

4. Reconceptualizing Civil Society for Now: Some Somewhat Gramscian Turnings¹

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I.

“Civil society,” much more than “state,” “government,” “power,” or even “democracy,” is a term of art in political theory. There is no discovering what the concept means, let alone what it “really means.” What instead is to be done is to see if we can forge some conceptualization or reconceptualization of civil society which would be useful, given, on the one hand, some important political or ethical purposes or, on the other, some theoretical purposes.

In ancient usage, *civilis societas* (in Cicero, for example) referred to the condition of living in a civilized political community: a community with a legal code, cities, commercial arts, and the refinements of living. For there to be a civil society, according to the ancient conception, is for there to be this kind of political community. Skipping a few centuries, by the time we get to contractarian thought, there is a considerable change. In John Locke, for example, political and civil society were taken to be the same thing (whether it was a society of refinement or not) and this contrasted with paternal authority and the state of nature. But still there remained the identification of political society and civil society.

1. Portions of this article have previously appeared in print in *Arena Journal*, No. 2 (1993/94), 159-174.

With Hegel and Marx, the conception of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) underwent a much greater change. For them, civil society was contrasted with political society. Civil society referred to a social order, and most fundamentally, an economic order operating according to its own principles, independent of the ethical requirements of law and political association. It was, for both Hegel and the early Marx, part of social life where avariciousness and egoism, sometimes accompanied by economic rationality, were the order of the day.² This part of social life lacked all the qualities of warmth, solidarity and moral cohesion at least supposedly characteristic of the *Gemeinschaften* of simpler societies.

Today many political theorists of rather different theoretical orientations and political commitments rather uncontroversially think of civil society as the nonpolitical and non-private aspects of society. It is located in a conceptual space distinct from, and between, the state and the at least supposedly private sphere of the family and spousal arrangements and the like. As opposed to ancient usage, where "civil society" was synonymous with a certain sort of "political society," the contemporary use of "civil society" generally refers to economic and other social arrangements whether they be practices, codes, institutions, or organizations, as long as they are apart from the state and also apart from the private sphere of the family. Still, economic institutions remain the central element in civil society so conceived. Thus I do not think much, if any, exception would be taken to Michael Walzer's remarks that "the line between political community and civil society was meant to mark off coercive decision-making from free exchange,"³ and that "the separation of civil society and political community creates the sphere of economic competition and free enterprise, the market in commodities, labor, and capital."⁴ This, of course, as Walzer is perfectly aware, is only the civil society of our bourgeois societies. Civil society here is quite literally just a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. But the point is, that it is in such societies that these forms of life have

2. In Marx's mature thought the term disappears. It is a moot point how much of the concept remains.

3. Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (August 1984), 321.

4. *Ibid.*, 316.

gained prominence. Moreover, there are analogies in earlier pre-capitalist societies and in what once were State Socialist societies.

However, this by now rather orthodox conception of civil society is not the only way civil society has been conceptualized. Antonio Gramsci, from an historicist but still thoroughly Marxian perspective, reconceptualized civil society into a tripartite conception in which civil society is juxtaposed not only against the state, taken as a coercive governmental apparatus, but, strikingly, against the economy and the private sphere of the family as well.⁵ Although he was thoroughly Marxist, he is not to be understood here (Noberto Bobbio, to the contrary, notwithstanding), as having abandoned historical materialism for a kind of Crocean historical idealism.⁶ He did take the state, civil society, and the economy to be distinct elements in the social fabric, but he also stressed that they were methodological (analytical) distinctions used for purposes of perspicuous representation, analysis and critical praxis. In the real world their boundaries are blurred, indeed they even flow into each other, and are not separable. He might have even taken a page from that great "atomist," David Hume, and have reminded us that everything that is distinguishable is not separable: being physical and being extended or being an equiangular triangle and being an equilateral triangle, for example. They are not like a chair with its various parts or a human body with its various parts. In societies complex enough to have a state there can be no state without civil society and no economic relations without both and no private sphere without all of these elements. They are analytically separable (distinguishable) but not separable in reality. They are not like the parts that make up an automobile. Still, there are important systematic connections between these elements of society. In reality

5. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, "Politics and Reconstruction of the Concepts of Civil Society," in Axel Honneth, et al., eds., *Zwischenbetrachtungen: Im Prozess der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989).

6. Noberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society," in Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 21-47. For a well-reasoned rescuing of Gramsci from the charge of being an historical idealist, see Jacques Texier, "Gramsci, Theoretician of the Superstructures: On the Concept of Civil Society," 48-79, in the same volume. For a clear articulation of the difference between historical materialism and historical idealism, see Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

they form a continuous whole. But it is often useful to make these analytical distinctions.

It is not only Gramsci that has in general terms such a conception but also ex-Marxists such as Leszek Kolakowski, neo-Marxists such as Jürgen Habermas, and social theorists influenced by Habermas such as Andrew Arato, Jean Cohen, and Claus Offe.⁷ It is my hunch—a hunch I will pursue to see if it is anything more than a hunch—that a clarified form of this conception of civil society is both politically and theoretically more useful than the more standard conceptions. It helps us to understand what makes societies tick. I shall turn to that after I have characterized rather more fully what this Gramscian conception of civil society comes to.

II.

Walter Adamson aptly defines this Gramscian conception of civil society as follows: “By civil society ... I mean the public space between large-scale bureaucratic structures of state and economy on the one hand, and the private sphere of family, friendships, personality, and intimacy on the other.”⁸

We need an adequate conception of civil society. In addition, we need to understand the politics of civil society in order to provide a corrective for a characteristic failure of liberalism, namely, that of operating with a simplistic conception of the distinction between public/private, state/society, and social/individual. Liberalism lacks, or at least seems to lack, the conceptual resources to make clear how there is a nongovernmental public sphere, a civil

7. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) (This book was originally published in German in 1962.); Arato and Cohen, “Politics and Reconstruction of the Concepts of Civil Society”; Jean Cohen, *Class and Civil Society* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); and Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). I should add that Arato and Cohen do not, I think rightly, follow Gramsci in taking the family to be part of the private sphere.

8. Walter Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” *Praxis International* 7, nos. 3/4 (October 1987 and January 1988), 320. See also his *Hegemony and Revolution: Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

society, which, though closely related to the state, is still not a part of the state apparatus. But this nongovernmental public sphere is nonetheless a vital force in forming public opinion, constructing consent and generating a *de facto* legitimation.⁹ Here we need to think of organizations such as schools, churches, labor unions, businessmen's clubs, ethnic associations, the media, various professions like medicine with its institutional setting, the legal profession with its institutional setting, and the like. Just what role—to take the most obvious example—do the media and the schools play in the forming of individuals (that is, in the forming of them as persons) or in the stabilizing or destabilizing of the state or the economy, and how does the economy interact with these institutions? Would a newspaper of any extensive circulation or a television network last long, indeed any time at all, if it took a persistently oppositional stance to the economic order of the time? Indeed it is very unlikely it would even come into being. Do we tend, when there is little conflict between the forces of production and relations of production, to have a nice functional meshing between the economic structure of society and the way its schools or media operate, or do we not? And if there is a meshing, just how does it work? Our political thinking tends to be so individualistic, with (as Ronald Dworkin puts it) individual rights taking center stage, that these problems tend not even to surface, to say nothing of being carefully and clearly examined in a way that might be helpful in the creation of a good or at least a just society.¹⁰

In locating civil society we must look for those organizations or practices that are not directly governmental or economic but which generate opinions and goals, in accordance with which people who partake in these practices and are a part of these organizations seek not only to influence wider opinion and policies within existing structures and rules, but sometimes also to alter the structures and

9. For the distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* authority and legitimation see Robert Paul Wolff, "Violence and the Law," in Robert Paul Wolff, ed., *The Rule of Law* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 54-72, and Kai Nielsen, "Legitimation in Complex Societies: Some Habermasian Themes," *Annals of Scholarship* 7, no. 1 (1990), 51-89.

10. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 171-77.

rules themselves.¹¹ Such a conception of civil society is valuable in coming to understand how the dominant classes often, indeed typically, rule by something other than force, how they achieve and sustain hegemony—that is, cultural leadership—across the society in which they are dominant, and how subaltern classes constitute themselves politically and mount challenges to the dominant political and economic order.

For Hegel, and for Marx as well, civil society was most centrally the sphere where the economic struggles of public life were played out. For Gramsci, by contrast, “the conflicts of civil society are centrally political ... their point is not merely the making of economic contracts and dividing of the existing labor product”—something which Gramsci took to be both economic and political—but in civil society, what is both more characteristic and more central is the formation of and the giving expression to political points of view by parties, religious groups, organs of information, and so forth deployed to “influence the political identification of the masses and the institutional nature and boundaries of civil society itself.”¹²

III.

At this juncture, a brief digression is in order on historical materialism, on how Gramsci’s historical materialism is to be understood, and on its relation to how he conceptualized and on how we should conceptualize civil society. Gramsci was not an historical idealist, but what G.A. Cohen and Andrew Levine have aptly characterized as someone reasoning in accordance with a weak and restricted form of historical materialism.¹³ Historical materialism, let us remind our-

11. Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 321.

12. *Ibid.*, 322.

13. G.A. Cohen: *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), “Reply to Four Critics,” *Analyse & Kritik* 5 (1983), 195-222. Andrew Levine: *Arguing for Socialism: Theoretical Considerations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); *The End of the State* (London: Verso, 1987), “Review of Jon Elster’s *Making Sense of Marx*,” *Journal of Philosophy* LXXXIII, no. 12 (Dec 1986), 721-25; and “Review of G.A. Cohen’s *History, Labour, and Freedom*,” *Journal of Philosophy* (1990), 267-75. Joshua Cohen: “Minimalist Historical Materialism” in Rodger Bechler, et al, eds., *On the Track of Reason: Essays in Honor of Kai Nielson* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 155-174.

selves, is a theory of epochal social change. From epoch to epoch, human history has a determinate structure and a direction resulting from an endogenous dynamic process in which social relations of production rise and fall in order to maintain functional compatibility with developing material forces of production. During a given epoch the relations of production exist as they are because they facilitate and do not fetter the development of the forces of production. Similarly, the political, legal, moral, and religious institutions exist as they are because they sustain the relations of production (the economic structures) that occur during that period. Restricted historical materialism restricts the explanatory scope of historical materialism. On the standard unrestricted account, economic structures (relations of production) explain all superstructural phenomena; on the restricted account, historical materialism only seeks to explain the superstructural facts which, via their effect on the relations of production, are required to explain how the distinctive dynamic forces of production remain in place, which in turn cause the rise and fall of economic structures. Restricted historical materialism seeks to be a general theory of history by explaining general trends, namely, epochal social change, but it is not a theory of general history; it does not try to explain all historical phenomena. However, it is still a strongly foundational theory for it explains how it is, from epoch to epoch, that there are major structural changes in our social life. Though Gramsci did not put things in this way, he was (and I think to his credit) a restricted historical materialist.

Gramsci also operated with what I shall characterize (following Levine) as a weak historical materialism. Traditional historical materialism (strong historical materialism, if you will) purports to give an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for epochal social transformation. Traditional historical materialism purports to explain how we go from one set of relations of production, from one economic structure to another. It holds that certain levels of development of productive forces are both necessary and sufficient for the inception and reproduction of particular and distinctive economic structures or sets of production relations and that "continuous development ... generates structural instabilities between forces and already existing relations of production."¹⁴

14. Levine, "Review of *History, Labour and Freedom*," 273.

Traditional historical materialism holds that the development of the productive forces is sufficient, as well as necessary, to explain the movement from one set of production relations to another; weak historical materialism, by contrast, only claims that the development is necessary for such a movement. "Weak historical materialism," as Levine well puts it, "does not advance sufficient conditions for epochal historical change but only necessary material conditions. It does not purport to explain what actually happens, other things being equal (or nonexistent), but only what is (materially) possible."¹⁵ But it still yields a determinate historical agenda, something that is essential for Marxian praxis, by giving us a characterization of (a) historically possible epochal economic structures (a typology if you will) and (b) a characterization of the possibilities of moving from one epochal structure to another. The rest, on a Marxian account, is a matter of political action in class struggle. And it is here, of course, that a good account of civil society, and most particularly of civil society in industrialized societies, is of crucial importance.

If historical materialism is to stand much chance of being a true account of epochal or social change, it should be a restricted weak historical materialism. It is that form that fits very well with Gramsci's historicism, his activism, and his account of civil society.

Marxist fundamentalists (if there still are any) believe in the inevitability of socialism and that, in some sense of "inevitability," fits well with traditional historical materialism. Where these beliefs—historical materialism and historical inevitability—are well-entrenched, there is a tendency for Marxists to move toward economism or, pessimistically, to self-consciously abandon class struggle and to content themselves with social democracy, while patiently waiting for the forces of production to develop. There are, however, as has been evident for a long time, good reasons, both political and theoretical, for not endorsing socialism's inevitability. But a Marxian revolutionary, which was what Gramsci was, need not and indeed should not believe in socialism's inevitability, but only that it is a feasible historical possibility, and

15. *Ibid.*, 277.

thus on the historical agenda—and so, given that it is also desirable, something to strategically plan for and to struggle for.

IV.

With this construing, or perhaps in effect rational reconstructing, of Gramsci as an historical materialist in the weak and restricted sense, let us return to his account of civil society. Walter Adamson, one of Gramsci's most astute interpreters, remarks:

Gramsci wanted to preserve both the Marxian insight that the forces of production (not the state) are the primary determinant of modern social evolution, and the Crocean insight that civil society is primarily a sphere of “ethical-political” contestation among rival social groups. The first point implies that the widening contradiction between the forces and relations of production remains the most basic precondition for the historical realization of a new socialist mode of production. But the second point implies that the fundamental political contest is unlikely to be a direct confrontation between capital and labor for control of the state and, thus, the means of production, at least not in the near term. Rather, the contest is likely to be a “positional” one for civil society conceived essentially as a cultural-political domain, indeed the sole public domain where mass consent is at issue.¹⁶

This whole passage fits very well with restricted weak historical materialism. The first point in the passage, with its talk of basic preconditions, brings out the necessary conditions side; the second point provides a plausible and politically fruitful way to proceed for someone who was such an historical materialist. In the situation we are now in, the political context would be that of the class politics of civil society. What specific struggles and what kind of politics—that is, concrete political strategies—would obtain will be strongly conditioned by what is possible at a given time and place. And intelligent moral agents should keep that firmly in mind. But that leaves plenty of *Lebensraum* for particular political strategies, for contestations of how civil society is to be forged. It provides conceptual space for what a Marxian politics or any other politics should be. So it is sensible enough to call Gramsci (as he has been called) a Marxist of the superstructures without at all suggesting (as has also been

16. Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 325.

suggested) that he has set aside the bedrock of historical materialism for a Crocean historical idealist framework.¹⁷ Keeping this in mind will help us to understand better the importance of his account of civil society.

Much of Gramsci's discussion of civil society, understandably enough, was focused on the Italian society of his time. A critical question we need to consider is how much of his analysis can more generally be extended to our present *bürgerliche Gesellschaften*. In Italy, since its unification, no group, not even the Catholic Church, had gained cultural leadership—what Gramsci called hegemony. The principal players here were Fascism, traditional Catholicism, laical liberalism led by Croce as a kind of “lay Pope,” and Marxism. In the struggle to gain hegemony in civil society and to extend this to the state and to the economy, Croce understood (and Gramsci took keen note of this) that “the great problem of the modern age was to learn to live without religion, that is, without traditional confessional religion.”¹⁸ Croce thought that traditional religion was, as such a social force, dead, but he also believed that the liberal tradition could be revived and refurbished and made to serve as a secular “religion of liberty”: an ersatz religion, if you will. He thought his *History of Europe in Nineteenth Century* (1932) provided the kind of narrative that would advance that.

Gramsci thought that Croce had posed the problem in the right way. Some form of secular religion was a key element in achieving a hegemonic culture in Italy—though, of course, he differed with Croce about what the content of this new secular equivalent of a religion should be. But he believed as firmly as Croce that Italy needed one, and that more generally modern societies need one. Gramsci wrote that Italy needed a “coherent, unitary, nation-

17. This is done very well by Jacques Texier, “Gramsci, Theoretician of Superstructures: On the Concept of Civil Society,” in Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 48-74. See also Anne Sasson, “Civil Society,” in Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 72-74.

18. Benedetto Croce's views, taken up by Gramsci, were most succinctly stated in his “Religione e serenita,” *La Critica* 23, (March 20, 1915), 153-55. Gramsci republished it in his own journal, *La Città Futura* (Feb. 11, 1917). Croce's article is available in English translation in Croce's *Ethics and Politics*. See Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 326.

ally diffused 'conception of life and man,' a 'lay religion,' a philosophy that has become precisely a 'culture,' that has generated an ethic, a way of life, a civil and individual form of conduct."¹⁹ He agreed with Croce that there was then in Italy a crisis in authority, what we would now call a crisis in legitimation. The Church and the ruling classes had lost their firm hold on the populace. These authorities could no longer rely on a consensus in society in which the allegiances and behavior of the masses were predictably stable. He further agreed with Croce that as a consequence the Italian state was forced into operating more and more by something approximating pure force. The masses had become "detached from their traditional ideologies" such that they "no longer believe what they used to believe, etc."²⁰

In formal terms, then, Gramsci agreed with Croce about the need for a secularized religion as the functional replacement of traditional religion, which in Italy was Catholicism, and, if he had known of his work, he would have agreed with Emile Durkheim as well about the role of religion in our social life. About such matters Durkheim more than anyone else in the twentieth century probed very deeply. He saw how very much modern society was in need of a secularized religion, in a world, as Durkheim put it, in which "the old gods are growing old or already dead, and the others are not yet born."²¹ But in content, as I have noted, Gramsci differed from both of them. What was needed, he believed, was not liberalism's religion of liberty, which Gramsci thought was little more than an "atheism for aristocrats." It neither could nor should succeed as a secular religion; what was needed instead was Marxism, what Gramsci, under the eye of the censors, called "the philosophy of praxis." It, he said, was an "absolute secularization and earthiness of thought, an absolute humanism of history."²² What Marxism

19. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 4 volumes, V. Gerratana, ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 2185-86. See Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 327.

20. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 311. See Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 327.

21. Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J.W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965), 475-76.

22. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 1854-64. See Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 328.

needed to do was to form its own intellectual body to “combat modern ideologies in their most refined forms.” This he thought would take time and strategic and organizational skill. Moreover, the central struggle in civil society was not with liberalism, which he saw as having no mass backing, but with the Catholic Church with its long tradition and complex entrenched organization. But, historical materialist that he was, he thought a nontranscendental conception of religion, an utterly secularized religion, was on the historical agenda and that, as the struggle in civil society played itself out for our time, it would become gradually apparent that Marxism was the “only religious faith that is adequate to the contemporary world and can produce a real hegemony.”²³

This is surely a remark that would startle analytical Marxists and scientific socialists, but I think Adamson rightly remarks that for Gramsci “Marxism is less a philosophy, political strategy, or understanding of history than a new religion which integrates its world view and practical ethic into a distinctive culture.”²⁴ So viewed, it could facilitate the acquisition of class consciousness in ways similar to the way any religion socializes its members. And what we get, when a population achieves class consciousness, is not just a knowledge of what a class is and what our particular class position is (though we do get that) but also, by what Gramsci regarded as a catharsis, a vivid feeling of group solidarity with a keen sense of “them” and “us,” a feeling for and a sense of “the collective power of a mutually shared vision of what the future can be and a mutually shared faith in the group’s ability to arrive at that destination.”²⁵ Marxism’s power, Gramsci believed, derives not from science or from its having a set of firmly warranted beliefs, but from culture, from a collectively shared faith.

Gramsci saw Marxism, in the political struggle for hegemony, as “containing in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world,” but, even more importantly, he saw Marxism as having the cultural and intellectual

23. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 1295, 1319-20, and 1380-81. Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 328.

24. *Ibid.*, 328-29.

25. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 1505, 1682-83, and 1860. Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 329.

resources needed "to give life to an integral practical organization of society, that is to become a total integral civilization."²⁶ In short, he saw Marxism, far in advance of Fascism, Catholicism, and liberalism, as offering a new and higher principle of civilization.²⁷

V.

How much (if any) of this Gramscian conception of the politics of civil society makes sense for us standing where we stand? How much of this, if much of anything, answers to our needs both purely intellectual and political? Adamson, a knowledgeable and sympathetic interpreter of Gramsci, writing in 1987, remarks, "In today's world, of course, the possibility that Marxism represents history's anointed successor to Calvinist Christianity appears extremely unlikely. That such a world-historical vision was still plausible in the 1930s dramatizes the very great political and cultural distance we have travelled in the last half century."²⁸ As a cultural force communism, and probably socialism too, is, for the present at least, a spent force.²⁹ Great masses of people may well never again march under red banners or sing *The*

26. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 1434-35 and Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 329.

27. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 1434 and Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 329.

28. Adamson, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," 331.

29. About communism as a viable intellectual conception what needs to be said is much more complex. See Andrew Levine, "Communism after Communism" (unpublished manuscript). The conception of communism in Marx, Luxemburg, and even Lenin may very well have been more confirmed than refuted by recent events. Russian and similar communisms are so different from the communism envisioned by Marx that the collapse of the terrible authoritarian statism of Russian communism may have, theoretically speaking, made no difference at all to Marx's communism, to genuine communism. Russian communism, to say nothing of what went on in Romania, was at best a grotesque caricature of communism. But, as Levine well realizes, things are not that simple. As a political-cultural phenomena, these regimes represented themselves, and were in some sense accepted as, the embodiment of Marxism. But it is these "embodiments" that have been so thoroughly rejected by their own populations, including their own working class. Given such considerations, where will the political clout come from to move societies along to a genuine socialism? What, practically speaking, will take the place of a class-conscious proletariat? What will fuel the drive for proletarian emancipation through revolution? Given that there is a proletariat (even though it does not see itself as such) how is that proletariat,

Internationale. Gramsci's "new religion" seems not to have stuck—I say this with what for me is a deep sadness. I have very little hope that the world we can reasonably expect to obtain during our lives will resemble even a minimally decent world. It will not be just and it certainly will not be humane and probably not even be very intelligently ordered. But, aside from fears—I think not unfounded—about the uncontrolled and now hardly effectively opposable, American domination of the world—or (alternatively) trilateralism (the joint American-cum-European-cum-Japanese domination of the world)—I have no sorrow at all for the passing of the Russian Thermidor, along with its client communist (pseudo-communist is more accurate) regimes. But I had hoped—a hope that proved illusory—that something would be salvaged of a genuine socialist tradition from the ashes and that there would not be in those countries a capitalist restoration. But the capitalist countries won the Cold War and a capitalist restoration is well in progress, though not without opposition, along with an American or at least a trilateral world domination. Communism and socialism appear at least to be conceptualizations, culturally speaking, of times past. (Still, this may be too hasty a judgement. In many ways, things look uncertain.)

There is an irony in this for Marxian theoreticians. Marxism as a social force is dead, for the present at least, just as we are gaining from the work of such analytical Marxists as G.A. Cohen, Andrew Levine, Erik Olin Wright, and John Roemer a sophisticated and appropriately rigorous Marxian social theory that is arguably the best holistic social theory in or out of town.³⁰ Marxism has always

given the turning of the world, going to come to see itself as a proletariat and take matters into its own hands and thereby emancipate itself, or more accurately begin the process of emancipation? Have we the slightest reason to think that anything like that will happen in the foreseeable future? Things look very bleak, but there are some hopeful signs as well. Things are working badly in capitalist societies and alienation is extensive. And so far at least, the turn to capitalism in the formerly state socialist societies has in most respects made matters even worse in those societies. Circumstances could arise in which that alienation would be transformed into opposition to the capitalist order. See here Russell Hardin, "Efficiency vs. Equality and the Demise of Socialism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 22, no. 2 (June 1992), 149-161. See also the references in footnotes 30 and 48.

30. See references in note 12 and Erik Olin Wright, "What is Analytical Marxism?" *Socialist Review* 19, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1989); Erik Olin Wright, *Class* (London: New

been something more (indeed very much more) than a theory, even a good theory, and now it will have no basis for its praxis. It will, whatever its intentions, not be a theory in the service of a revolutionary movement. But this is to take away its very underlying rationale.

So the wheel of the world having turned, our analysis of the politics of civil society will have to be somewhat different from Gramsci's. Still, deploying the notion of civil society may continue to be useful, perhaps even more useful than before, for analyzing and critiquing the contemporary world.

For the institutions of civil society to be in place and properly functioning, two essential preconditions must be met: (a) the society must be a complex society with many different social functions and roles into which people are slotted and (b) the state and economic organizations cannot incorporate or even completely control the various practices, organizations, and institutions of the society that are non-economic and non-governmental. Vulgar Marxism with its economic determinism and reductionism sees the state and other non-economic institutions as utterly in control of the ruling class that goes with the economic structure. But Gramsci plainly was not such a Marxist and, even if he were, such a Marxism is plainly false.³¹ In our societies these two essential preconditions for the possible viability of civil society are met, albeit perhaps insecurely. The key critical question for us should be: how should the politics of civil society appear, given present-day social realities? Put differently: what practices, organizations, and institutions should the particular civil society that is ours have and what kind of life together for ourselves should we seek to achieve? We, of course, cannot sensibly answer the latter question without a good understanding of what is feasibly possible: of what is on the historical agenda.

The preconditions for civil society are met in our world, but it is also true that the strength, and so far the growing strength, of economic-corporate and political-bureaucratic organizations

Left Books, 1985); and John Roemer, *Free to Lose* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Kai Nielsen, "Analytical Marxism: A Form of Critical Theory," *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 39 (1993), 1-21.

31. It should be added that Marx was not such a Marxist. See Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*.

threatens to undermine the institutions of civil society. There is, as Habermas puts it, a colonization of the life-world. Adamson is only being slightly hyperbolic when he remarks that “we face a social world in which the power of corporate-bureaucratic structures is so great as to threaten the very existence of civil society and even the private sphere as we know them.”³²

A viable civil society as a kind of third force between the state and economy, on the one hand, and the private sphere, on the other, seems to require some effective sense of community and of there actually being a community to which people are committed. That was plainly Gramsci's hope and indeed he thought that it would come about with the establishment of communism. In the long war of position for the challenging class—the working class—it can, in that struggle, forge partial structures of community within civil society, though this will not be achieved without class struggle. But an overarching sense of community is what he thought, with the entrenchment of socialism, the new religion of Marxism would articulate and enhance for us. Remember that this community would be a total integral civilization rooted in a total and integral conception of the world, with a unitary conception of the common good supported by an integral practical organization of society, yielding, when fully developed, a regulated society but a society that is regulated for the common good—a common good that would be so comprehensive that it would articulate justified norms for what Gramsci called a total integral civilization. It is understandable that this, given our past history, would give some people the jitters. For others it will just seem thoroughly unrealistic given the diversity of present day complex societies.

Hitler made the word *'Gemeinschaft'* a dirty word and Stalinist and neo-Stalinist realities in what once were the actually existing socialisms have stamped that feeling in. We have a well-warranted aversion for total ideologies, grand meta-narratives, or comprehensive totalizing theories. Yet what are the goals of our civil society, if indeed there is any consensus about this at all, in the really existing capitalist world? What conception of a truly human community can we plausibly come up with that we could aim to have instanti-

32. Adamson, “Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society,” 335-36.

ated and that could gain our reflective allegiance? Such a conception, if we can forge one, must not only be normatively warranted, it must as well be something that is feasible: that there could actually be such institutions, organizations, and practices in our world as distinct from their simply being something of which we dream—create in our philosophers' closets—for an ideal but unachievable world. When we are talking about such an unachievable world, the fact that we do this with elegance, rigor and adroit conceptualization matters very little. We are—if this is how we proceed—just playing little games. (Doing that is an old philosophical pastime.) The norms of a viable civil society must be justified and the conceptualized civil society must really be a civil society that could come to be in our world or at least in a near possible world that could actually come to be our own. But there is the rub, for I do not believe that a humanly viable civil society is on the historical agenda for at least the foreseeable future. Our societies are pretty rotten, to put it crudely and bluntly, but I think correctly, and I do not see much prospect for them being changed for the better.³³ I think Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky, in their different ways, are nearer to the mark about the prospects for a just and humane world order than social democratic communitarians such as Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer or Habermasian neo-Marxists. I would, of course, very much like to be mistaken and perhaps I am too pessimistic, too derailed by the death of anything like

33. Indeed in many respects things seem to be getting worse. In the United States between 1977 and 1987 the real income of the poorest 20 percent of the population fell by 9 percent, while for the richest 5 percent the real income went up nearly 53 percent. Homelessness and child poverty increased. Among homeless children, once declining diseases like whooping cough and tuberculosis are becoming common again. The United States is strikingly bad in these respects but similar phenomena occur in the other rich capitalist countries. When we turn to the Third World, things get dramatically worse. Given the productive wealth of the world, these things are not necessary, but these things go right along without much in the way of an outcry. People seem, for the most part, to accept them like they accept the onset of winter. William Plowden, "Welfare in America," *London Review of Books* 13, no. 13 (July 11, 1991), 8. See Howard Karger and David Stocz, *American Social Welfare Policy: A Structural Approach* (London: Longman, 1990) and Theodore Marmor, et al., *America's Misunderstood Welfare State* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). The best that we can hope for, is that because things are so rotten, so irrationally structured, that the capitalist societies will begin, with their citizens becoming increasingly disenchanting and disgusted, to collapse from within.

a Marxian utopian vision for a future society. I will close by giving some reasons for my pessimism while quite sincerely wishing to be shown that things are not as bleak as I am about to portray them.

VI.

There are a number of not so pessimistic, roughly social democratic moves that could be made here, including Habermasian ones and Rawlsian ones. I shall not consider the Habermasian and Rawlsian ones here. I shall, rather, consider only one such attempt to defend a conception of civil society for our time and a social democratic political culture: namely, the communitarian attempt. Sometimes, such an orientation, taking as it does some clues from Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, has been called (more ambiguously I believe) the civic humanist tradition, defending in its contemporary forms republicanism, industrial democracy, and with the latter a kind of democratic socialism.

Such communitarian accounts, and Habermas's as well, seek to reinvigorate the public sphere, to make us conscious again of how politicized civil society is, to make it self-consciously and overtly politicized, and to render it a viable mediator between the private sphere and the corporate-bureaucratic state apparatus with its linked capitalist economic order (by now a world order). I choose to examine communitarian defenses of social democracy because they are more directly normative and political than the more procedurally based accounts we have in Habermas and Rawls. But any detailed examination of the rationale for social democracy and the role civil society plays in that would have to include them too. I leave that for another day.

What centrally sets communitarian social democrats apart from social democratic liberals such as Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls is that the latter pair believes that the state should be neutral between different conceptions of the good life espoused by individuals, while the former group believes that a good society, including a genuinely constitutional democracy, needs some commonly recognized, socially sanctioned, conception of the good life.³⁴ The

34. Ronald Dworkin: *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 181-233, and "Liberal Community," *California Law Review* 77, no. 3 (1989), 479-507. John Rawls: "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy*

communitarians believe that without that there will be no viable community, including a political culture. Without such an authoritative conception of the good life there will not be the social cement to make us an *us* (a distinct people) and without such an *us* there will be no viable civil society.

What is needed in a good society (including, of course, a just society), communitarians argue, is an identification with others, in particular others in a determinate society or a cluster of closely related societies. The attachment needs to be to some particular community or cluster of communities (say, for a Dane the Scandinavian communities) and only secondarily, if at all, to some universal moral principle or set of moral principles, e.g., Stoic, Kantian or utilitarian principles. "Functioning republics are like families," Taylor remarks, "in this crucial respect, that part of what binds people together is their common history."³⁵ "Only when this obtains can there be a viable community, including a viable civil society. To have this is to have a common identification with an historical community founded on certain values."³⁶

In the individualistic tradition—what Taylor misleadingly calls the atomistic tradition—of Hobbes, Locke, and Bentham, common institutional structures are conceived of as collective instruments: as things that have instrumental value only. The only good reason for having them is that we, as collections of individuals thrown together as we are, can attain benefits and avoid distresses that we

and Public Affairs 14, no. 3 (1983), 223-51; "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, no. 1 (1987), 1-25; and "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," *New York University Law Review* 64, no. 2 (1989), 233-55. For communitarians see Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in N. Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 159-82; Charles Taylor, "The Nature and Scope of Distributive Justice," in Frank Lucash, ed., *Justice and Equality Here and Now* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 34-67; Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (1990), 6-23; Michael Walzer, "Justice Here and Now," in Frank Lucash, ed., *Justice and Equality Here and Now* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 135-50; and Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

35. Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal Communitarian Debate," 166. Taylor has a very naive and unrealistic picture of families as havens of trust and love.

36. *Ibid.*, 178.

could not secure or escape individually. "The action," as Taylor puts it, "is collective but the point of it remains individual. The common good is constituted out of individual goods, without remainder."³⁷ This is the only kind of common good that such individualists acknowledge or in some instances can even make sense of. Indeed it is the only kind that their methodologies allow them to recognize. Taylor thinks these methodologies are fetters and that they are arbitrary and confused. He also believes, though he thinks the methodological fetters keep many from being self-conscious about this, that in reality (though sometimes unwittingly) people in such societies as ours (as in all societies) do have, at least in practice, a richer conception of the common good than that purely instrumental one, though admittedly some kinds of common good are just instrumental goods. But there are other kinds that are not. This richer conception of the good shows itself in the very way we talk and act and in some quite mundane and unproblematic practices. What should be obvious is obscured from us by the atomistic individualistic theories that are pervasive in our societies: theories that in reality are little better than distorting ideologies.

That we have a conception of the common good that is not just constituted out of our individual goods can be shown in the following way. We need to distinguish between I-identities and we-identities and "between matters which are for me and for you, on the one hand, and those which are for us, on the other."³⁸ Suppose one member of an academic department, namely myself, notes that it is raining and observes as well that a colleague is looking out the window and sees that it is raining. I see him, as he is about to go to the Faculty Club, go to his office and get his umbrella. I then say to him, "Lousy weather we are having. It's raining again," and he acknowledges that it is and we go on for a bit about how this year has been very unusual. Prior to that remark, I was attending to the weather and so was he, and I was also aware that he was attending to the weather. It was a matter for him and a matter for me but they were distinct matters. What, as Taylor puts it, "the conversation opener does is make it now a matter of us: we are now attending to it together". It is important to see that this "attending-together is

37. *Ibid.*, 166.

38. *Ibid.*, 167.

not reducible to an aggregation of attending separately.³⁹ Plainly, it involves something more than each of us noting the bad weather alone and just silently noting that the other notes it.

Now consider matters of genuine importance. When I talk about things that matter to me, those to whom I talk are my intimates. But it is important to note that intimacy “is essentially a dialogic phenomena: it is a matter of what we share, of what’s for us.”⁴⁰ The “move from the for-me-for-you to the for-us, the move into public space, is one of the important things we bring about in language and any theory of language has to take account of this.”⁴¹

The same thing holds for goods. Some things, like health, have value to me and to you as well and to everyone individually. We can have health and value it individually but it is not essentially linked to an us. But there are some things that essentially have value for us. We cannot have them individually. Their being for us, and not just for you and just for me, enters into and constitutes their value for us. Friendship is a good example, as is intimacy. What “centrally matters for us is just that there are common actions and meanings.”⁴² The good in such contexts is what we share. We cannot have it alone. There is nothing there, as there is for goods like health or pleasure, which we could just have and of which our individual having would, just for us, quite alone as individuals, constitute a good. With friendship and intimacy we have a kind of good that is a common good, that is not just an instrumental good to individual havings. It is something we essentially have to have together if we are going to have it at all.

Taylor transfers this talk of such a common good to what he takes to be a similar political common good. In a good republic, a good polity, its citizens are animated by such a shared common good. Where there is a friendship between Jane and Janet, there is a shared common good. Similarly “the identification of a citizen with the republic, as a shared common enterprise, is essentially the recognition of a common good.”⁴³ Compatriots in a functioning

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, 168.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, 170.

republic have a bond of solidarity that "is based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value."⁴⁴ What the civic humanist tradition or communitarian social democracy seeks is a government and civil society that would instantiate that tradition: that would nurture and sustain or, if necessary, bring into being a political culture where the citizens of that community had that kind of solidarity, and where such common goods were acknowledged and prized. The political culture of such a republic would be one in which there would be a socially sanctioned conception of the common good and, as well, political liberty, namely, its being the case that all citizens will have a say in the decisions made in the political domain and in the sphere of civil society. And, with these democratic collective decisions, things they do as a people, they will shape their lives together. Everyone, where political liberty obtains, would have an equal say in how their common life together is to be ordered. There would, with such political liberty, be a sense that the political institutions and the institutions of civil society were expressions of themselves as citizens, as a people, and there would, as well, be an identification with the political community.⁴⁵ In sustaining political liberty, there would have to be a well-functioning public sphere where there would be debate and discussion, where the interchange would not principally, or perhaps even at all, be a matter of bargaining and compromise, but would be a genuine matter of citizens deliberating together, as we might as individuals deliberate with ourselves over what to do or seek or, with the same ends in view, deliberate in the private sphere with people with whom we are intimate. There would crucially in this public sphere be genuine citizen deliberation over the refinement, reconceptualization, the applications and implications of their shared conception of the common good. They would not bargain but instead morally deliberate together about it. There would, linked with that, be a participating in self-government and in such a situation the common actions of a free citizenry would be animated by common identifications.

Every political society, despotic or democratic, requires some sacrifices and restraints and demands some discipline from its citi-

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, 165, 170.

zens. Citizens have to pay taxes, serve in the armed forces, do jury duty, pick up after their dogs, and the like. In a despotic society these sacrifices, restraints, and disciplines are obtained by coercion or the threat of coercion. In a free society, where there is citizen dignity, these disciplines are willingly accepted as the doing of one's share in maintaining the commonwealth. It isn't that we like doing them—most of us do not—but that we realize we have a duty to shoulder our fair share of the burdens, where what is to count as a fair share has in turn been subject to democratic discussion and decision in a genuine public sphere. Where, that is, there is dispute about what these sacrifices and restraints should be, and how we should respond to them, this will be deliberated over and decided on by a free citizenry reasoning and deciding together. What is done, what is mandated, is what is freely consented to after free and fair deliberation, approximating, as much as possible, conditions of undistorted discourse and carried out in a public sphere.

Such a democratic regime calls on its members to do things that mere subjects would avoid and, in that way, by requiring service in public life, it is more onerous and demanding than in despotic or managed regimes whose citizens are treated as mere subjects; but, though it is more onerous, citizens in a genuine republic will have control over their own lives, have reasons for being loyal and not merely obedient to the regime and will have reasons, as well, for identifying with their state. In being such (if indeed it could be that) the state would be an ethical state. Hegel's conception is not conceptually incoherent.

This civic humanism is indeed an attractive *picture*, but it seems to me to be in fact only that. It is as unrealistic and unworldly as the classical normative theories of democracy. Just think how far we are from having anything like this public sphere and of what it would be like to achieve it in mass societies such as our own. The very idea of getting from here to there is staggering. We haven't any good sense of what would be an effective means here. Whether this civic humanism takes the communitarian form described above or a more Habermasian form, it is unrealistic, given contemporary, large-scale, bureaucratically organized and inegalitarian societies—inegalitarian in almost all spheres—but particularly deeply inegali-

tarian and hurtful about the distribution of power; power being in the hands of a few.⁴⁶ But this is the reality of our societies.

Such civic humanism is in a bad sense utopian, taking us away from the grim realities of political life, realities it is urgent to attend to if we are ever to have decent societies. What might have worked in a small scale, face-to-face, society is utterly unworkable in large-scale societies such as our own. Perhaps it would work in Iceland but never in Germany, the United States, or Canada. It is unworkable not because we are ideologically blinded by ontological theses about atomistic individualism but because of (a) the inescapability of powerful and dominating bureaucracies (both state and capitalist) and (b) the plain and inescapable fact—a fact stressed by John Rawls—of the extensive and entrenched *de facto* pluralism of our societies.⁴⁷ Our societies have a rich variety, and not always a har-

46. See Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), and Richard Norman, *Free and Equal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Michael Walzer perhaps does not stress this as much as he might. Commonly liberals ignore it or downplay it. However, Walzer does rightly remark: ". . . it is a false view of civil society, a bad sociology, to claim that all that goes on in the marketplace is free exchange and that coercion is never an issue here. Market success overrides the limits of the (free) market in three closely related ways. First of all, radical inequalities of wealth generate their own coerciveness, so that many exchanges are only formally free. Second, certain sorts of market power, organized, say, in corporate structures, generate patterns of command and obedience in which the formalities of exchange give way to something that looks very much like government. And third, vast wealth and ownership or control of productive forces convert readily into government in the strict sense: capital regularly and successfully calls upon the coercive power of the state." Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," 321-22. But Milton Friedman's dreams to the contrary notwithstanding, this is the name of the game for really existing capitalisms, even capitalisms with a human face such as Sweden's. What the liberal needs to tell us is how capitalist societies of any complexity can be reformed so that that will no longer be the case. It seems to me that a necessary condition for that ceasing to be the case is the public ownership and control of the means of production. But that is socialism. It baffles me why committed socialists such as Jürgen Habermas no longer see things in these terms.

47. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," 223-52. See also Kai Nielsen, "Rawls and the Socratic Ideal," *Analyse & Kritik* (Fall 1991) and Kai Nielsen, "Philosophy within the Limits of Wide Reflective Equilibrium Alone," *Iyyun, The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 43 (Juli/Vol. 13, 67-93, 1994) 3-41. For some cautionary notes, not as distant from Rawls as he seems to believe,

monious variety, of people with different ethnic backgrounds, religious identifications, moral outlooks, political orientations, class positions, and the like. There is not much reality to the melting pot or the vertical mosaic metaphors of the United States and Canada respectively. There is no chance at all that in such societies—that is, in our societies—that there will be anything like a consensus about a conception of a common good. One could perhaps, just perhaps, be imposed by a despotic or authoritarian state (though even that is rather doubtful), but one would not be accepted as part of what constitutes the citizens' moral point of view, even by an active citizenry—even if, counterfactually, we could galvanize citizens of such societies into participation. (Günther Grass was appropriately and effectively ironical about such participation.) Furthermore, when we consider citizens' feelings about their society, what we need to note is that very widely there is no such sense of loyalty, there is no such identification with contemporary governments even in the constitutional democracies, there is no such actual public sphere in which to exercise such republican virtues and there is little likelihood that such institutions are coming into being. Philosophers can deliberate about what the common good of their society is or over whether there is such a good or should be. With some groups of philosophers, it just might be possible to secure, after much deliberation, a conception that was recognized for a short period of time by these philosophers to be nearer to the mark than others, but even if, as is very unlikely, there could be a kind of local philosophical consensus here there still would be no chance at all of there being a general consensus across the society of the various people that inhabit those societies. Pluralism, for the foreseeable future, is just an inescapable social fact in societies such as ours. Whether it is or isn't a desirable thing is quite another matter; desirable or undesirable, we will have to live with it.

That, in the United States, some citizens responded with outrage to the Vietnam War, to Watergate, to the Iran-Contra affair, perhaps shows there are some residues among some citizens of a concern about republican virtues, some rather attenuated sense of citizen dignity, of what it is for a country to behave honorably, but

about the power of philosophy, see Michael Walzer, "Flight from Philosophy," *The New York Review of Books* (Feb 2, 1989), 42-43.

the evidence that there is a commitment to anything like civic humanism is rather slim, given the quiescence over the Persian Gulf affair and over the not infrequent American military interventions in the world, over the racism of American society coupled with the indifference to widespread poverty and in other ways extensive inequalities in the society. That the sight of the homeless evokes anger directed at the homeless and not at the society that allows this is symptomatic of the sickness of our societies. There is very little civic humanism in our societies and there is nothing to be patriotic about.

If to such considerations we add facts about voter turnouts and additional facts about the number of corrupt or incompetent politicians that get elected and re-elected, we seem at least to have rather strong disconfirming evidence concerning the existence of anything like the polity that Taylor and other social democratic communitarians regard as existent. The ship of state isn't what the communitarians take it to be. It is a nice ideal but ideals need to be tied to the real world. We need something more than pretty dreams. Moreover, to put the point directly normatively, why should one have any loyalty, patriotic commitment, or identification with such regimes? Obedience can be, and is, achieved out of fear, prudence, a recognition that there are no better alternatives around, and from a bitter recognition that the Marxian utopian visions of society are just that: at least supposedly unfeasible utopian visions that show no prospect of being realized or even approximated in a form that would yield human emancipation.⁴⁸ But the tradition of civic

48. I do not mean to give to understand that I think there is anything drastically wrong or in a bad sense utopian about sophisticated forms of Marxian theory either in their weak historical materialism, class analysis, more generally in their political sociology, or (in some cases) in their understanding of the role of moral notions in social life. On the contrary, these accounts seem to me realistic and reasonable. Indeed, seeing Marxian theory, principally through the work of analytical Marxians, as a developing theory being repeatedly refined, it seems to me that that account, though of course flawed (what account isn't?), is the best account we have to date of large-scale social phenomena. My point is rather that, given the political realities of the past few years, there will be no audience, at least for a time, for the case for socialism, no matter how well it is articulated and defended. That is unfortunate, but that is the way it is. The world has turned, but it can turn again in ways that are not so uncongenial to the possibility of worker self-emancipation. Tough-minded idealists can hardly fail to be pessimistic, the way things stand. But that need not be crippling either for thought or struggle. See here G.A. Cohen, "The

humanism is every bit as much an unfeasible utopian vision. It is a conception of a political culture that could have no instantiation in our complex societies, and it does not bring with it a civil society that is much of a bulwark against the economic order or a state that is anything but the realization of an ethical ideal.