the dichotomy between subjects and predicates, postulating a fundamental distinction between individual selves that pre-exist their actions, and such actions. For a self to be assumed to exist before it acts, and independently of its action, a grammar needs to be in place in which that subject is kept logically distinct from, and prior to its predicates.

The Danish linguist Ludwig Hjelmslev, though, contests that the predicative function can be attributed to just one element of the enunciate, an assumption that greatly reduces the applicability of the scheme. (For instance, in a painting, as opposed to an enunciate of a verbal language, it would not be possible to distinguish between a topic and a comment.) More poignantly yet, French linguist Lucien Tesnière calls into question the precedence

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[87] A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning,* pp. 106 and ff.

[88] see F. Marsciani and A. Zinna, *Elementi di Semiotica Generativa* (Editrice Esculapio, Bologna: 1991), pp. 54-55

accorded to the subject in the canonical scheme, as well as its very status. Plato had affirmed that the combination of a noun and a verb gives origin to the smallest possible form of discourse. Opposing the statements "Theaetetus sits" and "Theaetetus (…) is flying," he had concluded that one was true and the other false, by virtue of the first predicating something that was already true *of* the subject, and the second something false. More generally, he had determined: "When other, then, is asserted of you as the same, and not-being as being, such a combination of nouns and verbs is really and truly false discourse."[89] The predicate was then understood as a mere appendage of the subject, a bundle of already existing properties of which the predicate could only take note.

To this subject-centric view, Tesnière opposes the centrality of the predicate. If attention is shifted from theme to rheme, the verb can be exploded into a more complex structure. This structure is understood in dramatic terms, as such involving actors, circumstances and a process. If Plato's subjects were bundles of semantic and syntactic properties (traits that survive in Hobbes' and Locke's constructions of the self), Tesnière's verbs emanate systems of relations among a certain number of "actants", depending on the structure of the verb itself. So, for instance, the predicate "Mary walks" has one actant; "Mary eats a cake" has two; and "Mary gives a bag to John" has three.

Building on Tesnière's original intuition, and abstracting from Vladimir Propp's morphology of the Russian folktale in search for structural universals, Greimas defines the actant in purely syntactic terms, as the entity that occupies a certain position with regards to the act, before any semantic investment is made.[90] He goes on to propose a syntax of the enunciates, in an attempt to systematize his theory about the deep structures of language.[91] In particular, he focuses on binary and ternary enunciates, based on how many actants they

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[89] Plato, *Sophist* (1st World Library: 2008), p. 131

[90] see A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire Raisonné,* p. 3 and ff.

[91] see A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1987), p. 106 and ff.

involve. In the first case ("Mary eats a cake"), Greimas distinguishes a Subject Actant (S_1) and an Object Actant (O). Dismissing the opposition between "Mary eats a cake" and "a cake is eaten by Mary" as merely formal in nature, he identifies a common structure so that, unlike the superficial grammatical positions of subject and object, the Subject Actant and the Object Actant remain unvaried. In the second case, that of ternary enunciates ("Mary gives a bag to John"), Greimas calls the actants Sender (S_2), Object (O) and Receiver (R) respectively, again regardless of their superficial grammatical position.

Binary enunciates indicate utterances describing a status.[92] The function that relates the Subject Actant and the Object Actant is one of junction, a category that is deployed in the modalities of conjunction and disjunction. Accordingly, the notation: $S_1 \cap O$ designates a status in which the Subject Actant is united with its object of value. Conversely, the notation: $S_1 \cup O$ describes a status in which the Subject Actant is separated from its object of value. If S_1 = Locke's individual, and O = Property, then $S_1 \cap O$ describes the status of the state of nature in the *Second Treatise of Government*. If S_1 = Hobbes' individual, and O = security, then $S_1 \cup O$ describes the status of the state of nature in *Leviathan.*

Ternary enunciates indicate utterances of doing.[93] The function that relates Sender, Object and Receiver is one of transformation, a category that gets articulated in the modalities of realization and virtualization. Realization indicates the narrative program of a Sender (the French term, *destinateur,* is better suited to avoid any semantic cluttering of this syntactic position) that purports to unite a Receiver (*destinataire*) with its Object of value: $S_2 \rightarrow (R \cap O)$. On the contrary, virtualization indicates the narrative program of a Sender that purports to separate a Receiver from its Object of value: $S_2 \rightarrow (R \cup O)$. If S_2 = Leviathan, R = the parties to the covenant,[94] and O = security, then the narrative program of Hobbes'

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[92] see A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning,* p. 90 and ff.

[93] see A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning,* p. 90 and ff.

social contract can be described as: $S_2 \rightarrow (R \cap O)$. If S_2 = a corrupt government, R = the individuals in civil society, and O = Property, then Locke's indictment of tyranny can be read as: $S_2 \rightarrow (R \cup O)$.

In general, social contract theory might be characterized as a narrative project in which processes of realization and virtualization result in the conjunction and disjunction, respectively, of Subject Actants and Object Actants. Gone is the vision of independent individuals deliberately seeking association with others in order to conserve their pre-political selves. And effaced is also, from this structural reading, the delusion of grammatical subjects owning the actions of their aggregative processes. Actions, and political actions at that, take analytical precedence in this view, displacing at the same time the most basic assumptions of liberalism, a position that denies the inherently political character of humans. What Aristotle's claim had rendered with unfortunate grammar, i.e.: that political action defines (hu)man(s); a structural reading of social contract theory can now establish with greater clarity. Additionally, it can do so against the background of the position that is less amicable to such a view of the relationship between humans and politics.

Greimas' profound narrative grammar, moreover, can extend its analytical value beyond social contract theory, into political theory more generally. The infinite combinations of such enunciates of status and of doing provide the deep structure for any discursive formation, making it possible to construct models of any given text in which the structural relations among its elements appear pristine and uncluttered by semantic investments. Moreover, various typologies of discursive formations are classified by Greimas, and various modalities are employed to specify the relative positions of the enunciates in a discourse (for instance, the Subject Actant typically has to acquire the "will-to-do," then the "knowledge-of-how-to-do," and then the "ability-to-do" before it can act). These can account for a nuanced variety

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[94] it is important to notice that no biunivocal relation is assumed by this model between actants, at the level of deep grammar, and actors, at the level of superficial grammar. So, for instance, one actant can be narrativized by many actors, as in this case; or an actor can syncretically take on various actantial roles in the same enunciate, as in the case of autonomous individuals imposing a law onto themselves, for instance.

of situations, and thus fruitfully make sense of many of the narratives that are employed in political theory.

If Greimas is correct in identifying these deep structures of language, his system constitutes a powerful and parsimonious instrument for the analysis of how human beings share meaning and quarrel over it. If these elements of language could be uncovered in the specific genre of political discourse, more systematic comparisons could be attempted among various ideological formations. In turn, this would allow a systematic assessment of different political ideologies in their ability to make sense of the world of politics. In particular, the hypothesis that the current meta-ideological hegemony of liberalism is, among other things, also a function of some peculiar quality of liberal discourse that replicates the dominant structures of language, could be tested against an informed examination of its structural characteristics. Additionally, establishing what exactly is that makes liberalism semiotically successful, could provide crucial insights into some of the requirements for a potentially alternative meta-ideological formation.

To be sure, the world of politics, and by derivation that of political ideologies, are certainly too complex to be reduced to a finite number of algorithms and functions, as structuralist theories would do. Focusing on the tension between "structure" and "agency," however, there seems to be a particularly fertile area that stretches from these two poles and oscillates between them. In general, it seems that some of the more contested aspects of classic structuralism refer to the unsatisfactory explanation of the parts in relation to the whole. Not only is *parole* considered derivative from *langue,* but the role of the speaker appears that of a mere vehicle for the expression of signs. In Levi-Strauss' eloquent words, "the subject is the spoilt brat of philosophy".

If some of the parsimony of Greimas' categories is renounced, without rejecting their validity altogether, and if a set of analytical instruments peculiar to the argumentative style of political ideologies is devised, at the expense of naïve pretenses of universality, then the systematic mapping of political ideologies becomes an endeavor worth embarking on. If the premise is accepted that political ideologies can be considered as a genre, like other clusters

of literary works and more generally narrative objects, an area of commonality is postulated among them that allows for systematic comparisons and evaluations. Accordingly, a turn to post-structural semiotics might prove a fitting approach to the study of political theory and political ideologies, especially when considered in their meta-ideological functions. Resisting what Butler calls "the substance metaphysics of the subject-verb formations," the actantial model might provide the blueprint for what she envisages as "an ontology of present participles."

Alongside Greimas' reflection on the deep structures of grammar, the feminist tradition of critical engagement with the traditional subject might also prove beneficial in providing content and depth to this otherwise discouragingly abstract project. Rosi Braidotti's work on "nomadic subjects," in particular, promises to be a formidable contribution to the task of "making the individual uncomfortable." The nomadic subject is for Braidotti "a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity."[95] Outside of "fixity" and "essential unity," Braidotti's subjects are not thrown into a sterile world devoid of any meaning; on the contrary they "transition without a teleological purpose" through an environment pregnant with possibilities, one in which meaning is distributed in "nonphallogocentric" configurations.[96] This "rhizomatic" universe of meaning (to borrow Deleuze's felicitous metaphor as Braidotti herself does) in turn complements the "ontology of present participles" that Butler intuits and for which Greimas' actantial model provides a fitting systematization.

A grammar that reaffirms and perpetuates subject-centric linguistic structures also paves the way for a conception of the world in which individuals own their actions and choose

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[95] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (Columbia University Press, New York: 1994), p. 22

[96] see R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects,* p. 23

them. If the primacy of the subject in grammar is renounced, and if the primacy of the individual in politics is also called into question, a model may be constructed in which selves are constituted through acts and language, and through acts and language they are continuously undone and reconstituted. Breaking free of the cage of syntax can also deliver the self from the delusion of a stable identity, a semiotic and political device whose oppressive potential is relentlessly reinforced and reproduced in society. If absolute freedom is ultimately unattainable, resisting that power remains a crucial site of political struggle for the animal that Aristotle characterized as political by virtue of its linguistic faculties. If Butler is correct in identifying the "substance metaphysics of subject-verb formations" as the fundamental structure of language that both distorts and predetermines the world that it purports to express, then a careful deconstruction of the seemingly inert matter of grammar is the necessary precondition for effectively resisting the political order that it produces. The individual is but a catachresis of the subject.

MAPPING NARRATIVE TENSIONS: THE SEMIOTIC SQUARE

Ideological discourse aims at the production of effects of truth in the semantic field of politics. A political ideology typically tells a story in which an undesirable status quo can be overcome, and a desirable alternative to it can be reached. Accordingly, narrative devices like abduction and overcoding are employed in defining the status quo and its alternative, as well as their character of being more or less desirable. Likewise, narrativizing the action that solves the tension requires allocating agency in ways consistent with an ideology's semantic and political investments (e.g.: individual agents for liberalism; class for socialism).

Moreover, semiotic analysis can account for how ideological discourse needs to delimit its semantic field in order to sustain its narrative structure. Political ideologies typically organize meaning in oppositional terms, by pitting different concepts against each other, in order to associate euphoric value with some principles, ideas, states of the world, while

charging the rival entities with dysphoric connotations. Consider the case of anarchism, or at least certain versions of it, in which an opposition is constructed between "freedom" and "the state," for instance, in which the former is desirable and just in its own right, whereas the latter is portrayed as inimical to it, and inherently undesirable. The project of anarchism, then, could be said to coincide, in the crudest of its articulation, with the abolition of the state so that freedom might flourish. From state (description); to non-state (action-oriented); to freedom (normative).

Semiotics offers powerful tools for systematizing the study of such oppositional schemata in ideological discourse. The "semiotic square," in particular, accounts for the complex possibilities of sense that two antonyms can produce (see Figure 1). Greimas defines it as "the visual representation of the logical articulation of any semantic category."[97] Inherited from classical logic, the semiotic square starts from a pair of semantic units that can be constructed as entertaining a relation of reciprocal contrariness. In the sketch of anarchism presented above, these two terms would be "freedom" and "the state." On each of the two units, then, the logical operation of negation is also performed, so that each generates its contradictory. Negating "freedom" produces "unfreedom;" negating "the state" produce "statelessness." The two terms on the top horizontal axis ("freedom" and "the state") are called contraries, and their opposition is a qualitative one. The terms of the two couplets on the diagonal axes (or schemes) are called contradictories, and their relation is one of negation. The two terms on the bottom horizontal axis are called subcontraries. Finally, on the vertical axes (deictics) there lie relations of presupposition (for instance, "statelessness" suggests, or may imply in an anarchist worldview, "freedom"). This illustration has the advantage of capturing both the oppositional schema of a possible anarchist argument ("freedom" v. "the state"), and a pattern for its narrative unfolding (from "the state," to "statelessness," and then finally to "freedom," in a typical 'butterfly' movement).

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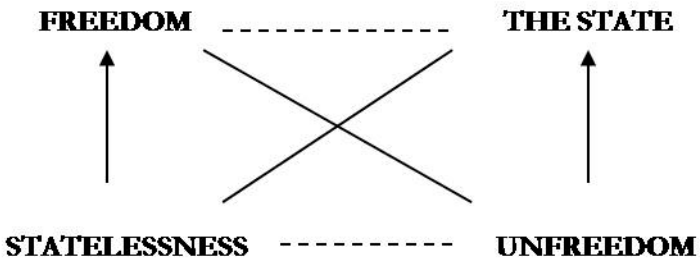
[97] A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire Raisonné,* pp. 29 – 33

Figure 1. The Semiotic Square: Freedom vs. The State



In chapter V I will use the semiotic square to map some of the possible articulations of meaning that inhere to the opposition between individual and community. The semiotic square, I argue, can both systematize the terms of the debates that have historically opposed advocates of liberalism and of communitarianism, and, most crucially, it can point to alternative configurations of meaning that the simple opposition individual-community risks obliterating. Together with the clarity with which the concept of overcoding points to the ways in which ideology charges portions of discourse with additional meaning, and with the relativization of dominant structures of language and discourse that the actantial model allows, the semiotic square can offer an important contribution to a study aimed at unveiling the discursive practices that make liberalism so successful as a meta-ideology, and at the same time at imagining the conditions under which different meta-ideological formations might emerge.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have illustrated some of the ways in which semiotics can contribute to the study of ideology. If ideology is regarded as a distinctive narrative genre, in fact, the

discipline that systematizes the analysis of signification and of its textual manifestations can provide both rigor and insight into the matter of how political meaning is constructed, mobilized, and contested through ideological discourse. In particular, as I argued in chapter I, it is necessary for the critique of ideology to definitively abandon the traditional dichotomy of truth/falsehood in assessing the value and impact of ideology. Rather, I maintain that in considering the operations of ideological discourse in the field of politics it is expedient to reframe the analysis toward the unveiling of the effects of truth that are produced within the discursive practices of ideology.

Ideology, I have noted, employs a style of discourse similar to that of rhetoric. As per Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, it too deals "with things that are for the most part capable of being other than they are;" however, unlike rhetoric, ideological discourse presents its premises as necessary and objective, so that its conclusions also follow necessarily from them, thus appearing immanently true. Whereas apohpantic critiques typically concentrated on exposing the untruthfulness of the premises assumed by an ideology in order to discredit its conclusions, a semantic approach is interested in reconstructing the allocation and deployment of meaning that make ideologies such powerful instruments for advancing political arguments. In this chapter I have briefly introduced three semiotic concepts that can be useful in assessing how ideological discourse produces effects of truth.

First I have presented the notion of abduction as a common scheme for the production of logical inferences. On the one hand, deductive reasoning applies preexisting rules to new cases, to infer necessarily true results; however, this process does not produce any new knowledge. On the other hand, inductive reasoning proceeds from cases and results to infer rules; however, the knowledge that is produced in this process is never certain, as new cases could determine the formulation of new rules. As I will explain in Chapter III, aggregating individual cases into general rules, and rejecting dogmatism, induction provides liberalism with the fundamental logical architecture to sustain its claims. Nevertheless, I argue, abduction is a much more common pattern for the generation of inferences, and as such a much more relevant element of the ideological function of producing effects of truth. The

process of abduction infers probable cases from rules and results; in other words, it formulates hypotheses that depend on the context and on extra-logical elements that affect the production of inferences. As such, abductive reasoning is creative of new knowledge, and while this new knowledge is neither necessarily true (like in the case of deduction), nor can it be scientifically tested by accumulating observations (like in the case of induction), it still produces effects of truth within discourse. For instance, in the case of overcoding, abductions might be performed on preexisting portions of discourse, thus charging them with a surplus of political meaning. A semiotic analysis of ideological texts can unveil these kinds of devices.

Secondly, I have reflected on a more fundamental level of the production of truth that inheres to language, and that ideological discourse in particular mobilizes for political purposes. Whereas grammar typically goes unquestioned as a pre-political or even a-political element of language, I argue that in fact certain precepts for making meaning available in discourse carry with them ponderous political implications: by weaving their arguments into certain recurrent configurations of meaning, ideologies perpetuate certain basic assumptions about the world without explicitly declaring them as political (and therefore disputable) concepts. Echoing Judith Butler's dissatisfaction with it, I regard the subject-centric character of mainstream grammar as "unfortunate." Liberalism, for instance, typically presents its claims by assuming a structure in which subjects exist before their actions, and continue to exist as subject regardless of the actions that they are contingently attached to them. Because this basic grammar of agency also corresponds to the liberal credo of foundational individualism, the ideology of liberalism benefits from the congruity between the content that it promotes and the expressive modes that it employs in doing so. Yet, in treating the grammatical primacy of the subject as an extra-political fact, liberalism surreptitiously depoliticizes its commitment to individualism. Moreover, as I will show in Chapter IV, the subject-centric, individualistic mode of expression of liberalism can also articulate non-liberal content, thus incorporating certain values, concepts, and arguments from other ideologies into a hegemonic meta-ideological scheme. Instead I propose Greimas' actantial model as an alternative way of understanding the relation between

subjects and actions. Focusing on action, and deriving actants from it, Greimas' model subverts the expressive infrastructure of liberalism, and provides the grammatical basis for thinking a politics of performativity that would in turn radically question the principle of individualism. I will consider this possibility in Chapter V as I reflect on how certain concepts of community can sustain an alternative to the meta-ideological hegemony of liberalism.

Finally, I have introduced the analytical device of the semiotic square. As ideological discourse typically employs an oppositional structure, between the status quo and a desirable future (and all the values, concepts and ideas that are associated to them), the semiotic square proves useful in mapping the semantic field that each piece of ideological discourse constructs. Moreover, these oppositions are not static, as they contain the elements for the development of the story that an ideology dramatizes; the movement between states of the world and the logical steps that are entailed in the various passages can be visually captured by the semiotic square, as I have briefly shown in a couple of examples. In Chapter V I will also map the oppositions between different concepts of individual and community onto the semiotic square.

In conclusion, I maintain that by opening up to the style of inquiry of semiotics, the study of political ideology can benefit from its systematic treatment of the deployment of meaning in discourse. In particular, unveiling the effects of truth that ideological discourse produces can also contribute to an explanation of the success of certain ideologies. It is my claim that liberalism especially exploits certain effects of truth to the effect of asserting its own hegemony while at the same time obfuscating the genuinely political character of some of its foundational claims. In order to investigate this level of hegemony, I now turn to an investigation of some of the effects of truth that some key figures in the tradition of liberalism have employed in formulating some of the most influential arguments in the definition of the ideology.

CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE IDEOLOGY OF LIBERALISM

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter I I presented some preliminary considerations on the centrality of ideas in politics, and on how ideas come to fruition in concrete instances of political discourse. In particular, I noted that within a political culture, ideas are typically organized in more or less coherent formations; ideologies, then, rather than loose ideas, are the level of analysis at which an ideational approach to the study of politics needs to concentrate. The pertinent question to be asked about ideologies, I argued, is not whether or not they capture some pre-discursive "Truth" in their expressive function, but how tightly and cogently they arrange political meaning. Toward a semantic-morphological study of ideology, then, in Chapter II, I proposed some basic instruments of semiotics as valuable tools for understanding more clearly how meaning is defined, contested, and mobilized in and through political discourse.

In this chapter I intend to invest these general reflections onto the actual reality of a specific ideology: liberalism. In doing so I maintain that the concept itself of "ideology" contains certain important features of a narrative, argumentative style that are recurrent across a wide array of discursive formations. Different *ideologies,* in other words, exhibit a certain degree of structural similarity with each other (though, of course, the content that they articulate can vary greatly), and this similarity resides in their common relation to the general notion of *ideology*. Not all ideologies, however, conform as neatly to the ideal type that could be deduced from an abstract definition of ideology, and many examples of ideological discourse self-consciously style themselves as non-ideological, while reserving that characterization as an epithet to be waged against rival worldviews. The example of "scientific socialists" is only one of the most obvious, as an anti-ideological predisposition extends, in one form or another, to all the main ideologies. Traditional conservatives, for

instance, have tended to dismiss ideology for its abstract, rationalistic style of discourse; ecologists often efface the distinctions among other ideologies as insignificant when compared to their common obfuscation of environmental themes.

Not all ideologies, however, are equally critical of ideology, and, most importantly, not all ideologies are symmetrically placed with regards to each other, and to the space for contestation that opens up among them. The very idea of a political "space" betrays the all too common tendency to *visualize* politics and the relations among more or less stable discursive formations. The most common spatial metaphor is that of a political "spectrum" oriented from Left to Right, with various clusters of ideological discourses along the continuum. The patent inadequacy of this linear representation is only marginally lessened by the disentanglement of economic and social matters onto a Cartesian plane, or by the addition of a vertical axis opposing "the people" to "the elite" (a crucial move for the articulation of populist positions). Neither can the indefinite multiplication of dimensions beyond the powers of the human brain to envision provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of mapping the positions and relations of different ideologies. Short of rethinking space along non-Euclidean parameters (an effort that relatively few political theorists are willing to make), some have instead proposed a horseshoe configuration in order to represent graphically the conceptual proximity of different forms of "extremism," like fascism and (implicitly Marxist-Leninist) communism.

However much the spatial metaphor can be refined, though, it still fails to account for a complex phenomenon that defies simple topological models. Perhaps an inevitable feature of our political thinking, spatialization is also an inevitably inadequate one. Moreover, the mental images that are produced are not neutral with regards to their effects on how ideologies are perceived. For instance, as Michael Freeden has observed, "The left/right continuum […] is itself ideological. It serves the purpose of bestowing a moderate or, respectively, radical, or even dangerous aura on an ideology."[98] In fact, both the linear and

[98] Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2003), p. 79

the multidimensional, Cartesian or horseshoe-shaped illustrations that are produced within contemporary Western political cultures invariably place liberalism at, or around the center of the political space. This systematic recurrence cannot be a simple coincidence. Is there something peculiar about liberalism that qualifies it as the "central" ideology? Or is this perceived "centrality" a function of the perspective from which those maps are drawn? No unequivocal answer can be provided for either of these questions without presupposing the other. No simple etiology can be reconstructed by imagining (liberal) ideological eggs and (liberal) societal chickens. However, this should not frustrate the efforts aimed at understanding *how* liberalism comes to enjoy a privileged place within certain ideological coordinates.

I will concentrate most of my analysis on the question of whether some intrinsic features of liberalism characterize it as peculiar among other ideologies; but first I would like to address the second question, pointing to the actual existence, and to the specific character of a liberal ideological hegemony in contemporary Western societies. In fact, from the triumphant tones of liberal apologists proclaiming an untimely *End of History,* to various shades of *Critics* and *Discontents,* a vast consensus has been registered over the last two decades on the formula that "liberalism is the dominant ideology of the West today." Both endorsements and denunciations of this alleged hegemony have come from rather disparate corners of the academic and extra-academic debates. The fervent certitude with which Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the universal spread of liberal values in 1989 and then again in 1992 contrasts starkly with the "political, not metaphysical" appeal to an "overlapping consensus" with which John Rawls defended his idea of "justice as fairness" since at least 1985.[99] Similarly, while Neil Jumonville and Kevin Mattons extol the transcendent qualities that place liberalism "in the mainstream of American history" as a "defensible and utterly

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[99] see, for instance: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (The Free Press, New York: 1992); John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political, not Metaphysical," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* Vol 14, No. 3 (Summer, 1985), pp.223-251

necessary creed," Raymond Geuss emphasizes the "highly contingent historical process" that resulted in the seemingly "inevitable" prevalence of liberal values in Western societies.[100]

The assortment of bedfellows in the "anti-liberal" camp is possibly even odder. If Michael Sandel laments the liberal postulate of an "unencumbered" self that pre-exists its ends, and contests the principle that "the right is prior to the good," Slavoj Žižek exposes the *Denkverbot* that defines the current "ideological hegemonic coordinates," and objects that "actual freedom of thought must mean the freedom to question the predominant liberal-democratic postideological consensus-or it means nothing."[101] Likewise, whereas Patrick Neal's discussion of the neutralist and perfectionist articulations of the current liberal paradigm is aimed at the vindication of Hobbesian, "vulgar" liberalism as a sounder political philosophy, Maureen Ramsay aims her critique at "the pervasiveness of liberal ideas," as she observes that "implicitly, most people assume the validity of liberal answers to [the questions of political philosophy]."[102]

Whether they regard it as a good or a bad thing, several theorists converge on the thesis of liberal hegemony. Some of the most perceptive among them also attempt assessing the confines and *modus operandi* of this hegemony. Alan Wolfe, a staunch defender of the liberal cause, addresses attacks that style themselves as positioned outside the liberal consensus by pointing out that: "We are definitely *not* all liberals now. But we do all live in a liberal world."[103] More explicitly, John Kekes, a distinguished figure in contemporary conservatism, notes that: "With the demise of Marxism, [liberalism] has become the dominant ideology of

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[100] Neil Jumonville and Kevin Mattons, ed. by, Liberalism for a New Century (University of California Press, Berkeley: 2007), p. 1; Raymond Geuss, *History and Illusion in Politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2001), p. 3

[101] see, for instance: Michael Sandel, ed. by, *Liberalism and its Critics* (New York University Press, New York: 1984); Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 2002), p. 545

[102] Patrick Neal, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (New York University Press, New York: 1997); Maureen Ramsay, *What's Wrong With Liberalism? A Radical Critique of Liberal Political Philosophy* (Leicester University Press, London: 1997), p.1

[103] Alan Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 2009), p. 255

our time, one sign of which is that even its opponents now couch the defenses of the regimes they favor in evaluative terms that liberals have imposed on political discourse."[104] In a liberal world, even non-liberal arguments are framed in the language of liberalism. Paraphrasing the title of a famous 1942 essay by Benedetto Croce, the Italian liberal philosopher, today one could chime: "Why we can't say we are not *liberals*."[105]

I construct a possible explanation of why that is the case in trying to answer the question of what allows liberalism to exercise this hegemonic role. In particular, here I argue that studying the discursive practices of liberalism is necessary for delineating the channels through which the dominance of liberal values is asserted. In other words, I want to contribute to the scholarship on liberal hegemony by concentrating on a relatively understudied aspect of this political phenomenon, by investigating its communicative, discursive, linguistic, and even grammatical dimension. My thesis is that before even presenting its descriptive, normative and action-oriented statements as, respectively, true, desirable, and feasible, liberalism is successful at making them easily intelligible. This communicative accomplishment, in turn, rests crucially on the ability of liberal discourse to replicate certain structural features of language that are coded in grammar. Liberal discourse sounds intuitively "right" because it sounds familiar, because the content that it articulates conforms to the expression that it employs. Consequently, it has comparatively less "convincing" to do than other ideologies and becomes a sort of default position of the linguistic status quo. In Chapter IV, moreover, I analyze some cases in which liberal modes of expression even succeed at articulating descriptive and normative claims that do not correspond to the defining values of a liberal ideology. Liberal hegemony, then, extend from the merely ideological to a more broadly meta-ideological dimension.

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[104] John Kekes, *Against Liberalism* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY: 1997), p. 2

[105] in *Why We Can't Say We Are Not Christians* Croce, a firm believer in secularism, had argued that the emergence of Christianity had been the most important revolution in the history of humankind, and as such it had shaped the existence of humans beyond the religious sphere more deeply than any other political phenomenon. See Benedetto Croce, *Perche' Non Possiamo Non Dirci Cristiani* (Laterza, Bari: 1944)

I certainly do not claim that this is the only explanation for liberal hegemony. Economic, historical, philosophical, and genuinely political accounts are clearly indispensable in constructing any sensible account of such a complex phenomenon. However, in Chapter II I have argued that the linguistic component is also a necessary ingredient in the mix of a well-balanced multi-causal story. Moreover, and more crucially for the development of my project, I ultimately do not wish to suggest that there is an immutable, a-historical basis to the linguistic foundations of liberal hegemony. This may sound counter-intuitive, as grammatical rules may be taken to exist outside of history and politics. Yet, in Chapter V I will attempt to advance an argument on how language itself, far from being a pre-political a priori, can be more or less consciously mobilized toward certain political goals, often with unintended consequences down the road. In particular, I will point to the concomitance, at the onset of modernity, of the rise of national states and the codification of standardized national languages. Finally, in Chapter VI I will consider the case of a peripheral area in the system of modern liberal hegemony. In such marginal areas, I will argue, the colonization of liberal discourse can be resisted, and different meta-ideological constructs can emerge.

Here I will first identify certain recurrent characters of liberal discourse, as they appear from some of the foundational texts of a liberal tradition. In particular, I will consider three authors whose contributions to the development of liberal thought I find especially significant. Though the genealogy of liberal ideas can probably be traced further back in history, John Locke indubitably makes the most coherent case for early liberalism in the *Second Treatise of Government* in the late 17th century. Accordingly, since his thought truly shapes the development of the ideology from its formation, I will reserve special attention to Locke's philosophy in general, and to its political implications in particular. The second theorist that I will consider is John Stuart Mill, as the ideas put forth in the mid-19th century, in such works as *On Liberty,* crucially advance the definition of a comprehensive liberal agenda. Finally, I discuss the position taken by John Rawls, who emerges as the leading political philosopher of the second half of the 20th century, animating the debates that flourish around his *Theory of Justice,* and that lead him to revise his original statement throughout his career.

I am not, obviously, equating the history of liberal thought with these three specific authors, nor could such a complex historical phenomenon be reduced to a limited number of discrete points in time. Thomas Hobbes could be claimed as a forefather of liberalism, as his is in many ways the earliest and most radical break with previous paradigms of political thinking (though not necessarily with the practices of government that descended from them). Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism clearly moves from liberal premises (though it, arguably, reaches illiberal conclusions). Robert Nozick's defense of a minimal state reinvigorated the confidence in a traditional theme of liberalism (though it inserted it in a libertarian political project whose relations with liberalism are far from unproblematic). Moreover, outside of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, critical contributions to liberal theory come from thinkers as diverse as Charles de Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant, and Amartya Sen, among countless others.

My choice to concentrate on Locke, and to discuss Mill and Rawls too responds to a three-fold set of considerations. First, their work spans over three centuries, thus addressing very different political scenarios, in which a wide array of questions arises from society, thus eliciting age-specific answers from political theory. Second, there is a certain degree of consistency in the political realities that these thinkers confront, and in the cultural horizons in which their work is located: from early modern to late modern Western society. Thirdly, Locke, Mill and Rawls can be interpreted as examples of what Christine Di Stefano has called "problem-solving" orientation of political theory (as opposed to a "problem-making" one).[106] Locke's writings, while their influence certainly transcends their specific context, have also been read (albeit inaccurately, as Peter Laslett's historical analysis has shown, thus challenging the standard account of the *Second Treatise* as a piece of problem-solving political theory) as a defense of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.[107] Mill's overarching goal is that of

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[106] See Christine Di Stefano, book review of Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy,* in *Political Theory,* vol. 29 No. 3 (June 2001), pp. 477-8

[107] See: Peter Laslett, "*Two Treatises of Government* and the Revolution of 1688," in Peter Laslett, ed. by, John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1988)

salvaging individuality from the tyranny of the majority. Rawls' project explicitly sets forth to contest the utilitarian paradigm, thus vindicating a Kantian version of liberalism. Together, their articulations of liberal discourse attest to the resilience and versatility of the ideology that their writings have contributed to inspire. In the next pages I hope to show what aspects of liberalism make it so successful at articulating political content. I start by considering Locke's political argument in light of his general theory of knowledge. Contrary to the some of the most established interpretive theses on *The Second Treatise* as either advocating "possessive individualism," or a deep form of communitarianism, I argue that, by characterizing individuals as members of linguistic communities, Locke in fact presents a much more nuanced account of both human nature and of the character of political interactions. To this argument I now turn.

LOCKE'S POLITICS OF SEMIOTIC INDIVIDUALISM

Though any given entry point into an analysis of liberal ideology would be questionable, not engaging the political writings of John Locke would seem like an unwarranted exclusion from the definition of any critique on liberalism. Though associating the label "liberal" to Locke's thought and times would be a sheer anachronism, as the political theory and ideology of liberalism did not acquire consciousness of themselves and widespread recognition in political discourse until about two centuries after the publication of his major works, the influence of Locke's ideas on the subsequent development of liberalism is clear and unmistakeable. While other thinkers, ranging from Hobbes to Montesquieu, from Adam Smith to the French *philosophes* certainly participated in shaping the early phases of the complex political project that was to be called liberal, it may legitimately be argued that Locke's system of thinking is the central knot in that web of contributions. Moreover, few other figures in the tradition of Western philosophy have exercised such a profound influence on both the unfolding of theoretical debates, and on the institution of political practices.

Accordingly, the scholarship on John Locke continues to be vast and lively, as his remain among the key ideas that later thinkers have discussed, critiqued, and revised, and that still inspire the core of liberal political culture today. During the twentieth century several interpretative traditions have emerged on such rich texts as the *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), the *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), and (with comparatively less attention from political theorists) the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Leo Strauss and his disciples have seen in Locke the continuation of the political undertaking initiated by Hobbes earlier in the seventeenth century. Though moving from the premises of a different, less chilling account of the state of nature, Locke too ends up reducing the role of the state to the protection of certain pre-political, natural rights.[108] Quite differently, John Dunn has emphasized the religious aspects of Locke's thought, arguing for a deep substratum of Protestant morality to justify his commitment to values of both freedom and equality.[109] Contrary to this historicist reading, the materialistic dimensions of Locke's theory have been the focus of attention of the Marxist interpretive school. Perhaps the most influential statement to come from that tradition, C.B. MacPherson's thesis revolves around the concept of "possessive individualism," stressing the connections between the theory of property offered by Locke, and the needs of emerging capitalism to justify the new order.[110] A radically alternative understanding has been more recently proposed by David Walsh. Questioning a facile identification of Locke's view of human nature with a simplistic ontology of individualism, Walsh maintains that the characterization of Lockean individuals as not embedded in their larger social contexts is a misleading fiction, as in both the state of nature and after the social contract the individual is naturally inclined toward community,

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[108] see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago University Press, Chicago: 1953)

[109] see John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1969)

[110] See C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1962)

and cannot be said to fully exist without the latter: community is logically prior to the individual.[111]

The latter claim is probably the most provocative one, as it radically redescribes the premises of the political project that lies at the heart of liberalism. In particular, Walsh's notion of a "liberal-communitarian" Locke contrasts sharply with MacPherson's notion of "possessive individualism." Are these two different, but complementary (or at least reconcilable) aspects of Locke's thought? Are they radically alternative interpretations? Is one correct and the other aberrant? Or, is there another way to frame the contribution of Locke to the development of liberalism in a language that overcomes the hermeneutical impasse between anthropological communitarianism and materialistic individualism? In the next few pages I will briefly consider the positions of MacPherson and Walsh, and I will then advance my own interpretation of Locke's peculiar blend of individualism. Paying attention to linguistic community, I argue that Locke grounds the individual in a system of shared meanings through which social interactions are mediated. Neither possessive, nor communitarian, Locke's politics can therefore be termed one of "semiotic individualism."

I will start by considering the argument that economic motives are at the core of the political vision delineated in the *Second Treatise*. This position has been argued by a variety of commentators, both sympathetic with and openly critical of liberalism. Both perspectives, in spite of their evaluative disagreements, have tended to converge on the interpretation that, for better or worse, the ideas advanced by Locke are indeed among the key propositions of a liberal ideology. Since the Marxist version of this thesis is especially clear, I will concentrate on one of its most influential proponents here, all the while referencing relevant passages of the *Second Treatise*. "The student of liberal theory," MacPherson points out, "is thus well advised to pay particular attention to the place of Locke's theory of property in his theory of

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[111] See David Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought* (Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont, CA: 2009), pp. 271-309

government."[112] That theory of property, in turn, rests on an ontology that posits the individual as "the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them;" in this view the individual is seen "neither as a moral whole, nor a part of a larger social whole, but an owner of himself."[113] In fact, in Locke's state of nature, free and equal individuals enjoy "*freedom* to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons," and "*equality,* wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another."[114] In this context, what is "proper" of human beings is to tend to their own self-preservation, and as much as possible, to preserve the rest of (hu)mankind too; in other words, free and equal individuals also possess the attribute of "reason," which Locke takes to coincide with the law of nature, and which "teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."[115] Though these "items" are kept conceptually separate at the beginning of the treatise, later the "lives, liberties, and estates" of those who join in civil society are conflated in a "general name, property."[116] Between the description of the state of nature, in which the various components of "property" are simply listed, and the introduction of the social contract, in which the protection of "property" (in the broad sense) has become the paramount goal of the associated life of humans, Locke situates the section in which he fully details his theory of property.

The logic of Locke's argument is both simple and ingenious. On the one hand, "God […] hath given the world to men in common [and He] hath also given them reason to make

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[112] C.B. MacPherson, "Editor's Introduction," to John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ed. by C.B. MacPherson (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge: 1980), p. viii

[113] C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1962), p. 3

[114] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ed. by C.B. MacPherson (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge: 1980), par. 4, p. 8

[115] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 6, p. 9

[116] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 123, p. 66

use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience."[117] On the other hand, "Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his."[118] What follows in Locke's equation is that mixing one's labor with what is common turns the latter into property. The act of gathering acorns makes them the property of the individual who gathered them. Concomitantly, two clauses limit such appropriation: avoiding the spoilage of the resources that one accumulates, and leaving "enough and as good" for others. The justification of appropriation and its limitations would seem to be equipollent, as they both derive from the same authority: "The same law of nature, that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too."[119]

So far this theory of appropriation remains fully consistent with the conditions of freedom and equality that were predicated of the state of nature. Where Locke departs from equality, thus offering moral validation to social arrangements that enable individual accumulation even to the extent to which this is conducive to egregious inequalities in material possessions, is in his explanation of the invention of money. Since money does not spoil and cannot be directly consumed, its accumulation by one individual does not inhibit others from acquiring property, and in fact, under certain conditions, promotes the latter too. As MacPherson notes, the introduction of money enables Locke to "transform the natural right of every individual to such property as he needed for subsistence, and as he applied his labour to, into a natural right of individual appropriation, by which the more industrious could rightfully acquire all the land, leaving others with no way to live except by selling the disposal of their labour."[120] The trajectory indicated here is clearly one from

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[117] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 26, p. 18

[118] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 27, p. 19

[119] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 31, p. 20

[120] C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism,* p. 231

equality to inequality: "Locke makes a unique and ingenious case for a natural right of unlimited private property, with which society and government are not entitled to interfere: no-one, before or after, has come near his skill in moving from a limited and equal to an unlimited and unequal property right by invoking rationality and consent."[121]

MacPherson's bitter irony notwithstanding, the Marxist commentator is truly and deeply worried about the political implications of the principle of unlimited accumulation of property. Moreover, he denounces the unwarranted naturalization of a profoundly historical and contingent concept of labor as a commodity to be exchanged on the market for a wage, as well as Locke's troubling silence on the possibility that that transaction would result in the "alienation of life and liberty," as subsistence wages would keep the working class at the level of survival, as opposed to life, all the while depriving of any real meaning the notion of "liberty."[122] In fact, the *Second Treatise* continues to be revered as a fundamental text in the tradition of Western political theory precisely because it outlines "an acceptable theoretical fall-back for publicists who accept the modern liberal state and society uncritically."[123] The relationship between Locke's thought and the development of a liberal ideology is clear and straightforward for MacPherson: "As a liberal ideology [Locke's doctrine] has almost everything that could be desired."[124] Central to this understanding of liberalism is the notion of possessive individualism; in turn the "core of Locke's individualism is that every man is naturally the sole proprietor of his own person and capacities—the absolute proprietor in the sense that he owes nothing to society for them—and especially the absolute proprietor of his capacity to labour."[125] The individual possesses the capacity to labor in order to

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[121] C.B. MacPherson, "Editor's Introduction," to John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* p. xxi

[122] C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism,* p. 220

[123] C.B. MacPherson, "Editor's Introduction," to John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* p. vii

[124] C.B. MacPherson, "Editor's Introduction," to John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* p. xxi

[125] C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism,* p. 231

accumulate property; the association of individuals and the ensuing formation of political power are secondary and merely instrumental to the protection of those possessions.

Several critiques of MacPherson's interpretive thesis have appeared over the last few decades. J.S. Maloy, for instance, locates his interpretation within "the trend of studies seeking to complicate the association of Locke with an ideal-type liberalism of limited government, free markets, property rights, and secularism."[126] Drawing inspiration from the "Cambridge School" of intellectual history, Maloy denounces as a false dichotomy the opposition between the political philosophies of Locke and Aristotle that is prevalent in modern academy. This view, illustrated, among others, by Michael Sandel's *Democracy's Discontents,* assumes Locke as the intellectual forefather of the "procedural republic," in which "government should not affirm in law any particular vision of the good life. Instead, it should provide a framework of rights that respect persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own values and ends."[127] On the other hand, Aristotle is invoked as the ancient champion of "organic community," in which "the purpose of politics was to cultivate the virtue, or moral excellence, of citizens."[128] Maloy, instead, claims that "Aristotle was the classic source for both the principal theoretic argument of Locke's *Second Treatise* and the method employed to pursue it;" furthermore, he argues that these "Aristotelian gestures […] would have been readily understood as such by Locke's contemporaries, even without the explicit attribution of Aristotle by Locke himself."[129]

In his textual and contextual analysis, Maloy observes the alignment between Locke and Aristotle on the definition of political power as separate from, and irreducible to other relations of power, such as those of the household. Both thinkers, then, derive "radically

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[126] J.S. Maloy, "The Aristotelianism of Locke's Politics," in *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol 70, No 2, April 2009, p. 238

[127] Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.: 1996), p. 4

[128] Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent,* p. 7

[129] S. Maloy, "The Aristotelianism of Locke's Politics," pp. 237-238

constitutional" conclusions from the premises of the specificity of the political, in both cases vindicating "the distinctiveness of the political against the pretensions of absolute monarchy."[130] On these grounds Maloy forcefully claims that his analysis is meant to "def[y] conventional assumptions about modern liberalism and its rivalries with "communitarianism," "republicanism," or what have you. The creature that has come to be called "liberalism" is nothing if not a mongrel."[131] To the extent that a liberal tradition stems from Locke's ideas, it does not stand in opposition to Aristotelian notions of virtue and community, but rather incorporates them.

An even more radical dissent with MacPherson's equation of Locke's theory of politics with his notion of "possessive individualism," and of this with the core of a liberal position is voiced by David Walsh: "While it may be argued that we have subsequently created a society of possessive individualists, Locke himself had a far more profound vision."[132] In fact, he goes so far as to claim that "The guiding intuition that prompted Locke's search for consensus was that the community of human beings came before and remained despite their disagreements."[133] The thesis of the primacy of community in Locke's thought is not novel: Virginia McDonald, among others, posited that: "[t]he crucial focus of the political society is, for Locke, the community, the original compact. This remains intact with the dissolution of government."[134] More generally, along the lines of the different fate of society after the dissolution of government in Hobbes' and Locke's theories lie the standard defense of the latter from the allegation of promoting social atomism. In McDonald's account, Locke's story begins with dissociated individuals who then form social and civil bonds which outlast the political effects of their compact; it is a one-way trajectory from individual to society.

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[130] S. Maloy, "The Aristotelianism of Locke's Politics," pp. 244

[131] S. Maloy, "The Aristotelianism of Locke's Politics," pp. 256

[132] D. Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 275

[133] D. Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 274

[134] Virginia McDonald, "A Guide to the Interpretation of Locke the Political Theorist," in *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique,* Vol. 6, No. 4, Dec. 1973, p. 620

Ruth Grant identifies the opposite trajectory. Taking Locke's anthropological position seriously, she argues that he "makes no claim that men ever lived in isolation from their fellows. Man's natural condition is to be embedded in a series of social relations throughout life."[135] Alongside this descriptive "communitarianism," though, Locke clearly articulates a view of "political individualism at the level of normative theory."[136] In Grant's account, Locke detaches individuals from community, but does not end up with social atomism, as strong social bonds are inherent to human nature. "Political relations," on the other hand, "can only be created by consent in accordance with the premise of natural freedom:" though the political is one step removed from the nature of humans, the social is always essential to it.[137]

While the case against Locke's social atomism can be made without questioning that strong individualistic themes characterize his political theory, Walsh's Copernican revolution in the exegesis of the *Second Treatise of Government* reformulates the very premises of Locke's thought, as it shifts the interpretive focus from rights to responsibilities. Similarly, John Scott has argued that an emphasis on "obligation" is needed in the economy of Locke's theory of the state:

> Locke constructs a sovereignless commonwealth with several coexisting claimants to supreme authority: the naturally free individual, the people or society, the legislative, and the executive. Locke rejects sovereignty as what unifies the state, and he wants to replace the discourse of sovereignty theory with a language of obligation that will help bind together the sovereignless state.[138]

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[135] Ruth Grant, "Locke's Political Anthropology and Lockean Individualism," in *The Journal of Politics,* Vol 50, No. 1, Feb. 1988, p. 60

[136] Ruth Grant, "Locke's Political Anthropology and Lockean Individualism," p. 50

[137] Ruth Grant, "Locke's Political Anthropology and Lockean Individualism," p. 61

[138] John Scott, "The Sovereign State and Locke's Language of Obligation," in *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 94, No. 3, Sep. 2000, p. 547

Because he has offset the equilibrium of the traditional political order centered on an absolute authority, Locke needs to devise a language of obligation as the "centripetal force that helps the political machine work without a single ultimate authority."[139] For Walsh, rather than breaking away from previous conceptions of morality, Locke's thought is still very much imbued with a profoundly Medieval conception of natural law. In this political universe, then, rights are in no way prior to obligations. Rather, rights rely on "a common responsibility to defend them;" in other words, "it is not the individual that sustains the political community but rather the political community that sustains the individual."[140]

This is no minor redescription, as it enables Walsh to claim that community is always already prior to the individual: before, during, and after the (possible) dissolution of the commonwealth:

> The community of humans who live together may not have a political representation in the form of a government, but it is not for that reason any less real. Bonds of mutual obligation remain even in the absence of an effective means of enforcing them. This prepolitical community that lacks any visible manifestation is carried within each individual member, and from the mutual trust and recognition the compact to form civil society eventually emerges. For Locke there really is no problem in accounting for the transition from an individual to a communal perspective because individuals carry the sense of common obligation toward one another from the beginning.[141]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, property does not receive much attention from this interpretive approach. Material possessions are understood as merely functional to the preservation of the rights to life and liberty; Locke's attitude toward unlimited acquisition is not justificatory in this view, but it rather carries "unrelievedly negative overtones."[142] Here and elsewhere

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[139] John Scott, "The Sovereign State and Locke's Language of Obligation," p. 547

[140] D. Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 275

[141] D. Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 277

[142] D. Walsh, "Locke," in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 283

Walsh's interpretation, albeit original and stimulating, fails to provide enough textual evidence to sustain its provocative theses: why does Locke's individual "becom[e] an individual through his assumption of civic responsibility"?[143] A more interesting set of claims concerns the complex relation between the individual, community, and the state:

> Government ultimately emerges in a mysterious process from individuals who are already inwardly united before they become visibly so […] We are individuals who determine our own existence and cannot be properly human if we are less than responsible for ourselves. Yet we cannot function alone. We find ourselves in a network of mutual obligations before we even become conscious of our self-determining prerogative. Politically this ambivalence is of great moment because it means that the breakdown or the failure of government is never ultimate. As individuals we carry the capacity for improvising government within ourselves.[144]

In a passage that seems to evoke themes of foucauldian governmentality, though in a very different context (most evidently: for Foucault "governmentality" describes a specific historical phase in the development of the relationship between governments and their subjects, whereas Walsh's argument appears to be ahistorical and rooted in human nature more than in the contingent actions of governments), this sentence is especially insightful: "We find ourselves in a network of mutual obligations before we even become conscious of our self-determining prerogative." However, unfortunately, Walsh does not elaborate on what constitutes this "network of mutual obligations," nor does he clearly specify what exactly these "mutual obligations" are, and how they impact the constitution, or at least the acquisition of conscience about our "self-determining prerogative." There is room to expand on the characters of the ontological universe that this claim subtends, and in particular on its implications for the role of individuals and community in Locke's system of thought. While I do not think that Walsh fully accounts for the critique that he presents of the thesis of possessive individualism, I believe that a move beyond the material is in order for advancing a more thorough interpretation of the political universe disclosed by the *Second Treatise.* At

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[143] D. Walsh, "Locke*,"* in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 275

[144] D. Walsh, "Locke*,"* in K. Deutsch and J. Fornieri, ed. by, *An Invitation to Political Thought,* p. 295

the same time, abandoning the category of individualism altogether as the interpretive key of Locke's contribution to liberalism appears rather implausible. Here I propose to locate Locke's individualism in what I understand to be a "network of mutual obligations" that affect and shape our sense of a "self-determining prerogative."

Language, I argue, provides human beings with the means for apportioning and sharing meaning in a system of mutually recognized expectations that make communication possible; language also provides humans with the means for accessing, contesting, performing, and expressing the identity of their selves. Systems of signification, more generally, rely on "networks of mutual obligations" inasmuch as the meaning that they organize requires that certain rules be recognized by those who participate in the processes of signification. Which portions of meaning get attached to certain vehicles for its expression, and how basic units of meaning are to be combined in order to form more complex units of meanings are two sets of such rules. While these rules might not be fully binding, and in fact can be transgressed in certain instances of communication, this does not mean that they cease to apply to the system as a whole. This semiotic infrastructure (a field of meaning; rules for the identification of discrete portions of meaning; rules on how to combine them) is in turn the prerequisite for acquiring consciousness of oneself as an agent and a source of valid claims. The "network of mutual obligations" established by language is logically prior to the claims that individual agents will articulate.

In this sense I argue that Walsh's intuition about a "communitarian" substratum in Locke's thought is worth exploring, though I ultimately argue that by virtue of that very intuition one can reach a rather different interpretive outcome than what Walsh himself envisions. For the "mutual obligations" that preside over a system of signification are not a fact of nature, as Walsh's Locke would have it, but derive in fact from a convention, from a sort of semiotic contract that is logically prior to the social contract illustrated in the *Second Treatise*. The outcome of the semiotic contract is the formation of the subject as the unitary locus of consciousness and the owner of action. To the subject of grammar corresponds in liberalism the social construct of the individual. Before even characterizing Locke's position

as "possessive individualism," I argue that it needs to be recognized as "semiotic individualism." In order to explain what I mean by that, and in order to sustain my claim, I now proceed to analyze certain aspects of Locke's political writings in light of his general philosophy of knowledge, and of language in particular.

A thread of continuity extends from Locke's empiricist theory of mind to his views concerning the relations between individuals and community. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* advances the thesis that the human mind is at birth a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate devoid of any innate ideas. Contrary to the philosophical doctrine of *innatism,* Locke posits the mind as in principle separate from the external world, which affects it through the medium of experience. Simple ideas are impressed onto the mind, which receives them passively: "Though the qualities that affect our senses are, in the things themselves, so united and blended, that there is no separation, no distance between them; yet it is plain, the ideas they produce in the mind enter by the senses simple and unmixed."[145] Semantic "atoms," in other words, indivisible units of meaning like "hot," "cold," "soft," "hard" are produced in the mind through either sensation (the experience of the senses), or reflection (the experience of thinking). Once it is invested with these simple ideas, however, the human mind possesses the faculty of acting on them in several ways. Simple ideas may be combined into complex ideas; ideas, whether simple or complex, may be compared; general ideas may be abstracted from particular ones.

If the mind is originally a blank slate, and if all knowledge depends on contingent experience, the very ability to perform these operations is what exists independently of specific experiences. This entity continues to exist regardless of the different experiences that a person encounters; as such, this continuity is what defines the essence of personhood separate from the accidents of experience. Moreover, since knowledge derives both from sensations (as the external world becomes known to us through our senses) and reflections (as we are aware of our mental processes) the self that Locke envisions is also aware of itself:

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[145] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding [1690]* (Kay and Troutman, Philadelphia: 1847), Book II, Chapter II, Section 1 "Uncompounded Appearances," p. 83

> [T]o find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for: which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it […] For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then.[146]

Locke's account of the self, then, postulates a rational being that remains "the same thing in different times and places." On these grounds one might be tempted to infer a view of atomistic, unencumbered individualism, in which, *pace* Walsh's claim, individual selves are conscious about their "self-determining prerogatives" without being immersed in any "network of mutual obligations." However, Locke's position is more complex than that, and as the *Essay* unfolds, a theory of language is presented that reinscribes the possibility of sociality. As I note in Chapter II, Locke proposes a two-stage model of signification.[147] First, ideas are derived from experience: in this sense ideas are "signs" of things, the idea of "hot" stands in for the actual experience of touching a hot object. Second, words are signs of ideas: "Words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him who uses them, how imperfectly soever or carelessly those ideas are collected from the things which they are supposed to represent."[148] If the first relation is imperfect, however, as the last passage acknowledges, if, in other words, the correspondence between "things" and the "ideas" of them that become impressed in the human mind is not a

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[146] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXVII, Section 9 "Personal Identity," pp. 210-211

[147] For a comprehensive treatment of Locke's philosophy of language see: Walter Ott, *Locke's Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2004); Michael Losonky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2006); Hannah Dawson, *Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2007)

[148] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter II, Section 2 "Words are the sensible signs of his ideas who uses them," p. 267

necessary one, then the second relation must somehow fix the potential for indeterminacy that the first allows. The openness of the thing-idea relation must be closed in the idea-word relation. To this end, a system must be devised so that the same words will stand for the same ideas in the minds of different people. Thus Locke summarizes the problem:

> But though words, as they are used by men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the ideas that are in the mind of the speaker; yet they in their thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things.
> - First, They suppose their words to be marks of the ideas in the minds also of other men, with whom they communicate: for else they should talk in vain, and could not be understood, if the sounds they applied to one idea were such as by the hearer were applied to another, which is to speak two languages. […]
> - Secondly, Because men would not be thought to talk barely of their own imagination, but of things as really they are; therefore they often suppose the words to stand also for the reality of things.[149]

This problem of communication is resolved by Locke by affirming the primacy of linguistic community. No individual speaker, not even "the great Augustus himself," in the example, has the power of imposing a word-idea connection at will onto a community of speakers: "no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same words that he does."[150] That power instead resides in "common use," and this ultimately derives its force from what Locke calls "a tacit consent:"

> It is true, common use, by a tacit consent, appropriates certain sounds to certain ideas in all languages, which so far limits the signification of that sound, that unless a man applies it to the same idea, he does not speak properly: and let me add, that unless a man's voice excite the same ideas in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly.[151]

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[149] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter II, Section 4 "Words often secretly referred, first, to the ideas in other men's minds," and Section 5 "Secondly, to the reality of things," p. 267

[150] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter II, Section 8 "Their signification perfectly arbitrary," p. 268

[151] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter II, Section 8 "Their signification perfectly arbitrary," p. 268

This tacit consent, then, apportions words to ideas, securing that connection for the community that abides by it. It is "consent" because it is conventional; it is "tacit" because prior to its existence there would not be any language to express it. This tacit consent is a sort of implicit *semiotic contract* which produces the conditions for communication; like the *social contract,* it rests on the agreement of individuals, and on the power of community to enforce it. In both contracts Locke invokes the language of "propriety:" the social contract is meant to protect the "proper" endowments of an individual (life, liberty and estates); the semiotic contract is required to protect the "proper" meaning of words. Semantic properties, as well as the property of the individual are elements in a system that a contract guarantees.

Considering the theory put forth in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* then, Walsh's claim that there exists "a network of mutual obligations" which is prior to the acquisition of consciousness of our "self-determining prerogative" can be taken to suggest that there exist certain linkages of signifiers to signifieds in language that constitute a system of mutual presuppositions by which individuals may assume the possibility of meaningful communication. This very system, I argue, and in particular the semiotic contract on which it relies, also produces individuals as beings conscious of their "self-determining prerogative." In this sense the semiotic contract also entails the paradoxical feature of producing the entities that will agree to it, a paradox that Locke solves by qualifying this consent as "tacit."

In light of this account of Locke's theory of knowledge and language, what are the implications for the interpretation of his more explicitly political writings, and in particular of their contribution to the ideology of liberalism? The notion of "semiotic individualism" seems to be a clearer lens through which otherwise puzzling aspects of the *Second Treatise* can be read. I argue that Locke is not (just) a possessive individualist, as MacPherson would have it; but he is not (quite) the communitarian thinker that Walsh wants to see. Nor, I believe, is Lockean interpretation to be located at any discrete point on an imaginary continuum between communitarianism and individualism; and neither is it to be constructed by juxtaposing discrete elements of both positions in a balance that is doomed to be

unsatisfactory and precarious. In characterizing his position as "semiotic individualism," on the one hand, I argue that Locke is committed to an individualist ontology, and that his individualism extends well beyond the material sphere of possessive acquisitiveness. The immaterial basis of Locke's individualism, on the other hand, is not rooted in the solipsism of disassociated beings, but in the socially constructed network of meaning through which they come to understand themselves. Lockean individuals are such because they have tacitly consented to a semiotic contract which is in turn what produces the conditions for their conscious existence.

Consider now the motivation for individuals to leave the state of nature and form civil societies. Locke identifies three major "inconveniences" in his otherwise agreeable state of nature: "want" of an "established, set, known law;" "want" of a "known and indifferent judge;" and "want" of a "power to back and support" the law "and give it due execution."[152] A desire to fix these problems is what prompts individuals into the social contract. In fact, this is but a specific case and application of the semiotic contract to which I refer above.

First and foremost, while in principle individuals in the state of nature have access to the law of nature, insofar as they are endowed with reason, the exact interpretation of that law remains indeterminate: "for though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures; yet men being biassed by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in the application of it to their particular cases."[153] While both appealing to their ideas about what the law of nature sanctions as "right" or "wrong," two different individuals could in fact mean something entirely different, either because of their emotional investments ("men being biassed by their interests"), or because of cognitive deficiencies ("for want of study of [the law of nature]"). The function of a positive law, "received and allowed by common consent," is precisely that of fixing ideas of "right" and "wrong" into words, so that those words can be taken to evoke

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[152] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* parr. 123-127, pp. 65-67

[153] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 124, p. 66

the same ideas in the minds of the members of a certain (linguistic) community.[154] If access to the law of nature were unproblematic, and in general if the "impression" of ideas onto the blank slate of the individual mind were not dependent on contingent experiences, then there would be no need to fix the meaning of the law of nature into a positive law made of words. Because the mind is a blank slate, the law of nature cannot be already inscribed in it, and because reason can only operate on ideas that come from experience, there is no guarantee that two rational individuals will derive the same ideas about the law of nature. The social contract that produces a positive law is possible because of the semiotic contract that establishes the connection between words and ideas.

Secondly, once ideas about the law of nature have been fixed into the words of a positive law, this still needs to be applied to specific cases. If the first inconvenience of the state of nature can be solved by anchoring signifieds to signifiers, the second pertains to the actual usage of the signs of law that are produced to the instances in which they are appropriate. If the first step was the creation of a positive language of law, the second is the application of that language to the world. Crucially, the "known and indifferent judge" that Locke postulates is to be endowed with "authority to determine all differences according to the established law."[155] This authority corresponds to the power of determining the extension of a sign. Semiotic analyses of meaning identify "intension" as the ensemble of the semantic properties of a certain sign, whereas "extension" describes the ensemble of referents in the world to which the sign can extend.[156] In his seminal article on concept formation, Giovanni Sartori has also employed the couplet extension-intension, describing the two terms as respectively equivalent to the denotation and the connotation of a word: "the denotation of a word is the totality of objects indicated by that word; and the connotation is the totality of characteristics anything must possess to be in the denotation of

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[154] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 124, p. 66

[155] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 125, p. 66

[156] See: Harry Deutsch, "Extension/Intension," in Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa, ed. by *A Companion to Metaphysics* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1995), pp. 158-160

that word."[157] For instance, the intension (or connotation) of the sign /cat/ includes semantic markers like: animal; feline; four-legged; has a tail; meows; etc. The extension (or denotation) of /cat/, on the other hand, comprehends all the entities in the world, past, present, and future, real and fictional, to which those properties apply: Felix; Tom; Hello Kitty; Maneki Neko; Socks; etc. Locke's judge determines the extension of the articles of the law to actual cases, like a zoologist would determine the extension of the abstract idea of /cat/ to concrete animals. Both would be engaged in the same semiotic operation.

Finally, having defined a "language" for the law, in both its intension and extension, Locke still needs to account for the validity of that system of signification as a system of communication too: he needs to demonstrate that individuals will be able to share and contest meaning, that the language will indeed be of "common use." The third inconvenience of the state of nature is that "there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution."[158] Though in this context Locke's use of the word "sentence" clearly refers to the legal meaning of an authoritative decision, it is a felicitous (and perhaps not entirely fortuitous) coincidence that that word could also be read as the grammatical unit of semantic and syntactic elements. In both ambits, the judicial and the linguistic, a sentence has validity and legitimacy only if it is sustained by the power of community: to apply it, or to simply understand it. Without community the sentence uttered by an individual is just a *flatus vocis,* empty sounds deprived of any force to impact the world.

These homologies between the social contract and the "tacit consent" that logically precedes it have not received the attention that they deserve from political theorists. Both are occasioned by certain inconveniences, and both devise solutions that hinge on a clever balance between the role of the individual and the role of community in the new formation, linguistic or political. There is one passage of the *Second Treatise,* in particular, in which

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[157] Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," in *American Political Science Review,* Vol. LXIV, No. 4, December 1970, p. 1041

[158] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 126, p. 66

Locke's discussion of political and linguistic matters is explicitly intertwined. In Chapter XIX the circumstances are described under which a government may be declared as dissolved. Locke sets forth by noting that "He that will speak with any clearness of the dissolution of government, ought in the first place to distinguish between the dissolution of society and the dissolution of government."[159] The precondition for properly assessing a political matter like the dissolution of government is that of "speaking with clearness;" once the linguistic armamentarium is appropriate, then Locke is confident that the political analysis will be accurate too. Accordingly, the government may cease to exist without precipitating the people back in the state of nature, for in the absence of a government power reverts to the society, and not to loose individuals. Moreover, after having detailed a fairly extensive list of causes for the dissolution of government, Locke responds to the possible objection that "this hypothesis lays a ferment for frequent rebellion."[160] His line of defense revolves around three main points. First, "the same will happen" regardless of the system of power: rebellions are a fact of political life, and their likelihood increases when "the people are made miserable, and find themselves exposed to the ill usage of arbitrary power."[161] Secondly, revolutions are not the result of sporadic mistakes on the part of the government: they originate only after "a long train of abuses, prevarications and artifices."[162] The etymology of "revolution" too here points to the concept of return: going back to a just(er) political order after a corrupt government has deviated from that course. In a skillful rhetorical move, here Locke swiftly substitutes "revolutions" for the term that he had originally used in formulating the possible accusation against his theory, "rebellion." In opposing rare "revolutions" to "frequent rebellion" he redefines the terms of the contention on a ground that is bound to be more favorable for the defendant.

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[159] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 211, p.107

[160] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 224, p. 113

[161] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 224, p. 113

[162] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 225, p. 113

In a rhetorical crescendo, then, Locke introduces the third and crucial argument by turning the accusation of fomenting sedition on its head. He returns to "rebellion," and boldly claims that his "doctrine of power" is indeed "the best fence against [it]."[163] In order to justify this claim, he provides a definition of the intension of /rebellion/ as: "an opposition, not to persons, but authority, which is founded only in the constitutions and laws of the government."[164] From this he then derives a definition of the extension of /rebels/:

> those, whoever they be, who by force break through, and by force justify their violation of [the constitutions and laws of the government], are truly and properly rebels: for when men, by entering into society and civil-government, have excluded force, and introduced laws for the preservation of property, peace, and unity amongst themselves, those who set up force again in opposition to the laws, do rebellare, that is, bring back again the state of war, and are properly rebels.[165]

It is ultimately on the power of language to establish shared meaning, and to attach unequivocal expression to it, that this defense rests. The power of community to forge the sign /rebellare/ from the association of a certain signifier to a certain signified binds members of that community to concede that Locke's theory does not "la[y] a ferment for frequent rebellion." Much like the establishment of a social contract requires a semiotic contract to be in place, the dissolution of government does not dissolve the social contract so long as the provisions of the semiotic contract continue to apply. Society survives the dissolution of government if the language that binds it together by making the contract possible remains in place. Short of redefining what /rebellare/ means (which is no disposition of any given individual), the act of deposing a corrupt government does not unravel the social contract, but confirms it in existence.

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[163] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 226, p. 114

[164] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 226, p. 114

[165] J. Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 226, p. 114

In conclusion, I argue that reading the *Second Treatise of Government* in light of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* allows for a more refined understanding of Locke's political theory by unearthing the semiotic foundations on which it rests. The concept of semiotic individualism points, at the very least, to the fact that Locke's individuals possess more than their property, however generally defined: they own their ideas inasmuch as the self preexists and outlasts the accidents of experience that cause the formation of ideas. In this ontological view of individualism, ideas are not constitutive of the self. On the other hand, the semiotic dimension of human beings, the association of words (signifiers) to ideas (signifieds) is inherently rooted in the dimension of a community: inasmuch as individuals use words to communicate with each other, they are always already acting as members of a community. In this double gesture there lies much of the versatility of Locke's thought, a versatility that contributes to explain the success of liberal discourse more generally. To some of the other sources for the foundations of liberal thought I now turn.

MILL'S POLITICS OF SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUALISM

Locke's construct of semiotic individualism constitutes the communicative infrastructure of the ideology of liberalism. On the one hand, the self is defined as "the same thing in different times and places," thus accounting for the disposition toward individualism that will come to characterize the main line of development of liberal thought. On the other hand, in Locke's story, these selves are not unencumbered, to the extent that they are immersed in the communities of shared meaning through which they come to understand themselves, each other, and the world. Of these two fundamental commitments the first tends to take precedence in the thought of later contributors to liberal theory. Consequently, the ideology of liberalism inherits an emphasis on the individual which is not balanced by an equal attention to the grounding of individuals in their communities.

The intervention of John Stuart Mill in the 19th century, in particular, signals a crucial phase in the definition of the central role of the individual in the system of thought of liberalism. Whereas Locke had characterized the individual in terms of the continuity of consciousness throughout the incessant flow of experiences, Mill prefers to refer to "the free development of individuality."[166] Accordingly, whereas Locke had conjured up the power of community to avoid the disruption of that continuity, hence protecting the conditions that allow it ("life, liberty, and estates"), Mill's concern is less with ensuring stability and more with creating the conditions that foster the unfolding of the potential that the developmental ideal entails. The purpose of *On Liberty,* then, is to advance a theory of what social and political arrangements favor individuality, and what limitations to individual freedom, if any, are ever acceptable. This, I argue, configures Mill's general project as one of "sovereign individualism." Whereas Locke had grounded individuals in the linguistic community in which they acquire sense of themselves and the world, Mill appears to relieve the sovereign individual of most social attachments. Nevertheless, I argue that in underscoring the value of reason as both a descriptive attribute of humans and a normative aspiration, this version of the liberal narrative of sovereignty ends up committing the individual to the external power of certain social expectations of reason. Though the Victorian climate of the 19th century might explain this attitude, at least in part, I argue that Mill's position also signals a more general tendency in liberal discourse toward the subordination of other modes of action to a certain codification of reason.

Mill subsumes the core of his argument in the fundamental thesis that: "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."[167] Several considerations about this formulation are in order, and contrasting its elements with the views of Locke is especially illustrative of Mill's departure from that system of thought. First, the political order designed by the *Second Treatise* had been primarily concerned with the bodily extent of

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[166] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty,* ed. by Elizabeth Rapaport (Hacket Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge: 1978), p. 54

[167] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty,* p. 9

individual liberty: the protection of "property" was ultimately aimed at promoting the continuation of bodily existence, in both one's self-preservation and the preservation of the rest of (hu-)mankind. To the extent that the *Letter Concerning Toleration* had carved a realm of the "mind" as separate from the body, and also worthy of protection from governmental interference, the goal was not the advancement of freedom, but congruence with religious dictates about true belief:

> In the second place, the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. […] Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgement that they have framed of things.[168]

The freedom of the mind was valuable for Locke not in its own right, but only because it served God's highest purposes better than forcible conversion. Mill clearly expands on this reasoning, and identifies the unfettered freedom of the mind as intrinsically desirable, and not just as a precondition for living a genuine religious life. Freedom thus applies to both body and mind (a problematic dualism that Mill does not question here), and the relation of the individual to both realms is defined as "sovereign." The principle of undivided, absolute sovereignty that Locke had expunged from the political, gets now reinstated by Mill at the level of the sovereign individual. Nor is this a conclusion that Locke could have made compatible with his thinking, for on his account the self is always compounded of a merely individual dimension, inasmuch as contingent experiences affect the mind, and an irreducibly social grounding, inasmuch as consciousness develop linguistically, and the ideas that are gathered individually become fungible only insofar as they are fixed in socially codified words. Mill postulates unity where Locke had seen separation, thus returning etymological accuracy to the notion of the "individual."

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[168] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration [1689]* (Bobbs-Merrill, New York: 1955), p. 18

Consequently, the only limitation that individual sovereignty can admit is the competing claim to sovereignty of another individual. There is no superior principle to which sovereignty can be subordinated; but the boundaries of its extent can be determined in a way that both defines and enables individual freedom. The "harm principle" states that:

> the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.[169]

While Locke had also postulated self-protection as the paramount goal stipulated by the law of nature, he had also added the subordinate provision that "the rest of mankind" be preserved too (whenever the latter does not conflict with the former). Moreover, Locke had envisioned a proactive role of the state in protecting property in order to guarantee the conditions for self-protection (and the protection of mankind). Mill, on the other hand, is only willing to recognize defensive power to the "collectivity:" not the power to protect, but the power to stop transgressions of sovereignty that threaten to cause harm. In general, Mill's version of liberalism appears to systematically resolve in favor of the individual the tensions that may arise in society.

Michael Freeden identifies a "Millite core" to liberalism, subsumed in the phrase "the free development of individuality." For Freeden, this phrase fuses together the three elements that form the nucleus of Mill's argument: liberty, the individual, and the idea of progress. The latter, in particular, reflects the 19th century milieu of faith in reason and in its deployment over time at the societal level. According to Freeden the morphology of the ideology of Millite liberalism hinges on this conceptual construct:

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[169] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty,* p. 9

> The relationship of liberty, individualism, and progress is one of mutual dependence and definition. It is impossible to disentangle them and to position one alone at the core of Mill's argument; all three are most usefully regarded as core concepts. Each manifests an ineliminable component: for liberty, it is the notion of non-constraint; for individualism, the notion of the person as a separate entity possessing unique attributes and capable of choice; for progress, the notion of movement from less desirable states – 'the idea of moving onward', as Mill puts it.[170]

Freeden's morphological analysis is both insightful and perceptive. In emphasizing the co-determination of the foundational values of liberty, individualism and progress, it does point to a distinctive character of Mill's thought. However, as usual, it only illuminates the plane of content, leaving the deeper grammatical aspects of Mill's ideology substantially unexplored. By looking at Mill's more explicitly political writings in light of his overarching philosophy of science, I argue, a more complete assessment of his blend of liberalism can be devised. In *A System of Logic* a general theory of knowledge is proposed, and concrete prescriptions are made for the acquisition and organization of knowledge. The research paradigm that Mill delineates identifies induction as the appropriate method for science, whereas deduction is a merely derivative function that does not add any new knowledge. Induction moves from the observation of particular cases to the formulation of general rules, and thus it logically precedes deduction, which simply applies general rules to particular cases. Mill's preference for the process that starts with the particular is clear:

> we shall yet, conformably to usage, consider the name Induction as more peculiarly belonging to the process of establishing the general proposition; and the remaining operation, which is substantially that of interpreting the general proposition, we shall call by its usual name, Deduction. And we shall consider every process by which anything is inferred respecting an unobservable case, as consisting of an Induction followed by a Deduction; because, although the process needs not necessarily be carried out in this form, it is always susceptible of the form, and must be thrown into it when assurance of scientific accuracy is needed and desired.[171]

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[170] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 145

[171] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (Harper & Brothers, New York: 1858), p, 137

In this formulation, the logical priority of induction over deduction corresponds to the primacy of the particular over the general in the realm of science. Much like the grammar of scientific discourse proceeds from particular to general, so the grammar of social interactions aggregates individuals in social compounds. However, Mill's concern for "scientific accuracy" notwithstanding, his faith in the virtue of induction rests on the positivistic milieu of his day. Charles Sanders Peirce's pragmatism, on the other hand, provided a more refined understanding of logical inference. As I note in Chapter II, Peirce's model supplemented the traditional categories of induction and deduction with what he called "hypothesis," "retroduction," and finally "abduction." In abductive reasoning, given a rule and a result, a *probable* case is inferred; in Peirce's own example:

> Suppose I enter a room and there find a number of bags, containing different kinds of beans. On the table there is a handful of white beans; and, after some searching, I find one of the bags contains white beans only. I at once infer as a probability, or as a fair guess, that this handful was taken out of that bag. This sort of inference is called making an hypothesis. It is the inference of a case from a rule and a result.[172]

Drawing hypothetical inferences, in fact, is the kind of reasoning in which human beings are engaged most frequently: unable to observe an adequate number of cases to infer certain rules (induction), and unaware of pre-existing rules to be mechanically applied to cases (deduction), we often proceed by making "educated guesses" based on the available information, and accept the conclusions as tentatively, heuristically true (abduction). Nor is the abductive model only valuable for describing mundane inferential operations, for scientific research too has been described, at least since Thomas Khun, as a much less orderly endeavor than inductive accounts would suggest, moved more by paradigm shifts than by the unfolding of linear progress.[173] Inductive reasoning, though, is a logical paradigm

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[172] Charles Sanders Peirce, "Deduction, Induction, and Hypothesis (1878)," in Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, ed. by, *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 1 (1867-1893)* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis: 1992), pp. 188-189

[173] See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1962)

especially well suited to provide Mill's liberalism with its discursive infrastructure: it starts with particular cases, and aggregates them into rules; it starts with individuals, and logically compounds them into a derivative society. Rules, like societies, therefore, have no explanatory power of their own, but are simply the convenient repositories of the specificity that is ultimately grounded in individuals/cases.

Moreover, "scientific accuracy," in Mill's view, is "needed and desired" not only within the limited extent of the natural sciences, but is the paramount value of the social sciences too. Having absorbed the utilitarian lesson from both his father James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, Mill is skeptical of metaphysical accounts of human nature, and of political phenomena too. Accordingly, the very idea of the social contract is untenable for him: "Though society is not founded on a contract, and though no good purpose is answered by inventing a contract in order to deduce social obligations from it, every one who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit."[174] Far from following from general rules, individual obligation toward others (the obligation not to harm them) is to be understood as a cost-benefit calculation aimed at maximizing individual utility.

Mill's notion of utility *de facto* departs from Bentham's formulation in that it involves a crucial distinction between "higher" and "lower" pleasures. "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility," Mill claims "to recognise the fact, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others;" higher pleasures are those "of the intellect, of the feeling and imagination, and of the moral sentiments," whereas lower pleasures are those "of mere sensation."[175] Whether or not this is indeed a development of utilitarianism that remains compatible with the principles of the theory, Mill's classification of pleasures introduces a new layer of complexity to the articulation of a liberal ideology. From a

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[174] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty,* p. 73

[175] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Savill and Edwards, London: 1863), p. 11

sympathetic point of view, John Gray has argued that this is both compatible, and indeed a fundamental component of Mill's doctrine of liberty:

> Mill's conception of happiness is hierarchical and pluralistic in that it decomposes happiness into the projects, attachments and ideals expressed in an indefinitely large set of human lives. If we treat Mill's distinction between the higher and lower pleasures as being between different kinds of activity or forms of life rather than between states of mind, we can see that, though he is far from supposing that the higher pleasures will be the same for all men, he does think they have the common feature of being available only to men who have developed their distinctively human capacity for autonomous thought and action.[176]

In Gray's account, then, Mill's insistence on the higher quality of certain pleasures does not result in the imposition of a particular view of the good life onto other individuals, which would contradict the fundamental idea of the individual as sovereign over his mind and body. Rather, liberty is enhanced by the cultivation of pleasures the enjoyment of which depends on one's "capacity for autonomous thought and action." Wendy Donner finds Gray's treatment of autonomy in relation to self-development problematic, as it "plac[es] on Mill's theory a restrictive elitist and libertarian emphasis that violates the spirit of his liberalism, shifting his political philosophy away from the collectivist, social democratic pole and toward the libertarian individualist pole of the continuum of liberalism."[177] Mill's liberalism, in Donner's analysis, would indeed be inclined to the "social democratic" pole. She observes: "According to Mill, the firm line his critics draw between individuality and sociality, between the private individual and the public individual, is misleading and inaccurate. Individuality and sociality are not contradictory, but complementary notions."[178] Appropriate social circumstances foster the conditions for the free development of

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[176] John Gray, *Mill On Liberty: A Defence* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London: 1983), p. 72

[177] Wendy Donner, *The Liberal Self. John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY: 1991), p. 166

[178] W. Donner, *The Liberal Self,* p. 147

individuality, without constraining it. Gray's position, however, remains compatible with this, as he notes:

> Though, like Aristotle [Mill] thinks that all human excellences will be informed or characterised by the exercise of generic human capacities, he differs from Aristotle in insisting on the uniqueness which will characterise any man's happiness […] A happy man will not, then, be simply a very distinct instance of a general type; rather, one part of his happiness, a necessary part in Mill's view, will be that he has fulfilled the peculiar demands of his own nature.[179]

Mill then, would be able to claim that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" without by the same token necessarily indicating Socrates as *the* model of virtue, of "higher pleasures," for everybody.[180] Mill would seem to have been able to turn Tolstoy's famous adage over its head: happy families are *not* all alike; every happy *individual* can find his/her own way to be happy (so long as it is still within the confines of what count as "higher pleasures"). Gray's generous defense is not convincing, but Donner's thesis of a socially-minded Millian liberalism is unpersuasive too. Mill seems rather to incorporate into liberal thinking the assumptions about science, progress, development that permeate his 19th century sensibility. The social, or even democratic dimension is not valuable in its own right, but only if, and insofar as, it contributes to the conditions under which self-developmental individuality can prosper. This remains the ultimate goal for Mill, and societies are evaluated based on how they perform on this measure. This attitude is confirmed by passages like: "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end."[181] The same teleology of human development that applies to individuals (from lower to higher pleasures)

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[179] John Gray, *Mill On Liberty: A Defence,* p. 81

[180] J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism,* p. 14

[181] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty,* p. 10

also applies to societies (from barbarism to civilization: advanced, Enlightened, liberal, remarkably similar to his own England…).

In general, Mill's project of sovereign individualism proves to be a rather profound reformulation of the proto-liberal stance expressed by Locke. Having expunged the residual "communitarian" elements of Locke's picture of the self as a semiotically defined entity, Mill both relieves the individual from any concrete attachments to a social dimension (minus the obligation not to harm others), and at the same time commits him (and, significantly, her too) to a plan for self-development whose path seems to be already marked. While the notion of individuality clearly remains consistent with the overall goal of individual freedom, shielding it from the threat of the "tyranny of the majority" too, its unfolding seems to be subject to a sort of "soft tyranny" of a different kind. Reason, which had been already described by Locke as a fundamental attribute of humans, becomes in the 19th century a normative goal, if not a totalizing aspiration. Arguably more insidious precisely because it is less explicitly recognized as such, the soft tyranny of reason becomes a constitutive element of liberal discourse: not only are individuals recognized as the "owners" of their articulations of meaning and actions, but they are also assumed to deploy their "properties" (of meaning and actions) according to certain more or less predictable patterns of operation. A fond penchant for reason thus becomes a key ingredient of liberal ideology, and of liberal discourse. To a contemporary contributor to the doctrines of liberalism I now turn.

RAWLS' POLITICS OF TEMPERED INDIVIDUALISM

Virtually all references to Locke in contemporary political debates are qualified with a note about the different historically and cultural coordinates in which his political theory is to be situated in order to be genuinely understood. Consequently, while he is revered as a key figure in the development of early modern political thought, his contributions to the foundations of liberalism are assumed as a starting point from which the theories and

ideologies of liberalism indubitably draw inspiration, but just as indubitably depart in some significant ways. The tradition of Mill's liberalism, on the other hand, can still be invoked by some liberal advocates as the articulation of a fully accomplished liberal paradigm. On September 20th, 2007, for instance, Mill was announced as the winner of "The Great Liberal Contest" organized by the Liberal Democrat History Group, a British organization devoted to "the study of Liberal Democrat, SDP and Liberal History," and the editor of the *Journal of Liberal History.*[182] "His masterpiece, *On Liberty,*" reads the motivation, "emphatically vindicated individual moral autonomy, and celebrated the importance of originality and dissent; it is the symbol of office of the President of the [British] Liberal Democrats."[183]

Encomia and acclaim notwithstanding, several critiques of Mill's doctrine of liberty can be levied from within a liberal camp. In particular, his connections to the theories of Utilitarianism expand beyond the mere biographical datum, and while his deviation from the Benthamite variant is remarkable, his substantial adherence to the epistemology of that position is also problematic. John Rawls, among others, has offered a reading of Mill aimed at highlighting his contributions to liberalism *despite* the unfortunate utilitarian elements:

> [M]y object has been to explain how, given his apparently Benthamite beginning, he managed to end up with principles of justice, liberty, and equality not all that far away from justice as fairness, so that his political and social doctrine – lifted from his overall moral view-could give us the principles of a modern and comprehensive liberalism.[184]

In general, Rawls' overall philosophical undertaking responds to the goal of devising certain principles of justice, and defending them within a tradition of liberalism alternative to that of utilitarianism. Though he successfully refuses the key utilitarian theses on human nature and

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[182] see: Richard Reeves, "Mill and Politics Today," in *Journal of Liberal History,* Vol. 57, Winter 2007

[183] Duncan Brack, "John Stuart Mill chosen as greatest British Liberal," available at: http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=110&item=history. Retrieved online on Monday, April 5th, 2010.

[184] John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.: 2007), p. 313

the social arrangements that befit it, I argue that Rawls' argument for a form of "tempered individualism" ultimately retains the same exclusionary potential that also haunts other articulation of liberal discourse. To the extent that his arguments for "justice as fairness" and for a "well-ordered society" crucially depend on an account of human nature predicated on the value of reason, the status of those human beings whose reason is deemed defective remains quite precarious. This, in turn, constitutes a fundamental trait of liberal discourse, a narrative style in which to the expectation that action be performed rationally corresponds the precept that it be expressed according to rational rules for the combination of units of meaning as well. A rational grammar of human action also posits a rational grammar of discursive formations.

Rawls responds to the utilitarian position by resorting to the style of thinking of 17th and 18th century social contract theory, though, as Michael White has noticed, he defines the object of his investigation differently. Whereas Hobbes, Locke, and to some extent Rousseau privileged the question of "commutative justice," concerned with determining "what parties would be willing to agree to, perhaps in idealized circumstances," Rawls focuses primarily on "distributive justice," purporting to devise principles for the fair allocation of "the benefits and burdens of social cooperation among the citizens."[185] In this sense he claims that justice "is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of system of thought."[186] The ambition of *A Theory of Justice,* of 1971, is therefore that of finding the "truth" about justice. In later writings Rawls will progressively abandon this metaphysical concern with "true justice," and will instead ground his conception within certain historical, cultural, and political boundaries. Throughout the development of his intellectual career Rawls remains committed to a theory of liberalism in which the foundations of individual freedom are coupled with a formulation of social equity that marks a clear break with previous instances of liberal discourse, and yet continues to be consistent with liberalism.

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[185] Michael White, *Political Philosophy: An Historical Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, Oxford: 2003), p. 201

[186] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass: 1971), p. 3

That Rawls's theory of justice moves from liberal premises is evidenced by his definition of society as "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage:"

> Let us assume, to fix ideas, that society is a more or less self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognize certain rules of conduct as binding and who for the most part act in accordance with them. Suppose further that these rules specify a system of cooperation designed to advance the good of those taking part in it.[187]

In this version of social contract, then, the question of justice pertains to the distribution of the "mutual advantage" produced in society among its individual members. In order to identify the social arrangements that would qualify society as "just" in this sense, Rawls resolves that the appropriate unit of analysis is that of the individual: for an allocation of costs and benefits within society to be just, it needs to be met with the consent of the concerned individuals. Establishing this consent is the crucial hinge of this theory, and the main problem that will lead to its subsequent reformulations. In *A Theory of Justice* an "original position" is hypothesized in which the individual is found as a disembodied, unencumbered entity, a kernel of pure rationality and pure potentiality.[188] As such, this view designs a much more radical picture of individualism than what either Locke's state of nature or Mill's notion of utility had envisioned. In my analysis, while Rawls normatively gestures toward a more "social" pole within the discourse of liberalism, the method that he chooses to employ for furthering his argument betrays a deeper commitment to an ontology of individualism. Accordingly, I refer to Rawls' blend of individualism as "tempered." On the one hand, the individualistic conclusions of other positions within liberalism are mitigated by the formulation that social cooperation ought to be more than an instrumental concern for pre-social individuals, as, conversely, it ought to be concerned with "mutual advantage." On the other hand, however, in conjuring up a stripped-down, infinitely agile stylization of "the individual" as the subject of the original position, Rawls tempers individualism also in the

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[187] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 4

[188] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 118 and ff.

sense of rendering its claims more resistant to possible critiques on the account that human nature is more complex. By settling for such a minimalistic description of "the individual," this fiction alleges to have accessed the ultimate core of the notion, without the dubious conceptual baggage that had weakened other accounts. Moreover, as Bonnie Honig has observed, Rawls' account of the original position is not merely functional to the unfolding of his theory, but is endowed with normative value as well, as it "operates as a much needed heuristic device designed to isolate morally relevant considerations, to simplify, clarify, order (and also consolidate) what Rawls takes to be a stable body of moral and prudential beliefs."[189] A moral order exists outside the contingences of life, and the fiction of the original position allows individuals to access it. Furthermore, Honig points out:

> When Rawlsian citizens experience dissonance (in themselves or in others), the default is to return to the original position and confirm that, from its perspective, the outlaw impulse, desire, or activity in question is indeed irrational or unjust.[190]

Individuals in the original position operate behind "a veil of ignorance," so that their choice about what would constitute "justice" is not does not suffer from self-interested bias: "They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations."[191] Based on these assumptions, Rawls obtains two principles of justice that he enunciates as:

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.
> Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.[192]

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[189] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca: 1993), p. 135

[190] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics,* p. 137

[191] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* pp. 136-137

The first principle articulates a version of the canonical liberal theme of individual freedom; consequently, it takes precedence over the second whenever the two are in conflict. It is the second principle, however, that characterizes the specificity of Rawls' politics of tempered individualism. Allowing inequalities only insofar as they are "to everyone's advantage" certainly introduces a concern for the well-being of everybody in society that is at the very least eccentric from the perspective of classical liberalism. Moreover, Rawls specifies section (a) of the second principle by presenting what he calls the "difference principle," the distributive scheme that he favors:

> the higher expectations of those better suited are just if and only if they work as part of a scheme which improves the expectations of the least advantaged members of society. The intuitive idea is that the social order is not to establish and secure the more attractive prospects of those better off unless doing so is to the advantage of the less fortunate.[193]

With remarkable argumentative elegance Rawls reaches rather egalitarian conclusions without departing from his liberal premises, and in fact reaffirming them in the form of the first principle. In a virtuoso exercise of intellectual acumen, he stretches the limits of liberal discourse almost beyond liberalism itself; the versatility of the language of liberalism, that he consistently invokes and employs, allows him to validate "justice as fairness" as the choice of a rational individual. That this is a necessary conclusion, however, fails to convince some of Rawls' early critics. Presented as the outcome of rational decision-making under certain conditions of radical individualism, the two principles of justice are called into question with regards to their alleged universality and moral superiority to competing conceptions of the good and the just. Defending the very approach that Rawls sets forth to undermine, John Harsanyi remarks: "It is regrettable that Rawls has ever made the untenable claim that he is

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[192] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 60

[193] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 65

proposing a moral theory superior to utilitarian theory."[194] From the libertarian camp, Robert Nozick proposes a theory of justice as "entitlement" that contradicts the redistributive outcomes that the difference principle indicates: "Rawls' construction is incapable of yielding an entitlement or historical conception of distributive justice."[195]

Responding to some of these critiques, but conspicuously avoiding to address the radical disagreement with Nozick, Rawls reworks the explanation for consent to the principles of justice as fairness. Redrawing it as a "political, not metaphysical" notion, he introduces the idea of an "overlapping consensus" as the logical justification of his concept of justice as fairness: "a consensus that includes all the opposing philosophical and religious doctrines likely to persist and to gain adherents in a more or less just constitutional democratic society."[196] This move dramatically limits the universalistic appeal of the theory, as it contextualizes this vision in the contingencies of Western liberal democracy. Rawls does not think (any more) that political theory can discover the formula of "true justice." Much more modestly, he presents his view as a "working agreement on the fundamental questions of political justice," a set of norms and institutional arrangements intended "to narrow the range of public disagreement."[197] At the same time, postulating this consensus (albeit contingent and historical) to really exist at least in certain societies, betrays in Rawls a rather robust confidence in his ability to read political phenomena and social movements – a confidence that his theoretical writings are not always persuasive in defending.

The significant revisions to the original statement of his theory of justice do not call into question Rawls' commitment to liberalism. Rather, they, once again, attest to the flexibility of liberal language: both from behind the "veil of ignorance," and from within an "overlapping

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[194] John Harsanyi, "Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality? A Critique of John Rawls's Theory," in *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 69, No. 2 (Jun. 1975), p. 606

[195] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, New York: 1974), p. 202

[196] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 1985), pp. 225 – 226

[197] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," pp. 228-229

consensus," the two principles of justice as fairness are justified in the name of the liberal individual, and in both cases the liberty principle is superior to the difference principle. The two arguments, however, differ in some very important ways; primarily, I argue, they signal a shift in Rawls' theory from a discourse of *rationality* to a discourse of *reasonableness*. The picture of a single, abstract, rational individual arriving at the principle of justice on the basis of silent calculations gives way to the view of multiple, real, reasonable individuals, comparing their beliefs through the medium of language, and identifying a core of shared meanings. Rawls himself discusses the roles of the Reasonable and the Rational in his theory in *Political Liberalism*:

> What is that distinguishes the reasonable from the rational? […]
> Persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals say, they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. Those norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore as justifiable to them; and they are ready to discuss the fair terms that other propose. […]
> The rational is, however, a distinct idea from the reasonable and applies to a single, unified agent (either an individual or corporate person) with the powers of judgment and deliberation on seeking ends and interests peculiarly its own. The rational applies to how these ands and interests are adopted and affirmed, as well as to how they are given priority. It also applies to the choice of means, in which case it is guided by such familiar principles as: to adopt the most effective means to ends, or to select the more probable alternative, other things equal.[198]

The rhetorical move from the rational to the reasonable corresponds to a substantial turn outward in the search for legitimacy for Rawls' conception of justice: from the individual as a rational chooser, to society at large as a system of fair cooperation among reasonable individuals. In this restatement Rawls' defense of reasonableness comes to resonate quite closely with Jürgen Habermas' conception of communicative action. Despite their enduring divergences, the critical engagement between the two thinkers points to the progressive rapprochement between rather diverse worldviews: liberal and grounded in analytic philosophy one; continental and rooted in critical theory, the other. Rawls' very willingness

[198] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, New York: 1993), pp. 48-50

to enter a conversation with Habermas can be regarded as symbolic of his cautious openness to the idea that the boundaries of the reasonable might extend beyond the universe of sense of liberalism.

In order to fully appreciate the evolution of Rawls' thought, and in order to estimate whether or not he ultimately succeeds in overcoming the critiques and in proposing a theoretically robust model, a careful semantic analysis of the concepts of "rational" and "reasonable" is expedient (see Figure 2). As a preliminary note, it should be observed that in the framework implicit in Rawls' theory "rational" and "reasonable" constitute the two poles of human reason. The attribute of "rationality," in this sense, designates the conformity of an instance of human conduct to expectations formed on the basis of certain assumptions on ends, means and will, and grounded at the level of the individual. In other words, in this context "rational" is the course of action chosen by an individual who selects the best means to achieve her ends – or, more precisely, to achieve those ends that she gives priority to, in case they conflict with other ends of hers. The key elements of rationality appear to be: 1) being rooted in one's individual consciousness; 2) being fundamentally instrumental in its character; 3) being concerned with ends only in a comparative way, and not in regards to an end's intrinsic value; 4) being a judgment over the outcome of some process of selection among alternative courses of action.

Conversely, "reasonable" literally indicates something "able to be reasoned upon," where "to be reasoned" points toward acts of deliberation and discussion among different interlocutors. The key elements of reasonableness in this context therefore are: 1) requiring more than one individual consciousness; 2) willingness to engage in conversation (real or simulated, staged in an individual consciousness) about both ends and means; 3) willingness to accept the other interlocutors' premises of validity; 4) being a judgment over the process (and not the outcome) of selection among alternative course of actions.

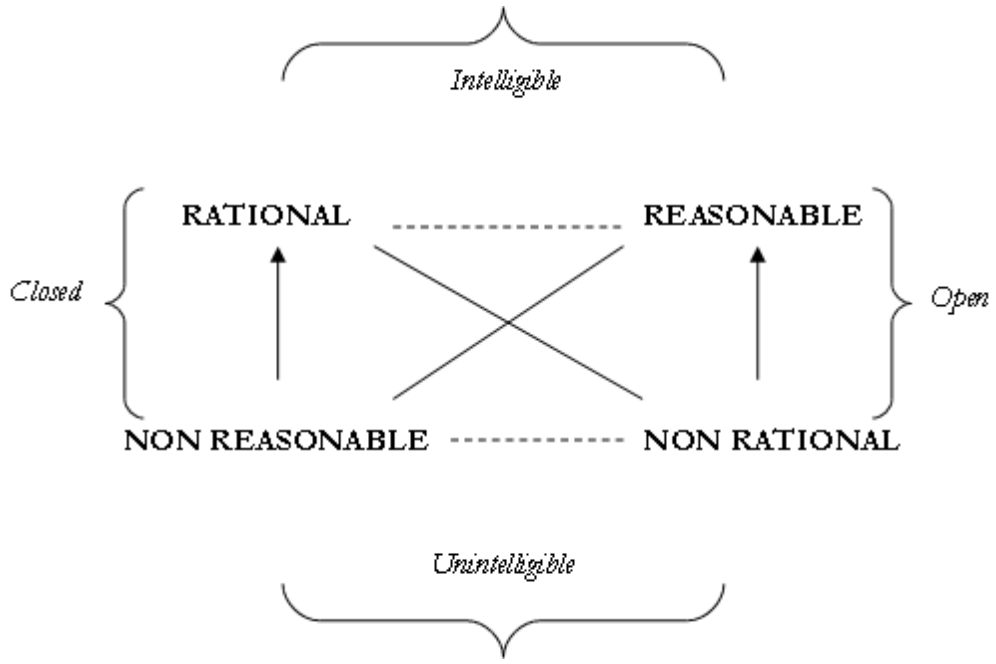
Figure 2. Rational vs. Reasonable

Rational	Reasonable
Individual	*Social*
Outcome	*Process*
Instrumental	*Communicative*

The antonymy between rational and reasonable, however, does not capture all the complexity of human nature, not even when one focuses only on the notion of society as a fair system of cooperation. This opposition can be logically developed by borrowing from semiotics the fundamental tool of the semiotic square, which I briefly introduce in Chapter II (see Figure 3). In this case, the semiotic square starts from a couplet of semantic units, "rational" and "reasonable" that entertain a relation of reciprocal contrariness. On each of the two units is performed the logic operation of negation, so that each generates its contradictory: "rational" produces "non rational" and "reasonable" produces "non reasonable." It should be noticed here that terms like "irrational" and "unreasonable" are loaded with a surplus of meaning in their common usage, so that they would not be good candidates to signify the simple negation of the original terms. "Non rational," for instance, covers a semantic area of which what we refer to as "irrational" is but one province. Rawls, however, does not seem to be concerned with this, as he opposes "unreasonable people" to reasonable ones, and "irrational people" to rational ones.[199] Visualizing semantic relations on the semiotic square allows for greater accuracy in assessing how meaning is constituted and contested in language.

[199] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 50, 54

Figure 3. The Semiotic Square: Rational vs. Reasonable



The two terms on the top horizontal axis ("rational" and "reasonable") are called contraries, and their opposition is a qualitative one. The terms of the two couplets on the diagonal axes (or schemes) are called contradictories, and their relation is one of negation. The two terms on the bottom horizontal axis are called subcontraries, or converses, and their opposition is less clearly demarcated than that of the original contraries. Finally, on the vertical axes (deictics) there lie relations of presupposition (for instance, "non rational" suggests, or may imply, "reasonable"). The italicized lexemes, outside the braces, indicate complex terms *(méta-terms)* that combine the characteristics of two simpler units of meaning. Combining what is "Reasonable" with what is "Non Rational" suggests "Openness:" an open-ended process in which meaning can be contested and redefined. Combining the "Non Reasonable" with the "Rational," on the other hand, points to a pole of "Closure:" both being "unreasonable" and being "rational" indicate that one is not available for contesting meaning, as meaning is necessarily predetermined, prefixed, closed.

Turning to the horizontal axes, "Rational" and "Reasonable" articulate a category that I term of the "Intelligible." This verbalization, although certainly arbitrary, has the advantage of pointing toward a common area of "understandability" and "predictability," that the notions of rational and reasonable participate of, in different modalities. Human *reason*, in this sense, is broadly understood as the style of thought of linearity. Metonymy is the modality by which this kind of thinking proceeds: the logic concatenation of meanings on the axis of sintagma characterizes both the solipsism of rationality and the socially deliberative enterprise of reasonableness.

Conversely, metaphor is the principle that governs the bottom edge of the square, "Non Reasonable" and "Non Rational." The metaterm I use for this polarity is "Unintelligible," because what is common to the subcontraries, and opposes them to the contraries, is the fact that they cannot be predicted or even understood on the basis of some algorithm, as in the case of rationality, and neither are they the algorithm, as in the case of reasonableness. Because metaphor expresses the sense of what is "non reasonable" or "non rational," it contains an element of ineffability as for how it works. By transferring meanings, it defies linguistic explanations and resists the linearization of its process. While metonymy advances knowledge in a predictable manner, metaphor by its very nature creates new knowledge (until it becomes a ready-made semantic unit codified in language).

For all its versatility, I argue that liberal language is much better equipped to deal with metonyms than with metaphors. In general, though liberal discourse can articulate intelligible meaning by allocating it in neat sintagmatic relations, it remains virtually silent on what might be termed "unintelligible meaning." Different rules govern the semantic field that works by intuitive, poetic, passionate associations of meaning; accordingly, metaphor is a potentially subversive tool for the liberal order grounded in the realm of human reason. Thus Rawls, in keeping with an inveterate tradition of glorification of "reason" and corresponding devaluation of its negation, completely overlooks the bottom couplet of the square when discussing the conditions for establishing society as a fair system of cooperation. I believe

that this is not only an instance of selectivity in the crafting of a theory, but that it betrays an attitude that ultimately discredits Rawls' conception of politics.

The political is dramatically misrepresented when it is only confined to the sphere of reason. When passions are not allowed to enter the public sphere, the latter becomes an aseptic place fit for academic, vacant exchanges. Purified from passion, disembodied from senses, meaning becomes senseless. Rawls believes that reasonableness alone can support meaningful exchange and fair cooperation; but he misunderstands the role of reasonableness in at least two ways. First, he does not realize that the dependence of reasonableness on (liberal) language subjects it to the same limits that (liberal) language encounters in expressing the full range of the human experience. Rawls believes that his subjects of reasonableness literally "speak;" yet he overlooks how much they "are spoken" through language in their acts of speech. Limiting the phenomenology of language to the expressive function, and equating that with the intentionality of the individual speaker, Rawls neglects the performative dimension that is constitutive of the subject.

Second, to Rawls' insistence on reasonableness and rationality does not correspond a mere benign neglect for the unreasonable and the irrational; rather, the exclusionary potential of liberalism surfaces through this element of his theory. Not only does this systematically mortify human traits as fundamental as passions, sentiments, bodily sensations, which are "not able to be reasoned upon." More troublingly, Rawls' liberalism deliberately excludes certain categories of human beings from the political, and arguably from full participation in society. He starts by defining who counts as a citizen, a full member of society:

> Since we start within the tradition of democratic thought, we also think of citizens as free and equal persons. The basic intuitive idea is that in virtue of what we may call their moral powers, and the powers of reason, thought, and judgment connected with those powers, we say that persons are free. And in virtue of their having these

> powers to the requisite degree to be fully cooperating members of society, we say that persons are equal.[200]

"In virtue of" is the locution that Rawls uses to connect moral powers and reason to freedom and equality. In other words, in order to be free and equal, one has to be endowed with (enough) moral powers and reason. It follows that, without (enough) moral powers and reason, one cannot be regarded as fully free and equal to others. In order to be free, then, citizens have to "regard themselves as self-originating sources of valid claims."[201] Rawls is aware that under those conditions there are human beings who do not qualify for "citizenship," and thus for freedom and equality. He acknowledges that by affirming:

> This does not imply that no one ever suffers from illness or accident; such misfortunes are to be expected in the ordinary course of human life; and provision for these contingencies must be made. But for our purposes here I leave aside permanent physical disabilities or mental disorders so severe as to prevent persons from being normal and fully cooperating members of society in the usual sense.[202]

Lack of (conventionally defined) reason thus would render unfree and unequal, unable to fully participate in society, and ultimately, somewhat less than fully human. This exclusionary theme is a recurrent (if not an unavoidable) feature of liberal discourse. In the 17th century Locke had explicitly excluded from the provisions of the social contract "lunatics," "ideots," "children," "innocents," "madmen."[203] In the 19th century Mill had deliberately excluded "barbarians" from his doctrine of liberty, as I note above. Rawls, in the discursive style of the late 20th century, displays his argument in more subtle and acceptable terms. Nevertheless, the potential for exclusion remains intact in a Rawlsian context, as the entitlement to liberties and rights is not a prerogative of human beings as such, but only of individuals who conform to certain socially defined prerequisites. Those who, "in virtue of"

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[200] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," p. 233

[201] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," p. 242

[202] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," p. 234; compare with: John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* p. 20

[203] John Locke, *Second Treatise,* par. 60, p. 34

their lack of reason do not qualify as free, equal, liberal individuals are left without agency: the same mode of discourse that positively locates agency in the individual subject, also treats certain human beings as unworthy of being individual subjects. This leaves the excluded human beings in the position of objects: passive receivers of the actions undertaken by individual subjects. Unable to be "self-originating sources of valid claims," unable to "speak back" in the language of liberalism, these human beings are dehumanized, marginalized, objectified in the name of liberalism. Rawls' theory of justice certain represents a remarkable accomplishment for liberalism; but it does not overcome this distressing feature of liberal discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have introduced the thesis that liberalism is the hegemonic ideology in contemporary Western societies, on which both advocates and critics of liberalism seem to converge. In particular, I have observed that to the success of liberalism contributes significantly a discursive style in which the mode of expression conforms to the articulation of liberal themes. In other words, I have argued that the content of liberalism replicates certain structures of grammar, and thus is easily intelligible, intuitive. In order to identify what features of liberal discourse might possess these characteristics, I have considered the contributions of three key figures in the development of liberalism.

First I have discussed John Locke, whose work on knowledge, language, and the human mind in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* presents an ontology that is then invested with genuinely political meaning in the *Second Treatise of Government.* I have presented the notion of "semiotic individualism" to account for Locke's refined view of the relation between individuals and the (linguistic) communities in which they come to acquire consciousness of themselves via the medium of language. A thoughtful focus on the semiotic element, I maintain, can advance the interpretive debates on Locke's political

thought beyond the impasse of an "individualist" versus a "communitarian" pole. In my account, Lockean individuals are primarily the "owners" of their narratives, and of the actions that they undertake; at the same time, this individual "ownership" depends on the social process of linguistic signification that I have called the "semiotic contract."

Then I have briefly analyzed John Stuart Mill's version of liberalism, as evidenced in both *On Liberty,* and also in *Utilitarianism* and *A System of Logic*. I have characterized Mill's position as one of "sovereign individualism," for it seems to weaken the social ties that Locke's theory of language had recognized. On the contrary, I have commented on a pattern in Mill's thought in that he systematically accords logical priority to the particular over the general, the inductive over the deductive, the individual over the social. Moreover, I have noted how his developmental liberalism emphasizes the themes of reason and progress, both at the individual and at the social levels.

Finally, I have briefly presented the evolution of John Rawls' concept of justice as fairness from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* as a political project of "tempered individualism." In the mutated grounds for the justification of the theory I have identified a prime example of the versatility of liberal discourse. Shifting from the code of individual rationality to that of social reasonableness, Rawls stretched the argumentative limits of liberalism thus also showing the resilience of its core principles. In doing so, I have argued, he does not question the exclusionary potential entailed by liberal discourse, for which certain human beings are classified as deficient in reason, and therefore can be denied ownership of their own narratives and actions.

Combining some of the insights that I have derived from each of these theorists, liberal discourse can be tentatively defined as including the following features:

1) Individuals own their actions;

2) The mode of action is rational;

3) Objects are treated as inert matter (and human beings can be treated as objects too).

This is clearly a very rough sketch of what liberal discourse might be; yet I argue that it captures at least some fundamental characters of what makes the ideology so successful. My claim is that these basic rules can also accommodate the expression of non-liberal content. In other words, I maintain that liberal discourse can incorporate claims that originate from outside a liberal paradigm too, without making them fully liberal. To the illustration of some examples of what I call "liberal incorporations" I now turn in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

LIBERALISM AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter III I have argued that the ideology of liberalism operates as a system of signification that allows political actors to formulate various kinds of statements about the world (both descriptive and normative), and then to call for action on the basis of those predications. A system of signification (a language, a code), is based on two sets of elements: certain rules of expression, and a field of content. The language of liberalism, in particular, is based on both an investment of sense on certain key concepts, and also, crucially, on the expressive regularities that make that content fungible. The analysis of actual examples of liberal texts, both in the content that they articulate, and in how they tend to express it, suggests the recurrence of certain deep structures of signification, a style of liberal discourse whose distinctive features can be reconstructed in a more or less coherent morphology. A fundamental contribution to this ambitious analytical project has been offered by the work of Michael Freeden. As I note in Chapter I, according to Freeden, political ideologies isolate certain portions of the semantic field and shield them from contestation: "'*This* is what liberty means, and *that* is what justice means,' [an ideology] asserts."[204]

Rather than focusing on the plane of *content,* identifying certain "decontested meanings" that characterize the ideology of liberalism, here I follow more closely Vladimir Propp's formalist example, as updated and systematized by Algirdas Julien Greimas' structuralist re-elaboration. Examining a corpus of one hundred Russian folktales, in 1928 Propp identified

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[204] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach.* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1996), p. 76

31 basic "functions" (e.g.: departure, trickery, victory) and 7 "character types" (e.g.: the hero, the villain, the helper). The variation among specific tales was thus understood by Propp as the result of the various possible combinations of those invariant elements.[205] Drawing on Propp's original intuition, in the 1960s Greimas expanded the scope of his analysis from Russian folktales to the immanent structure of narration itself. He posited a fundamental "actantial narrative schema" that would account for the variation within the broad genre of narration.[206] Expanding on Greimas' work, and calibrating it for the needs of analysis of a specific "genre" as ideological discourse, here I identify certain recurrent characteristics in the mode of *expression* of liberal discourse. Whereas Freeden focuses on the semantic aspects of an ideology, by looking at how certain key concepts are defined, and in turn define an ideology, I concentrate on how liberal discourse is characterized by the recurrence of certain syntactic structures. I then reflect on how a rigid dichotomy of expression and content is untenable, and so the form of expression is not neutral with regards to the substance of content, but it always prefigures it and, to some extent, molds it.

Freeden praises liberalism for being, among the major ideologies, "the most adept at giving expression to the mutating practices and ideas that human beings produce and develop."[207] Commenting on his comparative analysis of European varieties of liberalism, he further explains:

> In other words, liberalism does what any ideology aspires to do – it naturalizes what it regards as crucial social and political phenomena and constructs itself around them. In addition to its foundational belief in liberty, liberalism has naturalized change and diversity, rather than either stifling them or embracing them precipitately and irresponsibly. Two inevitable, creative and potentially unsettling processes are colonized by liberalism in such a way that enables its supporters to come to terms

[205] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Research Center, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind: 1958)

[206] Algirdas J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1987)

[207] Michael Freeden, "European Liberalisms: An Essay in Comparative Political Thought," in *European Journal of Political Theory,* Vol 7, No 1, January 2008, p. 15

> with, indeed to thrive in, a world of flux and uncertainty. The assimilation of that uncertainty and its presentation as a virtue rather than a defect, decoded as the freeing of human individuality, is liberalism's greatest asset and the central challenge to its comparative analysis.[208]

Here Freeden points to liberalism's peculiar ability to deal with "potentially unsettling processes" in a way that domesticates them and renders them compatible with its "foundational belief[s]" that he elsewhere indicates as "decontested." His argument is cogent; but its emphasis on political *content* (e.g.: concepts like liberty, change, diversity) risks obscuring the importance of what might be termed the *form* of the ideology: the mode of expression of that content. Freeden's own characterization of his approach as "morphological" might be misleading here: for it can convincingly account for the "form of the content" of an ideology, but it remains problematically silent on the "form of its expression." The latter, I argue, resides in the deep structures of language that preside over the formulation of statements about the world, and as such it is to be found in the grammatical rules that make the fruition of content possible.

Moreover, Freeden identifies "adaptation" as one of the fundamental modalities through which liberalism negotiates its relations with rival ideologies. This is made possible by "a combination of conceptual indeterminacy and interpretative flexibility:" ideas that occupied a marginal position in the morphology of the ideology may be brought closer to the core (e.g.: equality in Dworkin's thought); and even "illiberal features" can, within certain limits, be accommodated in a liberal framework.[209] I believe that this is a sensible description of one of the crucial characteristics of the *modus operandi* of liberalism; though I contend that the term "adaptation" overemphasizes the extent to which liberalism actually opens up its own core beliefs for contestation. "Incorporation," I argue, describes more accurately the process by which liberal discourse comes to absorb certain non-liberal themes from a position of dominance. And in order to study such incorporations, I argue, it is crucial to

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[208] M. Freeden, "European Liberalisms," p. 28

[209] M. Freeden, "European Liberalisms," p. 15 and ff.

supplement the analysis of the semantic dimension with a study of the syntax that underpins it.

Before delving in the analysis of liberal discourse, therefore I put forth some preliminary, general observations on language. At its core, I argue, language operates on the sense-less complexity of the real as a mechanism for the segmentation of sense into discrete units. In the beginning, there is chaos; it is language that intervenes on that chaos to impose an order on it. This primary operation of sense-making relies on an originary investment of sense that can never be fully accounted for, and that constitutes the paradox of the arbitrariness and at the same time non-arbitrariness of *langue* that Saussure so clearly identified. Moreover, a natural language entails a set of combinatory rules for the arrangement of signs into various types of aggregates, as theorists from J.L. Austin and J. Searle to Wittgenstein have shown.

In its *expressive* function, language fundamentally articulates two kinds of statements, as noted in Chapter II: descriptions of states of the world (Mary is hungry; Mary is watching a movie); and descriptions of transformations of states of the world (Elizabeth gives an ice cream to Mary; Elizabeth takes Mary out for a walk). Political ideologies can be described as styles of language that typically organize such statements in a progression from: 1) an initial state of the world (the working class is exploited); to 2) a transformation (the working class liberates itself and humanity); and finally to 3) a new state of the world (a classless society). Obviously, one should not underestimate the *performative* function that language assumes when political ideologies operate in the sense of motivating people to act in certain ways.[210] Yet, to the extent that it is possible to disentangle expressivity and performativity in the actual phenomenon of language, I concentrate on the first, and in particular on the rules that subtend it. In the case of liberalism I argue that its discourse typically produces statements of

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[210] It should be noted here that this stylization of the structure of a political ideology is helpful, but highly problematic. Certain ideologies in particular explicitly defy the very dichotomy of expression and performance in their political operations. Rejecting the validity of "a new state of the world" as separate and independent from the "transformation" that originates it, anarchism, for instance, distances itself from liberalism and socialism, typically embracing the theory and practices of prefigurative politics.

the first and second kind (descriptions of states of the world and descriptions of transformations of states of the world respectively) that conform to a limited number of fundamental rules. These include:

1) Agency is granted to individuals as one of their attributes (individuals "own" their actions, rather than being constituted by them);

2) The mode of action is rational;

3) Objects are treated as inert matter, the passive receivers of action (and human beings can be treated as objects too).

There is nothing simple and unequivocal about these rules, and presenting them in such stark terms might be misleading. They don't claim to be rigorous covering laws; yet, it seems to be a recurrent feature of liberal texts that they tend to organize meanings in similar formations. What I claim here is that those formations, while they certainly are not empty with regards to their own intrinsic meaning, can also accommodate a wide range of meanings that are not reducible to the decontested meanings that define various forms of liberalism.

In order to test this hypothesis, I now proceed to examine some examples of texts in contemporary political theory that appear to conform to the canons of liberal discourse, without articulating canonical liberal themes. In other words, I want to illustrate how the language of liberalism can speak non-liberal worlds, and at the same time I want to gauge how much of the original investment of sense required by a liberal syntax affects the content of the statements that are produced. The mode of expression of liberalism carries with it more than residual incrustations of liberal meaning; once extra-liberal sense gets grafted onto the structure of liberal discourse, the output becomes a hybrid political form. Much is lost in the translation from non-liberal to liberal discourse, and politically this cost corresponds to the ablation of non-liberal universes into a seemingly inescapable and ever-expanding liberal one.

In order to assess the impact of these processes more pointedly, I consider the work of three contemporary political theorists who employ a liberal vocabulary to articulate claims that originated outside of the liberal field. First I present Will Kymlicka's reflection on the "right to culture" as a patent illustration of liberalism's ability to co-opt non-liberal themes (communitarian, in this case) into its own framework. This represents the most self-conscious attempt of liberal discourse to incorporate non-liberal themes, rearranging their claims according to the rules of liberal discourse, and finally rearticulating them in such a way as to make them compatible with (although not fully reducible to) the canons of a liberal ideology. Then I consider Robert Putnam's emphasis on "social capital" as the (failed) attempt to resist liberalism's tendency towards atomization without renouncing its fundamental commitment to the value of individualism. Finally I analyze Philip Pettit's theorization on "neo-republicanism," and argue that his definition of liberty as non-domination, while certainly distinct from liberal formulations, does not question liberal ontology, and ends up justifying liberalism's conception of the political as merely instrumental to the preservation of individual liberty.

KYMLICKA'S (ATTEMPTED) SQUARING OF THE MULTICULTURAL CIRCLE

The ability of liberal discourse to articulate claims and visions of the world that stem from outside a liberal ideology finds one of its clearest illustrations in Will Kymlicka's engagement with issues of multiculturalism and recognition. Writing in the in the wake of the liberalism-communitarianism debate, and in particular responding to theorists of "recognition" such as Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and Michael Walzer, Kymlicka deliberately attempts to reconcile respect for cultural diversity with the fundamental principles of a liberal society. In *Multicultural Citizenship,* of 1995, he delineates a rather persuasive argument for the defense of minority rights, based on his consideration that they

are not only consistent with liberal principles, but also implicated by what he refers to as a long forgotten tradition within liberalism.[211] Such persuasiveness, however, crucially relies on a major theoretical redescription, one that "translates" minority rights into the vocabulary of liberalism. The very specificity of the project of "recognition" is lost in this translation, and though some of the most illiberal implications of "communitarianism" are avoided by this position, the problems that they present are not really confronted, as much as they are conveniently redefined so as to neutralize their non-liberal pungency.

A certain taxonomic zeal characterizes Kymlicka's project, aimed at distinguishing acceptable cases of "minority rights" from illiberal perversions. Two "broad patterns of cultural diversity" are identified: multinational and polyethnic. The first refers to "the incorporation of previously self-governing, territorially concentrated cultures into a larger state;" the second relates to "individual and familial immigration."[212] This categorization is extremely problematic: both at the practical level, as the proponent recognizes; and at the conceptual one, as he does not concede quite as easily. The polyethnic case is especially interesting to consider: in a typical move of liberal discourse, the relocation of masses of people into different countries is described as the aggregation of the actions of single individuals, each pursuing their own rational plans. What another discourse might describe as the effect of structural economic inequalities on which the single individual has little or no agency, liberalism swiftly constructs as the deployment of voluntariness and freedom. The literature on the causes of emigration is vast and far from unified. A compendium of the leading approaches would include positions ranging from neoclassical economics and (labor, like any other resource, responds to the forces of supply and demand and moves across countries accordingly); to the "new economics of labor migration" (decisions about migration are not made by isolated individuals, but are the product of more complex calculations at the level of family, household, and broader community); to the "segmented

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[211] see Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1995), pp. 49 and ff.

[212] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* p. 10

labor market theory" (immigration is "pulled" by receiving countries for their structural economic need for cheap labor); to various versions of world systems theories (as "periphery" countries enter into a relation of dependency with "core" ones, vast strata of their populations are economically displaced and relocate across the globe); to social capital theories (the social ties inherent to kinship, friendship, and community origin explain are crucial in determining the likelihood and patterns of migration).[213]

Of these approaches only the first, neoclassical economics, postulates the individual as the key unit of analysis, *homo oeconomicus* as the model for the rational calculation to migrate. Even in this explanation, the rational choice of migrants takes place on the background of market forces like supply and demand to which individuals can only adjust with at best very limited freedom. Kymlicka, on the other hand, confidently resolve that, because they "chose" to move to a given country, immigrants "typically wish to integrate into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members of it [by modifying] the institutions and laws of the mainstream society to make them more accommodating of cultural difference."[214] It should be noted that, regardless of the conditions of immigration ("chosen" or otherwise), integration could still be more or less deliberately sought by immigrants. Though the accuracy of an adverb like "typically" is highly dubious in this context, there is an even more problematic aspect in this proposition: however "accommodating of cultural difference" it might be, the kind of integration that Kymlicka envisions would still take place in a political-institutional context already constituted as liberal. Unless "the institutions and laws of the mainstream society" become entirely open for contestation, the project of integration risks being able to only accommodate (relatively) shallow cultural differences, while further alienating deeper ones (e.g.: granting special exemptions to those who wish to abstain from work on Wednesdays, but resisting pushes to renounce a principle like equal treatment before the law). Indiscriminate accommodation of all cultural difference (if such a possibility

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[213] Douglas S. Massey, "Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis," in C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, and J. DeWind, ed. by, *The Handbook of International Migration* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), pp. 35-47

[214] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* pp. 10 – 11

is even logically conceivable) would deny the liberal character of that society – incidentally exposing the myth of a value-neutral liberalism. Kymlicka cannot resolve the conundrum of multiculturalism by liberal decree. Accommodating differences, it would seem, is only possible in a liberal context so long as those differences are already formulated (and thus, crucially, can be formulated) in the language of liberalism.

In Kymlicka's liberal narrative, on the other hand, the initial state of the world is one in which certain individuals are unhappy with their life conditions in their countries of origin, and make the rational calculation that emigrating would better serve their interests; then they transform the state of the world by acting on this rational calculation and relocate; and finally they inhabit a new state of the world in which they accept the institutions and laws of their country of election where they live satisfactory lives and only aspire to escape homogenization (the paramount nightmare for liberal individuality). Based on this first example, one would be inclined to conclude that the form of liberal discourse contains more than a distant echo of liberal content. Yet, it is also to be remembered that Kymlicka's project is explicitly one centered on the incorporation of non-liberal themes into a solidly liberal framework.

As the argument of *Multicultural Citizenship* unfolds, the author engages the concept of what he calls "collective rights." The very notion of these alleged "collective rights" that Kymlicka sets forth to critically redefine is already imbued with strong liberal logic, modeled as it is on the mechanic adaptation of the idea of individual rights to aggregates of individuals. Yet, even these vestiges of "collectivism" threaten the very fabric of liberal discourse, and so Kymlicka has to dissolve collective rights back into their original components, individual rights. In doing so he distinguishes among the "group-differentiated rights" based on their consistency with the rights of the individual.[215] *Internal restrictions* designate claims for "restric[ting] the liberty of [a group's] members in the name of group solidarity;" *external protections* prescribe "protec[ting a group's] distinct existence and identity

[215] cfr. W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* p. 45

by limiting the impact of the decisions of the larger society."[216] Unsurprisingly, Kymlicka glosses that "[l]iberal principles are more sympathetic to demands for 'external protection'."[217]

Once again, the structure of liberal discourse seems to be at work here. Let's consider the case of internal restrictions first. The description of the initial state of the world is, implicitly, one in which individuals enjoy liberty; the transformation is then operated by the imposition of these bad "collective rights" that crucially *restrict* individual liberty. By comparison, the appreciation of external protections stems from an opposite scenario: in the initial state of the world individuals enjoy liberty; then a transformation occurs so that the individuals that compose a specific group are threatened in their very identity by the decisions and values of society at large; finally, another transformation is required to restore liberty to these individuals by *protecting* it. Narrativizing collective rights in this way presupposes the existence of individual rights in a pristine form in an original state of the world. These original individual rights can then be jeopardized by either one's own group, or by society at large; in either case, defense or restoration of individual rights seems to be the true function and limit of collective rights.

But, in the case of external protections, why would it be more desirable for an individual to experience the mediation of the group in the construction of his/her own identity, rather than an analogous interference from society? In other words, by this logic, why would an individual not be better off without any encumbrance at all, whether at the level of a group, of of society at large? Kymlicka answers this question by formulating the most distinctive element of his theory. Central to his argument is the notion that (societal) culture is valuable in that it provides individuals with options on "meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities."[218] Providing their individual members with "meaningful contexts of

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[216] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* pp. 36 – 36

[217] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* p. 152

[218] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* p. 76

choice,"[219] cultures enhance freedom. Contrary to the overwhelming majority of the wisdom of disciplines like sociology or anthropology, then, culture becomes an attachment of the individual, inasmuch as it is considered a "right." Also, rather than being the substance matter of which the identity of individuals is interpenetrated, culture for Kymlicka becomes little more than a tree diagram on which individuals display their rationality by moving more or less freely from one course of action to the next.

Once again, the syntax of liberal discourse sustains this adaptation of a non-liberal theme to the exigencies of liberalism. Patchen Markell correctly notes that "[Kymlicka's] philosophical justification of what he calls the 'right to culture' is grounded decisively in the liberal idea of choice."[220] Markell also lucidly observes that Kymlicka responds to theorists of recognition in the style of Charles Taylor by arguing that they engage but "a straw man" of liberalism: "[l]iberalism is perfectly capable of acknowledging the ways in which human agents are situated within historical and intersubjective horizons without abandoning its fundamental commitment to the value of individual freedom."[221] However, Markell seems at times to fall victim of the very reification of liberalism that Kymlicka rejects: "[t]his way of thinking about culture is an unstable amalgamation of the liberal language of property and possessive individualism and the communitarian language of encumbrance."[222] In this view what is questionable about Kymlicka's project is that it attempts to "steer a middle course between two equally problematic visions of the relationship between context and agency - one that equates agency with the total transcendence of context, and another that reduces agency to the performance of authoritatively given roles," and in doing so it produces "an uncertain equivocation between these two extremes."[223] Markell's own position seems here

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[219] see W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship ,* pp. 82 and ff.

[220] Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2003), p. 155

[221] P. Markell, *Bound By Recognition,* pp. 156-7

[222] P. Markell, *Bound By Recognition,* pp. 158-9

[223] P. Markell, *Bound By Recognition,* pp. 157, 161

to oscillate between the claim that liberalism can accommodate the situatedness of individuals in those contexts of choices that Kymlicka refers to as "culture," and the claim that doing so will produce "an unstable amalgamation."

Liberalism is always already capable of reconciling "individual freedom" with the "intersubjective horizons" in which action takes place, Markell maintains; artificially dichotomizing these two elements by distilling an essence of unrelenting ultra-individualism, from an equally dull blend of communitarianism, only to then recombine them in the precarious theorization of a "right to culture," is clearly a faulty intellectual operation. This is undoubtedly a very perspicacious analysis of the shortcomings in Kymlicka's project; however, I argue, it is missing a crucial link for explaining how liberal discourse can escape the flatness of a dull individualism. Precisely because of its unrelenting commitment to a grammar of subjects who own their actions and accordingly choose to undertake them, liberalism can process meaning that is intersubjectively constituted. Content might be produced in intersubjective settings; but subjects are ultimately in charge of action, according to the master-narrative of liberalism. Of course Markell is correct in pointing out that (most) liberals do not mindlessly discount the role of culture and context in providing individuals with meaning; but he stops short of detailing the process through which that meaning gets disassembled, reorganized, and ultimately made ready for discursive investment through a syntax of individual action. This omission risks reifying liberalism as an object of pure content independent of its form of expression.

Another form of reification is lamented by Seyla Benhabib. Critically engaging Kymlicka's notion of a "societal culture," she objects that "[t]here is never a single culture, one coherent system of beliefs, significations, symbolizations and practices [but] at any point in time there are competing collective narratives and significations that range across institutions and form the dialogue of cultures."[224] Kymlicka is therefore guilty of "cultural essentialism," as "cultures are not homogenous wholes; they are constituted through the

[224] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2002), p. 60

narratives and symbolizations of their members, who articulate these in the course of partaking of complex social and significative practices."[225] This critique is undoubtedly valid, and it crucially redefines the very terms of a proposal for a "right to culture." Yet, something appears to be missing Benhabib's reflection. Our understanding of "culture" should certainly be problematized, as cultures are by their very nature plural, and the pretense of unity that they carry with them should be exposed by a careful work of *analysis*, literally the subdivision of culture in its components, often inconsistent, and sometimes at odds with each other. However, by calling our attention to this important shortcoming in Kymlicka's argument, Benhabib seems to imply that the other term in the equation of the "right to culture," the individual, is less susceptible to that kind of *analysis*. As opposed to the unity of culture, which is always fictitious and deconstructable, that of the individual is assumed to be real, or at the very least it is left unquestioned. To be sure, in Benhabib's view the subject is not a metaphysical *a priori,* but it is critically constituted through processes of communicative, dialogic, intersubjective exchanges, and even continuously undone and reconstituted. However, at any given point in time there seems to persist an unscathed delusion of unity in the postulation of agency as the attribute of a self whose identity – albeit complex and mutable – is rationally accountable and transparent to itself, as opposed to being inescapably decentered and plural. This in turn reinforces the foundation of liberal discourse, which rests on the assumption that the subject of action is (and must be, in its normal status) an indivisible entity, as the very etymology of "individual" testifies. That a culture be not unified is physiological; that an individual might be so is pathological.

Thinking of other ways in which "culture" might be discussed is also illustrative of the reconceptualization at work here. On the one hand, a crude cultural determinism might consider "culture" as the independent variable capable of explaining human action; on the other hand, an equally crude form of materialism might relegate culture to the derivative category of super-structural irrelevance. A postcolonial sensibility might want to concentrate on those aspects of local culture that can foster independence from the foreigner's ideas and

[225] S. Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality,* p. 61

impositions; whereas moral universalists might resent culture as the irrational force that hinders the spread of common values; and moral relativists might resent it for the opposite reason, imposing common values onto people who have not independently formulated them. All of these exemplary positions would understand the relation between cultures and the individual members of those cultures as one in which agency is at the very least, not fully confined to the latter.

Liberal discourse of the kind employed by Kymlicka, on the other hand, positively assigns agency to individuals, and makes of culture the inert matter of the scenario upon which they act. Constraining this scenario might be; but at the same time that it is constraining, it is also enabling of free choices in action, and as such it is to be valued in that it resists the specter of a world of absolute un-freedom, in which action follows rigid and immutable patterns dictated with disheartening automatism by tyrannical forces like some hypostatization of "culture." However, Kymlicka's emphasis on the individual as the ultimate repository of the right to freedom appears to have been originally extraneous to the formulation of a politics of recognition, and for sure contradictory of the communitarian critique of the liberal notion of an unencumbered self. This conspicuous re-signification of the concept of "culture" is a powerful testimony of liberalism's exceptional ability to co-opt ideas and values from other positions into its own vocabulary, without compromising the essence of its own system of values and beliefs.

PUTNAM'S (PALLIATIVE) CURE FOR ATOMIZATION

Kymlicka's project in *Multicultural Citizenship* was characterized as the deliberate attempt of a liberal thinker to confront the emergence of multiculturalism and the "politics of recognition" from within a liberal paradigm. In this scheme, the formulation of a "right to culture" appears as the crafty solution to a problem contingent and largely external to the internal dynamics of liberal societies. When (and if) "collective rights" are demanded in a

multicultural context, liberalism can respond by dissolving them into individual rights, thus adapting to a new situation without compromising its core beliefs, but rather underpinning them. Other problems, however, seem to stem endogenously from the fabric itself of liberal societies; as such they are likely to require a more fundamental engagement with the precepts of liberalism. A tendency toward atomization, in particular, has been often diagnosed as the endemic syndrome of contemporary liberal societies.

Nowhere is the *Zeitgeist* of the 1980s more conceitedly palpable than in Margaret Thatcher's famous statement: "And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."[226] This epitaph to British society was promptly echoed and amplified on the other side of the ocean, where the Reagan Doctrine saluted in the advent of a new era of market fundamentalism the demise of politics and society. Obviously, the social and political milieu that made possible the declaration of such principles is not solely imputable to Thatcher and Reagan. Their figures and political philosophies, and in particular their appeal to a vision of society as a collection (aggregate, in economic terminology) of individuals, both reflect and exacerbate the effects of complex historical processes, culminating in the late twentieth century. Moreover, this blend of ultra-individualism was conjugated with profoundly anti-individualistic values, from hyper-nationalism to the reliance on a traditional moral order that would then fuel the rise of neo-conservatism. Wendy Brown has raised very provocative questions on this fascinating, and seemingly inconsistent, ideological alignment:

> How does a rationality that is expressly amoral at the level of both ends and means (neoliberalism) intersect with one that is expressly moral and regulatory (neoconservatism)? How does a project that empties the world of meaning, that cheapens and deracinates life and openly exploits desire, intersect one centered on fixing and enforcing meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire?[227]

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[226] Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women's Own Magazine,* October 3, 1987

Brown's own answer to these questions is not aimed at unearthing "a single or coherent logic," but at "understanding [...] the effects of two disparate streams of rationality in producing the contemporary landscape of political intelligibility and possibility."[228] In this sense she concludes that the projects of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, culminated with the two terms of George W. Bush's administration, converge on the effect that they produce: de-democratization. This is further specified as: "(1) the devaluation of political autonomy, (2) the transformation of political problems into individual problems with market solutions, (3) the production of the consumer-citizen as available to a heavy degree of governance and authority, and (4) the legitimation of statism."[229] Brown sums up the consequences of these processes as the production of "the undemocratic citizen."[230]

A similar concern about the undemocratic transformation that American citizenship was undergoing animated much of the academic debate in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, it was the neoliberal element of the emerging paradigm that attracted most criticism. An influential line of argument conjectured that the dramatic weakening of the civic fiber of the nation, epitomized by the triumph of Thatcherite and Reaganite values, had already been contained, *in nuce,* in liberalism's commitment to foundational individualism. This critique animated the coagulation of very diverse positions around the label of "communitarianism." This in turn sparked the defense of various liberal devotees, eager to conserve both the principles and the practices of their doctrine. Following the lead of Robert Nozick a platoon of theorists continued to extol the virtues of an uncompromising brand of liberalism.

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[227] Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization," in *Political Theory,* Vol 34 No 6, December 2006, p. 692

[228] W. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 693

[229] W. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 703

[230] W. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 692

Another strand of liberal thinkers, however, adopted a different strategy against the critics, one aimed not at resistance, but at mithridatism: assuming small doses of the communitarian poison, liberalism would grow immune from its most devastating effects. In this vein, for instance, Ronald Dworkin theorized of a "liberal community:" the liberal principle of tolerance, coupled with a strong emphasis on equality of opportunity, "is not only consistent with the most attractive conception of community but indispensable to it."[231] Charles Larmore has exposed the pretense of a value-neutral form of liberalism, noting that "the Romantic enthusiasm for custom and belonging" and "the contrary Ideals of autonomy and individuality to which Kant and Mill appealed" are co-constitutive of contemporary Western political culture, and concluding that "the Kantian and Millian conceptions of liberalism are not adequate solutions to the political problem of reasonable disagreement about the good life."[232] Most notably, John Rawls progressively revised his vision of justice as a "political, not metaphysical" project, sustained by the belief that in a democratic society an "overlapping consensus" can be reached not as a function of some universal principle, but as the more or less contingent historical product of that political community, so that "the most that can be done is to narrow the range of public disagreement."[233] Michael Walzer went so far as to portray the communitarian critique not as the archenemy of liberalism, but as a recurrent, "consistently intermittent feature of liberal politics and social organization," functional to the reinforcement of "[liberalism's] internal associative capacities."[234]

Salvaging society from Thatcherite pulverization became in particular Robert Putnam's goal; the chief instrument for this crusade would be the restoration of "social capital." Since

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[231] Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass: 2000), p. 211

[232] Charles Larmore, "Political Liberalism," in *Political Theory* Vol 18 No 3, August 1990, p. 345

[233] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political, Not Metaphysical," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol 14, No 3. (Summer, 1985), pp. 225, 228

[234] Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," in *Political Theory,* Vol 18 No 1, February 1990, pp. 6, 22

the literature on social capital responds just as much to the disease of atomization (explicitly), as it does to the cure of communitarianism (more implicitly), a brief recapitulation of the latter is in order here. Michael Sandel's argument against liberal individualism is an especially useful term of comparison to consider when assessing the role of social capital in the discursive economy of liberalism. In this sense Sandel does not serve as the model for a perfect, or even desirable political philosophy, but as one that is clearly alternative to the foundations of liberalism.

Both Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent* and Putnam's *Bowling Alone,* in fact, share a profound sense of criticism and dissatisfaction with the actual circumstances of American civic life. Both Sandel and Putnam observe a decline in civic culture, and indicate an "excess" of individualism as the disease affecting the United States' public sphere. However, the two authors differ greatly on the specifics of the diagnosis, as well as on the nature of their contentions and the evidence that they illustrate. What is common is the basic structure of their accounts: a narrative of decline, from a stage in which American citizens revered and maintained a set of values and virtues rooted in the civic sphere; to the current conditions of deviance, in which individuals just worship their privacy and tend to neglect the social dimension.

Democracy's Discontent is articulated around two major concerns: "One is the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives. The other is the sense that, from family to neighborhood to nation, the moral fabric of community is unraveling around us."[235] Politically, these two worries correspond to the themes of self-government and morality. At root Sandel's argument rests on the indictment of the liberal conception of the self as an "unencumbered" entity:

> Now the unencumbered self describes first of all the way we stand toward the things we have, or want, or seek. It means there is always a distinction between the values I *have* and the person I *am*. To identify any characteristics as *my* aims, ambitions,

[235] Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent* (Belknap Harvard, Cambridge MS: 1996), p. 3

> desires, and so on, is always to imply some subject "me" standing behind them, at a certain distance, and the shape of this "me" must be given prior to any of the aims or attributes I bear. One consequence of this distance is to put the self *itself* beyond the reach of its experience, to secure its identity once and for all. Or to put the point another way, it rules out the possibility of what we might call *constitutive* ends.[236]

As such Sandel's critique of unencumbered selves, and the implications that can be drawn from it, clearly contradict what was introduced above as the "first rule" of liberal discourse: *Agency is granted to individuals as one of their attributes (individuals "own" their actions, rather than being constituted by them).* The liberal self is fundamentally prior to its ends, and it experiences freedom inasmuch as it is able to choose among different actions, values, beliefs. The loss of community is therefore to be imputed not to the contingent actions chosen by individuals, but to the very conception of their selves as unencumbered that they have internalized.

The diagnosis in *Bowling Alone* is very different, and so is the prescription that Puntam recommends. Though remarkably different from the historical and philosophical considerations that animate *Democracy's Discontent,* the main themes of Putnam's work reflect similar worries for the unraveling of the social fabric of the nation; these in turn correspond to a broader interest in the quality of civic virtue in different political contexts. If Sandel's cardinal preoccupation was the evolution of the public philosophy in the bicentennial history of the United States, Putnam's analysis revolves around the decline of social capital in the much more limited time-span of the last decades of the twentieth century.

The concept of social capital is defined by Putnam as a form of civic virtue that is especially powerful because it is "embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations."[237] More precisely, social capital "refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating

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[236] Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Feb., 1984, p. 86

[237] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* (Simon and Shuster, NY: 2000), p. 19

coordinated actions."[238] Therefore, to have high social capital in a community, it is not sufficient that its members be virtuous: they must be interconnected too, lest their (civic) virtue remain idle and unexpendable. Contra Sandel's dismissal of the foundational premises of liberal individualism, Putnam's concern is here with "efficiency," and his language betrays a vision of the world as inhabited by individuals whose actions need coordination. Putnam observes how in contemporary United States social capital is menaced and all too often inhibited by an *excess* of individualism that induces people to withdraw from the public sphere and retreat in their private lives. It is not individualism itself that Putnam calls into question, but the "inefficient" social consequences that its contingent operations produce.

> For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago – silently, without warning – that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current.[239]

Putnam employs a set of instruments to measure the decline of social capital, but his main strategy consists in studying the trends of participation in formal associations. As the title itself, *Bowling Alone,* suggests, the claim is that the deterioration of social capital can be inferred by the figures describing the membership of organizations. Even though this is certainly a rough characterization of Putnam's work, it captures the essence of its limits. Formal groups are, by definition, joined by members who pursue association for the most various reasons, and take the appropriate steps to be accepted and belong into their group of choice. Typically this involves some ritualized process that marks the passage from the outside world into the closed universe of the group. No one, in this view, is born already "belonging," and "association" describes the deliberate action of associating oneself with others, not a pre-existing condition of being, like "community." More than a distant echo of

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[238] Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1993), p. 167

[239] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p. 27

social contract theory, the master narrative of liberalism's account of the relationship between the individual and society, is audible in this account.

Putnam's position, moreover, also appears highly problematic in its uncritical recourse to the standard research repertoire of methodological individualism. An inherently unobservable and non measurable phenomenon, social capital is put in relation to other variables, that are clearly visible, easily measurable, and unequivocally attached to individual agents. Among these variables, the level of associationism enjoys a pre-eminent status. The methodological question then is: how good of a "proxy" associationism really is to estimate social capital? Is it efficient? Biased? This issue is addressed by sociologist McCarthy's argument that "professional social movement organizations arise precisely as a response to a 'social infrastructural deficit'."[240] The choice to join a formal association can be constructed as a remedy to the loss of social capital; according to this view, associations "come too late", when social capital is already endangered by an "excess" of individualism. Of course, it can be counter-argued that the choice to join an association is made possible by a pre-existing level of social capital, themselves guaranteed by the possibility to re-enact dramatization of the liberal social-contractarian narrative.

More generally, the causal argument that sustains *Bowling Alone* exhibits some critical weaknesses. The use of statistical instruments conjures up so many variables that it is not always clear which ones have a significant effect on social capital, and in which direction. Additionally, and more relevantly for this analysis, the emphasis on the voluntary ways in which individuals do or do not expose themselves to the creation of social capital overlooks the systemic aspects of the problem of "the collapse of American community." As far as "the revival of American community" is concerned, Putnam cannot but see it as a project carried over by individuals who instrumentally choose a course of action alternative to that

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[240] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p. 153

of atomization because of the direct effect of social capital on the efficiency of a society. Hence the appeal that famously concludes *Bowling Alone* to "multiply picnics"…[241]

Questions of freedom (and of which kind of freedom) arise as well. In choosing an association (and whether to join one, altogether) one is acting in the sense of determining, limiting the possible outcomes of his/her sociality: an individual, for instance, chooses to meet people who belong to the same kind of associations and have similar interests. In so doing that individual effectively confirms its own individuality, rather than continually questioning it in the encounter with other others, others who have not been pre-approved as likely matches.

In sociologist Mark Granovetter's language, a study of formal, stable associations allows one to measure *strong ties,* but leaves *weak ties* thoroughly unaccounted.[242] Moreover, it might be argued that joining a formal organization (i.e.: a group characterized by membership and therefore clear boundaries between "inside" and "outside") does increase one's *bonding* social capital, but it does not necessarily expand the resources for *bridging* networks. "Bonding" social capital is described as exclusive, inward looking, such that it "reinforce[s] exclusive identities and homogenous groups;" "bridging" social capital is inclusive, outward looking, and it "encompass[es] people across diverse social cleavages."[243] The latter can only be obtained in favorable general conditions and, *pace* a liberal view, do not depend solely, or even primarily, on an individual's choices.

Putnam addresses this issue in *Better Together,* of 2003. "Bonding social capital is a kind of sociological Super Glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40," he writes, repeating *verbatim* a phrase that appears in *Bowling Alone* too; but then he also

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[241] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p 414

[242] see R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* pp. 22-23. Weak ties are the ones that link to "distant acquaintances who move in different circles from mine," whereas strong ties link to "relatives and intimate friends whose sociological niche is very like my own."

[243] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p. 22

significantly notes that the latter is "harder to create" than the former, because "after all, birds of a feather flock together."[244] The author must place a lot of confidence in the descriptive power of this saying, as he resorts to it again as a commentary to the statement that "bridging social capital is intrinsically less likely to develop automatically than bonding social capital."[245] Implicit in the discourse of social capital – and especially evident in the case of bridging social capital – is an underlying anthropology of liberal individualism. The picture that Putnam uncritically paints is one in which human beings experience their existence fundamentally as individuals, who may associate with others if they are recognized as "similar" (how this process of recognition works remains unaccounted in this study), but are unlikely to develop ties with other others. And so, social capital is something to "create," community is something to "restore;" neither is there in principle, in the beginning there are just individuals. Social capital – of the bridging kind in particular – is the product of the actions deliberately undertaken by individuals to bring it into being; it is an object (albeit of a rather abstract kind) and as such it is treated as inert matter, consistently with what was proposed above as the third rule of liberal discourse. In fact, social capital is presented as something that individuals possess and use:

> By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital – tools and training that enhance individual productivity – the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts can affect the productivity of individuals and groups.[246]

Useful like a screwdriver, albeit intangible like a college education, social capital is not regarded as productive in its own right, but just as an instrument on which and through which individuals act. That this "object" might indeed be what constitutes the "subjects"

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[244] Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (Simon & Schuster, New York: 2003), pp. 2-3

[245] R. Putnam and L. Feldstein, *Better Together,* p. 279. See also p. 282.

[246] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* pp. 18-19

that are claimed to pre-exist it does not seem to bother Putnam's beliefs in the construction and usage of social capital. Yet, there exists an alternative tradition in the literature on social capital according to which subjects themselves are shaped by the interplay of social, as well as physical and cultural/human capital, rather than instrumentally utilizing them. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, has offered an account of agency in which our 'choices' of music, art, food, entertainment etc., at the same time *distinguish,* and *are distinctive of* our different endowments with (physical, cultural, and crucially social) capital:

> Taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing, language or body hexis.[247]

Whereas Putnam's liberal world is inhabited by (pre-constituted) individuals with their (more or less metaphorical) "screwdrivers," Bourdieu's articulation of social space transcends the rules of liberal discourse, without lapsing in a form of rigid determinism in which the subject is simply the resultant of "objective" social forces. Whereas for Putnam social capital is only valuable inasmuch as it "enhances productivity," for Bourdieu it is a productive factor itself, as it contributes to the definition of "taste," and therefore it ultimately molds individuals through the preferences that they exercise.

Also consistent with Putnam's liberal worldview that individuals are always already pre-constituted as owners of their actions, and that "community" is something to create/restore, is the idea that "communication" is the mode of action that this endeavor needs to take. The same thaumaturgical function that "multiplying picnics" had in *Bowling Alone* is performed in *Better Together* by "telling stories:" the goal is that of crafting new identities, for "bridging may depend on finding, emphasizing, or creating a new dimension of similarity within which

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[247] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass: 1984), p. 173

bonding can occur."[248] In other words, in the wake of diversity it is expedient to create similarity: this is very close to the definition of assimilation, and assimilation is one of the fundamental strategies within liberalism for dealing with others, by reducing/obliterating their otherness. Bridging must be reframed as a form of bonding, for in bonding I recognize (aspects of) myself in the other, and as such I am able to accept her. If the other remains entirely other, there is no underlying commonality that can connect our unencumbered individualities.

Far from Sandel's historical and philosophical clarity, also Putnam's explanation of the causes of the decline of social capital is not completely convincing. Among the main factors he indicates the replacement of a civic generation by a less involved one. However, the reasons why the present generation does not replicate the level of civic engagement of the preceding one are not fully articulated, leaving this explanation as a mere label behind which the true reasons are hidden. Television, suburbanization and the change of work conditions are suggested as the other causes of the decline of social capital, but Putnam does not seem to possess a clear vision of the phenomenon in its entirety. Single variables, and even their interplay do not seem capable to describe the complexity that the shift of public philosophies depicted by Sandel accounts for.

Both Sandel's and Putnam's works have made lasting contributions to the debates on communitarianism and liberalism that have animated much of the intellectual life in the 1990s and early 2000s in American academia. Much of this conversation has been framed in the language of an assumed republicanism/liberalism dichotomy, with continuous reformulation and oscillation between the two concepts, but with a clear tendency to recuperate a positive role to the values of republicanism in American civic life. On the other hand, this renewed consciousness of the centrality of community in the democratic experience of the United States has reinvigorated a strenuous defense of liberalism. Among the most celebrated advocates of minimalist liberalism, Richard Rorty has disputed the

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[248] R. Putnam and L Feldstein, *Better Together,* p. 282

validity of Sandel's categorization itself of republicanism and liberalism. In particular, both the cogency and the pertinence of such duality in the contemporary American polity are questioned: "Most people nowadays believe *both* that a free society is one in which citizens participate in government, *and* that it is one in which people are, within the limits Mill defined, left alone to choose their own values and ends."[249] In this sense, however, the premises of a liberal individualistic ontology are left unscathed. Moreover, Rorty calls attention also to the relations between the changes in the economic performance of the nation and the loss of security and social trust of its citizens.[250] The concept of economic anxiety is echoed by William Galston's analysis, that invests the economic as well as the social and political spheres, focusing on phenomena like social disintegration and political dysfunction.[251] Once again diverting attention away from Sandel's critique of liberalism as a "public philosophy." More broadly, the very notion of "unencumbered selves" is contested by Rorty, who sees it as a philosophical abstraction whose relevance in real world is confined to few occurrences of extreme individualism. Finally he objects that liberalism, especially in its more recent Rawlsian formulation, does not necessarily imply the disenchantment derived by the absence of morality and its departure from politics, but that, instead, it can produce "new moralities and new religions."[252]

Quite differently, Isaac Kramnick complicates the articulation of republicanism and liberalism, arguing that in the founding era of the American polity significant was also the voice of Protestantism, and that the values it bore are discernible also in the analysis of the current situation.[253] All these accounts are, then, negated by Louis Hartz's classic argument

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[249] Richard Rorty, *Defense of Minimalist Liberalism,* in A. Allen and M. Regan (edited by), *Debating Democracy's Discontent: Essays on American Politics, Law, and Public Philosophy,* (Oxford University Press, NY: 1998), p. 121

[250] Richard Rorty, *Defense of Minimalist Liberalism,* p. 124

[251] see William Galston, *Political Economy and the Politics of Virtue: US Public Philosophy at Century's End,* in A. Allen and M. Regan, *Debating Democracy's Discontent.*

[252] R. Rorty, *Defense of Minimalist Liberalism,* p. 125

for the "irrational" and exhaustive attachment of America for Lockean liberalism.[254] Finally, historical institutionalism has challenged the appropriateness of studies primarily centered on the civil society, and incapable to visualize the broader picture in which the role of institutions in their interplay with communities becomes manifest.[255]

The rise of atomization as a problematic political phenomenon has stimulated a wide array of studies on both its causes and on the possible remedies. A vast consensus is registered on the argument that an "excess" or misdirection of individualism can produce grave social malaises; however a crucial distinction needs to be made between those observers who are willing to radically question the very foundations of liberal individualism, and those who are, de facto, confirming them by proposing a return to their true, genuine essence. The language of liberalism proves, once again, versatile and malleable in dealing with radical critiques, able as it is to rearticulate them in a way that does not threaten its principles. Putnam's engagement with social capital, much like Kymlicka's reconceptualization of multiculturalism, represents a remarkable accomplishment of liberal discourse. Putnam's case, in fact, is even more significant in this sense, as the author is less upfront about his liberal premises, and yet they unequivocally permeate the substance of the argument and determine its conclusions. Philip Pettit's formulation of "neo-republicanism" constitutes a much more ambitious attempt at devising an alternative public philosophy; nevertheless, the discursive hegemony of liberalism extends to this project much more deeply than the author would be willing to recognize.

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[253] see Isaac Kramnick, *The Discourse of Politics in 1787: The Constitution ad Its Critics on Individualism, Community and the State,* in H. Belz, R. Hoffman and P. Albert (edited by) *To form a more perfect Union: the critical ideas of the Constitution* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville: 1992)

[254] see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (HBJ Books, San Diego: 1955)

[255] see T. Skocpol and M. Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Brooking Institution Press, Washington DC: 1999)

PETTIT'S (DEAD-END) WAY OUT OF LIBERAL POLITICS

Whereas Kymlicka explicitly purports to locate the project of multiculturalism within a liberal horizon, and Putnam never questions the liberal coordinates within which the construct of social capital takes place, Pettit's work marks a clear theoretical break with the paradigm of liberalism, one aimed at the recovery and reevaluation of the alternative tradition of republicanism. Pettit rose to prominence in the world of political theory for his advancement of a theory of freedom irreducible to the categories employed by liberal thinkers, and at the same time distinct from the interpretation that theorists of republicanism in the tradition of Quentin Skinner had offered. In particular, Pettit reads Skinner as equating republican freedom with "noncoercion or noninterference."[256] Though this is a problematic rendition of Skinner's thought, Pettit employs it as a foil for his own characterization of republican freedom as "non-domination:"

> The republican conception of freedom was certainly negative […] but it did not represent liberty as noninterference in the manner that Hobbes had inaugurated and that came to prominence among nineteenth-century liberal writers. It was, rather, a conception of liberty in which the antonym is not interference as such but rather *dominatio,* or domination. Domination is subjection to an arbitrary power of interference on the part of another – a *dominus* or master – even another who chooses not to actually exercise that power. Republican freedom […] should be understood as nondomination, not noninterference.[257]

To be free, in other words, is not to be dominated, and not to be dominated is not to be subjected to the arbitrary power of another. The actual exercise of interference constitutes a specific case of unfreedom, but the very possibility of interference, which in turns descends from an arbitrary power relation indicated as domination, is in itself sufficient to negate freedom. In this sense, broadening the definition of unfreedom from the actual (interference) to the potential (domination), Pettit proposes to offer an account of freedom

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[256] Philip Pettit, "Keeping Republican Freedom Simple: On A Difference With Quentin Skinner," in *Political Theory* Vol 30, No 3, June 2002, p. 339

[257] Philip Pettit, "Keeping Republican Freedom Simple: On A Difference With Quentin Skinner," p. 340

that is more thorough than those offered by liberals, and thus constitutes a more solid foundation for a public philosophy. Switching the emphasis from the actual to the potential, this formulation comes to hinge critically on what counts as "arbitrary interference." However, as Patchen Markell has noticed, Pettit tends to employ an ambiguous notion of "arbitrariness," one that significantly weakens the internal cogency of his proposition, and thus betrays a fundamental commitment to an ontological premise that in turn entraps the author in a universe of sense from which he purportedly attempts to escape.

In its ordinary sense, the notion of arbitrariness refers to the capricious, whimsical character of an agent's choice of her actions; when these actions affect a different subject, the interference that ensues is to be deemed "arbitrary." However, in Pettit's usage of the term, arbitrariness comes to refer also to cases in which an act of interference is "not forced to track the avowable interests of the interferee."[258] In other words, if the first, commonsensical understanding of arbitrariness anchors it to the will of the agent of a potential interference, the second calls into question the interests of the interferee. An act of interference is arbitrary, in this second sense, when it is undertaken without considering its effects on the interests of the subject who suffers its consequences. This second definition, as Markell observes, is narrower than the first, as it opens up the possibility of acts that disregard the interests of the interferee, but are still governed by a logic of their own, and therefore are not fully arbitrary in the first sense.[259] Such cases would include, for instance, the example of a benevolent master who chooses not to interfere with his or her slaves for reasons other than a genuine concern for their interests (e.g.: desire to save one's soul, constraints imposed by a third party, etc.). These situations, while not entirely whimsical and capricious, would still be arbitrary in the second sense. Qualifying them as such enables Pettit to establish "the idea of non-domination - freedom from arbitrary power [as

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[258] see Philip Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2001), pp. 138-139, cited in Patchen Markell, "The Insufficiency of Non-Domination," in *Political Theory,* Vol 36, No 1, February 2008, p. 13.

[259] see P. Markell, "The Insufficiency of Non-Domination," pp. 13-16.

applicable] against a sufficiently broad range of injustices, including both rule-bound and non-rule-bound forms of subordination […] as a single, overarching political principle."[260]

Moreover, as Markell observes, the second definition of arbitrariness rests on the idea that the interests of the interferee must be "avowable," capable of being rationally expressed, motivated, and sustained. This view "still expresses a concern with caprice, only here it is not the whim or caprice of the powerholder that matters, but the whim or caprice of the interferee: power is nonarbitrary when its exercise is forced to track the interferee's interests *and* when those interests have themselves been validated, deprived of their arbitrary character by having been subjected to the standards of commonness and avowability."[261] Before her interests are taken into consideration, Pettit's subject must learn to identify and communicate them, thus expunging the capriciousness that might otherwise taint them. It is to this reflective, disciplined subject that belongs the freedom from domination: of others and of her own capricious will.

In Pettit's painting of its characteristics, then, the subject of republican freedom starts to look quite similar to the individual theorized by liberalism. To be sure, they draw the line between their freedom and unfreedom at different points, and the former is a lot more exigent than the latter; yet there seems to be a common concern for the formation of the subject as an entity capable of choosing its interests and the actions that promote them in a non-arbitrary, predictable way. This scheme for non-arbitrariness would seem to be, in both cases, an attribute of rationality as a quality located within the mind of the individual subject. Being free in Pettit's republican sense, involves, at a minimum: 1) being able to act according to one's beliefs and interests; 2) reflecting on those very beliefs and interests, thus choosing them in a deliberate manner as opposed to being enslaved by them; and 3) engaging in social relations mediated by discourse and such that the validation that one produces for her own

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[260] P. Markell, "The Insufficiency of Non-Domination,", p. 15

[261] P. Markell, "The Insufficiency of Non-Domination," p. 15

beliefs and interests cannot be reduced to relations of discursive domination that would negate her freedom. Pettit elaborates this ambitious account of agency in his *Theory of Freedom;* he also explicitly rejects the notion of a thin self that he would seem to impute to a liberal view:

> [I]f I am to maintain discursive interactions with others, then the self in question cannot recede to the point of being a purely formal 'I,' with a thin, commitment-free identity. In order to maintain discursive interactions with others, I must continue to stand by certain claims and intentions; I cannot change minute by minute, interaction by interaction. And that means that I must give my self a substantive specification; I must assume a substantive character.[262]

The subject of republican freedom would then appear to be a self endowed with a more or less stable (though revisable) identity, and capable of rational interactions with others, interactions that take that identity as a starting point, and not as the necessarily transitory stage in a process of transformation. While this is clearly not reducible to the stylization of the unencumbered self, it would seem as if Pettit's main preoccupation here is not to provide a description of the world in which identity is continuously negotiated, undone, and reconstituted by actions, but rather to justify a narrative in which individual selves pre-exist their actions and perform them with a rational concern for their beliefs and interests in their exchanges with others. This, in turn, remains fully consistent with the rules of liberal discourse. Not even the political is for Pettit an arena for the contestation of individual identities, as in his blend of neo-Roman republicanism "democratic politics is wholly instrumental to the supreme goal of non-domination."[263] Citizens engage in political action for the purpose of defending their freedom from domination; to the extent that this limited, protective goal is accomplished, they continue to live their lives as substantially stable selves. Republican freedom remains distinct from liberal freedom (and, arguably, a sounder political project); but the political context in which they operate, as well as the ontological

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[262] P. Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom,* p. 85

[263] P. Markell, "The Insufficiency of Non-Domination," p. 28

commitments that they share on the sense of human nature, seem to indicate more similarities than differences.

Pettit refines his account of the self, and in particular of the role that language plays in constituting it, in his recent *Made With Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics.*[264] Here Pettit starts from the premise that human beings are such by virtue of the faculty of thought that they possess, and that this in turn is made possible by the invention of speech. Hobbes' original intuition consists in the idea that language is "not a natural inheritance," but "an invented technology:" Hobbes is "the inventor of the invention of language."[265] To the claim that "man is *by nature* a political animal," and that he is so by virtue of his faculty of speech (in many ways the foundational adage of the civic republican tradition) Pettit responds via Hobbes by arguing that politics is two steps removed from the "nature" of man: first through the invention of language, and then through its contingent and instrumental application to political matters. Language endows human beings with the ability to establish comparisons and think relationally, to understand their place in the world with regards to the place of others. Here, and only here, Pettit's analysis parts from Hobbes' proto-liberal formulation. Hobbes sees in "Vain-glory" the ultimate evil, and an ineradicable cause of conflict, because unlike competition and diffidence, it cannot be transformed into a peaceful impulse (desire for commodious living and fear of death respectively).[266] Competition and diffidence, in fact, derive from the natural instinct of (individual) self-preservation, when this is exercised toward others; when the same instinct is turned inward, its energy can be harnessed for non-conflictual goals. Glory, on the other hand, pertains to the irreducibly social dimension of language: it lacks the self-referential quality that would redeem it. Glory

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[264] Philip Pettit, *Made With Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2008)

[265] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* p. 2

[266] see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Penguin Books, London: 1951), [chp XIII] pp. 185-188

is always glory relative to the standing of somebody else; glory entails the desire to be superior to others.

Pettit, however, contends that an even more fundamental impulse is the desire not to be inferior to others. And whereas the fulfillment of one's desire of being superior is not compatible with an equal desire by others, the desire of not being inferior can lead to such social arrangements that make its fulfillment possible, at least in principle, for everybody.[267] Non-domination, in other words, is the principle that should inspire the public philosophy of a society. Republican institutions can ensure the peaceful coexistence among citizens interested in preserving their own individual freedom. This is a brilliant solution to Hobbes' problem of glory; but it is hardly a position that reconceptualizes the fundamental essence of humans, or even their relation to the political. Theorizing politics as the arena in which pre-constituted individuals defend their pre-political freedom seems to mortify a tradition of republicanism that from Aristotle to Arendt extols *vita activa* as the culmination of human life itself. Though a cadet branch of republican thinkers (Machiavelli above all) has also praised politics as an instrument for the orderly coexistence among citizens, Pettit's project here lacks the elements of institutional inventiveness that would set it clearly apart from a liberal position.[268]

Moreover, presenting language as an appendage to the nature of humans (albeit one of the utmost importance) precludes the possibility that language is constitutive of the identity of the self, and not just the vehicle for its expression. Words are "used" according to Pettit for various purposes. Words are used first and foremost "to ratiocinate," to perform those logical operations that Hobbes famously assimilated to the arithmetical functions of addition and subtraction.[269] Reason is therefore presented as a mechanical and discernible process,

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[267] see: P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 3-4

[268] On "protective republicanism" see: David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge: 2006), pp. 35-37

not a mystical one; accordingly, it is a learned ability, and not an innate one. Words are carriers of meaning that humans use in computing. Humans relate to the inert matter of the world through the medium of language and reason: the meaning that is associated to discrete portions of the world (each unequivocally associated with a sign in this view) must remain stable if ratiocinating is to be preserved from becoming a vacuous exercise in sophistry. This liberal theory of language necessarily prefigures a universe of sense in which individual speakers objectify and deprive of intrinsic value everything in the world that cannot "speak back:" animals, plants, peoples and individuals that they recognize as other and inferior, either because they speak a language that remains unintelligible to them, or because they ostensibly lack the faculty of reason as expressed through language. This also corresponds to Hobbes' fascination with the Newtonian paradigm of seventeenth-century science as the model for reason.[270] The narrative that this position subtends about humans in the world, and that Pettit seems to accept uncritically, is one that neatly conforms to the principles of liberal discourse.

An even more explicit theme of liberal discurisvity is developed in the chapter in which Pettit explains Hobbes' theory of how words are used "to personate."[271] If ratiocinating pertained (primarily) to the relation of humans to the (allegedly) inert matter of their nonspeaking environment, personating indicates their ability to recognize each other through language as "persons […] who […] can speak or act in their own name or the name of a principal."[272] In other words, persons are "agents who relate in a certain way toward others […] authorizing their own words and actions as signs of their minds, and inevitably, taking others to authorize their words and actions in the same way."[273] Pettit concedes that this

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[269] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 42-54

[270] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 44-45

[271] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 55-69

[272] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* p. 56

[273] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,*p. 59

might entail the exclusion from (full) personhood of those who are (deemed to be) unable (or, arguably, unwilling) to "authorize their words and actions, to "speak or act in their own name." These are subjects that Hobbes indicates as "children, fools, and madmen," and that different incarnations of the liberal practice of exclusion have variously defined at different points in time, from Locke ("lunatics and ideots […] children […] madmen") to Rawls (persons affected by "permanent physical disabilities or mental disorders so severe as to prevent [them] from being normal and fully cooperating members of society in the usual sense"), typically coagulating around a semantic cluster of "lack of commonly defined rationality."[274] However, Hobbes is satisfied with leaving the decision of where to draw the boundaries of sufficient "personhood" to local conventions and legislation, and Pettit remains disturbingly silent on this issue.[275] In general, the value of personation consists in making individuals readable to each other (and to themselves): "[b]y virtue of being able to personate, human beings achieve a way of predicting one another's behavior and knowing when they can rely on one another."[276] This is, of course, propaedeutic to the paramount functions that Hobbes wants individuals to be able to perform: entering contracts, and ultimately the covenant that originates civil society. Here too Pettit seems to accept a narrative that sees in the social contract the artificial creation of pre-political individuals. Again, the goals that he wants them to be able to protect through the institutions of civil society are not simply reducible to those of liberalism; yet the political universe that they inhabit is not radically different.

Finally, the liberal underpinnings of Pettit's endorsement of Hobbes's theory of language are evident in the account of how words are used "to incorporate."[277] This indicates

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[274] see: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hacket Publishing Company, Indianapolis: 1980), par. 60; and John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political, Not Metaphysical," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol 14, No 3. (Summer, 1985) p. 234

[275] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 56-57

[276] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* p. 59

[277] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp. 70-83

"the ability of people […] to come together as a single corporate person."[278] Whereas through personation different individuals presented themselves to each other, by speaking and acting each on their own name, through incorporation an individual now comes to speak or act for other individuals, to re-present them. The most salient case is that of a multitude of separate individuals that get incorporated into a people and personated by the sovereign. Not only is there an assumption that the initial position of existence for humans is that of single individuals, but the very plurality of the multitude appears to be a fastidious transitory stage towards the final realization of a sort of "corporate individuality" of which the representer (the sovereign) is the embodiment more than the symbol: "[o]ut of the larval multitude there emerges a corporate butterfly […] the multitude ceases to be a heap of separate individuals and becomes" a people.[279] Even if the personation of a multitude is enacted by a group or committee, in their exercise of political power the members of that group or committee are bound to act like one person, for the multitude itself has become its own person. It is perhaps even more clear in this potentially democratic scenario that the model of unity based on the construct of the individual is so strong in Hobbes that it becomes impossible for him to accept plurality: in the meaning that words carry; in the pledges that individual persons make to each other; and now in the corporate entity that is molded from the multitude.

Though Pettit may legitimately emphasize the neo-Republican elements in his thought, in light of this sympathetic reading of Hobbes' theory of language it appears as his departure from certain fundamental aspects of a liberal ontology is limited at best. Edwige Kacenelenbogen has further observed that Pettit's theory bears a quaint resemblance to Friedrich Von Hayek's neoliberalism. In fact, both views share a commitment to "epistemological modesty:" they both see political order as being neither natural, nor planned, but emerging spontaneously from the aggregation of the actions of self-interested

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[278] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* p. 70

[279] P. Pettit, *Made With Words,* pp 72-73

individuals.[280] Kacenelenbogen points out: "The way in which, in Pettit's view, individuals interiorize social norms and acquire civility through 'habits' and customs is in many regards similar to the way in which, in Hayek's perspective, actors acquire their norms of good behaviour on a market."[281] I remain unpersuaded that the political implications of this parallel are so deep as to sustain the bold claim that "the opposition between liberal and republican thought is not as vivid as [Pettit] suggests."[282] At the very least, I am skeptical that Pettit's work should be regarded as representative of all "republican thought," as the statement above would seem to indicate.

However, I think that Kacenelenbogen's analysis is illustrative of how the adoption of the mode of liberal discourse leads Pettit astray from republican content too. More specifically, the narratives that Pettit can construct about the relations between individuals, their freedom, and the political system that best protects it prescribe to the rules of liberal discourse. This does not qualify the outcomes of Pettit's political theory as fully liberal, but it rather attests to the versatility of the language of liberalism, and its ability to speak a wide range of positions.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have presented a brief account of how liberalism concretely functions as a meta-ideology. My argument is that, on top of advancing its own political agenda based on certain core values, and on the set of policies that descend from them, liberalism also exercises a subtler hegemonic role in the contemporary political culture of much of "the

[280] Edwige Kacenelenbogen, "Epistemological Modesty Within Contemporary Political Thought. A Link Between Hayek's Neoliberalism and Pettit's Republicanism," in *European Journal of Political Theory,* Vol 8 No 4, October 2009, pp. 449-450

[281] E. Kacenelenbogen, "Epistemological Modesty," p. 461

[282] E. Kacenelenbogen, "Epistemological Modesty," p. 450

West" by providing many (but not all) competing ideological positions with the expressive "infrastructure" that allows them to engage each other critically, without either annihilating each other, or renouncing their specificity altogether.[283] Liberalism, in other words, sets the table at which other ideologies sit and argue with each other.

There is a "fee" for participating in this conversation. In this chapter I have argued that the toll corresponds to the more or less deliberate acceptance of certain basic rules of expression. Typically, non-liberal ideologies are not asked to fully conform to liberal precepts in order to be admitted to the conversation hosted by liberalism; but they do have to present their own positions in a language intelligible to the other participants. That language is the meta-ideology of liberal discourse. I have characterized this as a mode of expression that coagulates around a few basic rules. I have proposed a tentative formulation of three such rules: 1) individual agency; 2) rational action; 3) objects as inert matter. Of these, the first point (that individuals pre-exist and "own" their actions, rather than being constituted by them) takes priority over the other two. The list is in no way meant to be an exhaustive one, and the formulation of each of those "rules" does not claim to be anything more than a rudimentary attempt at highlighting the recurrence of certain characteristic traits of liberal expression.

I should emphasize that these rules are not presented here as the "minimum common denominator" of liberalism: not all themes that define the ideology of liberalism are accounted for, of course (e.g.: the concept of "equality of opportunity" cannot be automatically derived from them); and certainly some self-identified liberals could take issue with them (e.g.: it is conceivable that passions, as opposed to rationality, might be accepted in a comprehensive theory of action). Nevertheless, I still find this agile list of expressive rules useful for testing my hypothesis that liberal discourse can (within certain limits) accommodate extra-liberal content, and that it can do so in a remarkably successful manner. Whereas Michael Freeden refers to this process as "adaptation," suggesting that liberalism

[283] It should be noticed here that not all ideologies are equally amenable to this kind of expressive domestication; some certainly do resist it, often times facing marginalization and irrelevance because of that.

significantly opens itself up for contestation in its engagement of other positions, I prefer to characterize it as "liberal incorporation:" the acquisition of extra-liberal content into, and through the structures of liberal discourse.

I have analyzed three cases of what I describe as liberal incorporations. First I have discussed Will Kymlicka's engagement with multiculturalism. In his formulation of a "right to culture" I envisage a limpid exemplification of the versatility of liberal discourse in seizing portions of non-liberal content, and reorganizing this content in a manner compatible with a liberal order. The communitarian defense of minority rights becomes in Kymlicka's hands a liberal project for the advancement of individual rights. The narrative of migration, in particular, is presented as one in which the action of relocating is undertaken by individual agents who are, therefore, "typically" willing to integrate into the society of the new country. Dissolving a complex social phenomenon into simple components like individual actions (the rational choice to migrate) and attitudes (the alleged desire to integrate) is an emblematic move of liberal discourse. This peculiar reconceptualization of one of the fundamental problems of multiculturalism, in turn, is likely to predetermine the kind of solutions that may be proposed. Liberal discourse can express non-liberal content; but in doing so it shapes the horizon of the thinkable and constitutes the world of politics as the unfolding of a liberal narrative.

Secondly, I have focused on Robert Putnam's work on "social capital." Confronted with the undesirable effects of the atomization of American society, and the equally undesirable implications of certain communitarian projects, Putnam attempts to regain the Paradise Lost of an avowedly harmonious liberal polity. Accordingly, his formula is based on the translation of the theme of community into the vocabulary of liberalism. That translation roughly corresponds to what he indicates as social capital. Contrary to the communitarian critique of the unencumbered self as an ontological fiction, though, Putnam ends up glorifying the self that starts unencumbered, and then chooses to join in with others in the pursuit of a more or less explicit agenda of "efficiency." Social capital is not constitutive of the identity of individuals, but an object at their disposal, analogous to other kinds of capital.

This discursive rearticulation of "community" studiedly harnesses its potential for rescuing liberalism from its own atomistc degeneration. By virtue of the very expressive forms that it employs, though, this position frustrates the possibility of thinking outside of the ontological and political precincts of a liberal order.

Finally I have considered Philip Pettit's ongoing advancement of a "neo-republican" public philosophy. Though his characterization of republican liberty as "non-domination" cannot be fully reduced to analogous liberal formulations, the discourse that Pettit employs remains consistent with certain key themes of liberalism. In order to resist "arbitrary interference" (which follows from relations of domination), a subject needs to expose that arbitrariness, by declaring its own interest so as to present them as non-arbitrary in the first place. In order to do so, the subject needs to be already constituted as a rational self with a relatively stable identity; this is made possible by the faculty of language. Pettit's theory of language, modeled on Hobbes', seems entirely consistent with the canons of liberal discourse, as it too postulates a world of inert matter, in which individual speakers use words crucially to "ratiocinate" (perform logical operation), "personate" (relate with, and distinguish one another), and "incorporate" (coordinate and act in unison like one single body). Moreover, Pettit's proposal remains fully compatible with a liberal order inasmuch as it construes politics as an instrument available to individuals for the preservation of their pre-political freedom.

These are all cases of "liberal incorporation," I argue, and as such they are illustrative of broader processes through which liberal discourse absorbs, reconfigures, and operationalizes alien political meaning. Three general questions, however, can be raised about this conclusion. 1) Does the "incorporation" really happen at the level of language, or is it simply the inclusion of new content in highly adaptive liberal paradigms? 2) Is there really a liberal "meta-ideology" at work here, or are these cases just a testimony of the descriptive power of methodological individualism? 3) Is there really a conceivable, and crucially, also desirable systemic alternative to the discourse of liberal individualism?

My simple answer to the first question is that liberalism operates on two levels. At the level of content, it certainly exhibits a remarkable propensity for revising its own beliefs, and hedging in new ones. Rawls' toleration is not Locke's toleration, and T.H. Green's advocacy of an "enabling state" is a considerable departure from classical arguments for a minimal state. Yet, I argue, there is also a peculiar way in which the discourse of liberalism can make extra-liberal content more palatable by reorganizing it according to certain rules of expression. Otherwise, Kymlicka might have not insisted on his narrative of immigrants as individual actors; Putnam might have avoided dissolving community into a collection of individuals variously endowed with social capital; and Pettit might have not presented republican freedom as attached to individuals that only defend it in the political, without constituting their identity in the process.

As for the second question, I maintain that methodological individualism is a crucial dimension of the liberal project, in both its ideological, and meta-ideological incarnations. In particular, I suspect that, whereas in the ideology of liberalism individualism (both descriptive and normative) occupies a privileged position among other equally important principles (e.g.: freedom, reason, a certain notion of justice, toleration, etc.), in the meta-ideology it clearly enjoys a more dominant position. The discourse of liberalism owes more to the correspondence between the subject of grammar and the individual presented as the undisputed owner of action, than it does to the other principles of liberalism. Yet, a translation of holistic accounts into the language of methodological individualism might still lack the liberal political projections that are apparent in the cases analyzed above as examples of liberal discourse. Adam Przeworski, for instance, has endeavored to harness the explanatory potential of rational choice theory (a set of propositions and models of social action based on the assumption of the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis) toward a defense of the conclusions of Marxism (a system of thought in which structural relations among the classes explain social outcomes).[284] Though Przeworski translates the traditionally

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[284] Adam Przeworski, "Marxism and Rational Choice," in *Politics & Society,* Vol 14, No 4, December 1985, pp. 379-409

structuralist language of Marxism into that of methodological individualism, he does not reach liberal conclusions. It is possible, in principle, to keep the methodology of individualism separate from the politics of liberalism.

Finally, the third question is undoubtedly the most dauntingly fascinating one. My inclination is to respond that, whether or not a viable and desirable systemic alternative to the meta-ideology of liberal individualism can be found, it is worth looking for one. And to this quest I shall now turn, introducing my reflection on Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy as a way out of the rigid substantialism of both liberal and communitarian worldviews.

CHAPTER V

IMAGINING THE INOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I argue that the formulation of an alternative to the ideological hegemony of liberalism and to the meta-ideological pervasiveness of a liberal grammar is both a possible and a desirable political project. Toward the definition of a non-liberal style of discourse I discuss critically various articulations of the political concept of community, and in particular I present Jean-Luc Nancy's reflection on "the inoperative community" as a promising foundation for a non-liberal meta-ideological configuration. Since this is a crucial passage in the development of my project, before delineating the contours of the alternative that I envision, I will briefly recapitulate the main points that I have raised thus far.

The study of political ideologies exposes with particular vividness the arbitrariness of any artificial opposition between political theory and the practices of politics, or between the empirical reality of politics and its abstraction, depending on what is assumed as the entry point in the definition of this problematic relation. By their very nature, and by the function that they perform in the world of politics, ideologies straddle the line that is supposed to separate the world of ideas from the world of action. In organizing political content, ideologies also produce effects on how that content gets mobilized for various political purposes. My goal in this project is to advance a reflection on how a study of ideologies can be conducted to account for the complex relations between ideas and politics. In particular, I concentrate on the specific grammatical-ideological formation of liberalism, and I then reflect on how its current hegemony can be contested.

In Chapter I I defined my approach to this study by emphasizing the narrative dimension of political ideologies: fundamentally, an ideology tells a story about the world of politics. Both content and grammar are constitutive elements of this narration: whereas political theorists have systematically investigated the semantic fields delineated by various ideologies, I argue that that the syntactic infrastructure which makes the articulation of meaning possible has been often regarded as inert, extra-political matter, and as such it has been severely understudied. Along with their commitment to different political values and views of the world, in fact, different ideologies also exhibit a general pattern of regularities as to how they allocate meaning in their narrations. Typically an ideology moves from the premise of a description of the status quo, in which a set of problems, shortcomings, faults is identified. Cleary, this is a stylization of political reality, a vignette drawn for the purpose of sustaining the advancement of a normative view: an alternative, more desirable allocation of values, resources, political meaning. Crucially, then, an ideology adds that a better future is not only thinkable in the abstract, but that it can also be concretely realized. Though the status quo is flawed, it is not irredeemably so; though the future is attractive, it is not out of reach. A call for action, often times appealing at an emotional level ("Working men of all countries, unite!"), and a blueprint detailing what steps are to be taken (more or less literally "What is to be done") conclude the message of an ideology. This style of narrative, then is not primarily concerned with a notion of "Truth" as it may exist outside of the narration, but with the production of "effects of truth" within the narration aimed at showing that an alternative to the status quo is *truly* desirable, and that it is *truly* achievable.

In Chapter II I furthered the reflection on how ideological discourse produces such effects of truth. If political ideologies can be regarded as narrative constructs, I argued, they can also be studied by borrowing some basic instruments of analysis from semiotics. In particular, I introduced the logical category of abduction, with the specific case of overcoding: ideological discourses produce effects of truth by making inferences about certain portions of a field of meaning, and then decontesting these inferences into natural and necessary claims about the world of politics. Then I concentrated on the issue of how certain deep structures of language shape the field of meaning by apportioning agency in

ways that prefigure certain ideological worldviews at the expenses of others. In other words, I reflected on how a commitment to an ontology of individualism may be fostered by a grammar of subject-verb formations in which action is an attribute of the subject rather than constitutive of it. Concomitantly I also considered what the implication of an alternative grammar of agency might be for the world of politics, shifting the emphasis from subject to verb, from the individual as a datum to the performativity of action. Finally, I presented the semiotic square as a useful instrument for mapping the semantic field on which the narrative of an ideology unfolds.

In Chapter III I then invested my general reflections on ideology on the specific narrative of liberalism. I employed basic instruments of semiotics for the analysis of the contributions of three canonical liberal thinkers. First I looked at John Locke's arguments in both the *Second Treatise of Government* and in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Contra the prevalent readings of Locke's theory as either the prototype of "possessive individualism," or as an endorsement of the value of community over that of the individual, I argued that he advances a rather more complex politics of "semiotic individualism" in which individuals acquire consciousness of themselves and take ownership of the narratives that they originate by virtue of their belonging to a linguistic community. The latter is in turn constituted by a "semiotic contract" which makes both signification and communication possible. Then I looked at John Stuart Mill's politics of "sovereign individualism," in which the action of individuals is explained as a function of their individual rationality. Finally I considered John Rawls' view of justice as fairness as a politics of "tempered individualism," in which some of the social ties that Mill had deemphasized are instead underscored, but in which the exclusionary possibilities of liberalism remain largely unquestioned. In conclusion, I have identified three elements of a profound grammar of liberal discourse: 1) individuals own their actions; 2) the mode of action is rational; 3) objects are treated as inert matter (and human beings can be treated as objects too).

In Chapter IV I have argued that the same basic liberal grammar can also express extra-liberal political content. Liberalism, in other words, also exercises its hegemony over other

ideologies by incorporating at least some of their claims into its own expressive infrastructure. I have considered cases of "liberal incorporations" in three contemporary authors. First I have looked at Will Kymlicka's domestication of the communitarian dimension of multiculturalism into an individual "right to culture" to be granted in the context of a soundly liberal institutional setting. Then I have presented Robert Putnam's formulation of "social capital" as a gesture toward some themes of communitarianism, but at the same time a clear reaffirmation of the foundations of a liberal political project. Finally I have considered Philip Pettit's ambitious theorization of "neo-republicanism," and I have found it consistent with both a liberal institutional structure, and with a liberal account of the self. A liberal grammar, I have argued, allows the articulation of political visions irreducible to the core of a liberal ideology.

Is the grammar of liberalism uniquely endowed with such meta-ideological versatility? Can other grammatical configurations also convey meaning across a wide range of political positions? I argue that it is indeed possible to construct political narratives irreducible to the grammatical structures of liberalism. Moreover, contra the objection that outside of a liberal paradigm there can only be closed political universes rigidly organized around a set of core beliefs, I argue that Nancy's view of the "inoperative community," unlike other forms of communitarianism, can sustain a multiplicity of political claims, much like what I have defined as a "liberal grammar," but without some the problematic commitment of liberalism to the fiction of the individual, at the level of political content, and to the primacy of the subject, at the level of grammar.

My argument is loosely organized around the same narrative pattern that I have identified as characteristic of political ideology. At the "descriptive" level I have observed in previous chapters that the current status quo exhibits the hegemony (both ideological and meta-ideological) of liberalism. I regard this as undesirable, in particular because the individualistic ontology on which both the discourse and grammar of liberalism are founded does not constitute an adequate account of the complexity of human nature, and it constrains the development of the notion of the "political" in a distortive manner. At the

"normative" level, in this chapter I articulate (what I regard as) a more desirable foundation for political discourses, based on Nancy's peculiar understanding of community, and capable of accommodating political meaning across a variety of positions. Finally, insofar as the "action-oriented" aspect of ideology is concerned, in Chapter VI I will illustrate some of the concrete implications that an understanding of community inspired by Nancy might have for political phenomena like migration, and the encounter with the other more generally. In order to illustrate the specificity and originality of Nancy's formulation I will start by first reconstructing a possible trajectory of development of the concept of "community" in the reflection of some recent authors, ranging from Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor, to Benedict Anderson, James Scott and Pascale Casanova.

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: FROM ESSENCE TO IMAGINATION

If the hegemony of liberalism does indeed extend from the ideological level to the meta-ideological one, allowing liberal discourse to incorporate claims from other ideologies and to express them in such a way as to render them compatible with core liberal values, then I argue that this is due to certain features of a peculiar liberal grammar. In particular, I argue that the structural homology between the liberal commitment to an individualistic ontology and the grammatical structure of the subject can explain much of the success of liberalism in presenting its views as commonsensical, intuitive, or even natural. Both the liberal individual and the grammatical subject are described as owners of their actions: they pre-exist their actions, which are attached to them as contingent attributes to an immanent core.

Etymologically the notion of the "individual" clearly refers to "that which cannot be further divided." At the historical juncture of modernity, when thinkers like Hobbes, Locke and Descartes codified the rationalistic principles of the new era, the ongoing processes of dissolution of the feudal order across the societies of Europe had already fostered a radical critique of the traditional concept of "ascribed status." As Alan Macfarlane has shown for

England, for centuries before the events of the Civil War and the publication of Locke's *Second Treatise,* society had started morphing into the system of socio-economic as well as cultural values in which the principle of individualism would eventually take root.[285] As the rigid social hierarchies of the past had become increasingly unstable over the centuries under the impact of new economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and genuinely political transformations, the division of society into self-contained groups virtually impermeable to each other like the nobility, the clergy, and the ensemble of the commoners also became untenable. The latter set, in particular, increasingly started to appear like an ill-assorted *rassemblement* of people with very little in common: "commoners," for instance, were both the newly urbanized and enfranchised former serfs and the peasants who remained attached to the fields; both the nascent bourgeoisie and the laborers who were to become the first nucleus of a proletarian class. As ever more structured social differences became impossible to ignore, the status itself of "commoners" required analysis, literally "breaking down" into its constitutive elements; the endpoint of this breaking down was assumed to have been reached at the level of the individual, that which could not be further divided.

Questioning the validity of this outcome, then, would seem to imply at least two alternative possibilities. One position might argue that the very process of "breaking down" the unity of society into ever smaller components, all the way to the individual, is inherently misguided. Another position might respond that that process in fact stops short of questioning the unity of the individual itself, its actual character of indivisibility. I will return to the latter point at the end of this chapter, in the context of a postmodern critique of the self; but it is the former line of reasoning that has historically produced the foremost challenges to a conception of politics organized around the liberal view of individualism.

The liberal argument for descriptive and normative individualism, in fact, has attracted criticism from different sides of the ideological debate. Conservative thinkers, variously inspired by Edmund Burke's seminal *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* have argued that the

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[285] Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1978)

unity of an "organic society" takes logical and moral priority over the notion of the individual human being. Roger Scruton, for instance, has remarked that "[t]here is no autonomy that does not presuppose the sense of a social order, and if the order may be ideal, this is only because it was once experienced as real. The autonomous individual is the product of practices which designate him as social."[286] Contra the social-contractarian narrative of society as the association of originally autonomous individuals, Scruton redescribes the individual as derivative and dependent on the political, cultural, and moral premises of society. From a rather different position, socialists have typically rejected both the liberal view of human nature and its implications for society. To the extent that the very notion of human "nature" is tenable in the discourse of socialism, the nature of human beings is to be social creatures, and as such intimately and unavoidably shaped by social circumstances. Robert Owen, for instance, denounced as a mistake to suppose that "each individual man forms his own character," and countered that "the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him."[287] This strong argument for social determinism clearly rejected the individualistic premises of liberalism, as well as its conclusions on the organization of society.

The critique of liberal individualism was fueled toward the end of the 20th century by the emergence of a distinctive "communitarian" position. As I note in Chapter IV, Michael Sandel confronts the liberal postulate of an "unencumbered self." Prior to its ends and detached from them, in Sandel's analysis the liberal self is an artificial construct devoid of any constitutive attachments to its context and obligations to its community.[288] Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre indicts the modern notion of the individual as an "emotivist self." In a passionate vindication of an Aristotelian ethics against the moral relativism of the post-

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[286] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (St. Augustine Press, South Bend, Ind.: 2002), p. 66

[287] Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings* (Penguin Classics, London: 1991), p. 43

[288] Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1. (Feb., 1984); Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent* (Belknap Harvard, Cambridge MS: 1996); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MS: 1998)

Enlightenment world, MacIntyre notes: "this democratized self which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity can then be anything, can assume any role or take any point of view, because it *is* in and for itself nothing."[289] For both Sandel and MacIntyre only grounding the individual in the community to which it belongs can solve the social and moral problems epitomized by the atomistic tendencies of contemporary liberalism.

To the fragmentation of society into a contingent association of loosely connected individuals, thinkers in the tradition of Sandel and especially MacIntyre juxtapose the necessary unity of community. Community thus exists always already before the individuals that inhabit it. A community provides its members with the sources for the definition of both their collective and individual identities. The essence of a community is manifested by certain immanent characteristics such as a common language, a shared system of values and traditions, a coherent historical narrative.

Moreover, the abrasion of liberal and communitarian claims in the debates of the 1980s and 1990s produced various redefinitions of the liberal and communitarian arguments. In Chapter IV I discussed Robert Putnam's emphasis on "social capital" as a form of "liberal incorporation" (and ultimate enervation) of certain communitarian themes.[290] With an altogether different theoretical depth, Michael Walzer has elaborated a theory of justice as "complex equality." Contra the dominant paradigm of "simple equality," Walzer's theory of communal pluralism identifies different spheres in society, and upholds as just a social arrangement in which "no citizen's standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good."[291] Unlike the classic pluralist account of American politics put forth by Robert Dahl in *Who*

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[289] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN: 2007) [1981], p. 32

[290] Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1993); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* (Simon and Shuster, NY: 2000); Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (Simon & Schuster, New York: 2003)

[291] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Basic Books, New York: 1983), p. 21

Governs?, Walzer's particular version of the argument for non-cumulative inequalities crucially depends on membership in an interpretive community which is internally articulated in different spheres of value and distribution. In order for a society to be just, it has to be grounded in the community of citizenship and democratic participation. Furthermore, Walzer expands on his moral theory by exposing liberal morality as a "thin" one: universal and neutral, but by its very nature inadequate to regulate the balance of rights and obligations within a community. By contrast, a "thick" morality is rooted in local practices and traditions: as such it is the appropriate horizon for thinking about what binds together a community of shared understandings, but it would be ill-advised to follow its precepts in the international arena.[292]

Walzer thus ends up recommending a "thin" moral order at the international level, whereas a "thick" discourse of rights and obligation is required at the level of the domestic community. That the domestic sphere should indeed be understood as an undivided "community of shared understandings" is a postulation that other thinkers engage critically. In Patchen Markell's convincing analysis, the articulation of "recognition" as a political project also emerged as the refinement of the early statements of communitarianism, and in particular of their assumption of an undivided community:

> The politics of recognition, you might say, emerged as pluralist variation on this original, "communitarian" critique of liberalism, with the "identity" taking the place of "community" as the preferred vocabulary for thinking about the contexts in which human agents are inevitably embedded.[293]

As Markell perceptively observes, Charles Taylor's intervention in the debates on multiculturalism marks a critical juncture in rejecting the essentialist attitude of certain versions of communitarianism. On the one hand Taylor rejects the premises of "naturalism,"

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[292] See Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN: 1994)

[293] Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2003), p. 45

and in particular the idea that the agent can act independently of the context of their action. Individual human agents do not operate as atoms disengaged from society. On the other hand, though, Taylor observes that the complexity of contemporary society cannot be reduced to the idealized unity of community, as a plurality of social contexts typically coexist without being reducible to a common whole. Moreover, contra the view that identity descends in an unproblematic manner from either the unitary essence of community, or the specific essences of different groups in society, Taylor objects that the formation of identity is a more complex dialogical phenomenon. As such it entails the recognition of one's claim to identity from others: it starts from the formulation of a sense of one's being; but it is never complete until that claim is also validated by others. In Taylor's analysis:

> our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced form of being.[294]

For Taylor too, like for Sandel and MacIntyre, the identity of the self is not independent of the social context in which it is immersed; but emphasizing the importance of recognition also qualifies that identity as the product of dynamic social interactions that effect either truthful or distorted identities. For the Quebecoise to have their distinctness recognized by the Canadian state and society, with the "consequent demand for certain forms of autonomy in their self-government," is fundamental for their very survival.[295] Identity is neither simply the manifestation of one's intimate authenticity (*being* French Canadian, with all that this implies for one's language, history, traditions), nor purely the effect of a social construction (being *regarded* as French Canadian). For Taylor it needs to be both.

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[294] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutmann, ed. by, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1994), p. 25

[295] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," p. 52

Rejecting the essentialist thesis altogether, Benedict Anderson insists instead on the socially constructed character of the national community. At the beginning of *Imagined Communities* he defines nations and nationalism as "cultural artifacts of a particular kind."[296] Anderson's programmatic statement further specifies: "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[297] Three attributes qualify the understanding of the nation as a community:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion […] The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations […] It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm […] Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.[298]

In order to conceive of this kind of community, three pre-modern assumptions have to be displaced.[299] First, language has to be made into an instrument for the expression of extra-discursive truths: languages like Latin or Arabic, classically regarded as intrinsically imbued with Truth, have to give way to the much humbler national vernaculars. Second, a political shift away from the doctrine of the divine right of kings has to constitute the people as the ultimate repository of sovereignty. Third, time has to be re-apprehended as linear and empty, and not the cyclical repetition of a timeless continuity.

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[296] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, New York: 1991), p. 4

[297] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6

[298] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 6-7

[299] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 36

Language, in particular, is crucial for Andersen in fostering national sentiment, and thus awareness of itself in the community, and hence its imagining: "Nothing served to 'assemble' related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market."[300] Economic forces required the creation of national markets that would maximize internal homogeneity while also configuring a clear outside: contrary to the universalistic pretenses of Latin, French, English, Swedish had to emerge as national languages. Or rather, the national community itself would emerge from the language, without preceding it in any essentialist, primordial way: "from the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and […] one could be 'invited into' the imagined community. Thus today, even the most insular nations accept the principle of *naturalization* (wonderful word!), no matter how difficult in practice they may make it."[301] By ways of communication (speaking the national language) foreigners can begin to imagine themselves into the community, and potentially be accepted as members.

How language and nation stand in relation to each other, and how both instantiate community is an issue that has been debated by various authors. Anderson seems to accord much explanatory power to print capitalism, as the catalyst of the process of "imagination." James Scott, on the other hand, has seen in the imposition of an official language one of the most distinctive tasks of the state. States for Scott are engaged in transformative processes aimed at making society "legible:" in order to exercise political control and extract revenues, states need to render their citizens predictable and transparent, they need to be able to "read" society, ideally rendering all meaning immediately intelligible and easy to acquire in an "administrative more convenient format."[302] Scott comments on how a standard language served the purposes of legibility in the case of the French state:

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[300] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 44

[301] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 145

> Of all state simplifications, then, the imposition of a single, official language may be the most powerful, and it is the precondition of many other simplifications […] In the first efforts made to insist on the use of French, it is clear that the state's objective was the legibility of local practice. Officials insisted that every legal document – whether a will, document of sale, loan instrument, contract, annuity, or property deed – be drawn up in French. […] The campaign of linguistic centralization was assured of some success since it went hand in hand with an expansion of state power. […] It was a gigantic shift in power. Those at the periphery who lacked competence in French were rendered mute and marginal.[303]

National languages are therefore deliberately manufactured to maximize legibility. As such they are also standardized by a state that controls and enforces their correct usage: via institutions of mandatory public education, via the activities of the administration, and often via the creation of state-run organisms for the regulation of orthography, vocabulary, grammar (e.g.: the *Académie française*). Similarly, Antonio Gramsci commented on the enforcement of linguistic conformism as a political act, aimed at "for[ming] hundreds of thousands of recruits, of the most disparate origin and mental preparation, into a homogenous army capable of moving and acting in a disciplined and united manner."[304] To be sure, Gramsci listed several sources responsible for forging linguistic conformity, including the education system (which can largely be traced back to the state), but also newspapers, writers, theatre and cinema, radio, etc.[305]

Gramsci advances a complex and multicausal explanation for the connection between language and hegemony. Out of the rich texture of Gramsci's analysis, different thinkers choose to pick different threads. On the one hand, Anderson's explanation of the rise of

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[302] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven: 1998), p. 3

[303] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* p. 72

[304] Antonio Gramsci, "Historical and Normative Grammars," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 357

[305] Antonio Gramsci, "Sources of Diffusion of Linguistic Innovations in the Tradition and of a National Linguistic Conformism in the Broad National Masses," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 356

imagined communities exhibits heavy materialistic undertones; on the other hand, Scott proposes a state-centric approach. On the latter's (much simplified) account, ultimately states create languages, and then languages create communities. The terms of this equation are inverted by Pascale Casanova's study of world literatures. Focusing on the case of Italy, and inspired by the tradition of postcolonial studies, Casanova observes how the emergence of a national language precedes the formation of a unitary state. She notes:

> The example of Petrarch, now established both as a stylistic model and a grammatical norm, helped slow the pace of innovation in Italian letters. For a very long time the poets were confined to imitation of Dante, Petrarque [sic], and Bocaccio [sic]: in the absence of any centralized state structure that might have helped to stabilize and "grammatize" common languages [...] Broadly speaking, it is true to say that poetical, rhetorical, and aesthetic problems were subordinated in Italy to the debate over linguistic norms until the achievement of political unity in the nineteenth century.[306]

Absent a political embodiment of the community, the Italian nation was imagined first as a product of literature. As Gramsci too noted: "the entire historical formation of the Italian nation moved at too slow a pace. Every time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore."[307] In Casanova's analysis, the prestige of the great Tuscan literature of the 13th-14th century provided Italians with a surrogate (yet very real) sense of unity, and in various waves with the inspiration to fulfill the historical mission of political unification, much like in postcolonial settings reclaiming a local culture often fuels political movements of liberation. Though local vernaculars continued to thrive in Italy until the advent of the unitary state in 1861, and were significantly weakened only by the diffusion of television in the mid-20th century, the codification of a standard language in the example of the great figures of national literature

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[306] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M.B. DeBevoise (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2004), pp. 56- 57

[307] Antonio Gramsci, "Sources of Diffusion of Linguistic Innovations in the Tradition and of a National Linguistic Conformism in the Broad National Masses," in David Forgacs, ed. by, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* p. 357

provided the peoples of Italy with an avenue for imagining themselves as a people. Though this was probably a sentiment of some of the elites, and though the Sicilian, Venetian, and Neapolitan masses remained often indifferent (if not quite hostile) to the process of political unification, the very idea of a modern Italian nation as distinct from the memory of the glory of Rome owes as much to literature as to any other political factor. Similarly, the political, diplomatic and military process of German unification during the 19th century was crucially indebted to the philosophical reflection on language and nation advanced by Johann Gottfried Herder in the 18th century.

As this brief discussion of Anderson, Scott, and Casanova points out, the intellectual trajectory toward the de-essentialization of community does not reach a single endpoint, but trickles down into a variety of narratives of social construction. Whether by placing the emphasis on markets, states, or literature, it is possible to problematize the relation between (national) language and (national) community without reverting to a naïve form of linguistic determinism in which the essence of community comes to coincide with its language. This is certainly a reassuring outcome for an argument that aims to reject the essentializing descriptions of community that perspire from the pages of MacIntyre, or even Sandel.

Nevertheless, invoking one version or another of "social construction" as the master explanation of all that pertains to community runs the risk of trading an untenable foundationalism (the essential nature of community) for an equally dogmatic anti-foundationalism (community is always constructed, and as such there is no "real" community). I argue that grounding the study of community in a different paradigm is necessary to get out of the intellectual cul-de-sac of essentialism, while at the same time not regressing ad infinitum into a sterile version of social constructivism. I maintain that Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with community firmly rejects essentialism, but at the same time it does not end up in anti-foundationalism: rather than being a mere social construct, Nancy's community is the foundation itself of being. In order to appreciate the vast political potential of this intuition, I first go back to discussing the couplet individual-community, as one of the crucial components for an understanding of political relations.

INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNITY: EXPLODING THE DICHOTOMY

The ideological constellation of liberalism can be characterized as the archetypal political manifestation of a deep individualistic ontology. At the level of content, various liberal thinkers agree on a fundamental understanding of the nature of human beings as that of individual selves, thus deriving political relations from the association of pre-existing individuals. Other key themes certainly contribute to defining a complex ideological formation like liberalism; but a commitment to the value of individualism (both descriptive and normative) is the necessary premise for making sense of values like toleration, equality of opportunity, meritocracy, etc. At the level of expression, liberal narratives typically rely on grammatical structures in which the primacy of the subject over the verb corresponds to the primacy of the individual self over the actions that get contingently attached to it. Moreover, as I have argued in Chapter IV, a liberal grammar can also express content that does not originate from within the core of a liberal ideology; in this "incorporative" function, liberalism exercises a meta-ideological hegemony over competing ideologies. Consequently, I maintain that in order to question the current hegemony of liberalism, it is not enough to articulate extra-liberal content, but it is also necessary to question the very grammatical premises of a liberal narrative.

Certain versions of communitarianism do pose a challenge to liberalism on both the levels of content and expression. Inverting the terms of the liberal equation, communitarian thinkers in the vein of MacIntryre and Sandel, and, to some extent, Taylor and Walzer, postulate that the political community is ontologically, historically, and morally prior to the individuals who come to inhabit it under contingent conditions.[308] To the thesis that the

[308] Taylor, in particular, distinguishes between "ontology" and "advocacy" in his assessment of the liberal-communitarian debate. He laments that much of the contention happened at the level of advocacy, thus leaving the crux of the dispute (theories of the atomistic individual vs. theories of the situated self) in the background.

community is endowed with some kind of transcendental truth respond authors like Andersen, Scott, and Casanova: variously emphasizing the role of markets, states and literature in constituting community, they expose the latter as a social construct, and not a pre-political reality.

Ultimately, however, the description of a communitarian camp opposed to a liberal one distorts a much more nuanced interplay of claims, debates, and mutual definitions. In fact, the very notion of "liberalism" and "communitarianism," in the singular, is ultimately untenable as it obscures the fault lines on either side. Nevertheless, it is not incongruous to point out that a broad commitment to the values of the individual and of community characterizes the discourses of liberalism and of communitarianism, respectively. As such, the opposition between individual and community has dominated much of the liberal-communitarian controversy. In the production of their ideological appeals, thinkers from either perspective have often identified one or the other of these two concepts alternatively as the disease or cure of contemporary society. For instance, a communitarian ideologue might structure her narrative around three sets of claims:

A) The status quo displays a fragmented, atomistic society, and this is the result (either necessary or contingent) of an excess of individualism (or, possibly, of individualism itself). This is undesirable.

B) There is a way to fix the social problems caused by (excessive) individualism. A desirable social arrangement for the future will be founded on the primary value of community.

C) In order to accomplish the transition from A) to B), the state (for instance) has to uphold the value of community by promoting solidarity, cultivating a national sentiment, imposing religious conformity, protecting certain languages (for instance

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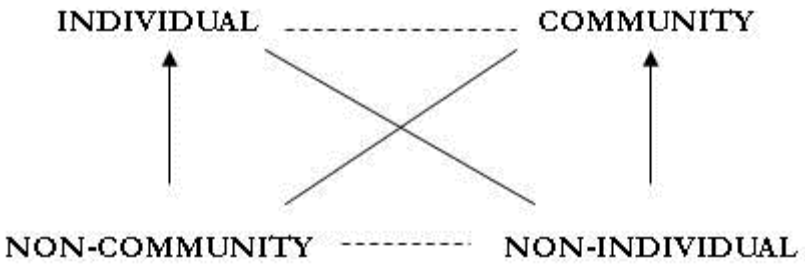
See: Charles Taylor: "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal Communitarian Debate," in Nancy Rosenblum, ed. by, *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 1989)

– this example is not meant to imply that any given communitarian thinker would actually endorse any or all of these goals).

A liberal rejoinder might object that the real problem with today's society is not too much individualism, but too little, and that reducing the role of community in imposing moral conformism (for instance) should be the goal of a free society. Either way, in this overly schematic illustration, both the logics of communitarianism and liberalism assume the entire matter of contention to be exhausted by the dichotomous alternative between individual and community. An echo of this attitude even carries over in the real debates. However, as I argue in Chapter II, the production of effects of truth within ideological discourse can be more accurately understood by exploding simple oppositions on the semiotic square (see Figure 4). While "individual" and "community" entertain a relation of mutual contrariness, the logical operation of negation can be performed on both terms, thus producing their contradictories. The contradictory of "individual," which may be simply referred to as "non-individual" does not quite configure "community" yet, thought it might suggest community (as I note above, a critique of the notion of the "individual" might deconstruct it without necessarily advocating "community" as a desirable alternative). Likewise, the semantic area of "non-community" is broader and less clearly defined than that of "individual."

Figure 4. The Semiotic Square: Individual vs. Community



One of the advantages of visualizing conceptual relations on the semiotic squares is that doing so allows the observer to capture more of the complexity of how ideological discourse actually frames arguments. Movement on the semiotic square typically follows a "butterfly" pattern. A communitarian might start from the top-left corner in her description of the status quo (individual); then move diagonally to the negation of that (non-individual); and finally reach the contrary of the first term (community). Conversely, a liberal perspective might move from the premise of community, then take distance from it (non-community), and finally reach the endpoint of an affirmation of the value of the individual. A position that actualizes the potential of "non-individual" into the reality of "community" might be identified as *Gemeinschaft*. Similarly, borrowing from Ferdinand Tönnies' pair, *Gesellschaft* could describe the political goal of framing social relations not as the result of a primordial community, but as an association of individuals instead.

The opposition between the left side of the square and the right side, between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft,* however, does not exhaust the possibility of sense (and of political sense, in particular) activated by the explosion of the opposition between individual and community. As I point out in Chapter IV, Wendy Brown has convincingly studied the emergence of the New Right in the United States as the intersection of "two disparate streams of rationality:" one, neoliberalism, aimed at emptying the world of meaning; the other, neoconservatism, aimed at fixing and enforcing meaning in the world.[309] On the semiotic square, I argue, the American New Right would occupy the top side, conglobating both individualistic and communitarian themes in a political project seemingly endowed more with political traction than with internal consistency.

It is worth to pause briefly and reflect on the (much debated) issue of the degree of coherence of the alignment of communitarian and individualistic themes. Roberto Esposito focuses on the dominant paradigm of communitarianism and claims that it is, in fact, intimately coherent with the paradigm of individualism, as both are fundamentally immanent

[309] See Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization," in *Political Theory,* Vol. 34 No 6, December 2006, p. 692

in their commitments. Both individualism and communitarianism, in this analysis, postulate discrete objects (the individual and community, respectively) endowed with the characters of unity, continuity, and self-identity. Esposito maintains that communitarian discourse is based on a misconception, in that:

> [it] forces community into a conceptual language that radically alters it, while at the same time attempts to name it: that of the individual *and* totality; of identity *and* the particular; of the origin *and* the end; or more simply of the *subject* with its most unassailable metaphysical connotations of unity, absoluteness, and interiority. It isn't by chance that beginning from similar assumptions, political philosophy tends to think community as a "wider subjectivity"; as, and this in spite of the presupposed opposition to the individualist paradigm, such a large part of neo-communitarian philosophy ends up doing, when it swells the self in the hypertrophic figure of "the unity of unities."[310]

A deeper analogy connects the two items on the top side of the semiotic square, according to Esposito. At least in the kind of communitarian discourse that he indicts, "community" is still understood through the lenses of the "individual:" a coherent, self-identical and self-contained whole. To the excess of immanence that, on Esposito's analysis, characterizes the top side of the semiotic square corresponds the negation of immanence on the lower side: an area of political content loosely structured around the poles of "non-community" and "non-individual." Contrary to the discourse of *Gesellschaft,* this nebula of meaning denies that the individual is the pre-political and pre-grammatical original position of human nature. Contrary to the vision of *Gemeinschaft,* the lower side of the square is not committed to an essentialist notion of community. Neither individualistic, nor communitarian, and certainly not both, the lower side opens up a vast, and largely unexplored horizon for contemporary politics. For a compass to navigate this semantic field I now turn to Jean-Luc Nancy and his musings on the inoperative community.

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[310] Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origins and Destiny of Community* (Stanford University Press, Stanford: 2010), pp. 1-2

NEITHER INDIVIDUALISTIC, NOR COMMUNITARIAN: NANCY ON BEING-IN-COMMON

In the quest for an alternative to the current hegemony of liberalism I have identified the "individual" and "community" as terms of a fundamental opposition for the field of politics. That opposition, I argue, needs to be problematized in order to account for the complexities of the arguments that sustain the contemporary ideological debates. Once exploded on the semiotic square, that couplet produces four possible configurations of political meaning, and crucially one that negates both the prevalent conceptualizations of the individual and that of community. What do human nature and social relations look like from such a perspective? What political implications can be drawn from it? Can this position configure a counter-hegemonic project that would be both alternative to liberalism, and crucially also desirable? I try addressing these questions in this section.

As I argue in Chapters III and IV, liberalism has gained its dominant position in the contemporary *ideoscape* through the concurrent action of two phenomena: 1) the successful decontestation of certain key-terms; and 2) the validation of a certain grammar for the articulation of political discourse that goes beyond the enforcement of any single set of ideological propositions. Both at the level of content, and of expression, the discourse of liberalism critically hinges on the depoliticization of the "I:" the "I" of politics, the individual; and the "I" of language, the grammatical subject. Jean-Luc Nancy's intervention in the contemporary reflection on community has the potential to destabilize both Is.

The individual that liberalism assumes as the essential ontological position of human beings is for Nancy "merely the residue of the dissolution of community."[311] On the semiotic square, one could say, the trajectory of liberalism goes from community, to the negation of community (its dissolution), and finally to the individual. Community, on the other hand, is for Nancy not a property, but the inclination *(clinamen)* of the individual.[312]

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[311] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1991), p. 3

Characteristic of community thus understood is its resistance against immanence: "[c]ommunity [...] assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject."[313] In other words, Nancy rejects the view of an immanent community, a self-enclosed entity distinct from an outside. On Nancy's account "community" does not designate a group of people to the exclusion of others (i.e.: French-Canadians vis-à-vis the rest of Canadian society), and neither does it come to refer to the aggregate totality of pre-existing individuals (in a social contractarian notion of society).

In fact, "[c]ommunity is simply the real position of existence:" being itself is always already being-in-common.[314] There is literally no being outside of being-in-common, precisely because being-in-common is *the* essential condition of being. In a crucial passage, Nancy distinguishes between the affirmation of the *being* of community (the master plan of communitarianism), and the acknowledgment of the *community* of being, the inherently shared character of existence: "the question should be the community of being, and not the being of community. Or if you prefer: the community of existence, and not the essence of community."[315] There can be no essence of community, because essence (being) is always already in common among all the entities, the things that are: "That which exists, whatever this might be, coexists because it exists. The co-implication of existing [*l'exister*] is the sharing of the world."[316] All the things that are, are; that much they have in common; their being is always being-with.

The logic of being-with also presupposes a notion of singularity. Being-with entails "being exposed simultaneously to relationship and to the absence of relationship," and

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[312] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* pp. 3-4

[313] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p.15

[314] J.L. Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common," in Miami Theory Collective, ed. by, *Community At Loose Ends* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1991), p. 2

[315] J.L. Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common," p. 2

[316] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford University Press, Stanford: 2000), p. 29

"singularity" designates "that which, each time, forms a point of exposure."[317] Contra the fixed immanence that the dominant discourse attributes to the individual subject, therefore, singularities are continually reshaped and renegotiated, activated or left in latency.

> As an individual, I am closed off from all community, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the individual – if an absolutely individual being could ever exist – is infinite. […] however, the *singular being,* which is not the individual, is the finite being. […] individuation detaches closed off entities from a formless ground […] But singularity does not proceed from such a detaching of clear forms or figures.[318]

Thus Nancy on the one hand rejects the commitment to the being of community which is characteristic of communitarianism, in one form or another. On the other hand, he marks the difference between an ontology of individualism and an acknowledgment of singularity. Whereas individuals are self-contained cut-outs of community, separate from each other and introverted (in the sense of being oriented toward their internal reality, as opposed to the external world), singularities continue to carry in themselves the orientation toward community which characterizes being-in-common. The oscillation between singularity and being-in-common allows Nancy's philosophy to account for a variety of political phenomena with an expressive versatility that is certainly lacking in the project of communitarianism, and that might be even superior to the political-expressive armamentarium of liberalism. Liberalism needs to "incorporate" non-liberal claims; the inoperative community always already contains them. In Benjamin Hutchens's clear outline:

> Communitarianism in Nancy's view is flawed by its presupposition of substantial groups composed of substantial individuals whose essence and being are ontologically predetermined (being-as-such) as well as rationally, politically and judicially pre-established. He also rejects the communitarian presumption of tradition as a necessary and viable means of communal identification. For Nancy, community

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[317] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 7

[318] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 27

> consists of the linkages of sharing among radically singular beings whose only essence is a common exposure to existence.[319]

Moreover, unlike the narrative of community as a social construct, *a la* Anderson, Nancy's community is real in that it is the real position of existence. The emergence of certain alternative political discourses, and in particular of liberalism, might obfuscate the reality of community, as I will argue in Chapter VI; but community is never to be socially constructed, created, or even restored (as Putnam would believe). Being-in-common and singularity are always already the real mode of existence, and overcoming the expressive infrastructures of liberalism and communitarianism is a crucial step in acknowledging that. Much like Esposito's critique of communitarianism, then, Nancy's argument also indicts the substance metaphysics that afflicts both communitarian and individualistic discourse. Instead Nancy looks at being in its simultaneous and mutually constitutive plural and singular dimensions. In doing so he also exposes the inadequacy of grammar to fix the polysemous meaning of being. In a passage reminiscent of Judith Butler's reproof of "unfortunate grammar," Nancy attempts freeing up meaning from the rigid (and distorting) constraints of grammar:

> Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have any determinate syntax ("being" is a verb or a noun; "singular" and "plural" are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations), mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct *and* distinct way. Being is singularly plural and plurally singular […] the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being.[320]

Juxtaposing the semantic fields of being, singular, and plural, without a definite structure of grammar to dictate their relations, this passage points to the potential (inherent in much of Nancy's reflection) to overcome the expressive infrastructure of liberal grammar. Much like singularities differ from individuals in that they are always already oriented toward being-in-common, regardless of the specific constraints and prescriptions which preside over

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[319] Benjamin Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal: 2005), p. 124

[320] J.L Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 28-29

interactions among individuals, so the semantic fields of being, singular, and plural are not self-contained units of a fixed grammar, in need of definite combinatory rules to associate, but they share porous boundaries, and their areas of meaning tend to overlap and to morph into each other. Contra what I identified in Chapters III and IV as the first principle of liberal discourse ("Individuals own their actions"), Nancy refuses to commit his ontology to the very construct of the individual, thus freeing action from its state subordinate to that of the individual agent in liberal grammar. Moreover, whereas what I listed as the second principle of liberal discourse would characterize the fundamental mode of action of individuals as rational, the very fiction of an abstract rationality cannot be reconciled with Nancy's emphasis on the embodied character of the lived experience. Not only is liberal rationality left without a stable (if inert) shell, in that the individual is deconstructed; but, perhaps more significantly, Nancy also destabilizes the notion that reason takes precedence over other modes and motives for action: the passionate, the tactile, the corporeal itself.[321] Finally, contra the humanistic assumption of liberal grammar (which I presented as a third principle: "Objects are treated as inert matter"), the inoperative community does not necessarily postulate the human as its limit: "it is not obvious that the community of singularities is limited to 'man' and excludes, for example, the 'animal'."[322] Both the content and the expression of "being singular plural," I argue, can potentially challenge the norms of liberal grammar and inspire an alternative mode for the configuration of meaning in the field of the political. Though Nancy does not set forth to oppose a positive vision of society and politics to the traditional continuum of communitarianism and individualism which he regards as inadequate to capture the deep ontology of the world, I argue that by questioning the existing coordinates he opens up room for other thinkers to build on his seminal intuitions of being-in-common and singularity.

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[321] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Fordham University Press, New York: 2008); see also Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford University Press, Stanford: 2005)

[322] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 28

Contra the liberal hubris of fully sovereign individuals (a project epitomized by J.S. Mill's confidence in the ability of a fully rational actor to even control and orient the development of its own individuality, as I note in Chapter III), singular beings are never singular to the exclusion of their *being plural,* and as such they are always defined by their finitude. As Nancy puts it: "*Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition*. It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a *finite* community [...] a community *of* finitude."[323] For Nancy "the *singular being,* which is not the individual, is the finite being."[324] Exposition of finitude reveals itself as "compearance," the "appearance of the between as such," and as such it constitutes "the essence of community."[325]

An insightful reading of the "trope of finitude" is offered by Georges Van Den Abbeele. In Nancy "finitude is not a negativity to overcome, but an event to dwell in and upon, the very advent of a thought which can never do more than exscribe its compearance."[326] In this sense being-in-common is "not itself a horizon, but the undoing of all horizons, namely a community founded upon the compearance of singular beings in the commonality of their *difference*."[327] Van Den Abbeele points to the poetic character of this thought, as, like in poetry, being-in-common entails "a making that is simultaneously an unmaking, a compearing of community that is also its withdrawal, an advent of sense in which sense is eclipsed, a speaking of what cannot be heard."[328] Can, however, Nancy's

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[323] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 27

[324] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 27

[325] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 29

[326] Georges Van Den Abbeele, "Lost Horizons And Uncommon Grounds: For A Poetics Of Finitude In The Work Of Jean-Luc Nancy," in *On Jean-Luc Nancy,* ed. by D. Sheppard, S. Sparks, C. Thomas (Routledge, London: 1997), p. 14

[327] G. Van Den Abbeele, "Lost Horizons," p. 15

[328] G. Van Den Abbeele, "Lost Horizons," p. 17

"poetics" of community also invigorate a more general project of rethinking the political away from the hegemonic paradigm of liberalism and of its communitarian counterpoint?

I argue that understanding community as "resistance to immanence" can indeed advance political discourse beyond the (false) dichotomy of individual and community.[329] A concrete example is helpful to clarify the sense in which the notions of "being-with" and "singularity" differ from those of "community" and "individual," as they are typically utilized:

> To begin with, the logic of being-with corresponds to nothing other than what we would call the banal phenomenology of unorganized groups of people. Passengers in the same train compartment are simply seated next to each other in an accidental, arbitrary, and completely exterior manner. They are not linked. But they are also quite together inasmuch as they are travelers on this train, in this same space and for the same period of time. They are between the disintegration of the "crowd" and the aggregation of the group, both extremes remaining possible, virtual and near at every moment. This suspension is what makes "being-with": a relation without relation, or rather, being exposed simultaneously to relationship and to absence of relationship.[330]

Passengers in the same train compartment; travelers on this train. Nancy's metaphor of the train evokes quite vividly the significance of his intuition on being-with. The train is also the background to the unfolding of a remarkable narrative of community as the resistance to immanence, conveyed by the especially apt medium of cinema (for viewers in a theater too are like passengers on a train, traveling together without being a group through the unfolding of the narration). In *Train de Vie* [1998], the Romanian director Radu Mihaileanu dramatizes the tragicomic epopee of a Jewish village in 1941 Europe.[331] Anxious about impending deportation to a concentration camp, the villagers decide to follow the plan devised by

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[329] J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* p. 35

[330] J.L. Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common*,"* p. 7

[331] See film description on: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0170705/, retrieved on Thursday, August 5, 2010

Shlomo, the village "idiot:" faking their own deportation by acquiring a train and taking it to freedom beyond the border. In the process some of the Jews take on the role of Nazis, and eventually start increasingly to identify with their act, a device employed in the film both to comedic effects, and most importantly to expose the power of performativity and the absurdity of the (real) Nazis' beliefs and practices.

In a crescendo of absurdity, meant to underscore the unfathomable absurdity of the Nazi theories of race, the self-deporting Jews encounter a community of equally self-deporting Romas (referred to as "Gypsies" in the film). A series of misunderstandings ensues, with the fake Nazis confronting each other to expose their respective inauthenticity, until the two communities recognize their respective ploys and decide to join forces. In a number of increasingly significant scenes, first the Rabbi allows pork on the train, thus contravening one of the basic rules of his community. Then young Jews and Romas become erotically involved with each other, thus attesting to the inclination of transcending the boundaries of their communities. Finally, in a scene of rare symbolic force, the two communities gather around the fire, and start playing their respective instruments in an impromptu display of mutual distrust; only to dissolve the very boundaries between their communities in an increasingly chaotic *jouissance* of sounds, chants, and firelight dances.

On the same train by mere chance, the two communities of rejects come to obliterate the being of their respective communities, and to embrace their being-in-common instead. Though both Jews and Romas independently symbolize a threat to the Nazi moral order of a racially pure community attached to its land and culture, it is in their contamination that the Nazi totalitarian delirium is ultimately exposed and ridiculed without appeal. The victory of the inoperative community that acquires awareness of itself on the train over the immanent community of the Nazis is sanctioned in a coda, in which an extreme close-up of Shlomo's face informs the viewers of the happy outcomes for the characters of the film, with the significant detail that most of the Romas end up in Palestine, the destination originally chosen by the Jews, and most of the Jews end up in India, where the Romas had planned to go, in an elegant deconstruction of the theme of the destiny/destination of community.

Except that in the very last scene of *Train de Vie* the camera zooms out and shows Shlomo behind barbwire, the image of bare life, wearing the typical uniform of the concentration camps, as a memento of the real atrocities of the Holocaust, and at the same time a commentary on the cathartic power of telling stories.

Thus *Train de Vie* resists the immanence of community by displaying an alternative (if only fictional) politics of being-in-common. The train is the appropriate background for a symbolic journey that sublimates in the trajectory from community to non-community, and from individual to non-individual. The field of political meaning subtended by the poles of non-individual and non-community opens up the space of Nancy's inoperative community, and as such it promises to constitute an alternative to both the discourses of liberalism and communitarianism, and a propitious horizon for the definition of a counter-hegemonic political project.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have presented a possible account of what an alternative to the ideological and meta-ideological hegemony of liberalism might look like. Defining the specific characteristics of that alternative is certainly much too ambitious for the scope of this project. Nevertheless, I maintain that signaling the possibility of a counter-hegemonic political and discursive formation is an exigent task for contemporary political theory. Moreover, in my preliminary reflection I have also specified that the formidable challenge might be that of identifying a *desirable* alternative to liberalism. I have argued that Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy can indeed inspire a radical rethinking of the field of the political without trading the hegemony of liberalism for a less attractive one.

In order to advance this argument, I have started by considering one of the most prominent recent formulations of a political project alternative to that of liberalism. To the liberal emphasis on the foundational value of the individual I have opposed a discourse

centered on the notion of community. In the polyphonic tradition of communitarianism I have identified certain key contributors. I have briefly considered Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of the "emotivist self" and Michael Sandel's critique of the "unencumbered self" as clear points of departure from the liberal commitment to an ontology of individualism toward notions of community as the reality of shared understandings. I have then presented Michael Walzer's moral theory as a distributive model underscoring values like belonging, citizenship, and participation, and ultimately a peculiar argument for the incorporation of certain communitarian themes in society. In Charles Taylor's philosophy, then, I have remarked the ambition of adapting the notion of community to the contemporary horizon of multiculturalism, and also, crucially, a gesture toward recognition as a dialogic process in which the authentic character of a group in society needs to be validated by others.

Though Taylor's vision already incorporated an element of social construction (in the form of recognition) to the constitution of community, I have argued that Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined communities" represents a clear break from essentialist visions of community. Imagined as sovereign and limited, the nation is for Anderson the archetype of a community that comes into existence and becomes aware of itself as a system of shared understandings because of a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and crucially also economic factors. Capitalism and the diffusion of ever more efficient printing technologies are of paramount importance for Anderson in allowing the national community to be imagined. If economic motives and the emergence of national languages are key factors in this version of social construction, on James Scott's account it is instead the state that codifies language in order to make citizens "legible," thus also promoting the diffusion of the idea of the national community. Pascale Casanova, finally, looks at Italy and traces back the idea of the national community to the codification of a national language in the literary example of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

In both its essentialist and socially constructed versions, the discourse of community is typically presented in opposition to the discourse centered on the individual. I have argued that the oppositional couplet individual-community can instead be exploded on the semiotic

square thus producing the semantic areas of non-individual and non-community. In this sense I have referred to a social arrangement that mobilizes the negation of the individual toward the affirmation of community as *Gemeinschaft*, while *Gesellschaft* would come to designate the negation of community for the affirmation of the individual. Moreover, I have argued that the discourse of the American New Right is committed to both the values of community and the individual, as Wendy Brown has observed. Rather than being merely the function of a contingent alignment, I have argued with Roberto Esposito that this is possible because of the common commitment to a substantialist, immanentist metaphysics of both the dominant notions of individual and community.

Finally, I have postulated that a clear political alternative to the contemporary hegemony of liberal discourse exists in the semantic area of non-individual and non-community. In this context I have introduced Jean-Luc Nancy's reflection on the "inoperative community" as a promising foundation for this counter-hegemonic project. Redressing the emphasis from the "being of community" to the "community of being," Nancy distances himself from the tradition of communitarianism, and instead advances a radical view of community as resistance to immanence: not the community of "us" vs. "them," and neither an aggregation of primordial individuals. Assuming, with Nancy, "being-in-common" as the real position of existence configures "singularity" as a point of exposure of that being. In the oscillation between singularity and being-in-common, I have argued, there lies the potential for a discourse more versatile than that of incorporative liberalism, and at the same time a political horizon radically irreducible to the totalitarian menaces that often haunt critics of liberalism.

If Nancy's intuition of being-in-common as the real position of existence is accepted as the foundation of an ontology of resistance to immanence, and if the discourse of being-in-common and singularity can indeed be a taken as a promising point of departure for the formulation of an alternative to liberalism, then it becomes the urgent task of contemporary political theorists to reflect on how this political project can be implemented, and with what kinds of political implications. This is the question that I want to raise in the next chapter. Without being able to provide a definitive answer to it, I intend to study the concrete

practices of the inoperative community in the complex dynamics subtended by the encounter with the other in an experience of migration. Can two communities, the locals and the immigrants, transcend the being of their respective communities and embrace their being-in-common instead? Under what conditions? At what costs? And, crucially, what expressive infrastructure is available for making sense of an experience that unfolds in the performativity of actions that cannot be traced back to unitary, immanent subjects? These are some of the questions that I raise in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

INOPERATIVE COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

INTRODUCTION

In this project I have posited that political ideologies can be fruitfully regarded as narrative objects. As such, the genre of political ideology exhibits certain recurrent structural elements. In particular, as I point out in Chapter I, in the unfolding of ideological discourse it is possible to distinguish a descriptive element from a normative one, and finally an action-oriented component. An ideology typically tells a story about the world of politics that moves from the premise of a description of the status quo, aimed at identifying certain aspects of it that are deemed unsatisfactory. Then an ideology continues developing its argument by juxtaposing to the status quo the view of a different social arrangement which can overcome the shortcomings of the present, and which can be realistically attained in the future. In its action-oriented dimension, then, an ideology includes a more or less concrete plan for implementing its normative goals onto the reality of society. As I note in Chapter II, in developing this standard narrative, the discourse of ideology produces effects of truth that can be unveiled by adopting instruments of semiotic analysis.

In Chapters II and III I have observed how, in the contemporary world of Western politics, the discursive styles of liberalism exercise a multilayered form of hegemony. On the one hand, liberalism is the dominant ideology in its own right: its values, principles, and goals seem to be broadly accepted as the norm of political discourse. On the other hand, I argue, liberalism is also hegemonic as a meta-ideology: even political positions that cannot be reduced to the articulation of liberal content, typically frame their arguments in the language of liberalism. Liberalism exercises its hegemony both at the level of political content and,

perhaps more fundamentally, at the level of expression. Consequently, I argue, the grammar of liberalism, the distinctive configurations of meaning that it employs, become an object of political relevance in their own right.

Adopting the very scheme of ideological discourse that I outline above, I describe the hegemony of a liberal constellation as problematic. Challenging the thesis of an inevitable, or even natural character of the hegemony of liberal discourse, I reflect in Chapter IV on the feasibility and desirability of a counter-hegemonic project. In particular I present Jean-Luc Nancy's musings on the inoperative community as both a clear alternative to the liberal ontology of individualism, and, unlike most communitarian positions, also as a desirable one. The oscillation between the poles of being-in-common and singularity endows Nancy's formulation with the versatility necessary for articulating a vast repertoire of political positions without foreclosing the horizon of what can be said or even thought in the universe of the political.

After having presented my description of the complex hegemony of liberalism, and a normative view for a counter-hegemonic project, in this chapter my goal is to reflect on what kinds of actions can support the actualization of that project. It should be noted here that Nancy's own philosophy is not presented as a set of normative aspirations. The inoperative community is for Nancy always already the real position of existence, and not something to create, revive, restore. Nevertheless, I argue that it is possible to draw inspiration from Nancy's ontology and derive from it the genuinely political goal of organizing our understanding of social relations according to that paradigm. Though being-in-common and singularity are currently obfuscated by the dominant discourses of communitarianism and individualism, respectively, I maintain that it is possible to identify social practices and values congruent with a deep ontology of resistance to immanence.

In particular, in this chapter, I consider the principle and the concrete practices of hospitality as a sounder alternative to the liberal value of toleration as a strategy for the encounter with the other. Whereas toleration remains trapped in the language of immanence typical of individualism, I argue that hospitality has the potential to transcend it. On the one

hand, whereas toleration congeals the mutual otherness of the tolerating and tolerated parties, and thus ultimately gives up on the possibility to fully encounter the other, hospitality continuously transcends and renegotiates the boundaries between the two parties. On the other hand, whereas the ideal and practices of domination would resolve the relation of otherness once and for all, with the eradication of otherness in favor of one party, at the expenses of the other, hospitality requires continuously exchanging positions in a dialogic and open-ended process. Hospitality constitutes a convenient entry point in the discourse of singularity and being-in-common.

As a concrete example of hospitality I illustrate the case of Badolato, a small town in southern Italy, where a group of undocumented Kurdish immigrants landed in 1997. Contra the dominant paradigm of toleration, and contra both the dominant discourses of liberalism and communitarianism, the local population and the immigrants engaged in practices of hospitality that resulted in an ongoing process of mutual constitution and deconstruction of their respective otherness. Without either dissolving their otherness in a composite common identity, or shielding it from the impact of their interactions, Badolatese and Kurds alike embraced the primordial, non socially constructed, ontology of the inoperative community and thus showed the promise and the potential of a political discourse irreducible to either the content or the grammar of hegemonic liberalism. In this chapter I present some reflections based on a series of open-ended interviews that I conducted in Badolato in the summer of 2007.

It should be noted that I do not claim that either the general discourse of hospitality, or, *a fortiori,* the specific case of Badolato can by themselves sustain the effort of rethinking the political away from a liberal paradigm. This would not be a sensible claim to make, and posing the question of an alternative to the hegemony of liberalism in these terms might even prove counterproductive. A discursive alternative to liberalism does not exist in a ready-made form, waiting to be discovered. To the extent that it is indeed possible and desirable, it needs to be thought into existence (as Slavoj Žižek would recommend), or rather written into existence (as both Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy would put it). In

keeping with the narrative structure of ideology that I have loosely adopted for this project, my goal in this final section is to create effects of truth that would question the hegemony of liberal discourse, and open up the possibility for alternative formulations of political meaning. Whether or not this attempt can succeed, I believe it is the task of political theory to engage in this intellectual divertissement, literally a diversion from the main path of politics.

DRAWING BOUNDARIES, QUESTIONING THEM: FROM TOLERATION TO HOSPITALITY

In order to understand the specificity of the value of toleration as a strategy for coping with otherness, it is necessary to consider the peculiar cultural and historical background from which it emerged. Both as an ideal, and as a series of concrete practices, "tolerating others" needs to be located in the context of Europe at the onset of modernity. Until the inception of modernity, in fact, the very coordinates of the space of Europe seem to resist an acknowledgment of otherness. As Michael Heffernan has observed: "The shift from a premodern to an early modern consciousness seems to have been accompanied by a movement from vertical (religious) conceptions of sacred space to horizontal (secular) notions of geographical space."[332] The tilting of the main axis of space, from vertical to horizontal, from religious to secular, signals a paradigmatic shift in the European spatialization of otherness.

Over the course of the centuries, in fact, a series of profound cultural, political and economic transformations literally *rotated* the dominant orientation of European space. First, the diffusion of heretical sects; then, the Anglican Schism; and finally – and decisively – the Protestant Reform challenged the religious monolithism that was the logical presupposition of a vertical spatiality. Doctrinal fragmentation relativized the uncontested centrality of *the*

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[332] Michael Heffernan, *The Meaning of Europe: Geography and Geopolitics* (Arnold, New York: 1998), p. 14

Church that called itself "Catholic," universal, and so introduced an element of *horizontality* in space.

The introduction of otherness called into question the previous cohesion of the religious and crucially political unit of "Christendom," and recast it into a composite geo-cultural unit named "Europe." Faced with the necessity of acknowledging the existence of otherness *within* Europe, whereas they were used to sameness *under* Christendom, the peoples of Europe were left disoriented and unable to make sense of the mutated scenario. Frequently they resorted to conflictual means: the *annihilation* of others became the fundamental strategy for coping with otherness.

A series of Religious Wars ensued on the battleground of France, wrecking the continent for more than thirty years in the 16th century, until the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598.[333] Out of the experience of these wars, a new way of engaging others was forged. Tired of killing each other, the peoples of Europe ideally reached a truce and settled on a shared value – the simple value of not killing each other *in spite* of each other's otherness. By reaction to the massacres of the Religious Wars, the practice of *tolerance* was devised. As such, *toleration*, to the extent that it was codified into a coherent principle, was not regarded as a high moral aspiration, but as a concrete *modus vivendi,* literally a way of living, without killing each other. This was a contingent agreement elevated into a sort of meta-norm of coexistence. As the etymology of the Latin *tolerare* attests, it was closer to the semantic area of forbearance, endurance, suffering than to a genuine endorsement of otherness.

The logical prerequisite of toleration was the reciprocal recognition of a relation of otherness between two (or more) discrete entities. What kinds of subjects does toleration presuppose? At the level of the relations among single human beings, the emergent discourse of liberalism devises the category of the individual as the ideal repository of rights, and significantly the right to be tolerated and to tolerate others in turn. As such the

[333] See Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1996), pp. 469-575

individual is constructed as the subject of a conscious self capable to entertain relations with other selves without threatening the respective indivisibility. As I argue in Chapter III, John Locke's crucial intervention in the articulation of the discourse of liberalism can be understood as the formulation of a proposal of "semiotic individualism." Rational beings and sources of valid claims, Lockean individuals derive the ability to access their individuality and their rationality from the expressive infrastructure provided by the linguistic communities to which they belong.

In an effort to reconcile a commitment to individual reason with a profound religiosity, Locke also advances the classic philosophical justification for toleration. In the *Letter Concerning Toleration* he establishes that "the care of souls does not belong to the magistrate," but that instead "the care […] of every man's soul belongs unto himself and is to be left unto himself."[334] Enforcing religious conformism by political decree, in fact, would not only be idle, as the care of souls always requires the genuine adhesion of the individual to that project, but it would also be harmful:

> Whatsoever is not done with that assurance of faith is neither well in itself, nor can it be acceptable to God. To impose such things, therefore, upon any people, contrary to their own judgment, is in effect to command them to offend God, which, considering that the end of all religion is to please Him, and that liberty is essentially necessary to that end, appears to be absurd beyond expression.[335]

In Locke's reasoning, then, toleration is not just a *modus vivendi* on this earth; it becomes also the best strategy available for pursuing the goal of eternal salvation in the afterlife. Toleration, though, cannot guarantee that the outcome of its practices will be the salvation of the souls of the parties entering the relation. This is evident in a passage in the *Letter* in which Locke considers the free and reasonable individual that he has postulated and raises the question: "But what if he neglect the care of his soul?" to which he responds that much

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[334] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration [1689]* (Bobbs-Merrill, New York: 1955), pp. 29-30

[335] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration,* pp. 35-36

like "No man can be forced to be rich or healthful, whether he will or no," so, *a fortiori,* "God Himself will not save men against their wills."[336] Toleration, in other words, entails the risk that an individual's soul will not be saved; in fact it ultimately gives up on the possibility of saving that soul. In general, in erecting a barrier between the individual and the external world, for the sake of the defense of the individual, Lockean toleration gives up on creating the conditions for a profound encounter with the other. Though the paradigm of liberal toleration clearly evolves since Locke's original codification of it, this aspect appears to remain at the core of the concept.

As a strategy for coping with otherness at the level of single human beings, then, toleration assumes individuals as its subjects, and responds to the goal of leaving those individuals intact, unfettered by the encounter with the other. At the level of the relations among organized political communities, the principle of toleration also postulates a specific category of subjects. In 1576 French jurist Jean Bodin published the fundamental *Six Books of the Commonwealth,* advancing *sovereignty* as the essential characteristic of the state.[337] The notion of "absolute and perpetual power" over a defined territory was the natural complement to the ideal of toleration. In order to engage another political community in a relation of mutual recognition, a state crucially needed to affirm its own identity by reinforcing claims to sovereignty. This dynamic, distinctive of a space that had become horizontal and parceled, was to find its most notable expression in 1648, with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia. The enunciation of the principle *"Cuius Regio, Eius Religio"* was to shape the relations among states in an order dictated by reciprocal toleration, while sanctioning the principle of sovereignty as the basic grammar for internal affairs.[338]

Both at the level of free and rational individuals, then, and at the level of sovereign national communities, toleration emerges in the discourse of early liberalism as the

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[336] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration,* p. 30

[337] See: Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford: 1955)

[338] See Norman Davies, *Europe: A History,* p. 485

distinctively modern modality for dealing with others. In both arenas toleration assumes stable subjects to enter and exit the tolerating relation without being affected by it. Compared to the practices of domination and possible annihilation of the other, toleration certainly represents an appealing alternative. With the advent of a new paradigm of liberalism, preoccupied not just with the *protection* of the individual, but also with its *development,* a conception advanced most notably by John Stuart Mill in the 19th century, the availability of difference in society came to be praised as a potential source for the improvement of the individual and of society at large.[339] In Mill's view of society as a "marketplace of ideas," the cultivation of diversity plays a crucial role in allowing good arguments to emerge and displace bad ones. Consequently, the existence of particularity in the private sphere is to be tolerated or even encouraged, by leaving the carriers of non-conformist values and models of behavior free to profess their eccentricity.

However, neither in the original Lockean, protective acception; nor, arguably, in its Millite, developmental elaboration, does liberal discourse fully investigate the ethical dimension of the encounter with the other. The value of toleration, and perhaps even the critical engagement of diversity recommended by Mill, articulate rather an *etiquette* of behavior, a set of norms and rules for encountering the other without risking mutual annihilation and, if possible, even enhancing one's individuality. The ontological primacy of the individual remains uncontested, and the possibility of deconstructing the constitutive elements of one's own individuality and recombining them in creative ways is also left unexplored.

Wendy Brown has engaged tolerance in a systematic and rigorous critique. In deconstructing the notion of tolerance and its centrality in the liberal constellation of values as a "discourse of power," Brown demystifies the vulgate of tolerating as a high moral stance:

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[339] see C.B. Macpherson, *The Life And Times Of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1977), p. 44 and ff.

> Despite its pacific demeanor, tolerance is an internally unharmonious term, blending together goodness, capaciousness, and conciliation with discomfort, judgment, and aversion. Like patience, tolerance is necessitated by something one would prefer did not exist. It involves managing the presence of the undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty – even the revolting, repugnant, or vile […] As compensation, tolerance anoints the bearer with virtue, with standing for a principled act of permitting one's principles to be affronted; it provides a gracious way of allowing one's tastes to be violated. It offers a robe of modest superiority in exchange for yielding.[340]

Looking under that "robe of modest superiority," Brown finds "discomfort, judgment, and aversion." She finds power wielded by one party over the other, and no attempt at renegotiating the boundaries of what might unite or divide the two parties. The discourse of tolerance starts by postulating the existence otherness (in religious, cultural, or gendered terms) and then devises "a mode of incorporating and regulating the presence of the threatening Other within."[341] In other words, "incorporating and regulating" amount for Brown to practices of disciplinary power akin to those envisioned by Foucault:

> [the] regulatory individuation of the deviant, the abject, the other, suggests a further implication of the normalizing work of contemporary tolerance discourse. Tolerated individuals will always be those who deviate from the norm, never those who uphold it […] Tolerance can thus work as a disciplinary strategy of liberal individualism to the extent that it tacitly schematizes the social order into the tolerated, who are individuated through their deviance […] and those doing the tolerating, who are less individuated by these norms.[342]

The act of tolerating, then, can be exploded into the two structural positions that it presupposes: tolerating and being tolerated. The active subject of toleration, often styled as magnanimous and "liberal," in fact disciplines the passive object of toleration by marking it with the stigma of not conforming to the norms. As a result, the discourse of tolerance

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[340] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2006), p. 25

[341] Wendy Brow, *Regulating Aversion,* p. 27

[342] Wendy Brow, *Regulating Aversion,* p. 44

"strengthens the hegemony of dominant or unmarked identity."[343] Moreover, toleration also reifies concepts of identity and difference that are instead the product of social construction. Focusing in particular on the role of the state, Clarissa Hayward has noted:

> Toleration is a decidedly reactive answer to questions of identity\difference; it recommends state action and inaction in response to extant forms of social difference. By definition, it fails to attend to – indeed it deflects attention away from – the role states play in making, remaking, and reinforcing social definitions of identity\difference.[344]

Toleration does not call into question the articulations of difference that the state constructs. However, as Hayward concludes, the state can take a proactive role in "making difference differently," as "[a]n adequate democratic response requires, not simply tolerating, recognizing, or deliberating across extant forms of difference, but working to change the processes through which difference-defining boundaries are made and remade."[345] Questioning the premise that the subjects of toleration be left unaffected by the tolerating relation, Hayward points in fact to the overcoming of toleration.

From a different perspective, Michael Walzer denounces the risks of what he calls "postmodern toleration." "In immigrant societies," he observes, "people have begun to experience what we might think of as a life without clear boundaries and without secure or singular identities."[346] In this context "tolerance begins at home," and sometimes even within "our own hyphenated or divided selves." [347] This is problematic because, according to Walzer, "in the first generation of mixed families and divided selves […] everyone still

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[343] Wendy Brow, *Regulating Aversion,* p. 46

[344] Clarissa Hayward, "The Difference States Make: Democracy, Identity, and the American City," in APSR, Vol. 97, No. 4, November 2003, p. 503

[345] Clarissa Hayward, "The Difference States Make," p. 512

[346] Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (Yale University Press, New Haven: 1997) p. 87

[347] Michael Walzer, *On Toleration,* p. 87

remembers, and perhaps longs for, more coherent communities and a more unified consciousness."[348] Likely outcomes of this longing are, for Walzer, sentiments of fundamentalism and intolerance.

Grounding the debate on toleration in the concrete setting of our immigrant societies is undoubtedly a necessary move in today's world; and Walzer is certainly right in exposing the risks that might be associated with changes in the dominant paradigms of toleration. Nevertheless, the opposition of toleration and intolerance does not exhaust the possibilities disclosed by questioning the value of toleration. If it is possible to question the value of individualism without necessarily ending up with outcomes that deny the freedom of single human beings, as I have argued in Chapter V, then perhaps it is also possible to question the value of toleration without reaching intolerant conclusions.

Once again, the semiotic square may prove helpful in questioning the false dichotomy toleration-intolerance, by exploding the possibility of sense entailed by the opposition between toleration and the alternative value of hospitality (see Figure 5). The contradictory of "toleration," in fact, does not necessarily imply "intolerance." "Non-toleration" might as well be actualized in the practices and value of "hospitality." Though liberal discourse often employs the rhetorical artifice of overcoding to suggest that outside of toleration there can only be intolerance, the discourse of hospitality may displace this misconception.

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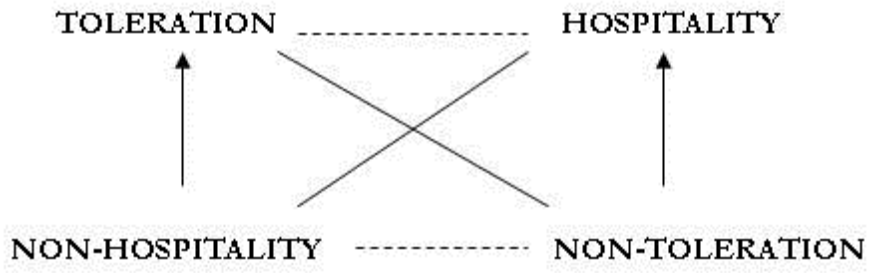
[348] Michael Walzer, *On Toleration,* p. 88

Figure 5. The Semiotic Square: Toleration vs. Hospitality



Toleration, in fact, while almost naturalized in the modern episteme by the hegemonic discourse of liberalism, is not the only strategy of peaceful encounter with the other that Europe has historically conceived. A long, uninterrupted if at times silenced, tradition stretches all the way from ancient Greece, where the guest was considered "sacred," and as such protected by Zeus Xénios and Athena Xénia, to contemporary philosophy. Jacques Derrida has theorized of *hospitality* as a project of ethical responsibility. This is how he frames the issue:

> That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?[349]

As such, the concept of hospitality is characterized by a constitutive *aporia,* an insoluble and paradoxical contradiction in its meaning. In Derrida's own words, "[w]e will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty, or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty."[350] Absolute, unconditional hospitality, that he calls "hyperbolical," the readiness

[349] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality,* trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford University Press, Stanford: 2000), p. 15

[350] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality,* p. 135

to welcome any number of unknown others, is not, strictly speaking a possibility. Yet, it always entertains a relation of tension with the opposite polarity of absolute closure. These contradictions, in turn, according to Derrida, do not weaken hospitality, or make it impossible, but, on the contrary, are its very pre-conditions. An element of regulation and an element of dispassionate openness are the fundamental components of hospitality.

On the one hand, the prerequisite for hospitality is the mastery of one's own house, country or nation. In order to be hospitable, one needs to have the power to host, one needs to be *in control*. This controlling attitude is deployed both at the level of one's own self-identity, and as a form of control over those who are being hosted. On the other hand, a suspension of the judgment and control in regard to who is eligible to become a guest is itself a constitutive element of genuine, disinterested hospitality. This loss of control calls into question the "master-slave" relation that is a necessary condition of hospitality, making the whole concept riddled with tensions and contradictions.

The value of hospitality, one might argue, is not in and of itself incompatible with a liberal political order. In fact, one of the most influential vindications of hospitality in modern philosophy has been offered by Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* of 1795. Kant outlines his program for organizing the world of international relations in accordance with the principles of the Enlightenment, thus creating the conditions for solving disputes among countries without resorting to violent means. After detailing a series of "Preliminary Articles," the essay culminates with three "Definitive Articles," intended as the backbone for governing the world after the end of all wars. The third definitive article states: "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality." Kant explains:

> Hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with hostility. It is not the right to be a permanent visitor that one may demand. A special beneficent agreement would be needed in order to give an outsider a right to become a fellow inhabitant for a certain length of time. It is only a right of temporary sojourn, a right to associate, which all men have. They have it by

> virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must finally tolerate the presence of each other. Originally, no one had more right than another to a particular part of the earth.[351]

More than an echo of Locke's argument about the original commonality of the earth for all humankind is audible in this passage. "Strangers" are to be treated "without hostility," unless it is possible to "refuse to receive" them without "causing [their] destruction." Human beings, in sum, "must finally tolerate the presence of each other." In Kant's liberal formulation, then, hospitality seems to amount to a form of toleration enhanced by (limited, conditional, temporary) mobility. It is more a "negative" right (visiting other countries without impediments) than a "positive" one (encountering the other in the process).

Derrida's project of hospitality, on the other hand, acknowledges the inherent tensions of the encounter with the other; but unlike the politics of tolerance (or, arguably, Kant's hospitality), it does not purport to overcome these tensions once and for all by "freezing" the otherness of the respective parties. With toleration, for Derrida, the actual encounter with the other is continually deferred: toleration amounts to avoiding any meaningful engagement with the other. There is, instead, a dynamic dimension to hospitality, a dialogic interaction in which the "I" and Thou" continuously trade places while constituting their relation. Though they do not end up exchanging their identities once and for all (the "I" becoming "Thou;" the host becoming guest), through practices of hospitality the two parties learn to destabilize their roles, to not take them as necessary features of their identities. The two parties engage in a mutual renegotiation of their identities in which their initial otherness ("discomfort, judgment, and aversion," in Brown's analysis) has the potential of developing into a more nuanced appreciation of their singularities and being-in-common. Thus Derrida's hospitality seems to gesture toward Nancy's inoperative community.

The action of tolerating, on the other hand, necessarily requires an active, tolerating party, and a passive, tolerated party, as Brown indicates. The grammar itself of toleration, I

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[351] Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* (Swan Sonneschein & Co., London: 1905), pp. 137-138

add, presupposes a fixed subject and a fixed object. The relation of hospitality, on the other hand, prefigures two actants, host and guest, that are both equally active and passive as their relation unfolds. The very couplet host-guest can in fact be rendered by the same word in some languages, signaling the potential for the transposition of meaning in these two positions: *hôte* in French; *ospite* in Italian; *huésped* in Spanish. As Derrida points out, in the unfolding of the relation of hospitality, the guest comes to occupy, if only symbolically, the position of the host:

> So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage—and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host's host. The guest (*hote*) becomes the host (*hote*) of the host (*hote*).[352]

The boundaries between host and guest thus are continuously transgressed. The host becomes guest, and the guest becomes host. In the beginning of a relation of hospitality a guest is (literally or metaphorically) invited into the host's house. At first the guest might be shy to even get a glass of water, and might ask permission, thus reinforcing the host's claim to sovereignty. Slowly the guest might start to make herself "at home." Eventually she might choose to thank the host by cooking for him, thus "inviting him over" for dinner, in his own house. As the relation of hospitality unfolds such reversals of position may continue, without ever settling on a fixed relation between an active and a passive party.

During the relation of hospitality, moreover, the host and guest (at any point in time) are encouraged, if not quite required to engage each other in a process of mutual understanding. Much like it would be impolite to attend dinner and not engage in conversation with one's hosts/guests, likewise hospitality presupposes an ethics of curiosity toward the other, an inclination to acknowledge the other as a member of the same community of being. Toleration, on the other hand, renounces the possibility of

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[352] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality,* p. 125

acknowledging the commonality between one's self and the other, thus locking one's identity in an artificial, insular universe (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Toleration vs. Hospitality

Toleration	Hospitality
static	*dynamic*
fixed	*transformative*
disengaged	*engaged*

In conclusion, I regard the kind of hospitality envisioned by Derrida as a feasible and desirable alternative to the paradigm of liberal toleration. On the one hand, hospitality is *dynamic*: it thrives on the tensions that define it, and transverses them. On the other hand, toleration is *static*: it purports to resolve once and for all the tension inherent in the encounter with the other. On the one hand, hospitality can be a *transformative* relation: it starts with a clearly defined host-guest relation, but then continually renegotiates its boundaries. On the other hand, toleration is a *fixed* relation: it shelters the respective identities of the tolerating party and the tolerated party in an inherently unequal relation. On the one hand, hospitality can be actively *engaged* with the other, without attempting to deny otherness, but continually participating in its undoing and reinvention. On the other hand, toleration is *disengaged*, not curious about the other, and chooses to give up on the opportunity of truly meeting the other.

Hospitality, I argue, is the modality of encounter with the other typical of the inoperative community. Hosts and guests, in their continuous transposition of roles, maintain their singularities while at the same time experiencing the community of their being in the plasticity of their relation. Their mutual engagement, or even curiosity toward each other, signals a fundamental inclination toward community. Finally, the dynamic nature of

hospitality is congruent with the "resistance to immanence" that defines Nancy's community. Like the inoperative community designs a radical alternative to the liberal ontology of liberalism, so hospitality is alternative to the value of liberal toleration. The most vivid illustrations of both hospitality and the inoperative community in general, it would seem, are to be found where the hold of liberal hegemony is less stringent. To the cultural periphery of liberal modernity, and to the geographical periphery of Europe I now turn for an illustration of the practices of hospitality in the community of Badolato, in southern Italy.

THE HOSPITABLE COMMUNITY: MEETING THE OTHER IN KURDOLATO

The eponymous myth of Europe evokes the forcible relocation of the Phoenician princess Europa, raped by Zeus under the semblance of a bull. A similar pattern of expansion, westward and north, marks the route on which clandestine immigrants embark in their journey of hope from the Global South toward Italy or Spain and from there to the affluent countries of northern Europe. European attitudes towards those unwelcome immigrants generally range from outspoken hostility (often times embellished with unhidden racist overtones) to compassionate toleration (whose humane concerns often disguise the dominant desire of being left alone, not bothered by the others).

As of the end of 1997, Europeans became aware of a different possibility associated with the relocation of foreigners on their continent. The events that were to gather media attention from all corners of Europe happened in a forgotten town in southern Italy, one stricken with poverty and depopulation, and both geographically and culturally peripheral to the project of modernity articulated by liberalism. Founded in the 11th century by the Normans of Robert Guiscard, Badolato is a typical village on the top of a hill that thrived for centuries and became an important fortress in the defense of the coast from the attacks of the Saracens. However, by the end of the 20th century Badolato was experiencing a condition of seemingly irreversible decline typical of many small villages in southern Italy and in other

areas of the country. Those Badolatese who did not find work in the *borgo,* or in the newly constructed Badolato Marina (a neighborhood located on the Ionian coast about six kilometers from the historic center) have emigrated elsewhere, including to the bigger cities of the region, the industrial areas of northern Italy, various destinations in northern Europe, or as a last resort to Australia and the Americas.

In general, the history of emigration is an intensely dramatic chapter of the Italian 20th century. A social and demographic cataclysm, in many ways it has forged the country, or at least most areas if it, more than any other economic, political or cultural transformation. Crude numbers certainly fail to convey a sense of the impact of this profoundly disruptive phenomenon. Yet, they may suggest the dominant patterns of this epochal shift:

> [Emigration] took a number of different forms, the most dramatic of which was emigration overseas, to the Americas and Australia. Between 1946 and 1957 the numbers of those leaving Italy for the New World exceeded by 1,100,000 the numbers of those returning [...] In the Calabrian villages, South America in particular was dubbed *'e d'u scuordo,* 'the land of forgetting.'
> Another pattern of emigration, of a rather different sort, was to north Europe. Between 1946 and 1957 the numbers heading north exceeded by 840,000 the numbers of those who came back: France took the lion's share (381,000), followed by Switzerland (202,000) and Belgium (159,000). The emigrants to these countries tended to go for shorter periods, on six-month or one year contracts, and regarded work abroad as a temporary rather than a permanent solution to their problems.[353]

Whereas in some cases the move to Northern Italy was only temporary and seasonal in nature (often regarding young men, both married and unmarried), in the vast majority of cases those leaving Badolato were never to return to their hometown. At any rate, the population declined dramatically – from 7,000 to 700 people according to some estimates – in few decades, as the emptying out of the town only left behind a rearguard of old folks.

This was to have severe consequences on the social fabric of the community, aggravating, if possible, the moral disease already diagnosed by Edward Banfield as "amoral

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[353] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York: 2003), p. 211

familism." Banfield's sociological study of the village of Chiaramonte, in the Region of Basilicata, in the 1950s, became the standard explanation for the extreme backwardness and lack of civic virtues of the South. Amoral familism was defined as "the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good, or indeed for any good transcending the immediate material interest of the nuclear family."[354] Mass emigration appears to have exacerbated the problems of amoral familism:

> Throughout the rural South, family life has been disrupted by migration. Even in the 1980s the patterns that we noted for the 1960s – of fathers being absent for many months of the year, of mothers or even grandparents being left to bring up children, of ageing populations – seem to have remained significant phenomena. [....] Kinship networks, as Piselli has reiterated, have remained as strong as ever. Yet these [...] are networks without collective projects, without a consciousness that transcends family interest. Neither from civil society nor from the state has there emerged a new and less destructive formulation of the relation between family and collectivity.[355]

However, beneath the desolating immobility that seemed to accompany Badolato to a death by outmigration, another type of change was occurring. In 1986 a provocative campaign was launched by local political and social activists under the name of "*Badolato paese in vendita*" (Badolato Town For Sale). This was an effort to attract Italian and foreign tourists who would invest in the maintenance and remodeling of the houses that the emigrants had abandoned without indicating any plan to return to them. The initiative was only moderately successful, as a few foreigners, mostly from Switzerland and northern Europe, did buy houses and made Badolato their regular vacation destination. However, this was not a solution to the problems of a dying community.

At the end of the century, though, this town plagued by emigration was to find unexpected opportunities of resurgence reinventing itself as a land of immigration. So the

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[354] Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.: 1958), p. 10

[355] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy,* pp. 417-8

English daily *The Guardian* recounts the events of December 1997 in the issue of Wednesday, March 22, 2000:

> It was December 27, 1997. Boats raced to the ship and ferried its human cargo to land. The Kurds were penniless and did not speak Italian, but for the villagers of Badolato, on Italy's toe, they had one priceless asset - youth.
> Most of the houses in the 1,000-year-old village, 900ft above the Mediterranean, had been abandoned over four decades. A population of 7,000 had dwindled to 700. Few babies were being born - most local couples had one child at the most. The elementary school had closed, businesses were failing, buildings were crumbling. It was just a matter of time before Badolato became a ghost town.
> And then the *Ararat* arrived: a Russian-made rustbucket that had left Istanbul for Rome six days earlier. The perils and £1,500 price tag had deterred elderly Kurds from making the journey, so the new arrivals were mostly under 40. They had not planned to make a life in Calabria, one of Italy's poorest regions, but that was what they were offered.[356]

In other words, two days after Christmas, in 1997, the people of Badolato received the unexpected present of 825 Kurdish asylum seekers. Equally unexpected for the Kurds was the warm reception that the Badolatese reserved them. They had reached the tip of southern Italy with no intention of relocating there, but only because it was the most convenient landing in their journey to Germany, France, Belgium, and Sweden.

The Kurdish people is an archetypal example of a "nation in search of a state." As David McDowall notes, the Kurds "inhabit a marginal zone between the power centres of the Mesopotamian plain and the Iranian and Anatolian plateaus," and they have been historically "marginalized geographically, politically, and economically."[357] Of the 825 Kurds that landed in Badolato, the majority were from Turkey. The Kurds in Turkey had experienced severe discrimination throughout the 20th century, as the republic that had formed after the fall of the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal,

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[356] Rory Carroll, "They were God-fearing people like us, and God knows we needed them," in *The Guardian,* 02/22/'00, retrieved on 02/20/'05 at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/population/Story/0,2763,184291,00.html

[357] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (IB Tauris, London: 2000), p. xi

Atatürk, pursued an explicit policy of "turkification" aimed at eradicating the linguistic and ethnic specificity of the Kurds and assimilating them into mainstream Turkish society.[358]

The passengers of the Ararat were leaving behind both economic desolation and political discrimination. *The Guardian* continues recounting the events of December 1997: "Central and regional government gave the Kurds food and money and promised to settle them in empty houses. Officials promised them work in new enterprises that would make the most of their skills."[359] In a short time, Badolato had attracted the attention of national and international media, and television crews came to report on the strange case of the town that welcomed immigration.

At the beginning of 1999 *Famiglia Cristiana,* a catholic Italian weekly, expressed its appraisal of this experience of peaceful integration. Gerardo Mannello, the Mayor of Badolato, explained in an interview that of the original group of 825 Kurds most had left for their final destinations, Germany and Switzerland in particular. Yet, the efforts of the local administrators and of the population had succeeded in convincing a few of them to stay.

> So the Pro-Badolato was born, an association of culture and tourism: it restructures houses and offers them to the tourists. The Kurds are employed in the works of construction and cleaning. They open artisan laboratories and above all the first Kurdish restaurant of Calabria, the second in Italy, is inaugurated: the *Ararat*, where one needs to reserve two days in advance. [....] Yusuf, together with Pino, has opened a laboratory of ceramic, from which the Carabinieri have commissioned the insignia for their headquarter. Ibrahim Sherin works in his new shop of fair trade. Then there are those employed in agriculture and construction jobs. The priest, don Vincenzo Gallelli, is super-happy: "A blessing for the Church. I have been able to preach Solidarity and Misericordia in concrete." On Easter night he will baptize five Kurdish adults.[360]

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[358] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds,* p. 191

[359] Rory Carroll, "They were God-fearing people like us"

[360] Alberto Bobbio, "Pizza curda e abbasso l'Onu, Badolato non ha paura," in *Famiglia Cristiana,* n. 11, 03/21/'99, retrieved on 02/20/'05 at: http://www.stpauls.it/fc99/1199fc/1199fc59.htm. My translation

It is worth noting, albeit in passim, that at this stage the Kurdish experiment in Badolato tends to reproduce structures of power all too familiar in the most inveterate practices of immigration. At the economic level, the newcomers are typically (but not exclusively) employed in "works of construction and cleaning," an embryonic tertiary sector that caters to the affluent (yet sporadic) tourists from Switzerland and Northern Europe. At the cultural level, the enthusiasm with which the local priest welcomes the new members of the community (an enthusiasm that the reporter for *Famiglia Cristiana* does not call into question), cannot obscure the fact that the Kurds are predominantly of Sunni Muslim confession and, presumably, not seeking conversion to another religion.

However, some complementary reflections may help to refine the first impressions about these seeming patterns of economic and ideological domination, by making sense of them not in the abstract, but in light of the specific local context. The productive system of Badolato, like that of most Calabrian villages, is one that hardly favors the emergence of a highly differentiated and dynamic structure of classes. The most meaningful distinction to be made here is not between "capitalists" and "proletarians," as there is little to nothing to capitalize on, and the traditional resource of the wealthier strata of population, land, is now a much less valuable asset. On the contrary, the subsistence economy of Badolato is a system fundamentally based on the *rimesse,* the money sent back home by the emigrants. In an area chronically plagued by unemployment, those who can count on a more or less stable source of income, produced locally and independent of the *rimesse,* are, in a certain way, a privileged class. This is the case with the Kurds.

As for the religious aspect of the integration of the Kurds into the social fabric of Badolato, worries about the forcible nature of their conversion to Catholicism are not at all preposterous. However, such an interpretation of their baptisms does not take into account the peculiar character of traditional religiosity in Southern Italy's towns. While this is obviously an overwhelmingly Catholic environment, it is not one in which religion emerges as an identity marker used to differentiate among various communities (as for example it was

in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia). Here religiosity is perceived and experienced as one element of a larger picture of "tradition," not to be theorized per se, and whose exercise is better understood as a series of ritualized habits than as a coherent set of moral and canonical formulations. As such, Catholicism is not necessarily an exclusionary force, as it peacefully coexists with a vast and dynamic substratum of alternative beliefs, ranging from a diffuse superstition, to enduring practices of magic and divination, to residual particles of pre-Christian religiosity. In synthesis, without underestimating its potentially troubling aspects, the commixtion of Muslim elements into a Christian community can be taken as an instance of a tendency towards syncretism that popular religiosity can exhibit to the extent that it is not rigidly codified.

Despite some legitimate doubts, then, the case of Badolato came soon to be seen as an interesting and largely successful experiment. The people of this small, peripheral town had not only passively tolerated the presence of the Kurds on their territory (what in many other places would have been a remarkable achievement in and of itself). The locals had actively welcomed the guests with signs of *concrete hospitality*. Badolatese houses were literally opened for the Kurds, and the whole population participated in collective efforts to help the newcomers establish viable and durable premises for sound, if modest, economic subsistence. Sure, the houses given to the Kurds were the humble habitations abandoned by Badolatese emigrants, and the jobs that they got may not have been the ones that they were dreaming of when leaving Kurdistan; yet this was a robust experiment with feasible hospitality, and the risks of its hyperbolic variant had been avoided. In April 2000 a news report from BBC asked a very interesting question:

> Could this be the answer for Italy's other dying cities?
> Daniela Trapasso of the Italian Council for Refugees says she was surprised and impressed by the welcome the asylum seekers received.
> "I thought the people from the village will be scared of them but it was not like this," she recalls
> "I was very emotional when I saw Italian people give food, bread and oil to the Kurdish neighbours."
> Two years later, that warmth has not diminished.

> Sitting around the piazza in weak spring sunshine, the old people are happy to talk about their visitors.
> "It's lovely to have them around," they tell me.
> "They never give us any problem and if there is something we can give them, we give it to them."
> "We don't understand them and they don't understand us but they are good, and the more people we have around the better it is for everyone."[361]

Especially noteworthy is the last passage of the interview, as it entails an implicit endorsement of the value of being-in-common. Contra traditional understandings of community based primarily on a shared language, these elderly Badolatese point towards a more basic aspect of commonality, one that does not necessarily require shared instruments of commun-*ication* because it is rooted in the acknowledgement of something that is already *common*. To the question of hospitality posed by Derrida: "must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language [...] before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?" the Badolatese implicitly respond in the negative.

However, in spite of such an excited optimism, at traits reminiscent of Derrida's conception of unconditional hospitality toward those that, symbolically, "do not speak our language," Badolato's experience did not turn out to be the squaring of the circle of the immigration and aging population problems. The BBC news report continues:

> The promised funds from the government for housing and start-up businesses to encourage them to stay have never arrived.
> The Badolato experiment, says Daniela Trapasso, is in bureaucratic limbo.
> "A lot of people came here," she says.
> "A lot of promises have been made but we have been waiting for this money for two years."
> "This is a big problem. If you talk with our government they will tell you – 'Ah yes! Badolato! - a very good experience. We must learn from Badolato. There, there is civilisation.'
> "But then - nothing."[362]

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[361] Jake Gilhooly, "Italy: Immigration or extinction," in *BBC News,* Wednesday, 19 April, 2000, retrieved on 02/20/'05 at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/719423.stm. Emphasis added.

Swedish based *FECL* ("Fortress Europe?" Circular Letter), an NGO active in the fields of "liberties and human rights, public order and security, policing, justice, data protection, immigration and asylum," has taken a critical interest in the bureaucratic vicissitudes of the Kurds in Badolato.[363] In particular, in the aftermath of the landing of the *Ararat,* the reactions of the Italian political elites seemed in line with the local attitudes of the Badolatese, and in general they seemed inspired by a benevolent and sympathetic comprehension. FECL reports that:

> Already on 30 December, Interior Minister Napolitano announced that the Government was willing to "examine favourably" the asylum applications of those Kurdish boat people who wished to submit an application, while those who preferred to refrain from an application in Italy, because they wished to join family members already staying in other European countries, would benefit from temporary protection in Italy. At his traditional New Year speech to the Italian people, President Scalfaro said: "When people come to our country, because they are being persecuted, our doors must be wide open." The following day, Prime Minister Prodi said: "We will grant asylum to all Kurds requesting it."[364]

The endorsement of the Kurdish (and Badolatese!) cause, voiced by the top three Italian authorities on the matter (the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Interior Minister) was not to be echoed by their European colleagues. In fact, public officials in Germany, France and Austria publicly issued their formal complaints. "The German Federal Interior Minister, Manfred Kanther, openly accused Italian authorities of lax border controls and demanded that Italy introduce random police controls on its national road network, in

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[362] Jake Gilhooly, "Italy: Immigration or extinction"

[363] see http://www.fecl.org

[364] "Italy And The Kurdish Refugees: No Panic," in *FECL 53*, January/February 1998, retrieved on 02/20/'05 at http://www.fecl.org/circular/5305.htm.
Note: FECL cites as sources: 'Boat-People aus Kurdistan', January 98, publ. by the Office of Ulla Jelpke, MP PDS at the German Bundestag; Migration News Sheet No.178/98-01; WochenZeitung, 8.1.98, 22.1.98; Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 3/4.1.98; Der Standard, 8.1.98; CEDRI-release on the reception of Kurdish refugees in Badolato, 30.1.98; our interviews with Massimo Pastore, Torino (26.1.98) and Christopher Hein, CIR, Rome (4.2.98).

order to stop 'illegal immigrants' from reaching Germany and other target countries."[365] Similarly inspired by a sort of psychosis of the new barbaric invasions, "Austrian Interior Minister Karl Schlögl vehemently accused Italy of 'dumping the problem [of illegal immigration] on others'."[366] As a result, Italy's adhesion to the Schengen treaty was called into question and passport checks at the Italian border were reintroduced on a temporary basis by both France and Austria. In this European context of "zero *tolerance*" toward clandestine immigration, the Badolatese experiment of *hospitality* was hardly to be seen as a step in the right direction.

The Italian openness toward extra-communitarians (i.e.: non-EU immigrants) was threatening the very fabric of the European Union. The constitution of Europeanness once again proved intolerant of any contamination with non-Europeanness, let alone hospitable. 'Strongly encouraged' by its Northern partners, Italy had to reconsider its policy of "friendly hospitality." By 1999 the majority of the undocumented immigrants were placed in gated camps, under strict police surveillance: the infamous "Welcome Centers" had been created, soon to be followed by the even more infamous CPTs, Centers of Temporary Permanence (Centri di Permanenza Temporanea). The Kurds who had already settled in Badolato escaped normalization, at this time; but the perspectives for the social experiment that they represented looked now gloomier than ever.

A team of scholars and researchers of the Department of Sociology and Political Science of the University of Calabria has conducted an accurate field study of the functioning and dynamics of the "Welcome Centers:"

> On June 2nd 1999, the "Welcome Center" (Centro di Accoglienza) S.Anna at Isola Capo Rizzuto becomes operative. The center is conceived in order to welcome hundreds of people at any time and is greeted by the representatives of the local

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[365] "Italy And The Kurdish Refugees: No Panic"

[366] "Italy And The Kurdish Refugees: No Panic"

> institutions as an efficient and rational solution to the problem of "first reception" ("*prima accoglienza*").
> [....]
> The presence of the Center S.Anna determines two main effects: 1) the refugees are reduced to an entity alien (*corpo estraneo*) to the territorial context that surrounds the "Welcome Center;" 2) the local institutions and the civil society are deresponsabilized of the handling of the phenomenon. This explains the almost complete absence of policies for the reception of the asylum seekers taken by the regional institutions and the little relevance of initiatives undertaken by the tertiary sector. This is a reason, if not the main reason, for the reduction of Calabria to an area of transition, and of the social dispersion of the refugees.[367]

Commisso and De Franco clearly identify in the "politics of segregation" enacted by the "Welcome Centers" the main reason for the failure of the project of cultural, economic and demographic *mestizaje* envisioned in the early days of the Badolato experience. Another research conducted by University of Calabria sociologist Elisabetta Della Corte also describes patterns of more endogenous malfunctioning:

> [I]n the case of Badolato too, the lack of funding has determined a reduction of the training activities. The only course activated (March 2003) is that of Italian language, that has classes scheduled for two hours two days a week.
> In 2001, instead, the vocational offer included a course of Italian language, a course in basic fashion design (three months, four hours, two days a week) for a total of 92 hours, and a course in basic computer science (72 hours).[368]

Both in Commisso and De Franco's analysis and in Della Corte's reconstruction, the perspectives for the social experiment of hospitality and being-in-common in Badolato seemed quite dim, in 2003. Armando Gnisci, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University "La Sapienza" of Rome, specialized in Postcolonial African Literatures, has studied the cultural effects of immigration in Italy. In 2003 he published a provocative

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[367] L. Commisso and M. De Franco, ed. by, "Richiedenti Asilo E Strutture Di Accoglienza In Provincia Di Crotone," (Rende, maggio 2003), p. 3; retrieved on 02/25/'05 at http://www.isolarifugiati.org/unical.htm. My translation

[368] Elisabetta Della Corte, ed. by, "Inserimento Socio-Economico Di Richiedenti Asilo E Rifugiati In Calabria" (Rende, maggio 2003), p. 11; retrieved on 02/25/'05 at http://www.isolarifugiati.org/unical.htm. My translation

volume entitled *Creolizzare l'Europa,* in which he analyzed the "literature of migration" in the poetic context that he calls of the "European decolonization."[369] Significantly, a section of the book (written in collaboration with Badolatese researcher Rosa Rafele) is dedicated to the case of Badolato.

The failures of this experience are analyzed without that sense of fatalism and that perverse fascination with defeat that scholars in the tradition of Banfield and Putnam have imputed to the anthropological type of the Southern Italian villager. Rather, Gnisci and Rafele point to the absence of an adequate set of laws for regulating the demands and the needs of political refugees:

> In fact, Italy is the only European country without a law on political asylum: a draft was stuck for years in the Parliament, without definitive approval until the end of the last legislature. The norms currently applied are the Geneva Convention and, for administrative matters, a law on immigration (Legge 40/'98). But since this is a generic law on immigration, not specific for political refugees, it presents many problems in its practical application.[370]

Just like Derrida theorized, "hyperbolic hospitality" cannot endure as such, and it needs the limits and specifications that a good law can provide. Had the inadequacy of the Italian bureaucracy really destroyed the radical potential that the encounter with the other in Badolato had disclosed? In order to assess whether or not anything of the spirit of 1997 had survived, albeit in a mutated environment, I decided to do field research in Badolato. I resolved to conduct open-ended interviews with a number of subjects, divided by the subsets "Badolatese" and "immigrants to Badolato." In both cases I chose to recruit my interviewees through face-to-face interactions and "snowball" techniques. I took notes during my interviews, and then re-elaborated them into more systematic reflections.

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[369] Armando Gnisci, *Creolizzare l'Europa* (Meltemi Editore, Roma: 2003), p. 9. My translation

[370] Armando Gnisci, *Creolizzare l'Europa,* p. 163. Also available at: http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/kuma/rubriche/intercultura/rafele.htm

At the end of the summer of 2006 I made a first trip to Badolato. I found a sleepy town: in the midday sunshine, only a few people walked slowly in the piazza, between the two cafés. I met with Daniela Trapasso, the coordinator of the Calabrian section of CIR (Italian Council for Refugees). Created in 1990 under the patronage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, CIR defines its basic mission as: "to defend the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers in Italy."[371] The conversation that we had in the office of CIR was an extremely helpful introduction to Badolato's social reality. From the vantage point of her institutional position, but especially from the perspective of an active social worker, Ms. Trapasso was careful to define the relationship between the immigrants and the local community not in abstract terms of integration, but, much more realistically, as a form of coexistence.

Nevertheless, she pointed to a complex pattern of hospitality, in which the host-guest relation frequently switched. In many instances, members of one of the two communities had participated in ceremonies and religious practices of the other group. Exploring each others' traditions, Badolatese youths had crossed the fire like their Kurdish counterpart did as a ritual of initiation into adult life. Funerals had also been an occasion for encounters, and many had incorporated rituals of both traditions. In an especially vivid example of engagement with the other, minor altercations had involved young men of both groups, mostly in relation to women. These disputes were of the kind that is not uncommon among young men, regardless of their ethnicity. To the extent that they should be classified as instances of "hostility" between Kurds and Italians, it is worth noting, with Derrida, that the concept of hostility too is semantically contiguous with hospitality. Whereas toleration prevents the rise of hostile relations by preventing the rise of meaningful relations altogether, hospitality acknowledges the possibility of agonistic human interactions. In Badolato the occasional hostilities among locals and immigrants never escalated into enmity, and in the

[371] http://www.cir-onlus.org/chisiamo2.htm

end they too served to strengthen community ties: the acknowledgment of the other as part of the same community of being which also involves the potential for hostile engagements.

An area of special interest to me was the linguistic contamination between the two communities. While the Kurds had been learning Italian from the locals, the Badolatese had also started to use Kurdish terms in their daily parlance, greeting the elderly in the deferential manner typical of the newcomers. Misunderstandings had not been uncommon, like when a Kurdish man had asked a shopkeeper for a "gas bomb" (*bomba a gas*), rather than for a much more innocuous "gas tank" (*bombola a gas*)… Unfortunately, in the climate of excitement and optimism typical of the early days of this experience, more serious mistakes were made too. Unconditional hospitality and generosity were bestowed onto the newcomers, in ways that made it difficult to eradicate expectations that were to prove unreasonable in the long run.

On my first visit to Badolato I also met with Vincenzo Squillacioti, a local historian and cultural animator. His perspective was also extremely helpful in delineating the social and cultural impact of the new arrivals on the community, both in the case of the "Badolato Town For Sale" initiative, and more recently with the Kurds. That very afternoon, as I was walking down a street, I heard a Muslim prayer coming from a window, and the British accent of a young lady coming from the next balcony. Neither would have been a likely occurrence in nearby towns; the proximity of the two added to the peculiar character of the phenomenon. Badolato wasn't just a haven for asylum seekers, nor was it simply the destination for wealthy northern European tourists. It was both, and at the same time it also remained alive with its Italian residents: both the ones that lived there year round, and the emigrants that returned for the summer and sometimes for the winter holidays as well.

When I returned to Badolato in the summer of 2007 I brought with me a set of questions for open-ended interviews (see Appendix). I classified my interviewees in four groups: A_1) resident Badolatese; A_2) returning emigrants; B_1) immigrants; B_2) tourists. In the subset of the "hosts" (A_1 and A_2) I expected to find a social stratification between the returning emigrants, who enjoyed greater exposure to culture and diversity in their places of work, and the resident Badolatese, who presumably lacked those experiences. Similarly, I

expected a marked difference between the perspectives of those who had immigrated to Badolato under economic or political concerns, and those who had elected it as their holiday destination.

On my second visit to Badolato I knew that on a hot, sunny day most people were likely to spend at least some time at the beach, in Badolato Marina, returning home in time for lunch. So I spent the morning re-familiarizing myself with the streets and sights of the town. I also took notice of the cars' license plates: alongside the local ones there were quite a few from central and northern Italy, as well as Swiss, German, French, Swedish ones, some belonging to returning emigrants, some to the new house buyers.

Around 4:30 pm the roar of the first Vespas headed down to the beach announced the end of the siesta. I observed small clusters of middle-aged and old men as they started assembling, some sitting in the shade on the piazza's benches, some playing cards and sipping soda in the cafés. Elderly women gathered on the church's stairs, then got inside and started praying before the mass. Tourists followed the Vespas to the beach; young immigrants, mostly males, took the benches that were left in the piazza.

As I started talking to people, I noticed that some were at least as eager to talk to me as I was to listen to them. At first some people felt unprepared to answer my questions, and pointed to their educated neighbors. My reassurance that I was not looking for accurate historical information, but for their personal experiences, was able to convince most of them. Also, as I asked the questions that I had carefully phrased while planning my research, I realized that they were most useful as a starting point for free-floating conversations, rather than as a rigid grid to impose on my interviews.

I spent several days in Badolato, and met with over fifty people, of whom around thirty I identified as "hosts" (both resident Badolatese and returning emigrants), and around twenty as "guests" (both immigrants and tourists). I met with a very loquacious priest and with an equally talkative old communist, a living testimony of the strength that the party of Antonio Gramsci once enjoyed in that district of landless laborers. From the perspectives of

their different systems of beliefs, these two interviewees agreed on many points, in ways that might have sounded surprising to observers less familiar with the dominant mentality, a centuries-old concoction of fatalism, hospitality, attachment to one's own roots. I asked them whether the recent influx of immigrants had been advantageous or disadvantageous for Badolato, and both responded that the new element in the community had been a valuable addition. One emphasized the role of immigrants as workers; the other framed welcoming others as a Christian precept. "The name of Badolato is more widely recognized now, and that is a good thing because more money is trickling into town," said the communist, and he added: "the Kurds are a valuable addition to our workforce, they are workers, they are not idlers."[372] "It is our moral duty as Christians to welcome others as brothers in Christ," argued the religious figure, and he commented: "our community has suffered from the plague of emigration, and therefore we understand the necessities of these immigrants. Many Badolatese still live in Argentina, USA, Europe."[373]

One of the questions that raised more attention in all my interviewees, of all the subsets alike, was: "Would you prefer to be richer elsewhere, or poorer in Badolato?" It generated an overwhelming majority of answers in favor of being poorer in Badolato. "Poorer!" shouted an interviewee, "I am the wealthiest person in the world here, not in money but in other values."[374] The allure of material wealth was much less attractive than the appreciation of values like health, friendship, tradition and especially the feeling of "belonging" to a place and community. To this constellation of civic values, the priest also added the sense of mission that characterized his vocation as an apostle among his people: "I have already

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[372] Interview A_2 – 1: "Il nome di Badolato e' conosciuto adesso, e questo ha portato soldi. I kurdi sono una buona aggiunta per la manodopera locale, sono lavoratori, non sono vagabondi." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[373] Interview A_1 – 15: "E' il nostro dovere morale come Cristiani di accogliere gli altri come fratelli in Cristo […] La comunita' di Badolato ha sofferto per la piaga dell'emigrazione e percio' noi capiamo le necessita' di questi immigrati adesso. Molti Badolatesi ancora vivono in Argentina, in America, in Europa." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[374] Interview A_2 – 6: "Piu' povero! […] Sono il piu' ricco del mondo qua, no di soldi, ma di altri valori." My translation from the original Italian into English.

chosen Badolato, with its context of poverty […] I had appealing proposals to move elsewhere, but I always refused."[375]

Additionally, while a general consensus emerged on the fact that Badolato had changed dramatically in the last few decades, the exact nature of the transformation was the object of much disagreement among my interviewees. At one extreme, a strongly nostalgic mood permeated some holographic reconstructions of an idyllic past, one in which the town had been economically self-sufficient, if not affluent, and especially one in which the moral fiber and the demographic composition of the Badolatese population had been much sounder. An elderly man lamented: "The town is becoming depopulated, it is on its way to dying. And this makes me sad."[376] Two elderly women convened: "[The situation] is much worse now. Things were better when they were worse. There is no respect, no affection for each other."[377] "The youths are lazy, good manners have been lost," pointed out another interviewee, tapping into the perennial trope of the young as the embodiment of what is wrong with the new.[378] On the other hand, some of my informants were more ready than others to recognize the amazing progress that improved communication, transportation, and education had represented for Badolato. Thus reminisced a returning emigrant: "People starved to death, once, now everybody has got something to eat. There was the war, there was poverty, in 1951 there was a flood. Then things started to improve."[379] Somebody else

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[375] Interview A_1 – 15: "Ho gia' scelto Badolato, con il suo contesto di poverta' […] Ho ricevuto proposte di sedi allettanti, ma ho sempre rifiutato." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[376] Interview A_2 – 3: "Il paese si va spopolando, va a morire. E questo mi dispiace." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[377] Interviews A_1 – 22 and A_1 – 23: "[La stuazione] e' peggiorata. Si stave meglio quando si stava peggio. Oggi non c'e' rispetto, non c'e' affetto tra le persone." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[378] Interview A_2 – 5: "I giovani sono vagabondi, si e' persa l'educazione." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[379] Interview A_2 – 10: "Si moriva di fame, prima, adesso qualcosa da mangiare ce l'hanno tutti. C'era la guerra, c'era la miseria, c'e' stata un'alluvione nel 1951. Poi le cose hanno iniziato a migliorare." My translation from the original Italian into English.

explicitly pointed out the recent changes in Badolato: "It has been rediscovered, repopulated."[380]

The priest was to be found in the first camp, and he expressed his sorrow at the ailing town quite profusely: "The town is getting depopulated, the ones who stay are mostly old and ill. There is numerical poverty, but also religious poverty: few people participate in the activities of the church. The agricultural sector has been largely abandoned too. We are not self-sufficient any more. There was more 'poetry,' once: artisans, shopkeepers, street vendors, they all used to sing traditional songs. There was joy in their singing."[381] The old communist activist espoused a rather different view: "There has been development. We moved from tilling the soil to going to school. There has been moral progress too. Now young people can choose by themselves with whom they want to get engaged, there is no jealousy. There is also more wealth."[382] In fact, both camps concurred on a narrative of modernization, but evaluated it differently.

The main focus of my interviews were the issue of co-existence and the practices of hospitality that characterized it. The Badolatese who had emigrated to escape poverty and unemployment, and who had now returned to their hometown, whether seasonally or permanently, were split on the issue of whether the arrival of the immigrants had benefited or harmed Badolato. Some tended to sympathize with the newcomers, recognizing that they performed valuable social functions, taking jobs that Italians would have refused: "they take

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[380] Interview A_1 – 28: "E' stata riscoperta, ripopolata." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[381] Interview A_1 – 15: "La citta' si va a spopolare, quelli che rimangono sono per lo piu' vecchi e malati. C'e' poverta' numerica, ma anche religiosa: poche persone partecipano alle attivita' della Chiesa. L'agricoltura e' stata abbandonata, per la maggior parte. Non c'e' piu' autosufficienza. Una volta c'era piu' 'poesia': artigiani, bottegai, venditori ambulanti, tutti cantavano canzone tradizionali. C'era gioia nel loro canto." My translation from the original Italian into English

[382] Interview A_2 – 1: "C'e' stato sviluppo. Siamo passati da zappare la terra ad andare a scuola. C'e' stato anche progresso morale. Adesso i giovani scelgono loro con chi si vogliono fidanzare, non c'e' gelosia. C'e' anche piu' ricchezza." My translation from the original Italian into English.

jobs that Italians don't want any more."[383] Others resented the fact that the immigrants now received assistance and in some cases subsidies, while their early years in Switzerland or Germany had been marked by social marginalization and inadequate economic remuneration: "they were given a house, they were given assistance."[384] Almost all of my interviewees were careful to characterize their positions as non-racist, answering in the negative the question on whether they would have preferred that more Italians (as opposed to foreigners) had relocated to Badolato: "It's not important where they come from, but whether or not they are good *Christians*."[385] Some went so far as to say that they preferred having foreigners relocate to town rather than Italians, as the former offer better opportunities for cultural cross-pollination and an overall evolution of the local mentality: "foreigners have travelled more, they are more open-minded."[386] A rather exuberant elderly man exclaimed: "Foreigners are good, but they have to keep their traditions, their customs. Italians are phony, it would take a Saddam with them, the end of the world!"[387] Beside this rather extreme endorsement of the cause of immigration and the repopulation of Badolato (and possibly Italy in general) by foreigners, the more mainstream non-racist disclaimers sounded genuine, for the most part; other informants echoed the frustration at their own alienation in the big cities of the north by showing little warmth for the newcomers.

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[383] Interview A_2 – 37: "Fanno lavori che gli italiani non vogliono fare piu'." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[384] Interviews A_1 – 22 and A_1 – 23: "Gli hanno dato una casa, gli hanno dato assistenza." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[385] Interviews A_1 – 22 and A_1 – 23: "Non ha importanza da dove vengono, ma se sono bravi *crisitani*." My translation from the original Italian into English.
Note: in the context of southern Italy, "Christians" (cristiani) is a colloquial expression for "people, folks." It does not carry any explicit religious connotations.

[386] Interview A_1 – 28: "Gli stranieri hanno viaggiato di piu', hanno una mentalita' piu' aperta." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[387] Interview A_2 – 6: "Gli stranieri sono buoni, ma devono conservare le loro usanze, i loro costumi. Gli italiani sono falsi. Ci vorrebbe Saddam, la fine del mondo!" My translation from the original Italian into English.

Not surprisingly, the category of the "guests" was a much more heterogeneous one. It included both homebuyers from elsewhere in Italy and Europe, and underprivileged immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Despite the obvious socioeconomic differences, these two groups shared the important experience of being a part of Badolato's community without having been born into it. In a way they were in a privileged position for partaking in the community of being that was becoming evident in Badolato, without being invested in the being of community. In particular, most immigrant interviewees underscored the fortuitous nature of their move to Badolato: "I was sent here by a community aid program," said one, referring evidently to the Italian Council for Refugees.[388] Virtually no one had chosen it deliberately, and few had even heard of it before relocating: "It was never my intention to move here […] I had never heard of this place," stated a young man from Nigeria.[389] A homebuyer from Florence explained the circumstances of his relocation as: "an incredible series of coincidences."[390] Paradoxically, this parallels the condition of Badolato natives who had not chosen to be born in that specific community.

The attachment to Badolato might not be as strong among the immigrants as it is among the locals. Yet several people commented enthusiastically on the help that they received as they adapted to the new conditions, and showed a degree of affection toward the town. To my question: "Have the people in Badolato helped you to adjust to the new conditions?" an informant from Colombia responded: "So very much! That's why I don't leave. Now I work in Badolato Marina, and the neighbors help me with my kids."[391] From a

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[388] Interview B_1 – 9: "Mi hanno mandato qua… un programma di aiuto comunitario." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[389] Interview B_1 – 47. Original in English.

[390] Interview B_2 – 31: "Una serie incredibile di coincidenze." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[391] Interview B_1 – 51: "Tantissimo! Per questo non me ne vado. Adesso lavoro a Badolato Marina, e I miei vicini mi aiutano con i bambini." My translation from the original Italian into English.

very different perspective, the same attitude was echoed by a homebuyer: "So very much! They [the Badolatese] are very open, hospitable. I think of them as my Calabrian cousins."[392]

The immigrants that I interviewed also appreciated the lack of pressures to conform. Specifically, they enjoy being able to keep their traditions, language, food, religion. Many strongly associate this sense of liberty with life in Badolato: "here I don't have to be afraid when I pray."[393] However, others, like one young man from Nigeria who voiced his intense frustration about the conditions and limitations of his relocation, lamented the isolation of Badolato, its small size, the lack of opportunities for both work and entertainment, and the lack of a fast, reliable Internet connection: "I expected it [Badolato] to be better. There is nothing here. It's hard to go to the train station, it's hard to watch TV, it's impossible to get fast Internet."[394] While he had no regrets about leaving his country, he was ready to go somewhere else. But is this really just a case of unsuccessful immigration, or is there more to this story? Aren't many young Badolatese similarly fed up with life in a small town, and itching to get out of it? All in all, this might be the ultimate, albeit ironic, proof of integration.

During the course of my interviews, I learned with some disappointment that no one from the original nucleus of Kurds was left in town, as in the long run they had all preferred to join their relatives in Germany or Switzerland. Nevertheless, the narrative of the Kurds' migration had been destabilized. The plans that they had made (relocating to Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium) had been called into question by the emergence of an unexpected social phenomenon: hospitality. The trajectory that they had envisioned for the deployment of their agency had been interfered with by the hospitable practices that had made them part of the same community with the local Badolatese. Though the pull of the

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[392] Interview B_2 – 31: "Tantissimo! Sono molto aperti, ospitali. Per me sono come dei cugini calabresi." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[393] Interview B_1 – 50: "Qua non devo avere paura quando prego." My translation from the original Italian into English.

[394] Interview B_1 – 47. Original in English.

economic opportunities in other areas of Europe had ultimately proved impossible to resist, in the face of bureaucratic problems and the impoverished reality of southern Italy, that political experiment had not been just a literary divertissement on an otherwise stable narrative. In the spirit of Žižek's admonishment, the "hegemonic ideological coordinates" had been questioned. That action would not unproblematically adapt to the new space should not be surprising, nor should it be disheartening for the perspective of reconstituting the discourse of immigration around new coordinates. The legacy of the original nucleus of Kurdish immigrants had stayed behind, both in the experience of the Italian Council for Refugees, and in the nickname of "Kurdolato." The encounter between locals and immigrants, with its dynamic practices of hospitality and the creative renegotiation of the host-guest relation, illustrates in Badolato the political promise of adopting Nancy's description of the inoperative community as a normative goal. Alternative to both the discourse of liberal individualism and toleration, on the one hand, and to the dominant paradigms of communitarianism, on the other hand, the acknowledgment of being-in-common as the real position of existence can reorient the field of politics away from the currently hegemonic narratives.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have presented my reflections on how the concrete world of politics might be impacted by a normative view inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's theorization of the inoperative community. Though Nancy explicitly presents it as an ontological account, and not as a political project, I argue that the discourse of being-in-common and singularity can express political meaning with such versatility as to qualify it as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of liberalism. Moreover, unlike other versions of communitarianism, Nancy's position rejects any essentialism, both at the level of the individual, and at the level of any specific community.

I have argued that the discourse of liberalism crucially relies on the value of toleration as the paramount modality for dealing with otherness. Both at the level of free and rational individuals, and at the level of sovereign national communities, toleration shields discrete entities from each other. In so doing, it also gives up on the possibility of truly realizing the encounter with the other. To the principle of toleration I have juxtaposed the value and practices of hospitality. Hospitality, I argue, requires an active engagement with the other, as the roles of host and guest are continuously renegotiated, and their boundaries redefined. Moreover, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, I also argue that hospitality can be a feasible political project, to the extent that it rejects both the pole of absolute closure toward the other, and the pole of absolute openness, of hyperbolic hospitality. Though hospitality is not a panacea for all the contemporary social and political ills, I argue that its practices have the potential to enfeeble the current hegemony of liberalism, thus clearing the ideological fog away from the inoperative community.

In order to show a concrete example of hospitality and being-in-common, I have presented the case of the encounter between immigrants and locals in Badolato, a small town in southern Italy. The landing of 825 undocumented Kurdish immigrants in 1997 activated a series of initiatives that transcended the simple practices of toleration, and qualified instead as a genuine case of hospitality. Rather than engaging in a confrontational politics of "us" vs. "them," or congealing their otherness, the two communities, the locals and the immigrants, questioned their boundaries, and without dissolving their specificities in an artificially composite unit, ultimately came to access the community of their being.

Though the original nucleus of Kurds soon relocated elsewhere, Badolato started to attract other immigrants, and as such it kept the experiment with hospitality and the acknowledgement of being-in-common alive. In this chapter I also presented the results of the research that I conducted there in the summer of 2007. Without romanticizing the peculiar experience of a very peripheral reality, it is possible to draw general lessons from the case of Badolato, and to draw inspiration from hospitality and being-in-common for envisioning a discourse alternative to the current hegemony of liberalism.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

A reflection on the connections between politics, language and ideology seems to be both a perennial preoccupation for political thinkers of various extractions and an especially urgent task for contemporary political theorists. Though a liberal constellation appears to exercise a virtually uncontested hegemony in much of the West today, its political vision remains highly problematic both with regards to the theories that justify it, and with regards to the practices that it promotes. Analyzing the discourses that sustain the articulation of a liberal project can prove both instructive in reconstructing the reasons for its success, and helpful in deconstructing the assumption of inevitability that accompanies some of the boldest arguments for liberalism. It is my contention in this project that, though the field of the political is currently dominated by liberal arguments, it is possible to resist their attraction and to imagine an alternative, more desirable political universe instead.

In order to purse the goal of questioning the hegemony of liberalism, I argue that it is first necessary to understand its modes of operation. This, in turn, requires a general theory of ideology and a method for studying concrete examples of ideological discourse. The intellectual status of the study of political ideologies has often been questioned from various corners within the social sciences. I argue in this project that supplementing the traditional methodologies for analyzing the production, contestation, and displacement of ideological discourse with instruments of semiotics can provide this effort with both the rigor and the adaptability that are necessary for advancing robust arguments in the field of inquiry of political phenomena. Ultimately, the aspiration of this dissertation is twofold: both unveiling

the deep discursive structures that contribute to explaining the hegemony of liberalism; and envisioning an alternative discourse for the articulation of a more desirable political project.

In Chapter I I have introduced the object of my study. Political ideologies, I argue, are akin to narrative objects of a particular genre. Similarly, Michael Freeden has devised his morphological approach to the study of ideology. Freeden insightfully calls attention on how, through distinctive discursive practices, ideologies decontest units of meaning (liberty, equality, gender, etc.) thus shaping the world of politics through the exclusion of certain concepts from the arena of contestation. While I regard this intuition as a crucial advancement over some of the traditional debates on ideology, I also argue that alongside with decontesting meaning, ideologies also employ specific expressive structures that affect the definition of the political at a deeper level. Ultimately, I argue that grammar itself is to be recognized as a political object, and that a specific grammar of liberalism contributes to explaining its hegemony.

In regarding ideologies as narrative objects, I move from the premise that an ideology simply tells a story about politics. The standard narrative formula of ideology mobilizes a tension between the description of a problematic status quo, and the normative vision of an alternative, more desirable future. The peculiar element of the narrative genre of political ideology is its orientation to action: in its pragmatic dimension, an ideology presents a plan for transitioning from the status quo to the desirable future. Not only do specific political ideologies differ with regards to what kind of political content they regard as desirable or undesirable; crucially, I argue, political ideologies also exhibit regularities with regards to how they express their arguments.

As I note in Chapter I, however, in many of the historical debates on ideologies, their arguments have been discredited as either false or irrelevant. While this position has enjoyed much success within the intellectual traditions of Marxism, Antonio Gramsci valorized the study of ideology as a fundamental component toward the definition of a comprehensive political project. Further refining an understanding of how ideological discourse works, though rejecting the term and category of "ideology," Michel Foucault reoriented the debate

from some extra-discursive, metaphysical notion of "Truth" toward the fully discursive phenomenon of the production of "effects of truth."

In Chapter II, then, I have engaged the notion of effects of truth, and I have presented some basic concepts of semiotics for studying their functioning within ideological discourse. Ideology, I argue, can be studied as a narrative object similar (but not fully reducible) to rhetorical discourse. Though they are both engaged in the art of persuasion, ideological discourse is more insidious as it presents the "truths" that it produces as necessary and objective. Studying ideological discourse, I argue, requires understanding the processes for the formation of these effects of truth, and not their congruence to an external Truth. I borrowed from the repertoire of semiotics three basic instruments for unveiling the production and deployment of effects of truth in the specific genre of political ideology.

First, I introduced the concept of abduction, with the specific case of overcoding. Effects of truth are produced in discourse when inferences are made about certain portions of a field of meaning. The conclusions of those inferences are then presented as natural and necessary. I argue the categories of abduction and overcoding refine the understanding of the phenomenon that Freeden terms "decontestation." Secondly, I argued that the profound structures of language allocate agency in ways that produce effects of truth in the field of political meaning. In particular, I have noted, a grammar of subject-verb formations in which the subject pre-exists its action and chooses them, is congruent with the liberal ontology of individualism. Thirdly, I presented the semiotic square as a useful device for tracing the development of arguments within ideological discourse. In opposing a desirable future to a problematic status quo, I argue, ideologies mobilize two contrasting concepts or values, and then proceed as their narrative unfolds from one to the other, in ways that the semiotic square visualizes more clearly than other modes of analysis. Semiotics, I argue, can systematize the study of how ideological discourse works, both by analyzing the production of effects of truth within a liberal paradigm, and, potentially, by inspiring the articulation of political meaning in counter-hegemonic projects.

To an analysis of the contemporary hegemony of liberalism I have turned in Chapter III. I argue that, though explaining this hegemony would undoubtedly require a very complex, multicausal story, a crucial role is also played by the structures of liberal discourse. In particular, I maintain that the political content organized by liberalism is especially intuitive, intelligible, and ultimately convincing because it replicates certain structures of grammar. The correspondence between the "I" of the grammatical subject and the "I" of the liberal individual generates a joint effect of truth on the notion of that I that gets reinforced virtually at every instance of discourse. In order to trace the construction of that "I" in liberal political theory, I have considered the contributions of three of the most influential thinkers in the liberal canon.

First I have discussed the political vision advanced by John Locke in the *Second Treatise of Government* in light of his work on knowledge, language, and the human mind in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Contra the prevailing accounts of Locke's thesis as either individualistic or communitarian, I argue that his position is best described as a politics of "semiotic individualism." On the one hand, Lockean individuals "own" the actions that they undertake and the narratives that they produce; on the other hand, they acquire consciousness of themselves and of the world via the medium of the language of their community. A "semiotic contract," which originally organizes the field of meaning (a vocabulary) and provides rules for combining units of meaning (a grammar) is the logical prerequisite for Locke's political theory.

Secondly, I have considered John Stuart Mill and the liberal ideology defined in *On Liberty,* as well as elements of his thought from *Utilitarianism* and *A System of Logic.* Mill, I argue, departs from Locke's balance between individualistic and communitarian themes in his politics by formulating a theory of "sovereign individualism." To Mill's systematic preference for the individual over the social corresponds an equal predisposition in the fields of science and logic for the particular over the general and for induction over deduction. The unifying character of Millite liberalism, I have argued, is a very prominent emphasis on the values of reason and progress.

Thirdly, I have commented on John Rawls' concept of justice as fairness and its evolution from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism*. Rawls' version of liberalism, I argue, constitutes a form of "tempered individualism:" tempered both in the sense that it mitigates the anti-social bias of certain other liberal thinkers, but also in the sense that, in so doing, it ultimately strengthens its commitment to the value of the individual. Moreover, while Rawls' project resolutely advances the discourse of liberalism toward its limits, by incorporating a distinctive emphasis on social obligations, it still remains trapped within the liberal pattern of excluding from full political citizenship those who do not meet the requirements for being "normal" individuals.

In sum, I have identified three general principles of liberal discourse:

1) Individuals own their actions;

2) The mode of action is rational;

3) Objects are treated as inert matter (and human beings can be treated as objects too).

In Chapter IV, then, I have argued that these principles explain how liberalism functions as a meta-ideology by exercising its discursive hegemony over competing political positions. Not only is liberalism dominant at the level of political content in much of the West today; it also provides the field of politics with the expressive "infrastructure" that allows a variety of claims to be articulated. As I have noted, liberalism, in other words, sets the table at which other ideologies sit and argue with each other. By participating in a conversation hosted by liberalism, on liberal (expressive) ground, non-liberal ideologies do not fully conform to a liberal worldview: it is sufficient that their differences and peculiarities be made compatible with the language of liberalism and with the three principles of liberal discourse in particular. By attracting other ideologies in its meta-ideological orbit, I argue that liberalism effectively "incorporates" some of their extra-liberal content and expels their most irreducibly illiberal claims. I have discussed three examples of "liberal incorporations" from contemporary political theory.

First I have considered Will Kymlicka's work on multiculturalism. What he calls "right to culture," I argue, is in fact the translation into liberal discourse of the non-liberal content of a communitarian defense of minority rights. Kymlicka's narrative of migration is especially clear in that it explicitly presents relocating to different countries as the free choice of individuals, and not as a complex socio-economic phenomenon. In employing the grammar of liberalism toward the description of multicultural phenomena, then, Kymlicka is also able to justify liberal arrangements of political values and resources, thus attesting to the power of grammar in forging the world of politics.

Secondly, I have presented Robert Putnam's definition of the concept of "social capital." An antidote to the social disease of atomization, more than an alternative to a liberal structure of society, I argue that Putnam's social capital translates the theme of community into the language of liberalism. Consequently, Putnam does not question the ontology of liberalism, but simply purports to reconcile it with a more efficient social arrangement based on a more pronounced emphasis on values of cohesion and mutual trust. Assigning agency to individuals, and explaining social capital as a function of the rational actions that they undertake, ends up corroborating the liberal narrative of the social contract as the coming together of free and independent individuals.

Thirdly, I have discussed Philip Pettit's formulation of a "neo-republican" public philosophy. I argue that Pettit's view of liberty as "non-domination" neither questions the deep ontology of liberalism, nor does it offer a clear alternative to the liberal order and institutions. Pettit's theory of language, moreover, also confirms the premises of liberal discourse. Ultimately, I regard Pettit's proposal as an example of liberal incorporation in that it bends republican themes to a discourse in which pre-formed individuals only engage in political activity to preserve their pre-political freedom.

Confronted with what appears as such a pervasive meta-ideological hegemony of liberalism, the search for a desirable systemic alternative needs to be guided by a creative and imaginative sensibility. I argue in Chapter V that Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the inoperative community can indeed inspire a radical reconsideration of the paradigm of

liberalism. Moreover, I maintain that, unlike the alternative posed by the prevalent versions of communitarianism, Nancy's philosophy of "resistance to immanence" can indeed overcome the rigidity of the liberal ontology of individualism without sacrificing its commitment to the freedom of single human beings.

In order to explain the specificity of Nancy's view, I first illustrated some of the most prominent themes in the tradition of communitarianism. Both Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of the "emotivist self" and Michael Sandel's critique of the "unencumbered self" configure radically alternative projects to the descriptive and normative value of individualism within the discourse of liberalism. However, they trade the rigid substantialism of a view centered on the individual for an equally rigid view of the foundation of the political on the essential value of community. Other authors have attempted relaxing these essentialist undertones of communitarianism. Michael Walzer, for instance, has emphasized the values of belonging, citizenship, and participation as conducive to his argument for a just arrangement of society. Charles Taylor, moreover, has concentrated on the contemporary reality of diverse, multicultural communities, in which minority groups strive for recognition from the state and from society at large.

Further rejecting the essentialist thesis, Benedict Anderson has described nations as "imagined communities." A product of social construction, the national community is imagined into existence as a system of shared understanding at a time in history when the development of capitalism and the technological innovations of printing create the conditions for national languages to serve as vehicles for the creation of national communities. James Scott, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the state in codifying language for the ultimate purpose of making citizens "legible." With a standardized national language in place, then, the idea of the national community becomes available to the people of that nation. Pascale Casanova, finally, has adopted a postcolonial outlook to assess the role of a national literature in providing the model for a national language in the case of Italy, and ultimately in opening up the possibility for imagining the national community before and in absence of a political embodiment of it.

I argue that, contra both these essentialist and socially constructed notions of community, Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy has the potential of radically resignifying the field of the political away from both a liberal and a communitarian vocabulary. In fact, Nancy rejects both the notions of "individual" and "community" as irredeemably compromised with the discourse of immanence. Instead, he founds his ontology on the idea that "being-in-common" is the real position of existence, and that "singularity" is a point of exposure of that being. Being is, in other words, what is common to all the things that are; this commonality is exposed in each singular instance of that being. Singularities, therefore, are not simply reflections of being-in-common, as individual members of a community might be. Likewise, the inoperative community exists always already as such, and is not the creation of individuals forming a society. With two "engines," one propelling being-in-common and the other singularity, and without ever settling for one or the other, or a static combination of the two, I argue that Nancy's philosophy can sustain a counter-hegemonic both alternative to the discourse of liberalism (and of the dominant forms of communitarianism) and desirable.

In Chapter VI, finally, I have harnessed Nancy's musings on the inoperative community toward the analysis of the actual political experience of the encounter with the other. In particular, I have discussed the value of hospitality envisioned by Jacques Derrida as a feasible and desirable alternative to the liberal notion of toleration. Whereas toleration presupposes the existence of a tolerating party and a tolerated party interested in shielding their individuality from possible interactions with others, hospitality assumes as its point of departure the instability of the roles of host and guest. As the host and guest in a relation of hospitality trade places and transform their identity in the process, they also destabilize the notion of the individual on which toleration relies. Moreover, I argue that Derrida's hospitality, unlike other formulations of the concept, corresponds to the inclination of the individuals toward community that Nancy also discusses. In transcending the artificial boundaries that the discourse of liberalism erects in the notion of the individual, and then fortifies in the notion of toleration, hospitality discloses the realization of being-in-common, while at the same time allowing the free interplay of different singularities.

I have discussed concrete practices of hospitality and a possible vision of the inoperative community in the encounter between migrants and locals in Badolato, a small town in southern Italy. Ever since 1997, when a group of 825 undocumented Kurdish immigrants landed on its shores, Badolato has exhibited its original politics of welcoming others, thus creating space for the emergence of a strong feeling of being-in-common among both the communities of the locals and of the immigrants. Though a series of bureaucratic vicissitudes eventually halted the social experiment that had become known as "Kurdolato," I argue that a distinctive politics of coexistence between locals and immigrants continues to characterize that reality. In concluding Chapter VI I have presented some reflections based on the ethnographic research that I conducted in Badolato in the summer of 2007. By interviewing both locals and immigrants I gathered valuable information on the opportunities and challenges of framing the encounter with the other outside of a liberal paradigm.

In general, as the goal of this project entailed reflecting on both the hegemony of liberalism and the possible formulation of a counter-hegemonic alternative, it is apparent that such ambitions far exceeded the scope of this work. Nevertheless, I argue that calling attention to the political significance of the expressive infrastructure of liberalism, and in particular on how a liberal grammar contributes to the meta-ideological hegemony of liberalism, is a necessary complement for the prevailing attitude in contemporary political theory to privilege the content of politics over its form. Additionally, I maintain that assuming the notion of the inoperative community as a source of inspiration for the formulation of a desirable alternative to the discursive hegemony of liberalism is a promising starting point for rethinking the dominant paradigms of contemporary political ideologies. On both accounts, much more work needs to be done, and much more intellectual creativity needs to be devised. Yet, it would be a remarkable accomplishment for this project, or for any engagement with contemporary political theory, to destabilize the notion that there can be no alternative to the contemporary hegemony of liberalism.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ENGLISH VERSION

Questions for subset "*hosts*:"

1) Were you born in Badolato?
2) Did you live most of your life in Badolato?
3) If you spent portions of your life elsewhere, why did you come back to Badolato?
4) If you spent portions of your life elsewhere, did you miss Badolato? If so, why?
5) Would you prefer to be richer elsewhere, or poorer in Badolato?
6) When you compare Badolato in your youth and Badolato in its current conditions, what are some of the changes that you notice?
7) Do you believe that the influx of immigrants has helped or hindered Badolato?
8) Would you prefer that more Italians, rather than foreigners, had relocated to Badolato?
9) Are you curious about the immigrants' language, food, traditions, religion?
10) Do you interact with immigrants? If so, how?
11) When you think of your life in Badolato before the immigrants came, and compare it to your life in Badolato now, do you think that the interactions with others have changed who you are? If so, how?
12) What would you think if you/your daughter/your son wanted to marry an immigrant?

Questions for the subset "guests:"

1) Where were you born?
2) Why did you leave your country/town?
3) How did you happen to relocate to Badolato?
4) Had you heard of Badolato before?
5) What, in particular, do you miss of your life before you moved to Badolato?
6) How did you expect your life to be after you relocated?
7) Have the people in Badolato helped you to adjust to the new conditions?
8) Would you prefer to be richer elsewhere, or poorer in Badolato?
9) Being in Badolato, have you been able to preserve your language, food, traditions, religion?
10) Being in Badolato, have you been curious about other languages, food, traditions, religions?
11) Do you interact with Italian Badolatese and/or other immigrants? If so, how?

12) What would you think if you/your daughter/your son wanted to marry an Italian Badolatese, or another immigrant?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ITALIAN VERSION

Domande per la categoria "*hosts*:"

1) Lei e' nato/a a Badolato? ∗
2) Ha vissuto la maggior parte della sua vita a Badolato?
3) Se ha trascorso parti della sua vita altrove, perche' ha deciso di tornare a Badolato?
4) Se ha trascorso parti della sua vita altrove, le mancava Badolato? Se si, perche'?
5) Preferirebbe essere piu' ricco altrove, o piu' povero a Badolato?
6) Se paragona la Badolato della sua gioventu' alla Badolato nelle sue condizioni contemporanee, quali sono alcuni dei cambiamenti che lei nota?
7) Ritiene che l'arrivo degli immigrati abbia beneficiato o ostacolato Badolato?
8) Preferibbe che piu' Italiani, e non stranieri, si fossero trasferiti a Badolato?
9) E' curioso/a rispetto alla lingua, cibo, tradizioni, religioni degli immigrati?
10) Ha interazioni con immigrati? Se si, come?
11) Se pensa alla sua vita a Badolato prima dell'arrivo degli immigrati, e la paragona con la sua vita a Badolato adesso, ritiene che le interazioni con gli altri la abbiano cambiata? Se si, come?
12) Cosa penserebbe se lei / o sua figlia / o suo figlio volesse sposare un immigrato / un'immigrata?

Domande per la categoria "guests:"

1) Dove e' nato/a?
2) Perche' ha lasciato il suo paese/citta'?
3) Come ha scelto di trasferirsi a Badolato?
4) Aveva sentito parlare di Badolato in precedenza?
5) Che cosa, in particolare, le manca della sua vita prima che si trasferisse a Badolato?
6) Come si aspettava che la sua vita sarebbe stata dopo essersi trasferito/a?
7) La gente di Badolato l'ha aiutata ad adattarsi alle nuove circostanze?
8) Preferirebbe essere piu' ricco altrove, o piu' povero a Badolato?
9) Vivendo a Badolato, le e' stato possibile preservare la sua lingua, cibo, tradizioni, religione?

∗ Note: the most formal modality of address is employed in these questions. Actual interaction may vary slightly to take into consideration social expectations about the deference and/or friendliness.

10) Vivere a Badolato ha suscitato la sua curiosita' riguardo alla lingua, cibo, tradizioni, religioni degli altri?
11) Lei ha interazioni con Badolatesi di origine italiana e/o con altri immigrati? Se si, come?
12) Cosa penserebbe se lei / o sua figlia / o suo figlio volesse sposare un/una Badolatese italiano/a, o un altro immigrato / un'altra immigrata?

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