

Reply to Critics

It is a great honour to have elicited comments from such a distinguished assembly of scholars and thinkers, and I feel greatly moved by this.¹ The papers range over a large number of topics and more than one of them leaves me feeling out of my depth, conceptually or in terms of scholarship. To reply to each of them in turn would be a very major undertaking, and though it would no doubt be very rewarding for me, by forcing me to fill gaps in my knowledge and face up to inadequacies of my arguments, it might turn out to be less than readable for others. In the light of this consideration, it has seemed to me best to single out some of the major themes which occur repeatedly in these essays, and comment on the individual criticisms in connection with these themes, thereby paying my critics the compliment of rational opposition (Jane Austen's phrase) which they so amply deserve (unlike the character in the novel who provoked the use of this expression).

The crucial themes would seem to be the following:

- 1) Nationalism
- 2) Segmentation
- 3) Islam
- 4) The nature of modernization and its place in macro-sociology
- 5) The philosophy of the social sciences.

Nationalism

On nationalism, the criticisms include certain objections which arise so frequently that, at the very least, my writings must be open to the suspicion that they frequently provoke opposition, at these points, in the minds of readers. Even if these objections are based on misunderstanding, it is still up to me to reformulate my views in a way which does not encourage such misapprehensions. One of them might be called the Argument from Identity. It runs roughly as follows: my vision of nationalism grossly underrates the emotional intensity of national identification and perhaps, more generally, the role of identity in human life in general. Their nation means so dreadfully much to men! Love of one's country, love of one's nation, is marked by a depth and intensity of passion, which is shamefully travestied by a theory which would make it a mere consequence of the labour market situation in an occupationally mobile society in which work is semantic rather than physical. Did men die, suffer, kill, write poetry, merely so as to enhance their career prospects?

There is a positive chorus on this point. For instance, Nick Stargardt in his essay refers, with moderation, to my 'greater emotional distance' (from nationalism).² Perry Anderson puts it more firmly and squarely:

[Gellner's theory] plainly neglects...the overpowering dimension of collective meaning that modern nationalism has always involved...not its functionality for industry, but its fulfilment of identity...Where Weber was so bewitched by its spell that he was never able to theorize nationalism, Gellner has theorized nationalism without detecting the spell. What was the tragic fate for the one becomes prosaic function for the other. Here the difference between idealist and utilitarian background tells.³

Here Perry lets me have it straight from the shoulder, and does not hesitate to speak *ad hominem*. Well, he does get it right in part, but only in part. He refers earlier in the essay to the difference between cultivated middle classes in Berlin under Bismarck and Prague under Beneš which would account for the difference of tone between Weber and me (and of course I'm greatly flattered by such a comparison).

First of all, let us be clear on this point: both families I spring from were unambiguously petty bourgeois and provincial to boot. The family only

¹ This is an extract from Ernest Gellner's 'Reply to Critics', published in John A. Hall and Ian Jarvie, eds, *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, Amsterdam 1996. The passage on segmentation has been omitted.

² Nicholas Stargardt, 'Gellner's Nationalism: Spirit or Modernisation?', in *ibid.* The author teaches Modern History at the Royal Holloway University of London.

³ Perry Anderson, 'Science, Politics, Enchantment', in *ibid.* The author teaches History at UCLA.

became very precariously middle class in culture (but not yet economically) during my father's generation and in the course of my youth. My father had a degree and so even did some of his sisters, but my mother had only pretty elementary education. Perry is right, an utterly prosaic element and humour are indeed very important in Bohemian life, and this reached me through Czech literature (Hásek, Čapek, Hostovský Voskovec and Werich, Žak, Havlicek, Kopta's novel about the Czech anabasis, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ivan Olbracht's *Nikola Subaj*, and the poet Nezval, whose 52 *Bitter Ballads*, in the style of Villon, came out anonymously when I was about twelve and for a time became my favourite reading), rather than through the family, and it certainly influences my attitude to nationalism and everything else, and may help explain the 'low jokes' (P.A.'s phrase).

But on the crucial factual issue, Perry gets it absolutely wrong: I am deeply sensitive to the spell of nationalism. I can play about thirty Bohemian folk songs (or songs presented as such in my youth) on my mouth organ. My oldest friend, whom I have known since the age of three or four and who is Czech and a patriot, cannot bear to hear me play them because he says I do it in such a schmaltzy way, 'crying into the mouth-organ'. I do not think I could have written the book on nationalism which I did write, were I not capable of crying, with the help of a little alcohol, over folk-songs, which happen to be my favourite form of music. I attend folklore performances from choice, but go to Covent Garden or the Narodni Divadlo only from social obligation or snobbery. I shall argue with what Perry actually says, but the psychological characterization with which he supports his misguided argument happens to be factually up the creek.

Brendan O'Leary makes much the same point: he says that I rely on 'culturally or materially reductionist accounts of the political motivations which produce nationalism'.⁴ Though he notes that I defend myself against an economically reductionist interpretation, he evidently does not think I succeed. Ken Minogue says the same: 'Nationalism as an idea is explicitly the discovery and cultivation of an identity: nationalism as a Gellnerian phenomenon is essentially an instrument for transforming society.'

So once again, I am accused of treating nationalism reductively or instrumentally as something which is basically a means to something else providing 'benefits... in dealing with bureaucrats... and the ability to get jobs'. In fact, the direct, powerful emotional impact of nationalism is something which I both recognize and try to explain.

If various critics (from opposed ends of the ideological spectrum) agree so warmly on the same point then not only must they be wrong, as Oscar Wilde would have said (they are), but they also deserve the compliment of rational opposition. So I must restate my theory of nationalism in a way such as will (hopefully) ensure that this vulgar-materialist reductionist element does not even seem to inhere in it.

⁴ Brendan O'Leary, 'On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism', in *ibid.* The author teaches in the Department of Government, London School of Economics.

Bureaucratic Life

Agrarian life, for the great majority of its participants, is heavily routinized and involves contact with only a small number of social partners. The range of possible messages which pass during social contact is so small that they are familiar to both participants and can be, and generally are, conveyed by context. Precise, finely honed articulation is not required, and the training for it is not available, its practice would be bizarre and offensive. Modern life is quite different: the range of contacts is very large and so is the range of possible messages between interlocutors. Hence both partners must speak the same idiom, and they must be trained to be able to articulate and comprehend context-free messages—no mean skill, one which presupposes prolonged training. Modern life *is* contact with bureaucrats: shop assistants, railway clerks, etc., etc.

It is this which pushes people into nationalism, into the need for the congruence between their own 'culture' (the idiom in which they can express themselves and understand others) and that of the extensive and interconnected bureaucracies which constitute their social environment. Non-congruence is not merely an inconvenience or a disadvantage: it means perpetual humiliation. Only if such a congruence does obtain can one feel 'at ease in one's skin'. Only then is one's personal style of being accepted and endorsed by the environment, only then is one allowed to 'be oneself', without impediment. Nationalism is not explained by the use it has in legitimizing modernization—a view with which I am quite mistakenly credited—but by the fact that individuals find themselves in very stressful situations unless the nationalist requirement of congruence between a man's culture and that of his environment is satisfied. Without such a congruence, life is hell. Hence that deep passion which, according to Perry Anderson, is absent both from my theory and my bosom. As it happens, it is very much present in both of them. The passion is not a means to some end, it is a reaction to an intolerable situation, to a constant jarring in the activity which is by far the most important thing in life—contact and communication with fellow human beings.

The social situation of a peasant was in no way aggravated by the fact that he speaks an idiom distinct from that of his bailiff, landlord, shopkeeper, innkeeper, priest, and local political overlord. They know each other so well that they communicate only too easily, without the use of lucid and explicit prose. The differences in their speech actually help to avoid ambiguities of status and hence friction. The peasant is oppressed and exploited qua peasant, not qua member of this or that cultural category. Provided tribute and corvée are delivered, the recipient is utterly indifferent to the speech employed by those who deliver the goods. All this changes when men move into an economically and politically centralized, mobile, anonymous and egalitarian world. The highly variegated and single-shot ad hoc relationships in such a world are function-related and negotiated rather than hierarchically pre-determined. So the functionally essential base-line egalitarianism (all are in principle equal, inequalities are temporary consequences of the state of play, like positions in a football league table) of mobile, occupationally unstable societies is one of the elements in an argument which leads to the need for a shared, standardized,

politically underwritten 'national' culture. To take part in the game at all, as a *gleichberechtigter* participant, you need to be acceptable and trained at quite a high level in a complex culture with well-defined rules, capable of engendering an infinity of context-free messages.

This way of reformulating the position has a number of advantages apart from constituting a rebuttal of the 'reductionist' criticism. It is also an answer to a criticism not made in these papers but made to me on another occasion by word of mouth, and which ran as follows: the theory is circular in as far as it *presupposes* the very nationalism which it is meant to explain. It assumes that bureaucrats of all kinds (political, economic, educational and others) will be hostile to and prejudiced against those speaking in an alien style, and therefore humiliate and disadvantage them, thus turning them into either assimilationists or irredentist nationalists, or indeed both.

No: irrespective of whatever prejudices bureaucrats may or may not have, in contexts in which context-free communication, ranging over a wide choice of possible messages which are not routinizable, inability to communicate will engender friction and irritation. The prejudice may already have been there in the agrarian situation, but it did not matter much—it did not worsen the peasant's situation. In the circumstances of industrial society, differences in effectiveness of communication will lead to relative advantage and disadvantage, and produce prejudice even if it was previously absent (which may or may not be the case, and hardly matters). Even an initially unprejudiced bureaucrat will eventually become irritated with clients who cannot observe the conventions because they do not understand or respect them, who ignore instructions and signals, and whose own signals are unintelligible.

Furthermore, this formulation also enables me to answer another very frequently encountered criticism, namely, that the theory is 'functionalist'. Brendan O'Leary elaborates this criticism in his essay in great detail and with great sophistication, and then proceeds to offer me a way out. Functionalism is a term people sometimes apply to their own position and it is not clear why it should be a badge of shame. What I think the critics mean is that the theory is *teleological*, that it explains a phenomenon in terms of the needs it satisfied, and this is not acceptable in good science: a need may be demonstrated but it does not bring forth its own satisfaction. Nick Stargardt is very explicit on this: 'it is...Gellner's... teleological assessment of the present and the future which I would dispute...'

I accept entirely this repudiation of teleological explanation: I have many needs which, whatever their urgency or intensity, nature has not deemed fit to satisfy. Bitter experience, quite apart from the canons of scientific propriety, has taught me this unpalatable truth. Needs engender no realities. But my theory does not sin against this. It is straightforwardly causal. Political and economic forces, the aspirations of governments for greater power and of individuals for greater wealth, have in certain circumstances produced a world in which the division of labour is very advanced, the occupational structure highly unstable and most work is semantic and communicative rather than physical. This situation in turn

leads to the adoption of a standard and codified, literacy-linked ('High') idiom, requires business of all kinds to be conducted in its terms and reduces persons who are not masters of that idiom (or not acceptable to its practitioners) to the status of humiliated second-class members, a condition from which one plausible and much-frequented escape route led through nationalist politics.

I welcome Minogue's exceedingly general point in philosophical anthropology. 'When human beings act they act in terms of two general considerations. The first is to achieve something they desire and the second is to present some identity they cherish.'⁵ Amen. This is meant to be a criticism of my position, in as far as I am viewed as a reductionist, who would see the national passion as a mere tool either for individual professional advancement or collectively, for the attainment of modernity. My view is not, as Ken Minogue claims, that nationalism is a tool for the transformation of society: it is the consequence of a certain kind of transformation which does not happen through primarily ideological causes at all.

Far from down-playing identity in human motivation, I would go further and say that it is far more fundamental and important than desire. Human beings as such seldom have aims or desires, over and above a certain very basic and coarse minimum: avoidance of physical pain, death, hunger, thirst. Over and above this, the aims they do have are corollaries of the need to play out a given cultural role. Out of that context, their satisfaction is worthless. Even in the case of those minimal needs dictated by nature—hunger, thirst—the preferred specific form of their satisfaction is imposed by culture, not nature. The contrary idea—that people pursue isolable identifiable 'aims' whose attainment constitutes or leads to contentment—is engendered by a very distinct social condition, one special culture, namely our own: in a mobile, occupationally unstable economy, with a society without important ascribed ranks, people do indeed pursue 'wealth', because it happens to be the main or only means of securing status and power: hence it seems to make sense to think of men living in pursuit of the 'maximization' of some identifiable quantity. But even in our society this is an illusion—men play out a role, they do not pursue aims—and when the point is generalized for other less mobile, growth-oriented and atomized societies, it becomes a blatant absurdity.

So in a sense I am far more aware of the importance of identity to men than Ken Minogue, who I understand takes seriously *laissez-faire* economic theory (based on the absurdity of man as the aim-pursuing animal). But the point cannot be used as a stick for beating a theory of nationalism, which derives nationalism from the social conditions in which it emerges. You might say that the theory credits men with a certain 'aim', namely, the avoidance of perpetual humiliation. The language of 'aims' is indeed so labile that it can be applied to almost any activity. But a more natural way of putting the point is to say that under conditions of industrial mobility of labour and the pervasiveness of semantic work, a man whose culture diverges from that of the surrounding bureaucracies simply is not

⁵ Kenneth Minogue, 'Ernest Gellner and the Dangers of Theorising Nationalism', in *ibid.* The author is Emeritus Professor of Political Science, London School of Economics.

allowed to play out his role—he is ever interrupted and never heard, his role is not endorsed and confirmed by his social partners—and by restoring harmony between his own and the surrounding political cultures, he ensures that henceforth he will get all the prompts, responses and so forth, to make him feel that he and his role are accepted, valued, and that he is receiving all the encouragement required for carrying on with full confidence. No wonder he is a nationalist.

So the importance of identity as such cannot be turned against this theory. Nationalism did not invent identity, any more than it invented the wheel. Both of these pre-date nationalism by a considerable length of time. Yet identity is relevant to nationalism. Nationalism has profoundly changed *the nature of that with which men identify*. Previously they identified, roughly, with their location in a social hierarchy, in a structure of positions. The fact that their ‘culture’ (style of speech, dress consumption, and so forth) was not the same as that of occupants of other nearby positions did not undermine a person’s confidence in the continued occupancy of his own niche: on the contrary, it reinforced it. Cultural differences sustained political cohesion, rather than putting it under stress. They were markers which helped identify the position and differentiate it from its neighbours: they greatly helped him to slot himself into the right place, and to stop others usurping that place. Now, suddenly, men live in a musical-chairs world in which they only occupy locations very briefly, without firm or deep commitment, but what does matter to them is their mastery of and acceptability in a culture, which delimits the range of positions within which they may settle without discomfort and objection. It is this which engenders nationalism (preoccupation with culture-membership and the political protection of the culture and the collectivity it defines). Nationalism heralds not the coming or reaffirmation of identity, but a novel and peculiar form of it, incompatible with old political forms and engendering new ones.

Ken criticizes me for my dismissal of nationalist *theories*, which I combine with the claim that industrialism ‘casts a long shadow’ ahead of itself (by asking how that shadow could ‘take any other form than an idea on which some prediction or expectation is based’?) The shadow cast ahead of itself by industrialism is the image of an affluent, powerful commercial society, in which traders and producers are not profoundly subjected to a non-economic but exploitative ruling class. Thus for instance, Greek navigators and traders on say the island of Hydra, when they supported and financed the Greek nationalist revolution, must have been fully aware that traders in, say, Marseilles were safer, freer and richer than they, and the idea that they would share these advantages in a Greek, non-Ottoman state, if they succeeded in creating it, could hardly have been long in coming. It did not require theoretical ideas about nationalism.

The ‘Disease’ of Rationalism

Other Levantine traders sought Western protection by seeking citizenship of outside powers and sheltering under the ‘capitulations’. It was perfectly logical for Greek traders in areas where they were endowed with an extensive Hellenic hinterland, to seek, a so to speak, collective capitulation in the form of a nation-state. At the first try, they even

attempted it in an area where they weren't even favoured by the ethnic hinterland—in present day Romania. Special local factors do modify situations, but this does not destroy the underlying similarity of modern nationalisms. It is in this way that I invoke the 'shadow' to face what unquestionably is a problem for my theory, namely, that Balkan nationalism ante-dates local industrialism proper. Others, such as Miroslav Hroch, have made this criticism. I happen to be aware of the fact that Nauplia in 1830 (or now, for that matter) did not resemble Manchester. Ken castigates the 'shadow' argument as a 'monster-barring' device (the phrase is Imre Lakatos's). But monster-barring is a perfectly legitimate procedure when not carried to excess. Better a theory which needs to refine its terms so as to cope with given problems, than an approach which insures itself against all and any bets from the very start, by its own theory of knowledge. The central thesis of the Oakeshottism which Ken professes is immune to all facts and needs never bar any monsters. And that brings me to my deepest disagreement with Ken.

It is worth stressing that my disagreements with Ken Minogue are far deeper than this and go well beyond mere divergences on the subject of nationalism. That is merely the tip of a much bigger and quite interesting iceberg. It is not a matter of just having diverse theories of the same object, 'nationalism'. My critics do not hesitate to offer depth-intellectual diagnoses of my position, and I see no reason why I should deprive myself of the pleasure of doing the same unto them. Ken Minogue is an Oakeshottian, and an antipodean, originally rooted in New Zealand and Australia. These two traits are connected, as I shall try to show.

Oakeshott first: the Oakeshottian mode of practising the study of politics is eccentric within the social sciences. Other social sciences by and large simply take for granted the hypothetico-deductive model of inquiry: there is an external world, we postulate theories about it and test them against the available facts. These are simply the underlying conventions of normal contemporary discourse which it would be bizarre to spell out. They go without saying. It also follows that if a theory is true, it has legitimate implications for political practice. These assumptions are widely taken for granted as completely uncontentious, obvious and uninteresting, like speaking prose. But they happen to be emphatically repudiated by Michael Oakeshott: valid political knowledge somehow emanates from practice and only from practice, which remains sovereign, and cannot be fully verbalized or verbally transmitted. If verbalized, it accompanies and perhaps adorns the practice but in no way exhausts it or provides access to its mastery. You have to *belong* before you can know in a serious or laudable sense. The denial of these Oakeshottian counter-conventions is characterized as 'Rationalism' and is described as a disease which has spread since the Middle Ages, doing us all great harm. It feeds on the insecurity of incompetent new entrants on the political scene who seek helps from 'cribs' which would tell them what to do, thereby encouraging the 'rationalist' illusion that genuine knowledge can be independent of the embeddedness of the practitioner in his social position, and that it can be conveyed, learnt and applied through abstract formulation.

Genuine knowledge on this Oakeshottian view really is a form of belonging (to a 'tradition'). Belonging is knowledge really, whereas the pursuit of

and attempts at implementing abstract knowledge betrays *not*-belonging and only makes everything worse: the supposed remedy aggravates the disease. Efforts to interfere in practice count as 'ideology' (bad!). There appear to be four forms of knowledge: 'practical' (good, very good, in possession of ruling classes habituated to handling power), but imbibed through prolonged membership and participation only, and not really articulable; 'technical' knowledge, communicable but (therefore?) inferior, for servants really; philosophical, also good but destined to remain separate from practice, any attempt to implement it constituting a kind of pollution, and betraying the unworthiness of him who attempts it; and ideology, invented by insecure arrivistes in the vain hope of compensating for their lack of membership. They try to use it as a guide and so are addicted to harmful interference. Bound never to succeed, they do however inflict a lot of damage in the process of trying. The entire content of 'political education', a phrase which figured in the title of his Inaugural Lecture is to teach us not to try, and to snub those who do. It is astonishing that so simple a lesson should require a three-years honours course for its transmission.

This curiously mystical and hierarchical theory of knowledge, within which what is worth saying cannot be said and what can be said is hardly worth knowing, is at the very heart of the whole style, and makes its practice quite discontinuous from other organizationally neighbouring disciplines and not really capable of communicating with them on equal terms. (Yet this eccentric set of conventions is put forward as a kind of constitutional or entrenched law, which defines legitimate moves, so that the propounder cannot lose and the opponent cannot win...) Most of us live, most of the time, in a world in which it is assumed that objective and articulable knowledge is available and symmetrically accessible to all enquirers and, if valid, is eligible for applied use. These assumptions, held to be uncontentious and trivial in normal discourse, are repudiated by Oakeshott and his followers, and replaced by a different set which sounds as if it were part of the same language. In reality, it is endowed with rules so different that it really becomes another language altogether. Its users speak a different tongue, bound by distinct and strange rules: in practice, however, they tend to be bilingual and switch to Ordinary-Speak (hypothetico-deductive conventions) when convenient whilst falling back on the ineffable depths when in difficulties. The ordinary post-Enlightenment decencies of scholarly discourse are spurned: why shouldn't they be, when Oakeshott has made his contempt for the Enlightenment plain? Enlightenment rationalism is *the* enemy.

The trouble is that not everyone is aware of all these strange conventions and sometimes this strange currency is taken as locally minted, and sometimes it is less than clear just which currency is used for adding up the bill. All too often, the acolyte practitioners themselves are liable to switch from one language to another without noticing they have done it (a common habit of many bilinguals) and they do not really know themselves which mode they are in. I fear that applies to Ken, as for instance when he is puzzled concerning why I should need a *theory* of nationalism at all. After all, ideologies are aberrations which need no theory; like weeds they just happen. At the same time, he reproaches me for the view that in the distinctive case of nationalism, theory does not matter;

because objective social factors act directly on individuals, without being much affected by the theories which those individuals may happen to hold. In an Oakeshottian context, the idea that one might understand the objective circumstances of a social process is alien: one communes with tradition, one contemplates philosophies (it is not clear why, given their inherent irrelevance to reality), but the idea or aspiration to an objective sociology is absent, indeed abhorred. Ken's two criticisms—I seek a theory of nationalism, and I ignore theories of nationalists—might seem mutually incompatible, but it makes sense if one knows a bit about the extremely idiosyncratic and only in part coherent conventions of Oakeshottian discourse. But if you treat Oakeshott-speak as ordinary-speak, you are liable to be sorely puzzled and to get it all wrong.

Oakeshott's substantive theory is encapsulated in his theory of knowledge, which in turn is presented as universally valid for all possible worlds: it implies a very definite vision of society, in turn heavily loaded with practical political consequences, which however are presented with an air all at once Olympian and innocent. Formally relativistic and given to confining both theorizers and practitioners within the bounds of their tradition and its own inner but specific truth and norms, in fact this theory, like other relativisms, grants itself a non-relativistic meta-theory, which in turn is heavily loaded with practical implications: a traditionalistic society is presupposed within which no reforms in the light of abstract ideals or moral symmetry are allowed. Others are denounced for untoward interference in concrete politics (and told that they do it on account of their lowly origins, insecurity and incompetence), but the Oakeshottian condemnation of contemporary trends he dislikes is presented as simultaneously coming from On High and yet also sublimely neutral. In fact, it is nothing of the kind, though it does vacillate between saying that the modern world cannot exist at all, and that it is nasty and ought not exist.

Blind to Modernity

What exactly is that modern world which is both denied and damned? This is highly relevant to what may perhaps be the deepest disagreement between Ken and me. Ken criticizes me for overrating the importance of the chasm between traditional and modern society: it is, says Ken, but one of many possible distinctions which can be made, and this interpretation is no more important than many others that can be offered. Nothing could be further from the truth. A world doomed to starvation, inequality, oppression and superstition, and one in which something more or less resembling Oakeshott's epistemology does alas apply—there is not much knowledge over and above 'intimations' contained in 'traditions'—is totally different from a world in which affluence and liberty are at least possible, and within which there is genuine knowledge, independent of any one tradition and transcending them all. This is by far the most important fact concerning our world, and a social theory which denies it is worthless. Any genuine social thought must start from this point.

Ken's blindness to it springs from the fact that he is so *totally* a part of modernity—originating in one of those European settler communities which had forgotten to bring the ancien regime along with them—that he takes it so much for granted that it is quite invisible to him, and this

makes it possible for him to adopt the idiom of Oakeshott's ostrichism, the denial, in effect, not merely of the Enlightenment but also of the Reformation, of revealed transcendence-claiming religion, and of Greek thought. The settler societies which, happily for them, failed to bring even traces of the ancien regime along with them, consequently cannot really imagine it, and take their own liberties for granted, as parts of the human condition. The Americans were an extreme example, when they proclaimed the historically eccentric values of the Enlightenment to be 'self-evident', but the same illusion can also be found in other settler societies. In Sydney, if the words Bourbon or Romanov are mentioned, they can only mean whisky or vodka. No one will think that these terms could possibly refer to a social order. The type of society these names suggest simply is not within the realm of the imaginable or for that matter the thinkable in Sydney. How on earth could people like that (i.e. Ken) understand the problem of politics, which is—how does one escape from such societies?

One curious consequence of all this is that Oakeshottian political philosophy only consists of one proposition and a negative one at that—no political *theory*, in our normal sense of the word, is possible. What is worth knowing cannot be said, and what can be said is not worth saying. We can do philosophy (no applications, mind!) and retrospective history (the owl of Minerva only looks backwards) but nothing else. All rival theories are wrong, not because they are factually incorrect (a small matter), but because they go against this basic schema which defines the very rules of the game. Crawl back into your tradition-cocoon, for that is all there is or ever can be. Oakeshott in fact somewhere or other says as much, more or less in these words: a political tradition can only save itself with resources from within itself. There is and can be no external salvation. (This generalization concerning the limits of possible political action is never tested, and the undefined nature of its crucial term—tradition—would make such testing difficult or impossible. Within the system, the generalization is simply an axiom or a tautology.)

It is widely held that Oakeshott is attacking modern rationalism: in fact, his arguments apply at least as much to 'Axial', founded universalistic salvation religions which proclaim a uniquely valid truth and an omnibus, open salvation independent of, indeed antagonistic to, the social incarnation of the beneficiary. Oakeshott obscures this by re- and misinterpreting Christianity in a manner which makes it simply a way of life, and not a transcendent correction or indeed abrogation of a way of life. All messianic, chiliastic, missionary, universalistic, puritan elements are expurgated from this bizarrely bowdlerised Oakeshottian version of Christianity, which is reduced to tea on the vicarage lawn. On such a view, from which all intellectual passion has been excised, how on earth can we have the slightest understanding of the dynamics of Western history?

Ken actually alludes to this general view, which guides his argument though a bit coyly and with a surprising but endearing touch of hesitant, becoming diffidence (which would be altogether alien to the Master), when he observes 'Political ideas, one might almost say, *ought* to be uninteresting to philosophers. They ought to be so tied to the circumstances of the lives of those involved as to lack true universality.' (The puzzling and endearing element in these sentences is the hesitant 'almost'.) He

then goes on to say that an Oakeshottian theorist of nationalism, the late Elie Kedourie (whom, like Ken, I am proud to have counted a friend), saw nationalism as it is in historical reality, whereas I only see 'a *theorized* social condition: in other words his (E.G.'s) own idea of the social evolution of man.' (Emphasis in the original.)

Oakeshottians grant themselves privileged access to historical reality, but consign others to the realm of ideology. For some strange reason they also approve of abstract philosophy, provided (by some curious amputation of obvious implications of philosophical theories) they make no difference to practice, which is reserved for hereditary practitioners. This in Oakeshott's case led to a curious view of Plato and Kant as not intending to have any application of their views: Kedourie was more consistent as far as Kant was concerned, crediting him with concrete political applications which he condemned, though I believe him to be mistaken concerning what those consequences really are. Now I cannot accept my implied demotion to another realm: Ken, Elie and I all live in the same realm (I refuse to be expelled), and our theorizing has equal rights and, in the end, facts and nothing else will decide who is right. Kedourie's account of nationalism is as theoretical as mine: he holds it to be the consequence of the ideology, I hold it to be the consequence of profound social changes. I will not allow a theory to be condemned simply by an altogether a priori and invalid epistemological meta-theory, which was very much Oakeshott's way and which alas is taken over by Ken. You'll have to work a bit harder than that.

Kedourie's theory invokes political thought of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mine invokes larger social rather than intellectual changes. I like to think that we stand as equals before the bar of historical evidence, and that I cannot be ruled out of court merely in virtue of the kind of evidence I use, rather than by its accuracy and relevance. But Oakeshottian epistemology which provides the main premise for his view of politics has precisely this effect (and, I would add, function): as Noel Annan once elegantly put it, it ensures that all rival players are automatically off-side and Oakeshott cannot lose.

On Oakeshott's own brazenly and explicitly formulated principles, theorizing should be restricted to those immersed (three-generations participation-residence is the minimum entry qualification) in the practice of the tradition in question. I did once ask Elie Kedourie how he could accommodate himself to such a view. He replied that Oakeshott was such a nice man that he could not possibly have meant it (though it is in print!). A strange defence indeed. Yet the overwhelming majority of distinguished Oakeshottians accepted by the Master have roots in places such as Chicago, Sidney and Baghdad. The Master himself had, it appears, a Fabian father and went to a progressive school, so non-U that my own very marginal and incomparably more non-U grammar school played it at rugby (I remember playing against them). Individualist liberal egalitarian values are so deeply embedded in settler societies that their members treat them as self-evident (one of them said as much in its Declaration of Independence). This point is often made about the USA but it applies equally to the antipodean Dominions. Consequently their members can on occasion flirt with politics and epistemic hierarchy: it gives them a

frisson but inspires no fears for the liberal values are so self-evident that they cannot be precarious. They can be kicked with impunity. There is a curious similarity between left revolutionary romanticism (as of 1968) and romantic reaction. The Enlightenment can be spurned, because it is, in complacent and insular fashion, taken for granted.

There are no significant differences, as far as I can see, between my position on nationalism and that of Michael Mann.⁶ Apparent disagreements are in part simply terminological: I used the term 'industrialization' in a broader sense which includes the earlier commercialization of society, which only also become 'industrial' in a narrower sense (power machinery, large-scale production) later, thereby however allowing the social changes already initiated by commercialism to be preserved, extended and to become entrenched.

It is, however, true that I did not stress sufficiently (without however being unaware of) the importance of a certain kind of centralizing state for both cultural homogeneity and for the emergent awareness of the importance for each individual of partaking in the culture of the state and nationalism. A process of this kind presumably accounts for the cultural unification of Han China, for the Latinization of the Western Roman Empire and the Hellenization of the Eastern and Byzantine empire. This process in the Hapsburg empire, with the replacement of Latin by German, initially led to a *Landespatritismus*, at first intertwined with a linguistic ('ethnic') nationalism which, however, in the end replaced it altogether. Political centralization, the imposition of a bureaucracy with standardized recruitment procedures and written idiom and its replacement of power-holders with a local power base, unquestionably constitutes part of the preconditions of nationalism. A state committed by its very manner of operation to cultural *Gleichschaltung* is not merely an effect of a new socio-economic system, but also an important independent cause. On this point, I am glad to have learned much from Michael Mann's work, and thanks to him, am unlikely to commit this error again in the future. One should also add Protestantism (and its emulation in other denominations and faiths) as a similarly important precondition.

Oppression and Cultural Differentiation

Brendan O'Leary's essay I read with admiration, and a certain puzzlement—why is the tone of the essay that of a critic when in fact I find myself in agreement with virtually every line? Sometimes this can be explained as what I would describe as a misinterpretation of my views: this obviously applies to the 'reductionist' charge. Because I endeavour to explain nationalist sentiments as a consequence of social conditions, this in no way means that I consider those sentiments anything other than deep, passionate and sincere, and capable of leading those under their sway to perform remarkable acts, whether of heroism, self-sacrifice, or brutality. There must be, in many people, a kind of Kantian assumption that anything explicable is less than authentic, and therefore that social explanation devalues nationalism. In as far as I hold nationalism to

⁶ Michael Mann, 'The Emergence of Modern European Nationalism', in *ibid.* The author teaches sociology at UCLA.

be the consequence of historically specific conditions, it does indeed follow that it is not inherent in human nature as such. If that is a 'reduction', then let the charge stick, but not if it means anything more.

In close connection with this, O'Leary claims that once I admit that 'repression, as opposed to blocked social mobility' helps cause nationalism, my theory is somehow in trouble. This does not seem to me to be the case. The point is, the repression itself is a corollary of a nationalism-engendering situation. In stable, hierarchical, agrarian societies blocked mobility, in other words people knowing their place and being restricted to it, is in the main felt to be normal and accepted. The fact that the place is identified with the aid of cultural differences does not aggravate the situation: on the contrary, it diminishes friction by endowing the system of status with clear markers. Come modernity, i.e. mobility and eventually, semantic work, both the restriction of people to their ascribed social locations and the indication of those locations by cultural markers come to be experienced as oppression. Being resisted, the oppression may indeed have to be intensified. But the role of repression as catalyst of nationalism does not, to the best of my understanding, present problems for the theory. Oppression is not some kind of independent and additional factor: cultural differentiation, inoffensive under the old intimate social order, is automatically experienced as oppression in the age of anonymity, mobility, and pervasive bureaucratization with a standardized idiom.

My greatest difficulty with O'Leary's position perhaps concerns his sentence that 'Nationalism is, firstly, the doctrine that nations should be free'. O'Leary seems to endorse the statement in as far as he affirms in his final conclusion, that 'Nationalism is the major form in which democratic consciousness expresses itself in the modern world'. My trouble with this is not that I do not wish nations to be free, but that I do not believe nations exist universally, as a kind of basic component of social furniture. (Elsewhere on his penultimate page, O'Leary concedes this.) It is not what the statement asserts but what it presupposes (the universal existence of discrete nations) which is the problem. In the past, men found their identity in other things, and they may do so again. When they were deprived of freedom, it was not qua members of this or that nation that they experienced their deprivation: slavery is painful in itself and it is not necessarily or generally aggravated by the carrying of an ethnic label. We should not make nationalists a present of their ontology. It is not universally applicable, and to accept a principle which implies the contrary, means that we start from false premises.

With Anthony Smith, there is I think a deep disagreement, but I suspect it lies beyond any simple resolution by argument.⁷ (As I am meant to supply relevant autobiographical detail, perhaps I may say that I feel very great pride in the fact that I supervised Anthony's PhD, which eventually saw the light of day as *Theories of Nationalism*.)⁸ Anthony feels a reverence for the past. I do not spurn it, but am more neutral towards it.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, 'History and Modernity: Reflection on the Theory of Nationalism' in *ibid.* The author teaches at the European Institute, London School of Economics.

⁸ A. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, London 1981.

Perhaps one can make some progress here by separating two distinct issues. One is the genuineness of the historical recollections which enter the self-images of nations. Smith is a kind of obverse of the 'invention of tradition' school, perhaps even of Renan with his doctrine of the ethnogenetic power of oblivion. Are the elements which enter into the collective representations of the past genuine or not? A Russian friend assures me that the folk recollection of the Tatar yoke was created by Czarist education in the nineteenth century. Do Czechs 'remember' the White Mountain or do they think they remember it because they learn about it in school?

The answer to questions of this type probably varies from case to case. My own attitude has tended to be that for the purposes of understanding modern nationalism, it did not matter, that an invented tradition is as good as a 'real' one, and vice versa. Anthony Smith feels a laudable reverence towards the real past and evidently feels that a genuine affinity between the present soul, the past, and the themes which bring them together, is significant. No doubt such a respect makes one more sensitive, less reductionist, and is to be welcomed. To what extent the thesis of 'real' continuities can stand I am not clear, and I certainly would not wish (and happily, do not have the power) to prejudge the issue.

Mixed up with this issue is another one, which is also important and ought not to be confused with it: in nationalism, there is, as so to speak, generic nativism—irrespective of the historical validity of nationalist myth relating specifically to this or that nation, there is also a yearning for an agrarian past, for rootedness as such. In a curious way, this is reflected in contemporary national disputes: conflicts over territory cannot be resolved by a simple counting of heads. I call this the Potato and Reindeer principle: groups that grazed reindeer over a given stretch of land, or grew potatoes in it, have mixed their cultural souls with it more deeply than populations which only produced tractors or computers on the same area. One hunter equals say twenty industrial workers, one peasant equals five of them. Some such formula may have to be applied in disputes between aboriginal, peasant and modern-labour-migrant populations. Smith's approach enables us to do some justice to this. [...]

Islam

With Talal Asad's essay [...] what seems to be at issue is largely a matter of research strategy: my aspiration is to find general models (rightly or wrongly, I believe there is one to be found for traditional Islam), whereas Talal thinks the diversity is more important; and partly, he favours something like a 'discursive tradition' as a key concept whilst I remain loyal to the simple notion of structure. I see no harm in mutual tolerance.⁹

As, however, I here been asked to supply some autobiography as well as replies, I would like to offer my recollection of my first encounter with Talal Asad. He came to see me when he was still a student for advice. I learnt that his father had been both in Saudi and in Pakistani service, and

⁹Talal Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam', in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*. The author teaches in the Department of Anthropology at the New School for Social Research, New York.

supposed that in virtue of this Talal could have access to either a Saudi or Pakistani passport, or even both. My advice could hardly have been more cynical: international organizations need to recruit to some extent in a manner which ensures that all countries are represented. By using one or the other of these passports, this promising young man could secure interesting and advantageous employment. I am pleased to reflect after the passage of quite a few decades, that Talal Asad very properly ignored my shamelessly opportunist advice, and became a distinguished anthropologist instead, from whose work I have learned a great deal.

Charles Lindholm's elegant paper does not in one way offer me any challenge, in as far as he says that he accepts my 'Khalidunian model of oscillation between centre and periphery in Middle Eastern culture', and so does not promise any disagreement.¹⁰ Nonetheless there may be room for some fertile debate. He extends the ideas we share in an astonishing direction: I cannot follow him there, but find the ideas original and very intriguing.

First of all, I am not sure I should accept his initial formulation: the oscillation in traditional Islam is not so much between centre and periphery, as between a high form of the faith—monotheist, scripturalist, unitarian, puritan, anti-mediationist—and a low form, spiritually pluralist, addicted to mediation and ritual and magic. Each of these forms has its own relationship to centre and periphery: the high version is the normal style at the centre but is adopted by the periphery during occasional periods of religious excitation. Nor am I fully convinced by the statement credited to Meeker and alleged to express anthropological consensus that in Morocco 'there was an absence of legitimate political authority'. A fair proportion of Moroccan dynasties managed to be fairly long-lived, including the present one, and, though political power was indubitably fragile, there was frequently a curious coexistence of lack of obedience with religious respect. There is some kind of recognition of the religious legitimacy of central authority, combined with a tendency in the past to defiance. It does not seem to me true to say that tribal cohesion is left unexplained by Ibn Khaldun, as a kind of brute fact. He makes it plain that in the desert, where no one enforces the law, where there is no militia, a group must either be cohesive or perish. Those that persist must have had cohesion. And is it true that European peripheral peoples felt 'powerless in relation to the state'? This is not my image of Highland Scotland or the Swiss cantons of Abruzzi or Montenegro or Mani or Albania or the Gurali.

The point at which Lindholm becomes seriously contentious and original is when he credits the townsman with the same values as the tribesman: here he clearly parts company with Ibn Khaldun. Here there is a clear denial of the disjunction between urban and tribal society. No doubt there were indeed associations within the city, in guilds, Sufi orders, neighbourhoods and so forth. But is it really plausible to claim that these bonds 'remained as potent in the city as in the hinterland'? Why then were they less capable of engendering corporate groups and holding the state to

¹⁰ Charles Lindholm, 'Despotism and Democracy: State and Society in the Pre-Modern Middle East', in *ibid.*

account? Why was the *raya* so easy to milk, unlike the tribesmen? Lindholm sees trade, which indeed was important, generating a pluralistic civil society. Why then was the state so despotic, as he himself describes it?

Lindholm is heading for a paradox, as he himself notes. The despotic Middle Eastern state is normally explained by the supine, atomized nature of urban society, rendered more so by the fear of the cohesive internally civic but externally rapacious tribesmen. The townsfolk are too frightened of the tribesmen at the gate to consider combining and resisting the sultan. Lindholm paradoxically claims that the whole of Muslim society is endowed with the virtues and cohesiveness normally only credited to self-administering tribesmen. Nonetheless, the stereotype of the state remains valid. Tocqueville's account of the Americans would apparently apply, more or less, to the individual member of a Middle Eastern society, and yet the political consequences are not at all similar. How is this possible?

Lindholm's answer: *because* the Middle Eastern state lacks legitimacy (partly at least because its leaders failed to live up to the promise of early Islam) the civic spirit which does characterize the individual fails to be translated into civic loyalty and responsibility. The denial of the legitimacy of secular government causes problems when politics ceases to be merely local. For, 'the despotism characteristic of the Middle Eastern government is a corollary of the deep-seated insecurity of rule in this highly egalitarian and democratic context...' The traits which, according to Tocqueville, made democracy in America work were present in Muslim society and indeed pervasive, but when conjoined with a total distrust of government and its actual disability, have exactly the opposite effect. Because Middle Easterners are democrats at home and in their hearts, they tolerate tyranny in the larger public sphere, and indeed aspire to be tyrants if possible. The larger public sphere is not one in which virtue has any place or could be practised. They have despaired of the public sphere and expecting the worst, then suffer it, indeed engender it. And Lindholm unquestionably has a point when he says that 'in the Middle East the state was in large measure constructed in opposition to as well as derived from precisely those small-scale democratic polities that it sat precariously upon'. He might have quoted Ibn Khaldun's splendid definition of the state as the institution which prevents injustice other than such as it inflicts itself. And if there is nothing to be hoped for from the secular state, there may on the other hand be hope in 'renewed Islam' which would break through the vicious circle of self-confirming encouraging uncivil conduct in all those obliged to deal with it.

Lindholm ends with noting that, whereas modernization led to secularism in Europe, it had the opposite effect in Islam—a point wholly valid, and which constitutes one of the most interesting features of our current scene. But then he argues—in the end, could not the revived religiosity lead to a strong civil society, as happened in Tocqueville's America? Instead of contrasting secular liberal Europe with fundamentalist authoritarian Islam, one should say instead—religious democratic America, therefore, in the end, religious democratic Islam. This ignores the fact that the puritans in America saw themselves as minorities seeking toleration, and sprang from a tradition which, after the failure of the English revolution, gave up the idea

of imposing righteousness on the entire society. Muslims belong to a majority and conceive themselves to be labouring under that very obligation.

Lindholm, as he recognizes, says not merely that Ibn Khaldun did apply in the Middle East (where I fully agree) but that so does Tocqueville, not in what he said about Algeria, but in what he said about America. Tocqueville knew a lot about Algeria and wrote about it with very great perceptiveness, even though, alas, he himself never assembled his Algerian observations into a single coherent volume. They remain dispersed. But perhaps the main argument against Lindholm is that indeed Tocqueville never wrote a book called *Democracy in Algeria*. If Lindholm were right, such a companion volume to *Democracy in America* would have been entirely appropriate, and it would have been strange indeed for Tocqueville to have refrained from writing it.

I do not accept Lindholm's paradox: the trouble in Islam is that the puritans are not civic and those who are civic are not puritan. Puritans flourish in atomized political contexts which do not constitute a civic education, whilst the famous cohesion emerges in rural contexts not normally favourable to puritanism. So there would seem to be little prospect of a Tocquevillian democracy sustained by puritanism. The alignments are quite different. The Khaldunian disjunction continues to hold. I cannot accept the assimilation of the tribals and the urbans to each other, and cannot believe that the new wave of fundamentalists will bear the same political fruits as did the Pilgrim Fathers. It is hard to believe that if, for instance, the FIS prevails in Algeria, Algiers will become a new Boston. It is a nice idea but I cannot quite see it happening. But Lindholm's paradox does make one think, which is the function of paradoxes—and it is a pleasure to read.

I have already commented on Perry Anderson's observations about nationalism; here it would be appropriate to note his remarks on Islam. He makes a number of criticisms: my view of traditional Islam is too heavily influenced by the Maghreb, and takes insufficient note of the Middle East proper with its extensive peasantry and, above all, its long-lived Ottoman empire. My answer would be that the Ottoman Empire was only a counter-example in some of its privileged regions—the Nile valley, Western Anatolia, parts of the Balkans. In other and very extensive regions the world of Ibn Khaldun—fragile, weak political power, local self-administration, towns politically weak for fear of tribes—lived on under the surface, and often above it. He expressed doubts about my contention that Islam escapes secularization, and suggests that it is bound to be 'decommissioned' by science and consumerism. I have no wish to be dogmatic about the future which may yet prove him right: but the evidence so far goes against him—notably the tendency of fundamentalists to triumph over nationalists. Peace in the Middle East has made advances in part just because two nationalisms prefer each other to the fundamentalists waiting in the wings. The fundamentalist option, in a chaotic world, has to be taken seriously, and Islam exemplifies the most powerful form of it. I do find Khomeini's thought impressive (which of course is not to say that I like its conclusions). The fact that an apostate can be hounded strikes me as a sign of strength, not weakness. Clearly Perry thinks I am too favourable to Islam, partly because I am insufficiently sensitive to the problem of the status of women. This last charge is one to which I can only plead guilty.

Theories of History and Modernization

The essays by William McNeill, Alan Macfarlane and Shmuel Eisenstadt devote themselves to a problem I find fascinating, namely the emergence of our distinctive modern world. McNeill and Macfarlane do not share my pessimism concerning the agrarian world. In some ways, these two important thinkers take *opposite* viewpoints on the crucial issue of the shared traits of agrarian societies. McNeill thinks that the differences in various parts of what he calls the 'ecumenical system' have been exaggerated.¹¹ He concedes 'Early modern Europe was unique to be sure'. The English expression 'to be sure' belongs to an interesting class of phrases like 'I would be the last to suggest', which mean the opposite of what they seem to mean. McNeill is anything but sure that European uniqueness amounted to anything very much. His real point is 'if the particular concatenation of affairs that allowed an explosive expansion of European wealth and power had somehow gone awry... then some other society... within the circle of the Eurasian ecumenical system would surely have come along and pushed the transition to modernity to further heights in much the same way...' McNeill clearly falls on the other side from me along what I think of as the big Hegel-Weber divide: Hegelians, in this general sense, think of modern society as the oak tree which had ever been firmly inscribed in our shared acorns. It was bound to come (at least in Eurasia) come what may. Weberians think that only a special, contingent social mutation allowed the modern development.

McNeill observes that though my book is entitled *Plough, Sword and Book*, I am really only concerned with the book and pay little heed to coercion.¹² It is certainly true that I do not go into details concerning the Varieties of Coercive Experience, and certainly do not possess a mastery of this area remotely comparable to McNeill's. But my failure to go into details is not only due to ignorance, but also to the fact that I hold that the agrarian political predicament is, *au fond*, very similar: the stability of technology and the nature of coercive equipment force men either to submit to the concentration of power or to combine in ritually and otherwise stifling communities (or indeed, both of these at once). This thesis, which seems to me important and deserving of sustained scrutiny, explains why, unlike McNeill, I do not think the escape from the idiocy of rural life could easily have happened anywhere, and similarly I do not think, as Macfarlane does, that cultures which avoid the agrarian trap could easily emerge without any 'miracle', or could even have persisted in a kind of perpetual lineage of liberal purity. If Macfarlane ever turns seriously to biological anthropology, I expect him to work out a theory of Whig gorillas who already practised liberal individualism up in the trees and who are the direct ancestors, in uninterrupted line, of modern liberties. There is a certain affinity between Oakeshott's and Macfarlane's insistence on continuity, unnoticed by both these authors. The difference is that, whereas Macfarlane is concerned with the continuity of liberty, Oakeshott favours the continuity of hierarchy and deference to the ineffable. Both seem to me mistaken, but the former is more likeable.

¹¹ William H. McNeill, 'A Swansong for British Liberalism?', in *ibid.* The author teaches at the Department of History, University of Chicago.

¹² Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, Chicago 1990.

Where McNeill reproaches me with failing to see Eurasian homogeneity (interestingly, *Eurasians unite* is also an important theme in some of Jack Goody's recent work, on the basis of material quite different from McNeill's), Macfarlane reproaches me with exactly the opposite sin, namely lumping all agrarian societies together. There is in my work a 'tremendous lumping together of differences in "Agraria" . . . If they are all lumped together...it makes the emergence of modern industrial civilization inexplicable'. (It is, as Tony Wrigley has shown, the early observers of the miracle who noted and understood it, and who are mistakenly treated as its prophets, in fact couldn't believe their eyes and had grave doubts about its long-term prospects.)¹³ Can I be guilty of both sins? Probably I can.

The point is—I am, contrary to Macfarlane's charge, fully aware of the great diversity of agrarian societies. But notwithstanding that diversity, an *argument*, not just an uncritical or ignorant assumption of homogeneity, persuades me that they *cannot* easily or without special favourable circumstances break out of the trap in which they find themselves. The argument is simple. Agrarian society is defined by food production and storage plus a fairly stable technology, and hence by the absence of sustained innovation, hence no mass-production. From this it follows that it must be Malthusian. It must value offspring, or at least male offspring, as a source of labour and military strength, but at a certain point cannot sustain population growth.

From this, consequences follow for its organization and ethos. Its members cannot escape the ever-present threat of hunger by expanding production, because the precondition of sustained, open-ended expansion, namely a growing technology based on science, is absent. That exit being barred, the only possible strategy for individuals and groups within agrarian society is to try and improve their position within it. In Agraria, when famine comes, men starve according to rank. Food consumption is inversely related to status. Within my own lifetime I have been in societies in which members of upper orders were physically bigger than members of lower ones. (The explanation for the fact that in England, Etonians are taller than others is probably different: their fathers and grandfathers more frequently married big, attractive ladies, Gaiety Girls, models, etc.)

The logic of this situation is reflected in the value systems of agrarian societies: 'honour', i.e. preoccupation with status above all else (in the Middle Ages, as Tocqueville put it, nobility was beyond price), high regard for aggressiveness and martial skill, contempt for work. Add to the rule of the Red, the rule of the Black: when writing is added to food production, the storage of ideas and morality in writing freezes the system further, and makes it self-perpetuating.

One should add that agrarian societies can be subdivided into two large classes, those which are centralized, and those in which power is diffused. The first work by creating a monopoly of the tools of coercion in one centre or one stratum, the latter by engendering sub-groups which

¹³ E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Commonwealth*, Oxford 1987.

mutually check each other. In the latter case, though such societies are 'democratic' in allowing or indeed requiring a far more widespread (though seldom if ever universal) political participation, the methods employed to ensure cohesion, i.e. pervasive ritualization and restriction of entry, are quite incompatible with modern notions of liberty, as Fustel de Coulanges showed. The idea that such a society could allow a fully free market in either goods or ideas is absurd. Can you imagine a clever peasant making a corner in all the local potatoes and then, when winter snows cut off the village, starving the laird into submission? No: the peasant will behave in a Chayanovite way and not bother to accumulate a surplus which the local power structure will prevent him from deploying.

The Fate of Agraria

In brief, Agraria is doomed, by the very logic of its situation, to remain what it is. We know, in fact, that we have broken out of it: if the argument showing that this cannot be has some cogency—which to my mind it has—then we must be puzzled concerning the nature of the explanation. Knowing the answer may even be of some practical significance. There are reasons for supposing that the social condition must at some none too distant time restabilize: current liberalism and mobility depend on growth, and there must come a time when further economic improvement has a negligible marginal effect on well being, and the use of wealth as surrogate status also ceases to be effective. Moreover, just as a feebly productive economy *had* to be politically controlled to avoid instability or chaos, similarly an excessively powerful technology and associated productive processes may also need to be brought back under political control. Economic liberalism was possible only during a relative brief transitional age, when technology was just strong enough to replace coercion by bribery, but not yet strong enough to wreck everything. Given the persisting hunger and craving for more affluence, it is difficult to make this termination of growth-orientation imaginatively persuasive, but cold reflection suggests that it must eventually come.

For McNeill, the problem does not really arise: the breakthrough was on the agenda, deep in the social genes of Eurasian society, and was a matter of time and chance just where and when it would happen. Whilst a Chinese breakthrough is imaginable, I for one cannot follow McNeill in visualizing it in Malaya. It takes more than an indented coastline and some traders and pirates to make the modern world. It is attractive to think of Penang as another Venice, but Venice was not enough. Macfarlane does see the problem, but thinks I overstate its gravity: it is not so difficult or rare for agrarian societies to escape that fatality, ascribed to it by my argument, and his own (favoured) society has happily escaped it.

Here, once again, I wish to indulge in the pleasure of ideological analysis of my critics, doing unto them what they often do unto me. Macfarlane is an English *narodnik*, who rightly loves the virtues of English society, but likes to see them inhering in it deeply, above all permanently, an heirloom not an acquisition, rather than seeing them as fruits of the steam-engine (Marxism) or of the sleepless nights of Calvinists pondering their

possible damnation (Weber).¹⁴ It is all much older than that. In his previous work, he has seen English modernity going back to about 1400, with only hints of earlier roots, but in this essay we are told of the possibility of modernity in England in the tenth century (significantly, before the Normans) and an at least 'potentially' modern system throughout Western Europe during the period from the fifth to the eleventh centuries... The whole thrust of Macfarlane's work is to see modernity (liberal individualism) not as an escape from or reaction against a dark stifling hierarchical domination (I have a feeling that such an origin would sully it for him), but as *continuous* with a pure past. Macfarlane would seem to be an heir to those seventeenth-century English radicals who looked back to the liberties of a pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon past. Macfarlane's earlier work scandalized some historians by criticizing the retrospective importation of the *muzhik* to the Home Counties: historians with names such as Kosminsky, Vinogradov and Postan projected Eastern Europe onto medieval England and got it all wrong. (Britons never never never have been Slavs.) Perhaps one should add Aron Gurevich to this list, who turned to the study, not exactly of the Anglo-Saxon, but of their Norsemen cousins, not as the ancestor but as the antithesis of the modern spirit.

For Macfarlane, not only early medieval Western Europe, but some forager societies are modern, and an astonishing passage even goes as far as to hint that a path might lead from hunter-gatherer societies to (modern) Los Angeles... Just as, in local myth, the Rhone is said to pass through the Lake of Geneva, without mixing with its waters, so evidently Alan would like his liberal society to have passed from early to late modernity, never sullied by the mud of agrarian oppression and collectivism, from the fourteenth, tenth, fifth centuries, or ideally, right from the Neolithic revolution...

The aspiration is endearing, and if valid, Macfarlane's message to me—don't worry your head with how they *became* modern, some of us always were like that (he has said something of the kind in discussion) and so never had any need to reschool ourselves for liberty—would indeed follow. I have grave difficulties with this. If Anglo-Saxons were ever free, how did they differentiate themselves from other Teutons, some of whom were not? Or if all Teutons were free (some becoming corrupted in post-eleventh-century continental Europe), then how did the Teutons differentiate themselves from other Indo-European, some of whom most certainly were not friends of liberty (for instance, Persians)? And if these linguistic phenotypes do not correspond to the historical genotypes, the question has to be rephrased, but the problem remains. Macfarlane is clearly attracted by the idea, actually sketched out in this essay, that there has been a continuous Whig tradition from the Neolithic Revolution to our times, preserving and passing on an unsullied torch of liberty. This humanly attractive but historically implausible idea has led him into extremely original and valuable investigations into pre-modern individualism, which aroused the hostility of some historians at least. It is entirely

¹⁴ Alan Macfarlane, 'Ernest Gellner and the Escape to Modernity', in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*. The author teaches in the anthropology department at Cambridge University.

to the good that (what I hold to be) a foible should lead to important and extremely stimulating work. At the same time, however, his desire that this flame of freedom should never have been sullied, leads him normally to evade and disregard and be somewhat dismissive of the problem of how these pro-individualists *became* free. He says, in effect—well they could *always* have been free, continuity is perfectly possible, or alternatively, if not, given the random diversity of social forms in the agrarian age, it was quite possible for this free form simply to emerge, among all the others.

For my part, I hold the thesis of Neolithic Whigs, persisting bulldog-wise from the birth of agriculture to the steam engine to be quite outstandingly implausible, and the Monte Carlo alternative—freedom emerged by accident through agrarian diversity, its number had as good a chance as any other to turn up on the agrarian roulette-wheel—almost as improbable: the miraculousness of individualist liberty in Agraria is not a consequence of it being one of a set of equally viable alternatives, but a consequence of its going against the very grain of agrarian life, and special circumstances not merely had to allow its birth, but help it get around the hump, to pass the Cape, as the French say. Macfarlane's distaste for the thought that he might have non-individualist ancestors impels him to the continuity thesis, and its implausibility, to the easy-random-emergence view. He should choose. But I am proud of having pushed him—against his inclination, I think—into seeing this problem, which must be faced by anyone adopting his views. Whether a weak bilateral kinship system plus an ascetic religion is an adequate answer, I would not know.

Incidentally, it is both odd and regrettable that there is no debate on this issue between him and Jack Goody, who has elaborated a quite different theory of the origins of late medieval individualism: the Church destroys kin groupings by inventing additional degrees of prohibited marriage, thereby acquiring much land, in the form of bequests which would otherwise have stayed with the kin group, and rural individualism is the result.³ If the two social anthropologists who stand at the forefront of rehistoricizing kinship studies produce rival theories concerning the same problem, ought there not to be a confrontation?

Macfarlane's solution is attractive. It is, as he himself points out, a modern version of the separation-of-powers recipe for liberty. The anthropologist adds kinship to coercion, production and religion to the list of institutional zones which need to be autonomous and to balance each other, if liberty and individualism are to emerge. The important thing is that neither kinship nor polity nor religion nor economy should dominate all else. Then you can breathe freely. This can, says Macfarlane, happen even in Agraria and, if it does, all else is plain sailing. I am inclined to agree that such an institutional stalemate is marvellous, but continue to think that the conditions of Agraria militate against it so that an explanation over and above the random play of factors is required if it does happen. The general conditions of agrarian society—scarcity, hence competition and conflict and no escape through growth—all make it exceedingly hard for men to breathe freely. The providential balancing out of powers or institutions, which Macfarlane invokes, is a luxury

³ J. Goody, *The Development of Marriage and the Family in Europe*, Cambridge 1983.

which agrarian society cannot allow itself. It is not allowed to happen even by accident. So if it does happen, we need to know why.

So our research strategies will continue to diverge, he seeking out continuities on the sunny uplands of freedom, whilst I try to find traces of the escape route from the general gulag of Agraria. Ultimately, the difference between us is simple: he thinks of his liberty as a birthright, immemorially inherited, whereas I think of mine as something bestowed upon me by recent and unreliable fortune—and he resents historians who would demote him to my level, even if they date the acquisition of liberty some centuries back. That's not good enough. The Macfarlanes were ever free, and no miracle was called for to liberate them. I know I escaped from the ghetto, Alan hates to think of the Ur-Macfarlane as a *muzbik*. McNeill needs no miracle because it was all fairly easy anyway, Macfarlane wants none because it would be demeaning.

Shmuel Eisenstadt's extremely interesting essay is one I cannot really comment on, for lack of competence: Japan is not an area I have dabbled in, even in my superficial manner.¹⁶ However, its central problem is one which seems to me extremely important, and it is highly desirable that it should be so effectively raised: what explanation is there for the paradox that the most successful case of emulative Westernization should have taken place in a non-Axial civilization, that is, one in which the dominant religious style remained communal or traditional, rather than being linked to a universalistic salvation religion? I am not qualified to discuss the question, which no doubt will have to be faced, concerning whether this characterization is historically defensible, or whether, on the contrary, it can be challenged by invoking the importance of Buddhist or Confucian elements in Japanese life.

If Macfarlane is right, of course, there is hardly any case to answer: if Japan was indeed fortunate enough to escape one of those heavily institutionalized and psychically demanding religions which so often accompany fully developed agrarian societies, the problem should be not how it managed to modernize nonetheless (and fast and effectively at that), but why it had not modernized sooner and even faster. Perhaps this is going too far, in as far as Macfarlane does not claim that all societies which escape the full agrarian incubus are modern, but only, that some of them may be. However, in as far as Macfarlane hints that Japan was specially well equipped for the escape from Agraria, one can only look forward to the publication of his thoughts on this matter. I am little surprised to find Eisenstadt claiming that his approach to Japan is in the Weberian tradition, because I have supposed Weber to believe (I do not know whether he said it in so many words) that whereas some societies endowed with world religion are ill-equipped to modernize, all those *not* so equipped are even more profoundly disqualified. But we have now entered an age when even pre-Axial traditions are revived and invoked as banners of modernizing societies (such as shamanism) and so the kind of problem raised by Eisenstadt here will arise repeatedly.

¹⁶ Shmuel Eisenstadt, 'Japan: Non-Axial Modernity', in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*. The author teaches in the Department of Sociology in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Marxism, Methodism and Gin

Ron Dore, a thinker from whose work I have learnt a very great deal, contributes another essay in this group.¹⁷ Part of the argument here has the same logic as McNeill's: it could all have happened elsewhere, and it might have happened in a non-individualistic style. It seems to me fairly obvious that industrialization could not, on its first occurrence be planned and deliberate, simply because no one realized that such a radically different society was possible at all. What cannot be conceived cannot be intended. A supporting argument (perhaps not fully in harmony with the preceding one) is that *if* it had been anticipated, it would then have been thwarted: it would have been so much in the interest of the power-holders not to allow an order which would deprive them of their power and privilege, that they would have strangled it at birth. From this, I have inferred, perhaps a little too easily, that the initial transformation had to be individualistic (though subsequent emulative ones need not be such). Does it really follow? Could it have been unintended and collectivist, the by-product, say, of an organization eager to enhance its power through military or economic strength, and stumbling upon the new methods by accident? Ron advises us to consider such a possibility, and I am sure he is right. I for one have, in the past, disregarded it far too lightly.

Ron has been pre-eminent among those who interpreted Japan and its success for us. For my part, I always—ever since I thought about these matters at all—suspected that emulative industrialism need not and would not be individualistic, but initially I got it quite wrong concerning the question of just which collectivism would preside over late industrializations. Once, long ago, I thought it would be Marxism. It is not that I ever liked it or supported it, but it seemed to me to have the characteristics—its determinism, ruthlessness, authoritarianism, messianism—which would take a modernizing society through the long bitter years in the wilderness. This was the secular Calvinism of emulative collective industrialization. The English working class might have passed through the years of agony with the help of Methodism or gin, but this wouldn't do elsewhere. I was quite wrong, and learnt from Dore how overtaking was *really* done. Incidentally, my belief is that what converted the Soviet rulers to disestablish Marxism was not merely the failure to catch up, but the demonstration that it could be done, and was being so much more effectively done by others, notably the Japanese. A mild collectivism which does not, like Marxism, engender a single-hierarchy monolith, does seem to fit in with technologically advanced production better than either the fusion or the puritanically severe, formal separation of economy and polity. [...]

I have already commented on Perry Anderson in connection with both nationalism and Islam, but it is also appropriate to consider him here. I accept his point that the kind of solution I favour—affluence, a liberal instrumental state, a tamed nationalism—may be temporary and precarious. I also agree with him about one of the factors which is liable to upset the apple-cart, namely genetic engineering. I would put this more

¹⁷ Ronald Dore, 'Sovereign Individuals', in *ibid.* The author is a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

broadly: the industrial age can be defined as the consequences of the conquest of nature *unaccompanied by the conquest of man*. The human science in which I have spent my life, may be clever, illuminating, interesting and enjoyable, but, so far, their manipulative power is negligible. If this changes, we shall truly be in an altogether new ball game. If, for instance, our tastes and values can themselves be manipulated, the utilitarian model of what life is about ('pursuit of happiness') which underlies consumerism will become unusable: if our aims are themselves a manipulable variable, they cannot—logically cannot—advise us about the direction of our endeavours, the standards which should govern our manipulations.

This will also have other consequences. The possibility of manipulation of humans will probably result in return to much deeper inequality than the one which prevails now in relatively affluent milieux where wealth is little more than a means to or symbol of status. This manipulation will probably be expensive and thus engender an enormous difference between those who can and those who cannot afford it, a difference as great or greater than that which existed in the days when wealth meant the difference between starving and not starving.

Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Ian Jarvie is a thinker to whom my personal debt is quite specially great.¹⁸ Much of his essay is an exposition of my views with which I am not much inclined to disagree. Some of his essay also chides me for misinterpreting Popper and indeed using a travesty of Popper invented by Lakatos. I am not too sure about all this, and perhaps lengthy exegeses, which would have to be textually documented, are not in place here. Jarvie claims that the problem of defining experience does not really arise for Popper, because all that he requires is for our conjectures to 'bump' into the world and teach us that we have conjectured falsely. I am not sure that I find this adequate: our ideas can get into trouble in all kinds of ways, for instance by leading us into trouble socially, and we need some way of sorting out the legitimate condemnations of our views (by experience, reality, what you will) from mere repudiation for other reasons. The identification of a legitimate bump is a way of referring to experience or reality. There is a difference between testing and mere volatility: we need to identify the legitimate judge of ideas and distinguish from arbitrary foes, who might eliminate an idea in the name of something quite illegitimate, or in the name of nothing at all.

However, it might be best to proceed to what Jarvie himself calls a 'deep quarrel', namely the location of the transition to the rational or critical attitude. Popper locates this birth somewhere among the Pre-Socratics, whereas I connect it with the rise of industrial society (in a very broad sense of the term). This is of course far more than a dispute about dating. What is at issue is the relevance of sociology.

First of all, it is apposite to point out that, in the light of some of Popper's views, it is hard to understand why the Open Society needed to

¹⁸ Ian Jarvie, 'Gellner's Positivism', in *ibid*. The author teaches in the Department of Philosophy at York University, Canada.

be initiated, born, at all. If the essence of the scientific method is something as simple as trial and error, and this has always been with us, ever since the amoeba, then why did trial and error need to be reinvented? Why did humans, whom the invention of language enabled to disconnect the idea from its bearer and thus to practice trial and error faster, more effectively, and more painlessly, than pre-human practitioners of trial and error who could only eliminate error by being themselves personally eliminated— why did beings blessed with this great advantage, tumble back into a ‘closed’ way of thinking which evades trial and ignores error? Popper the optimistic evolutionist seems to me to be at loggerheads with the pessimistic prophet of the Open Society. He needs a theory of the Closed Society, and one which is not circular and does not simply explain it by the yearning for security, for the closed tribal womb.

But even if we make him a present of the problematic existence of the Closed Society, there is the issue of the conditions of its demise, and of the emergence of Open Society. Of course, critical thought can and did arise at various times. Greece, Renaissance Italy, perhaps elsewhere. But both the thought itself and the social milieu which sustained it were extremely fragile, and soon disappeared. Serious liberals, eager for a tolerant and participatory society, want more than that. Popper’s somewhat ‘heroic’ attitude to the problem is most unsatisfactory: it makes it sound as if it all depended on the heroism and modesty and self-control of some great teachers, who managed to instil these virtues and values in their disciples. It reeks a little bit of the Great Man theory of history. But we do not wish to be at the mercy of Great Men, who cannot always be trusted (consider the difficulties Popper himself had with tolerating dissent amongst his pupils), and we do not even wish to depend on the virtues of the citizens of the Open Society. The Open Society should have an institutional structure which can tolerate a certain amount of non-virtue amongst its members: after all, it grants them freedom, and there is no telling how some of them will use it.

It is better to live in the world of Mandeville, where private vices can be public virtues, than in the world of Montesquieu, where the republic requires virtues in its citizens. So we must be curious about the institutional preconditions of the Open Society, and we have even made some little progress in that direction. Ian Jarvie is wrong in describing me as a vigorous (if that means indiscriminate) advocate of modernity. The balance sheet of modernity is complex and the items are by no means all on one side of the ledger. I advocate modernity (as an assembly of good, bad and indifferent features) partly because, by now, it could hardly be reversed without mass famine, and partly because it is a precondition, but certainly not a sufficient condition, of liberty. To make it bear the fruits we desire, we need to understand it better, and here, Popper’s dislike of sociology, and his romantic-heroic attitude to the emergence of Openness, does not help very much.

My main difficulty with John Wettersten’s interesting essay is that I simply do not recognize the views attributed to me in it.¹⁹ ‘Gellner holds that we must recognize that thought is determined by and limited by

¹⁹ John Wettersten, ‘Ernest Gellner: A Wittgensteinian Rationalist’, in *ibid.*

the form of life in which it occurs.' As it happens, I hold the *falsity* of the preceding sentence to be the single most important fact about the human condition. This is the main reason for my radical opposition to the later thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Reasons can indeed be adduced in favour of that proposition, but the most important events of human history—the emergence of abstract doctrinal religion, the possibility of Reformations which invoke abstract truth against social practice, the possibility of an Enlightenment which does the same in secular terms, the emergence of a trans-cultural science confirmed by a uniquely powerful technology—all these facts show that thought is not limited by the form of life in which it occurs, but can transcend it. Just how this is possible is another question, to which I have given some attention, and I would not wish to claim I possess the correct answer: but there is no shadow of doubt in my mind concerning the fact which requires explanation. This is one of the main issues with which I am concerned, and it is strange to be credited with the view that it does not even arise. Equally, I am not guilty of the view that 'our standards of rationality ... cannot be rationally improved'. It is the doctrine of our imprisonment in 'forms of life' which I find intolerable in Wittgenstein, and here this view, which I have attacked with a passion that has been held against me, is actually credited to me!

Wettersten's essay also contains a straightforward error of fact: he says that I credit the *sociologists* at the London School of Economics with having taught me to see thought in context. In fact, the acknowledgement of this debt, in *Words and Things*, is to the social anthropologists at that same institution.²⁰ The difference is not trivial.

Wettersten also claims that 'contemporary Marxist socialism' is an 'important influence' on my thought. My relationship to Marxism has at all times been critical: it has only influenced me so to speak by reaction. I am a mild socialist in the sense that I consider the generalized market to be a bad model (prescriptively and descriptively), though at the same time I hold the absence of central control over production and trade to be a precondition of liberty: in other words, I believe in a mixed economy. In an advanced and partly atomized society, I hold an effective welfare state to be both a moral imperative, and a precondition of a stable order. Passionate and messianic socialism, which sees the pervasive abolition of private control over resources as *the* big divide between good and evil, and hence as permitting any means in overcoming its inherently evil opponents, is, demonstrably, the biggest enemy of freedom in industrial society. None of this makes me an acolyte of Marxist socialism, as Wettersten claims, and I find the observation that I adopt a 'contemporary Marxist position' exceedingly strange. As it happens, I was *never* a Marxist, and have been consistently hostile to Marxism since my teens. The charge that I am guilty of 'praise of openness in socialist countries' is equally bizarre. What is true is that I felt much sympathy for people facing the predicaments of life under 'real socialism', and was interested in the sometimes heroic, sometimes hidden, attempts at genuine thought which took place: but to present this as praise of the system as a whole is absurd. I have detested the system throughout my life, even though I am

²⁰ Gellner, *Words and Things*, London 1959.

also appalled by the manner and possible consequences of its dissolution. I would have preferred to see that transition managed better. [...]

Leftist Critique

Rosaire Langlois's essay criticizes me for unsuccessful attacks on Marxism, rather than for adhering to it.²¹ I think he makes too much of my highly tentative invocation of James Woodburn's theory of the Neolithic Revolution. It was simply an illustration or the specification of a possibility: I have no illusion that I know how the Neolithic Revolution took place. I know it to be important and try to work out its implications, but that is not the same thing. My observation about Marxism was that, having been articulated prior to the theory of the Neolithic Revolution, it strangely enough fails to invoke one of the two greatest changes in the material infrastructure that mankind has experienced, and in that sense, it is less, not more, materialistic than Western archaeology or anthropology. On the other hand, Langlois is surely right in blaming me for inadequate attention to the difference in the social implications of different forms of agriculture.

Langlois's critique is very much from the Left (it really is strange that I seem to look like a fellow-traveller to Wettersten and a cold warrior to Langlois) and so, not surprisingly, charges me and people allegedly influenced by me, with insufficiently enlightened views on imperialism, both in theory and in connection with current politics. It appears that I under-rate the economic and interested motives in recent quasi-colonial wars: the West, and notably the USA, feared the example of socialism in, say, Nicaragua. Even in connection with the Gulf War, I seem to be part of a Western conspiracy which 'ignore[s]... self-declared facts and blame[s] the victim instead'. Saddam is a strange victim indeed, and if American interventions are inspired by fears of a shining socialist example, then that age must now be truly past. The countries of 'real socialism' were allowed to go their own way without attempts at intervention, and they have proved incomparably more persuasive than Adam Smith or the Chicago School in effecting a widespread conversion to pure marketism (which, in fact, I deplore).

The interesting thing about Langlois's neo-leftism is that it has a certain theoretical coherence, absent in say Chomsky, whose denunciations of the sins of the West seem a kind of totally unreasoned populist moralism, a denunciation of sheer but mysterious wickedness. (Why do the USA and Israel have a near-monopoly of it? I should add that I enormously admire the linguistic insights even if I find the political stance quite unintelligible.) Langlois sees the point of one of my crucial objections to Marxism, namely, that once coercion is allowed an independent role in and entry to history, the Marxist promise of righting everything by putting economic relations in order, lapses. He denies that 'coercion has a life of its own often independent of production. Here I maintain the contrary view.' This is all of a piece with maintaining an economic theory of recent conflicts, and endows the whole position with a certain backbone. I cannot agree,

²¹ Rosaire Langlois, 'Coercion, Cognition and Production: Gellner's Challenge to Historical Materialism and Postmodernism', in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*.

but I like to see coherence in an opponent. It is hard to argue with chaos. At the same time, whilst committing himself bravely to an overall economic explanation, Langlois doubly protects Marxism by saying that, in any case, the theory of the autonomous role of coercion was anticipated by Marx and Engels. (He seems to miss the point of the argument from the Oriental Mode of Production: if it does exist, a large part of mankind can only be liberated by accident, from the outside, if indeed there is any outside, and not by the internal contradictions of class-endowed societies, as promised. Ex hypothesi, the Asiatic Hydraulic Despotism is engendered by coercion, rather than being, as mainline Marxism would require, a consequence of a pre-existing class tension, *and* there can be no breaking out of it.) Either way, all ways, it seems, they win.

Perhaps this is another place for a touch of autobiography. I am exceedingly proud of a remark once made about me behind my back by David Glass: 'When the Revolution comes, both sides will shoot him.' The conjunction of Wettersten and Langlois supports this view.

Raymond Boudon focuses on a problem which is indeed central to my preoccupations, namely relativism.²² I deplore the contemporary facile indulgence in it, the self-righteousness with which it is presented as some kind of liberation from provinciality, and its use as an expiation of colonial guilt. (Unless all truths are equal, men cannot be equal either...) In fact, cognitive relativism is absurd, and moral relativism is tragic.

In between these two, there is the relativism concerning human and social matters. Current relativism in this sphere is linked to hermeneutics: if the object of inquiry in this area is made up of meanings, or if the aim of inquiry is to offer meanings, or if, a fortiori, both of these claims are true, then the volatility of interpretation is transmitted to social/ human studies. (One of the many sources of this mood, Wittgenstein, had a complex position on this point: meaning was socially imposed and so was not optional for the individual, but nonetheless at the same time these communally carried systems of rules were ultimate, semantically sovereign.)

I am happy to find a powerful ally in Raymond Boudon in the repudiation of all this. Boudon goes further in his rejection of relativism in the social/human sphere than I would, in that he believes that the social sciences demonstrate the possibility of the attainment of unique objective truth. The contrary impression, he says, springs only from their assimilation to nineteenth-century philosophies of history. I hate to appear to dissent from the views of a man I admire as a thinker and value as an ally, and only wish I shared his confidence; but the facts of the case do not seem to me to establish this. For better or for worse, the social sciences lack the two features which are so convincing in the case of the natural sciences: the existence of politically unconstrained and cumulative consensus, by and large, and the existence of a genuinely powerful technology based on theoretical insights. For the philosopher of science these facts provide a problem (and in this field, consensus is absent), for the sociologist of modern societies, they are simply a datum. These two facts

²² Raymond Boudon, 'Relativising Relativism: When Sociology Refutes the Sociology of Science', in *ibid.* The author teaches Sociology at the University of Paris Sorbonne.

on their own show that the main idea of Kuhn, let alone of Feyerabend, cannot be valid. This is an enormous and important topic and I am not sure that I have anything to add, so I must content myself with saying that I hope Boudon is right, and fear that he is not.

Ralph Schroeder's essay is located in the same problem area as Raymond Boudon's.²³ Ralph accuses me of a special kind of 'idealism', which consists of holding that 'science is the only legitimate world-view within the modern world'. The terminology is strange: I had thought that this was the definition not of idealism, but of positivism. Furthermore he goes on to say that in my view this vision or the criteria it is based on are not 'subject to any societal influences'. This is strange indeed, in as far as much of my work is devoted to speculating what those influences are: by and large, I am tempted by a Weberian account which links the pursuit of exclusive explanations to the jealousy of a unique God. (Langlois rightly chides me for the narrowness of this explanation, which gives no credit to the Greeks. It is indeed hard to give a Weberian account of push towards unity of vision among the Greeks in terms of their scandalously un-unitarian religion and the un-puritan comportment of their gods.)

Ralph claims to discern a conflict between my purely descriptive account of the role of science, and the 'Hegelian' endorsement of the historical verdict of the scientific-industrial revolution. On the surface, Ralph has unquestionably found a contradiction: scientific explanations insist on symmetry, all cases being equal, and here there seems to be a case of worshipping a single event, albeit a big one. If the religious apotheosis of a single Incarnation is to be proscribed, how can one allow oneself such exclusive reverence for the Single Initial Industrialization?

Touché. But is this really so grave? First: my 'descriptive' attitude to science consists of the fact that for the historical sociologist, the efficacy of science is simply a datum: he may not and probably cannot explain it, but he must work out its implications for human society. He does note, however, that part of its manner of operation is the requirement of symmetrical explanation, the proscription of unique potencies.

The reverence for the Big Ditch (unique, admittedly) does not really violate the preceding principle. It does not say that the Great Transition is authoritative because it is unique. No interdict is placed on attempts to explain it in terms of general sociological principles. It is unique in another sense: it transforms the world radically and irreversibly. Amongst other things, it leads to a population size such that most of us would have to starve if we were to go back to a pre-industrial order. Most of us would be unwilling, and unable, to go back for other reasons as well: industrialism is profoundly habit-forming. *Therefore*, there is indeed a kind of Categorical Imperative of industrialism. Now Hegel attempted to extract a moral, and a morality, from the *whole* of the historical process. I am saying that all the other events (except possibly the Neolithic Revolution, for reasons analogous to those connected with the Industrial

²³ Ralph Schroeder, 'From the Big Divide to the Rubber Cage: Gellner's Conception of Science and Technology', in *ibid.* The author teaches Sociology at the Royal Holloway University of London.

Revolution) have no such authority, and there is no reason to credit any authority to the historical process as a whole. It has no coherent plan and its events do not bind us. One particular event, because of the enormity of its social implications and its (related) irreversibility, does have authority over us. We must heed its commands. This is what I playfully called the (quasi)-Hegelian reasons for the correctness of positivism. We are tied to industrialism, which in turn cannot work without science, therefore our historical position (rather than some epistemological argument) establishes the authority of science. Spelt out in full, I do not think there is any contradiction, but Ralph is right in spotting one in the light-hearted, careless formulation of the position. Ralph is right in saying that I do not much consider other attitudes to science, though I should have thought that my 'Rubber Cage' thesis covers the antinomian permissiveness which is indeed widespread outside serious science and production.

Malinowski and the Good Soldier Svejk

Chris Hann's essay falls somewhere half way between a contribution to the history of ideas and a personal assessment.²⁴ I shall naturally try to focus on the former aspect. My first disagreement with Chris is a matter of nuance and formulation, and in all probability Chris would not disagree, but it is as well to get it straight. My view is not that Polish statelessness at the turn of the century directly led Malinowski to his anti-historicism: rather, it led other Poles to a historicism and nationalism which did not suit Malinowski, either personally or as a proponent of a new, un-Frazerian anthropology.

Hann finds my insistence on Malinowski's sense of the unity of culture unconvincing, given that Malinowski treats the Trobrianders so very much as individuals. Are the two things incompatible? Malinowski's undisputed insistence on *context* is a way of stressing the interdependence of cultural features. In his posthumous book, Malinowski displays a fine sense of the manner in which individuals only fulfil themselves through a culture. In some ways, the remarkable thing is not that Malinowski is also an individualist, but that he is not more of one: his functionalism is taken over from Mach, in whose work it is not merely biological but individualist: ideas are explained in terms of the service they perform for the individual. Malinowski collectivized Mach. Hann himself goes on to stress what he calls the "subjective" or idealist currents' in Malinowski's work, the interest in presenting 'the *native's* vision': but is that not equivalent to a sense of culture? Malinowski could hardly have aspired to present individual, idiosyncratic visions. His work on meaning and language stresses above all the involvement of speech in social practice and hence the dependence of meaning on shared practice. This, of course, is wholly parallel to Wittgenstein's 'later' philosophy, far more concrete (Malinowski works with real examples, not invented ones), and free of the bizarre philosophical use to which Wittgenstein put it.

Chris suggests that my stress on Malinowski's 'cultural nationalism' is not supported by textual or other evidence. One piece of documentary

²⁴ Chris Hann, 'Gellner on Malinowski: Words and Things in Central Europe', in *ibid.* The author teaches Sociol Anthropology at the University of Kent.

evidence I would invoke is Malinowski's remarkable introduction to a cooperative volume on the Cassubians.²⁵ This also provides conclusive evidence that Malinowski did sympathize with the victims of Polish (or other) centralism.

Related to this is the charge that both Malinowski and I idealize the Hapsburg empire, and perhaps the British empire as well. For my own part, I am fully aware of the under-current of brutality, at what you might call the sergeant-major level of society, which co-existed, in intimate symbiosis, with both an orderly *Rechtsstaat* and with the *Gemüthlichkeit*. All the same, it was moving in the right direction, and in some places, such as Prague and Cracow, the order and creativity were more in evidence than the brutality, and it was all incomparably better than the two totalitarian systems which, after two decades, followed the collapse of the Empire. Nothing Chris can throw at me will lead me to abandon my political slogan—*Better Franz Josef than Josef!* I am a card-carrying member (or would be if someone found me a card) of the party founded by Jaroslav Hašek, author of *Svejk*, namely, the Party of Mild Progress Within the Limits of the Law. Hasek stood for the Town Council on this ticket but failed to get elected, for some reason. Hasek knew all about that undercurrent of brutality—just read *Svejk*. There is the passage in which the sergeant-major complains bitterly that after they broke all the prisoner's ribs by jumping up and down on him, it still took him a whole week to die. This has the ring of truth. This aspect of life—not absent in other societies either—is not being denied.

Chris is also unfair to Malinowski in as far as he implies that he did not recognize the inequalities among the nations of the Hapsburg Empire: 'in Galicia, the Polish majority bullied the Ruthenians...'²⁶ The essay in which Malinowski makes this point probably provides the most succinct and elegant summary of his political credo. 'Pre-war Austria in its federal constitution presented, in my opinion, a sound solution to all minority problems... The difficulty of the old Dual Monarchy lay in the fact that the Central Government could not impress its liberal policy upon some of the autonomous provincial administrations...' 'Nationalism is deplorable enough; but it is certainly more dangerous... when the majority in power uses the political mechanism of the state for the denationalization of minorities...'

Much of the rest of Chris's essay is a straight political polemic, and none the worse for that. Chris says that my remarks about Malinowski tell us more about me than about Bronislaw: Chris's remarks about me tell us more about Chris. He is a socialist whose justified dislike of the defects of Western capitalism (as well as of Bolshevism) led him to hope for a Third Way, and the manner of the demise of the communist empire has, at least for a time, dashed such hopes. The Magyars, to whom perhaps he is closest amongst East Europeans, at one time looked as if they might find it. Everyone knows they are very clever. The wrecking of these aspirations is not something he bears lightly, and he seems to blame the slogan 'Civil Society' for this, at least in part.

²⁵ B. Malinowski, preface to F. Lorentz et al., *The Cassubian Civilization*, London 1935.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Now the curious thing about *this* disagreement is that it is largely or wholly imaginary and unnecessary. What's in a phrase? I happen to like 'Civil Society' because it has better links to the real institutional bases of a free, law-based society than the word 'democracy', which is loaded with all kinds of misleading theories. I don't like 'Third Way' because it implies a symmetry between the two evils which does not obtain and is therefore grossly unfair to the West. But if we go beyond the words to the substance, in terms of values and sociological perceptions, I do not think there is much or any disagreement between us. I don't give a damn for the market as such, but it is an indispensable precondition of the full existence of countervailing institutions under modern conditions. Law enforcement *must* be centralized: I have no wish to return to the feud. If the polity must be centralized, then only the existence of genuinely independent centres of economic power can provide the underpinning for plural institutions, out in the open rather than skulking surreptitiously under the floorboards, as was the case during the terminal decades of 'real socialism' in Eastern Europe. If in the course of allowing such economic autonomy, some bastards make a lot of money in questionable ways, this is the price we must pay, and if possible, taxation should eventually strip them of it. In any case it is better than the total economic centralism which engendered enormous differences in power and privilege without, nominally, doing so in terms of 'property'.

Chris notes the probably exceptional nature of the Czech Republic in contemporary Eastern Europe. The secret may be that under the Chicago rhetoric, the present rulers have been careful to maintain a welfare net (even to extend it) and to maintain social consensus. The story used to be told of an Egyptian president who yelled at this driver when the latter asked which way to turn at a crossroad—'idiot! signal violently to the left, turn to the right.' I wonder whether Klaus does not yell at his driver—wave like mad to the right, turn mildly to the left. That's the way to go just now, which is not to say that one endorses the claustrophilia, insularity and philistinism of that government.

Finally, there is a criticism which really hurts. Hann impugns the quality of my fieldwork, and says it is redolent (sic!) of Frazer (who did his strictly from the armchair). He says I made the wrong inference from walking for four days in the Tatras, in good weather, and not seeing a single party of climbers. (I concluded that freelance mountaineering was out.) Hann, whilst brazenly admitting that he too made 'no special study' of freelance groups of the time, goes on to accuse me of 'reproducing... stereotyped images... of the Cold War period!' (The proscription of freelance climbing was not an important theme in the CIA-inspired abuse of Eastern Europe of the time.) If this charge is allowed to stand unchallenged—bad fieldworker and Cold Warrior—I shall no doubt be expelled from the Association of Social Anthropologists, and even fewer people will speak to me in my very progressive college. So, in self-protection, I must defend myself. At the first opportunity, I would like to go walking with Chris, for four days, say in the Coolins or in some appropriate part of his native Wales, and count the number of climbing parties we find, even in bad weather. I look forward to such an excursion. The fact that none were to be seen, during four full days in the Tatras, allows no explanation other than the one I offered, and I stick to it. (I expect I'll be expelled anyway.)

Freudian Faults

John Davis's essay is half about anthropological method, half allusion to the psychic roots of my position.²⁷ His first criticism is—why be so uncharitable to psychoanalysis, and so charitable to anthropology? I think the latter half of this point should really be—why be so charitable *within* anthropology, i.e., when practising it? John does not mean that I am necessarily charitable to anthropology but that I am happy to endorse their practice which is, in turn, charitable to the people they study, as it were professionally, crediting them with good sense. The first answer is, of course, that when I wrote my book about Freudianism, I thought that I was indeed doing anthropology: my principal question was, how does this interlocking system of ideas, practices, institutions, and segmented personnel, actually work? It was, admittedly, done without formal field-work: I requested the Institute of Psychoanalysis for permission to carry out field work, and the permission was refused. The refusal was communicated by the celebrated Winnicott himself, who was quite incoherent and swung from one incompatible theme to another: he made me a long speech about the undesirability of people trying to advance their careers by that kind of research... (I was, at the time, a full professor, a fact he took in only intermittently), and the impossibility of doing that kind of research without powerful unconscious factors interfering, and the fact that there was no need for such research in the first place because psychoanalysis was in itself a kind of Permanent Research and so did not need to be researched in turn.

But why be so uncharitable to psychoanalysis? I suppose the answer is that in our society, people ought to know better. Societies not possessed of powerful knowledge have to make do as best they can with the means at their disposal, and deserve sympathy. In any case, it is our job to understand them, and denigration of their techniques of exploring the world would not help either them or our inquiry. Our society is marked by the continuous advancement of genuine knowledge, the principles of which are, at least in part, understood. To employ a system of ideas which violates those principles—by camouflaged circularity which eliminates counter-evidence, for instance, and which promises cures without any evidence, and then manipulates the criteria of cure to cover up this failure—is something which can be usefully challenged. Is this a good enough justification of the difference of treatment accorded to *igurramen* and to analysts?

John becomes agreeably personal when he discusses my admiration of Ibn Khaldun. I suspect that what he says or hints at is correct about me, and not wholly correct about Ibn Khaldun. The fascination which Ibn Khaldun exercises on me is indeed connected with the antithesis of nobility and civilization. In the Prague of my youth, I was indeed aware of the difference between the people I knew best and could communicate with easily—urban, cerebral, mobile, rootless and uneasy intellectuals—and ideal man as conceived by the populist romanticism which was dominant in literature, art, even politics and philosophy. This confrontation

²⁷ John Davis, 'Irrationality in Social Life', in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*. The author taught Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford.

was far stronger and sharper in the lands of Hapsburg after-taste than it was in England, and it culminated in Nazism. But it stayed with me and played a major part in the decision to do field work, and the decision concerning where to do it. When I first saw Berber villages of the central Atlas, each building clinging to the next, the style wholly homogeneous, the totality crying out that this was a *Gemeinschaft*, I knew at once that I wanted desperately to know, as far as an outsider ever could, what it was like *inside*. I knew I had the motivation to undergo whatever hardships the inquiry would bring.

So John is right there. But I am not so sure he is fully right about Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun did indeed perceive the very same distinction which European romantics also perceived, the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. But I very much doubt whether he was a romantic. He appreciated the political and military potential of social cohesion, but I wonder whether he savoured and lusted for the sense of cohesion in itself. He would not have fitted into the society of Café Schwarzenberg on the Ringstrasse. He is the sociologist but not the poet of tribal populism. Of course, for Europeans the difference is one of transition, of movement from one thing to the other. For Ibn Khaldun, each of these social forms was present simultaneously and forever. When the tribesmen are still a danger you are not inclined to romanticize them: this was true of Hume as much as of Ibn Khaldun.

But that is not the main difference. I do not think Ibn Khaldun felt nostalgia or romantic longing. Of course there was no need for nostalgia, because the belongingness, even supposing he did like savouring it, was not about to disappear. As far as he was concerned, there always would be civilized cities and hardy, cohesive tribesmen, and that was that. Perhaps the best that could be had was to be a tribesman who had not yet lost his cohesion but had just taken part in the conquest of the city, and could enjoy its pleasures and benefit from cohesion, all at once. We are not like that: those of us Europeans who try to return to *Gemeinschaft* by going native or joining a populist collective or digging a cottage garden, do not do so because we expect that our hardened muscles will enable us to conquer the city and live it up: modern cities are no longer to be conquered in that manner. We do it to satisfy a sentimental nostalgia which Ibn Khaldun neither needed nor could allow himself. He just told it like what it was. He provided us romantics with material, but he wasn't one of us. He was too lucid for that. [...]

Rod Aya's essay belongs to philosophy, or perhaps general social history²⁸. I have almost nothing to say to his piece, other than to express my gratitude. His account of my views is accurate, and he presents them with greater succinctness and elegance than I have. Perhaps I shall allow myself two brief and related comments. His basically correct account of my view of Thomas Kuhn presents me as a little more favourable to Kuhn's central position than in fact I am. I do compare Thomas Kuhn to Thomas Hobbes: Paradigms like Sovereigns are beyond scrutiny, for

²⁸ Rod Aya, 'The Devil in Social Anthropology; Or, the Empiricist Exorcist; Or, the Case Against Cultural Relativism', in *ibid.* The author teaches Politics at the University of Amsterdam.

there is nothing which could judge them without their ceasing to be Paradigms or Sovereigns, and thus contradicting the initial hypothesis. Without order, no society/science, order requires the Sovereign/Paradigm, therefore the Sovereign/Paradigm rules absolutely. This position, however, is far more disastrous for Kuhn than for Hobbes. There is nothing to prevent Hobbes from accepting this corollary and saying yes, there is no way of judging Sovereigns by some meta-Sovereign, for, ex-hypothesi, we cannot have such a thing. There is simply the distinction between Sovereign-endowed orderly societies, and Sovereignless warre.

He can say this, because there is no reason to believe that states simply must be ranked in terms of merit. As a matter of fact, not being Hobbesians, most of us do it, in a somewhat unsystematic way, but if Hobbesians wish to be consistent and to refrain from doing so, they are not flying in the face of some utterly obvious and important feature of the world. But theoreticians of science, unlike Hobbesian political theorists, simply cannot do this. It is a blatant and supremely important fact of the world we live in that scientific systems are not all equal, but that, all in all, science gets better and better. The sustained and continuing cognitive conquest of nature, with its technological implications, is the most important fact governing our social life, and this, as Rod recognizes, is one of my main arguments in support of the view that cognitive relativism is an absurdity and an affectation. But this puts Kuhn in a quandary which to my knowledge he has not properly faced: either the paradigms are not sovereign after all, or there is no scientific progress. The latter option is absurd, the former contradicts his main position. (And a paradigm cannot generate anomalies unless there are extra-paradigmatic ways of knowing, which also contradicts his main position.)

This relates to Kuhn's error about pre-scientific cultures. He sees them in the light of the social scientists he met at Palo Alto, as living in a pre-paradigmatic State of Nature. This chaotic wilderness may indeed be the condition of social scientific theorists—especially distinguished ones, who are invited to the Centre—but it is not the condition of pre-scientific cultures, who are not paradigm-free, but tend to have pre-scientific paradigms, generally more insistent on their sovereignty and absoluteness than scientific ones. But that is another story.

Which brings me to a certain incompleteness in Rod's account of my views. He speaks only of the Big Ditch, as if everything the other side of it were the same. There is one important further distinction which needs to be made concerning pre-scientific visions. They can be divided into traditional ones, based on ritual and story, and 'Axial' or world-religion faiths, which focus on doctrine and codify it. This is of course of great importance for any theory of how the Big Ditch is ever jumped: the Weberian answer is that doctrinal religions, by rationalizing and codifying faith and salvation, destroyed themselves by providing the means for crossing the Ditch. [...]

Andrus [Park] was wrong in thinking that I am not interested in the question concerning whether mankind is entering a fourth stage of his-

tory (subsequent to foraging, agriculture and industry).²⁹ I am exceedingly interested in this issue, but I do not think we have entered such a stage *yet*. The basic features and rules of the industrial age continue to apply: very powerful and augmenting technology for the control of nature, not much effective technology for the manipulation of man; end of the Malthusian predicament, shift of stress from coercion to production, and legitimacy and effectiveness of government determined by growth and the anticipation of affluence. We shall enter a new age when any one of the following things happens: 1) technology makes man, and not only extra-human nature, manipulable; 2) there is a shift back to the primacy of coercion, perhaps as a result of military technology, perhaps as a result of the fact (if such it turns out to be) that late industrializers will have values quite different from those of earlier ones; or internal tensions may reconvert even the early industrializers away from liberalism; or government by growth ceases to be effective. It seems to me inherently probable that at least one, if not more than one, of these things will indeed happen. We shall then see a different kind of society, and those of us permeated by liberal values (and unable to treat them as mere accompaniments of our contingent social situation) will regret this, and even indulge in the impertinence of trying to prevent it. However, all this remains in the future: powerful human technology is not here yet, the thirst for affluence continues to be powerful and, all in all, liberal values are doing better towards the end of the century than had seemed probable some decades ago.

Prague, January 1995

²⁹ Andrus Parks, 'Gellner and the Long Trends of History', in *ibid.*