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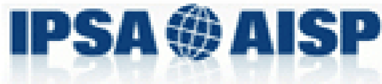

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Political philosophy in political science: sixty years on

Part II: current features of contemporary political philosophy*

Jean Leca

If what we have argued in the previous part of this article (published in this journal in November 2010) carries some weight, it follows that political philosophy is again part and parcel of political science.[1] It can perform its task in two entirely different ways that have long been the watershed of the discipline. The first one, from Plato to Marx, Hayek (1973–9) and Nozick (1974), considers politics as something awkward, superficial and empty since, like the state itself, it cannot be reduced by an 'iconography of order' (Oren and Skowroneck, 1994). Therefore, the genuine reality must be located elsewhere, in 'society' (for a critique of the concept, see Latour (2005) and on its 'future', Outhwaite (2005)), biology, religion, law, economy or philosophy. Politics is then a social misformation, which should, and could, disappear some day from this world. The alternative, dating back to Aristotle, is to view politics with all its 'patterned disorder' as a constitutive dimension of the human condition (Crick, 1964; Freund, 1965/2003; Walzer, 2007). Its frontiers and values may widely vary and be expanded or 'displaced' (Honnig, 1993) as evidenced today by the various feminist political philosophies (James, 2003) insisting for instance on completing or replacing 'justice' by 'care' as a foundation of a fair political community (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993). This entails substantial changes in the assessment of past political philosophies and political science itself (Hartsock, 1997; Nussbaum, 1999; Okin, 1989; Pateman, 1988; Phillips, 1991; Pitkin, 1999; Sylvester, 2001; Tickner, 2001; Young, 1990).

A 'third way' has recently appeared, stating that we are currently witnessing the transformation of the idea of political community inherited from European history and its 'Wesphalian' turn (Linklater, 1998). This may lead to a revival of 'cosmopolitics' (Beck, 1998; Beck and Grande, 2007; Brennan, 1997; Robbins and Shea, 1998; Stengers, 1996–7), with notions worked out by empirical as well as philosophical theories such as 'global citizenship' (Carter, 2001; Dower and Williams, 2002), 'global civil society' (Germain and Kenny, 2004), 'transnational governance'

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(Dingwerth, 2007), 'world government' (Campbell, 2008), 'Global State' (Shaw, 2000) and 'World State' (Cabrera, 2006; Wendt, 2003). This is reminiscent of Dante's 'universal Empire' expounded in *Monarchia* (Till Davis, 1993) and Kojeve's (2000) comparable concept of an 'universal homogeneous state'. Although the idea of a world state is sometimes rejected by cosmopolitics and has been strongly criticized by Michael Walzer as a dystopian top-down tyranny (the opposite of the Kantian advocacy of a League of small republics; Walzer, 2004), these ideas remain alive, since many of them stem from the contention that politics should not be viewed as the taming of the social war and the containment of violent conflicts.

The only vital conflict today is humankind opposing its real enemy – *itself* – when it destroys the earth's eco-system and forgets that it is a dependent part of that system. War on factors generating climate change, likewise the war on poverty, is the only proper task of politics since politics is first of all about the production of public goods (for a concise definition stemming from a rational choice approach, see Colomer [2010] and 'global justice'; Pogge [2002]). Admittedly, the last position is strongly denied by those holding that 'social justice' can only be conceptualized within domestic state politics, as globalism requires other virtues such as the Kantian duty to assist those who need it most (Nagel, 2005; O'Neil, 1988). The same problem surfaces when one moves from social to economic justice, raised, among others, by 'the more Rawlsians than Rawls' (Pogge, 1990, 1994, 2002). Actually, the plausibility of such a turn does not depend on philosophical arguments but on the psycho-sociological consequences of those global changes. If, as seems almost certain, they entail a vastly unequal distribution of costs and benefits among different areas, then the 'common enemy' will not unite humankind but will turn certain frustrated human groups against others and philosophy will be back to square one. Notwithstanding, the idea of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2005) has paved the way for the concept of a 'second modernity' calling for the replacement of 'methodological nationalism' by a 'methodological cosmopolitanism' (Beck and Grande, 2010; cf. Calhoun, 2010).

This leads at times to the fading of the Hobbesian divide, which is still worth recalling. On the one hand the 'realist' theory of international relations holds that, whatever the preferences of reason, conflict is the order itself and accordingly virtual wars are always possible in a metaphoric 'state of nature' (Aron, 1962; Walt, 2002; Waltz, 1979). This does not mean that realism is averse to international law and morality. Even to 'liberal internationalism', a carefully conditioned sovereignty may be considered as the best buffer against imperialist actions (Cohen, 2004). So, war may be legitimized as 'self-defence' against aggression (Rodin, 2002), which keeps alive the issue of the moral legitimacy of war, a very ancient concern of Christian, Muslim, Indian and Chinese political thought (Kelsey and Turner Johnson, 1991; Walzer, 1977, 2004; on Buddhism see Jerryson and Juergensmeyer, 2010; on the Chinese case, Kim, 2010). The moral legitimacy of war is especially important in circumstances when the thorny issues of the preventive use of force and armed humanitarian interventions without a mandate from the United Nations arise (Bellamy, 2004, 2010; Buchanan and Keohane, 2004; Chatterjee and Scheid, 2003; Holzgrefe and Keohane, 2003; Nardin and Williams, 2006; Teson, 1997; Wheeler, 2003). On the other hand, the liberal philosophy of domestic relations, where war is banished and conflict has its magnitude and severity limited by the requirements of order, may question the necessity of a Sovereign to reach that goal. This is one of the most pressing issues of contemporary political science and philosophy since it encompasses all the claims to the obsolescence of the Hobbesian divide (Axelrod, 1984; Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Keohane, 1994; on the contention that democracy today does not need a sovereign nation-state, see Colomer, 2007, 2010). It is worth recalling Rawls's (1999) dual effort to take into account the resilience of the Hobbesian divide by devising another 'veil of ignorance' applicable to the

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construction of justice at the international level while getting rid of the concept of the (implicitly 'sovereign') state, and replacing it by 'the people'.

Whatever the life-chances of those opposed views, the 'professionalization' of political philosophy, different according to each historical context (for an excessively severe analysis of 'political theory' as a subfield of American political science, see Gunnell, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1993), should not be construed as making irrelevant other forms of political reflections derived from religious beliefs and above all from works of art: Homer's epic poetry, Greek tragedy (Euben, 1986, 1997), Shakespeare's plays or, closer to our times, Dostoievsky, Musil, Orwell or Soljhenytzin. It may even be claimed that political philosophy and all forms of political thought have a 'literary dimension' since the texts always express the linkage between *what* is said and *how* it is said (Euben, 1997; Nussbaum, 1990),[2] autobiography being intrinsic to all interesting philosophical writing (Cavell, 2010). Of course, philosophy remains bound to seek self-understanding and beyond – the understanding of human culture – by using logical reasoning instead of an aesthetic or edifying narrative. Yet, it remains possible that it may miss something vital in politics if it is a knowledge not born of pain and passion since those passions and emotions cannot be tamed by pure reason or even instrumental rationality as Hume emphasized long ago; so, reason cannot rule unfettered in the human world. As Bernard Williams noticed, that may be philosophy's shortcoming, not to have kept the traces, dating back to the fifth century BC and earlier, of an Epicurean conscience not yet superseded by Plato's and Aristotle's endeavours to make our relation to the world fully intelligible (Williams, 1993, 2006).[3]

Although a significant part of contemporary political philosophy looks dedicated to keeping political tragedy at bay, a sense of tragedy still lingers, not only due to the conflict between the individual will to excel oneself in the practice of self domination, born from the appeal of Fortune and the political and institutional conventions of the city (Griffin, 1976), but also from a conflict about the meaning and foundation of different values within the same set of conventions. In this respect the warnings of green political theory are, sometimes unwittingly, not devoid of a tragic character (Ball, 2003; Bookchin, 1990; Carter, 1999; Goodin, 1992; Humphrey, 2001; Jonas, 1990). Furthermore, especially (but not only) in international relations, the tensions between 'restorative justice' – righting the wrongs of the past and peace-assuring harmony in the present – are more complex than several philosophers seem to think when checked against the thoughtful narratives of newspapermen (Hazan, 2010). Likewise, the 'globalization paradox' showing that global markets, states and democracy cannot coexist (Rodrik, 2011) exposes the tragedy of our time. Small wonder if the idea of progress, long taken for granted, is submitted to careful scrutiny (Freund, 1984; Taguieff, 2004).

An idealist and heroic effort to deny any place to tragedy lies at the heart of many contemporary philosophies of democracy: 'economic' (Becker, 1976; Grofman, 1993), 'deliberative' (Dryzek, 2000; Fishkin and Laslett, 2003; Macedo, 1999), 'communication-based' and 'Kantian republican' (Habermas, 1998; Sintomer, 1999), 'educative' (Ball, 1988; Barber, 1988), 'without enemies' (Beck, 1998), 'strong' (Barber, 1984), 'cosmopolitan' (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Archibugi et al.,1998). Only a few dissenters voice their concerns about 'democracy's discontent' and recall the Montesquieu problem of the priority of a public philosophy (Sandel, 1996). One of the most important issues is 'judicialized democracy' (Hirschl, 2008; Shapiro and Stone Sweet, 2002) attempting to insulate law from politics and to place politics under the control of law (i.e., the judiciary) so as to safeguard liberty. This is likely to provoke the counterattack of those who defend 'the dignity of legislation' (Waldron, 1999) and of the reckless upholders of a *jus politicum* ('public law'), legally binding the 'government' but not the 'state' (that is the people made by, and making, Leviathan).

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In this instance, the state is bound only morally and politically, which makes a strong government more apt than a weak parliament to represent 'the state' in times of social change and political crisis (Loughlin, 2005, 2010). This conception seeks to bridge the gap between 'methodological exceptionalism', mentioned earlier, and 'ordinary democratic politics' (Kalyvas, 2009). Needless to say, the distinct nationalist and Schmittian flavours of the argument (despite Loughlin's reliance on Spinoza's concept of liberty as self-government, highly praised by republicanism, and Kalyvas's attempt to rely on Hanna Arendt rather than on Schmitt and Negri) and its relation with a Hobbesian conception of sovereignty, suffice to make it quite exceptional in current political philosophy and put it outside of the mainstream theories.

Most of them (the economic theories being the obvious exception) have in common the tendency to extol the virtues of rational and peaceful dialogue as a necessary and sometimes sufficient condition not only of philosophical practice but also of real-world democratic politics. Too often they forget that an ideal dialogue leading to consensus is only one of the many features of a complex process bringing about interaction, understanding and mutual agreement through a host of creative proceedings, majority decisions, negotiation, compromise, law-making, jurisprudence, socialization, economic innovation, and more. As Michael Walzer (2007) has wryly noted, philosophy is so passionately dedicated to ideal debate that once its conditions have been determined it looks hardly necessary to debate. Hence, too many philosophers dream of replacing political debate with an idealized version of judicial deliberation.

Likewise, the opposite concept, 'the will of the majority', does not exist as a plain empirical fact and Dahl's (1978) concept of 'polyarchy' is closer to the facts, although it leaves out the issue of the necessary decision stressed by Weber (1968). The idea of 'will of the majority' may even be dangerous if taken as the dogma of the 'will of the people' (Lefort, 1981). The people as a plurality (the Aristotelian 'multitude') has no 'unified will' except the universal (and universalist) banality that every ordinary human being wants to live in the *tranquillitas ordinis* of a just and safe society protected against the 'ousiders'. This view leads more to interpretive divisions than to political consensus, as testified by the ordeals of collapsing states (Milliken, 2004) when peoples want to make up a people without agreeing on which kind of people, one of the main nagging issues of 'secession' and 'self determination', raised as far back as 1919 by Sir Ivor Jennings (Buchanan, 1991, 2004; Buchanan and Moore, 2003; see also Binder, 1996). Yet, majority is neither useless nor devoid of validity. It is only one of the many practical devices invented, *among others*, to reach an acceptable decision, and so is 'deliberation'. Both of them need prior conditions to function smoothly – nothing less but nothing more.

A tentative normative epistemology of contemporary political philosophy

The above conclusion leads one to venture into normative epistemology. First, like historical sociology, political philosophy must eschew both the illusion of 'historical inevitability' (the present is already written in the past; Berlin, 1978, 2000) and the 'fallacy of discontinuity' (the present is *radically* new, yet bound to happen; Goldthorpe, 2002), which is in many respects symmetrical to the idea of *philosophia perennis* (the basic problems never change, being written in the immutable 'human nature').

Second, although philosophy resembles science in so far as it has to rely on argument without claiming any longer to be the mirror of nature (Rorty, 1980), the validity of political philosophy's discoveries should be viewed as different from scientific discoveries. They cannot claim the

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monopoly held by scientific theories once vindicated, (at least provisionally), until they are falsified by a new scientific discovery: philosophical 'truths' do not have the same status as scientific ones.[4] For example, it is dubious that animal rights and the 'great apes sovereignty' can be established beyond question by philosophy. Political philosophy always seeks a balance, different depending on practical contexts, between values, for instance 'negative' and 'positive' liberty (Berlin, 1958/1979a; cf. Skinner, 1998) or the 'politics of faith' and the 'politics of scepticism' (Oakeshott, 1996). Far from being a weakness, this is the enduring strength of contemporary political philosophy not to edict a theory of everything and to accept as a truth the plurality of reality and so the reasonable pluralism of different philosophies, by nature partial and incomplete, without falling down into the relativism of mere opinions. As Bernard Williams (1978) says about Isaiah Berlin, being 'truthful' is perhaps the only way to be true.

One may deplore that a part of the fast-growing political philosophy of the European Union (Bellamy and Castiglione, 2003; Føllesdal, 2006) aims at offering a total explanation and justification of something that comes to us in bits and pieces, the consistency of which may be questioned (for example the assimilation of the EU, deemed a 'compound polity', to *The Federalist*'s concept of 'compound republic', Ostrom, 1987). Hence, there is a bias towards both immanentism ('all that happens in the EU is good/panglossism or bad/catastrophism') and teleonomy ('everything in the EU is governed by the law of the "final causes"'). Perhaps Schopenhauer's advice should still be followed: philosophy starts from a 'painful amazement' in front of an illusion no longer credible and commences its argument with a 'chord in a minor key' like the overture of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Too many philosophers start in a major key with new illusions coming from the only bits of reality that suit them, for example the concept of a European 'Supranational *Sektorstaat*', a polity made of differentiated and functional 'subpolities', based only on two basic empirical features: associationism and comitology (McCormick, 2009). One may venture that such a shortcoming is not the monopoly of European studies.

This may be due to the latent opposition (not devoid of a certain irony) between the current task assigned to political philosophy (to draw a general picture of the conventions and problems of an epoch), which should induce it to rise above narrow specialties, and its 'professionalization' confining it in disciplinary departments (politics and government, philosophy), which submits its productions to the rules governing the academic achievement (overspecialization, methodological refinements, evolution toward progress) it is expected to criticize. As MacIntyre (2010) has felicitously put it, the compartmentalization of academic life, which does not spare philosophy, tends to ignore the overall moral dimension of all human inquiry, or, at the very least, takes moral improvement as a kind of fastidious self-regard for one's 'authenticity' ('a wish to be able to think well of oneself') instead of genuine moral virtue (MacIntyre, 2010).

Third, political philosophy should stay away from both 'sociological' and 'philosophical' reductionisms (Merleau-Ponty, 1983). Sociological reductionism makes philosophical statements and their reception a secondary effect of social determinations and adds that, *therefore*, they need not be studied in themselves but explained away as 'pre-scientific', and so 'eliminated' as the states of mind are eliminated by their reduction to observable states of the brain.[5] Yet sociology properly understood may account for the emergence of ideas and their 'context of discovery', but it does not follow that the 'context of justification' and justification itself can be disposed of by the same method. On the other hand, philosophical reductionism as a narrative drawing a stylized and idealized picture of politics is flawed. This is not so much because it may lead to simple commentaries of past philosophical works, or even because it may presuppose a human being 'floating' above history and untied from any social relation (a presupposition not shared by most of the

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philosophical reductionists), but because it excludes from empirical reality everything that does not conform to its philosophical requisites, which ignore our second epistemological requirement. As Michael Walzer (2007: 26) puts it, 'Habermas argues for unconstrained communication, but he means only (!) to exclude the constraints of force and fraud, deference, fear, flattery and ignorance.' The single exclamation mark in the text is the most concise blow ever dealt to Habermas (for a more comprehensive view of the German philosopher, see Apel, 1990; Ingram, 2010).

Paradoxically, such a reductionism substitutes opinions and impressions for sound empirical knowledge. To claim that philosophy has nothing to do with science and that 'true concepts' such as 'Being' or 'Substance' should reign amounts to a denial of philosophy (Schlick, 2010; Heidegger is the target here). That does not by any means entail the banishment of utopia from political philosophy: utopia is not the depiction of an actual perfect future but the present depiction of what shall never be (Cassirer, 1953; Mucchielli, 1960). It is a 'transcendental horizon' we should always keep in mind to help us stay alert when dealing with the actual political arrangements of today.

Last, but by no means least, political philosophers should remain aware that they operate in different contexts and temporalities than political actors. Perhaps philosophy is politics construed in tranquillity and politics is philosophy implemented in confusion (Walzer, 2007). That does not mean that philosophers should ignore real politics or symmetrically accept to become politicians (or claim to be their masters). Quite the opposite: they should be aware that their discourse has no value if they do not care for the details of the problems and situations they are commenting upon (Walzer, 2007). Like the French16th-century jurists who departed from a literal interpretation of the Roman *Corpus Juris Civilis* to promote historical inquiry into the art of governing, they should go beyond the endless commentaries of their pet philosopher to look for the technical, moral and political practices of their time. This motto goes with a caveat: they should refrain from playing the philosopher-king or dressing up their political opinions as philosophical statements. They should assume that 'philosophical thought and enquiry are one thing, the vicissitudes of everyday activity quite another' since the call to philosophy is always a 'summons to situate oneself in an ongoing set of conflicts . . . that we inherited from an extended history' (MacIntyre, 2005: 75). For once, it is not the Devil who is in the detail, it is humility and absence of arrogance.

Universalism, localism and the challenge of identities to political philosophy and political science

Contemporary political philosophy, charged with the duty to be contemplative and reflexive, yet practical and prescriptive, is also facing the unavoidable challenge to try and say something universally valid, or at least 'in reach' in Rawls's parlance, while being exposed as being 'municipal' and interpretative of the local conventions of an age or a civilization (Parekh, 1996). Western philosophy with its local differences (Raynaud, 2009) and its various brands – contractarian, utilitarian, republican, even communitarian (Taylor, 1989), 'pragmatic' and 'ironic' (Rorty, 1989) – occupies most of the field, and most controversies take place within the general framework of political liberalism and democracy (Gaus, 2003). Some important issues considered in these strands are as follows:

- the requirements of a moral life in liberalism (Rosenblum, 1989);
- the nature of political obligation (Parekh, 1993; Pateman, 1985);
- the possibility of self-government (Bird, 2000);
- the conditions allowing the justification of economic liberalism (Van Parijs, 1995);

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- the possibility of a social justice without 'paternalism' (Sartorius, 1983);
- the logical consistency of a liberal social justice (Ackerman, 1980, Barry, 1995; Clayton and Williams, 2003) and democratic equality (Guillarme, 1999; Gutmann, 1980);
- the logical requisites of justice and equality (Cohen, 2008);
- the right criteria of a realist and viable concept of social justice, basic liberties for all (Rawls, 1971), 'entitlements' guaranteeing property rights and unregulated economic liberties (Nozick, 1974), access to 'capabilities for functioning' enabling people to exercise 'effective freedom' to choose what they have reason to value (Sen, 2009; for an overview of Sen's contributions, see Morris, 2009);
- the possibility of a 'civic liberalism' (Spragens, 2002);
- the rules governing institutional design in a democratic context (Olsen, 1997);
- the role of random selection ('sortition') in resource allocation (Goodwin, 2005) and more generally in the improvement of democratic processes in various domains (Delannoi and Dowlen, 2010; Dowlen, 2008), a device dating back to Greek and Italian city-states and advocated for certain functions in contemporary times by scholars of different persuasions (Ackerman and Fishkin, 2004; Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1970);
- the possibility of a rational design of international institutions (Koremenos et al., 2004); and, finally,
- the debates around the right normative framework for opposing 'procedural' to 'epistemic' value whereby collective decision-making procedures should be justified in terms of their 'epistemic value', that is their ability to produce the 'right' solution to collective problems, the fundamental standard of evaluation of procedures and outcomes being political equality. The interpretations of Condorcet's 'theorem of the jury' are at the core of current debates. Two requisites are opposed: 'epistemic proceduralism' versus a particular substantive theory of justice, the first one being conceived as escaping the accusation of 'ethnocentrism' confining democracy in a predetermined set of standards (Christiano, 2008, 2009; Estlund, 2007, 2009).

Despite the deconstructionist assaults of Michel Foucault (1977b)[6] and Alasdair MacIntyre (1985, 1988; see also Horton and Mendus, 1996)[7], the dominant western philosophy is doomed to be the legatee of the diverse Enlightenments. One of the only noticeable exceptions is 'anti-liberalism' (Holmes, 1993) represented by the Straussian pocket of resistance, yet Strauss, in his American period, had moved to an 'untimely liberalism' (Schiff, 2010) and, albeit careful to distinguish 'ancient' and 'modern' liberalisms (Strauss, 1978), he knew how to pay his respects to modern 'liberal education' (Strauss, 1978). The other two exceptions are the legacy of Joseph de Maistre (Berlin, 1990), Donoso-Cortès and Carl Schmitt (Meier, 1998) and the conservative school of thought (Quinton, 1993). The first one is almost outside the borders of 'professional' political philosophy and the second one may claim that, as 'conservative', it does not deign to be a philosophy. As for nationalism, flourishing under various guises, secular or religious (as usual, Isaiah Berlin (1979b) was one of the first scholars signalling its powerful 'revival', if it had ever been dying), it may be taken seriously by a political philosophy not entranced by the charms of cosmopolitanism (Beiner, 1999; Manent, 2006; Miller, 1995; Taguieff and Delannoi, 1991). There may be important arguments about different types of nationalism (Plamenatz, 1975 and the critiques of Chatterjee, 1986), or the liberal flavour of certain nationalisms (Tamir, 1993), their combination with cosmopolitanism (McCarthy, 1999), their compatibility with liberal values (Margalit and Raz, 1990), but it cannot be, by and in itself, the core of a political philosophy since a nationalist philosophy would be a contradiction *in adjecto* whatever the importance of 'local knowledges' might be (Mittelman, 2004).

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This apparent dominance of a philosophy born in areas that do not make up more than 15 per cent of the world population and to which the fall of the Berlin wall marks the beginning of an epochal change in political philosophy brings its logical and sociological backlash. That is, its indictment for fake universalism based on a very local conception of what an individual is and accordingly what her concept of liberty, her quest for justice and more broadly her rationality may mean (Jullien, 1995). To be sure, this small part of the world had once dominated the entire world by founding huge overseas empires of which the mere existence and success incited many intellectuals belonging to colonized peoples to desert the ranks of traditional thinkers. Instead, they joined the troop of would be 'organic intellectuals' espousing the basic tenets of the conquerors' public philosophy to turn it against their imperial endeavour. But 'the rot had set in': despite, or perhaps more accurately because of, the universal success of decolonization and its major theme, anticolonialism. The dual nature of the 'West', liberal inside and dictatorial outside, came to be seen, not as a logically inconsistent yet sociologically explicable combination of two sets of contrary values but as a whole package of values. This, in turn, gave rise to 'Occidentalism', a term coined after Edward Said's famous *Orientalism* to depict a distorted image of the real object (Buruma and Margalit, 2004). All the more so as Marxism, which had long been a powerful tool for convincing the colonized peoples that they could stick to the Enlightenment while getting rid of its racist and colonialist side, had lost most of its appeal and credibility. In this respect, the real epochal change was the demise of the Soviet Union (announced by the rout of the once powerful communists in the struggle to share in the success of the Khomeini revolution in Iran) and the emergence of capitalism with a hegemonial communist party in China. Hence the search for new ideologies, and, in academic terms, public philosophies, to pursue the unfinished struggle against western intellectual hegemony and to gain a better understanding of what are the real 'subaltern' needs and visions (Chakrabarty, 2002; Chatterjee, 2003; Chatterjee and Pandey, 1992).

Such an offhand yet plausible sociology should have nothing to do with a serious philosophical and scientific debate. Yet, it is a very powerful input that paves the way for new inquiries into the meaning of concepts in areas left, until now, out of western philosophical concerns and confined to anthropological and ethnological research. These research areas have their own biases despite the breakthroughs made by Clifford Geertz, Ernest Gellner and Louis Dumont, themselves later criticized for their ethnocentric biases (on Geertz see Asad, 1983). Hence, the exploration of the various and singular ways of being related to the world, not reducible to the abstract categories of European thought (Chakrabarty, 2000), which in turn stirs up a renewed interest in civil society (Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2003) or freedom (Taylor, 2002; oddly, this collection dedicated to broadening the concept of freedom restricts the liberal conception to the economics of rational choice). Still more important is the surge of concern for 'identities' (Abdelal et al., 2006; Connolly, 1991; Tully, 2003), no longer left to psychology (see however, Golgeier and Tetlock, 2001), which deeply modifies the usual debates about justice by shifting them from redistribution to recognition (Benhabib, 2002; Fraser, 2003; Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

The quarrels over 'positive discrimination' lie at the heart of the 'dilemma of the universal welfare state' trapped in the dual duty to provide services to all on an equal footing and to promote particular categories (Rothstein, 2001). They become more bitter when the relevant groups are characterized by their location in a social stratification not based on division of labor and material rewards but on ascriptive traits (religion, ethnicity, even gender), which may lead to a justification based on a 'compensating rationality' and 'restorative justice' sometimes curiously put forward to claim that groups whose identities have been excluded, suppressed or marginalized have a right to the recognition and public toleration of their own intolerant practices (Galeotti, 2006). So a combination of cultural

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relativism and respect for the rights of cultural communities pretends, under the guise of empirical descriptions, to be the political philosophy of our age (Bauböck and Rudell, 1998).

Still more debatable are the assaults against current political philosophy and, by implication, political science. Starting with the (rightly or wrongly) taken for granted demise of sovereignty (Sassen, 1996) as a sociological concept (which it has never been, being a legal concept) and of the 'old' theory of the modern nation-state caricatured as the superposition of one territory, one people, one sovereignty, one constitution and one homogeneous political space directly relating to the individual onto the state (Parekh, 2002), they deny most of the value of liberal and republican philosophy when applied to areas other than those where they were born and even in those areas themselves, transformed as they are by the great migrations. In his usual forceful way, Parekh (1992a, 1992b), after exposing the cultural particularity of liberal democracy and excoriating the poverty of Indian political thought, has set himself the task of explaining why western philosophy stands no chance to succeed in countries where, for historical reasons already mentioned, political institutions of the past are re-enacted as alive or revived. Thus, in these societies, political imagination is less 'disciplined' (a Foucaldian allusion), bolder, more reckless, and prone to explore a broader range of possibilites than in the West (Parekh, 2003).

Should we then conclude that the category of 'the universal' is unstable and must be considered as an 'empty place' necessary to pinpoint the infinite ways for a particularity to masquerade as 'universal' (Chakrabarty, 2007)? This is a very good question that brings us back to the Marxist theory of modern bourgeois ideology, the perennial problem being that, in order to perform such a task, one has to fill in the 'empty place', even though a 'universal' concept is always articulated from specific times and places providing the thinker with 'prejudices' that are necessary 'conditions of understanding', like in Gadamer's hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1979). It is easy to perceive the dead end of this line of reasoning, a dead end overcome by Marx by resorting to historical materialism and by Gadamer through the use of tradition and the possibility of a 'radical self-understanding', a highly dubious claim (Ladrière, 1978: 145; Gunnell, 1979).

Let alone, the obvious comment that Parekh's eulogy is nothing other than the reverse of the famous 'orientalist' descriptions (perhaps grounded in Hegelien philosophy) considering the non-western peoples as those whose visions were alien to 'modern' visions and were deprived, as long as they did not join the 'civilized peoples', of something necessary to become again part of History, such a thesis suffers from two basic flaws. It does not give us any idea about what these new philosophies might look like, once we have disposed of the Foucaldian fancy of a new 'political spirituality' emerging from the Iranian revolution. One may wonder if the idea of 'Islamic Human Rights' betters the usual idea of 'universal Human Rights' (Meyer, 1991, 1994). Or which is the more creative and imaginative of the two conceptions of the relations between religion and politics and the modern role of Muslim legacy that mark the epistemological divide in Islamic political thought: the transcendence of justice as an intangible and eternal trait of the good society versus historicity of reason (Arkoun, 1984; Soroush, 2001). The first epistemology favours revolutionary conceptions of Islam based on ontological premises adverse to political freedom whereas the second one relies precisely on freedom to criticize the first one's tenets (Ismaïl, 2003). Besides, Parekh neglects the necessary combination of universalism and particularism offered by Walzer's (1994, 2007) concept of 're-iteration'. Walzer begins with a distinction between two universalisms or rather two dimensions of universalism. To the 'covering law universalism' there is one and only one law, one justice, one correct understanding of the good life or the good society or the good regime. To the 're-iterative universalism', taking seriously what it means to have a history, every universalist principle is inevitably re-iterated in a particular way in its historical existence, even the will to reproduce a principle and to

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replicate its application brings about some historical singularity. It ensues that the second universalism makes no prediction about the substance of the successive re-iterations.

Such a line of reasoning provides a solid basis to a moral universalism opposing the obligation to 'recognize' and 'include' groups whose morality is radically at odds with the requirements of a Rawlsian 'reasonable pluralism' (criticized by Young, 1990, and Parekh, 2000, and convincingly defended by Moon 1993). It thus frees the State from its 'duty of indifference' (Kukathas, 1992, 1998; Sartori, 2004), while recognizing at the same time that liberalism is not averse to, and even promotes, the rights of minority cultures (Kymlicka, 1989, 1995a, 1995b; Raz, 1994). By the same token, political secularism can be judged as a universal value, provided it is not restricted to a particular conception sometimes attributed to western secularism with its hostility to non-protestant religions (a position held by Hobbes, Locke and Voltaire but certainly not by Kant, Tocqueville or Rawls) and that it does not rely on a rationalist conception of reason ignoring its plurality and imposing unjustified limits on the manner in which issues are to be brought into the public domain (Bhargava, 1998, 2006). This is a view congenial to Isaiah Berlin's conceptions of liberalism and pluralism and, anyhow, the distinction between the rational and the reasonable has been made for some time already (Sibley, 1959). One may be rational, reasonable and 'reasoning'. These ways to use 'reason' do not always lead to the same behavioural output (on the 'reasoning voter' see Popkin, 1991; Tiberj, 2004).

To be fair, let us recognize that Parekh's position is not restricted to an excessive indictment of western political theory when it ventures out overseas. Not only does its empirical basis seem quite defensible and supply some theoretical justification to its call to take into account the comprehensive moral doctrines and reconsider the foundations of an autonomous political philosophy, but it offers also some wise advice to do so. Philosophers must confront those doctrines, expose their logical flaws, and their inadmissible moral and political implications, and found their own political theory on a reasonably convincing conception of man and the world. Unfortunately, this is a very difficult task: if the philosopher is involved in politics she cannot start a deep theoretical inquiry for lack of time. If she wants to escape from *vita activa* the intellectual liberty required by political theory is missing in societies dominated by religious, ethnic or ideological orthodoxies. Even in free societies like India, the inhibition stems from the fear to question the dominant ideological consensus and so to encourage various forms of extremism (Parekh, 2003). The point is very well taken (alas!) and Leo Strauss would have been sensitive to those disenchanted reflections.

At least, in countries that are 'disciplined' by other means and where a relative freedom of opinion and expression still reigns, one could expect political science and political philosophy to eschew the strange dual efforts to (a) accommodate the idea of singular cultural outlooks, irreducible to one another, and the idea of a world community endowed with common values (short of reducing them to the rules of the market economy) and (b) substantiate the idea that the static identities engendering territorial and cultural boundaries are nothing other than the outmoded legacies of nationalism and imperialism (Benhabib, 1996; Bhabha, 1994). One would also see them critically review at the same time the opposite idea that the cultural minorities and the 'borderless nations' must be institutionally protected, which supposes that identities are somewhat static and worth perpetuating (see the subtle comments of Appiah (1996) on the virtues and shortcomings of a strategic 'antiracist racism' and the necessity to police 'the imperialism of identity'). This is actually a curious way to abide by Max Weber's (1917/1958: 128) heroic appeal: 'all historical experience confirms the truth – that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible'. To respond to Weber's call to arms does not mean that one should be oblivious of the requirements of logical thinking.

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Notes

1. To be fair, let us recognize that 'global macro-history' is a major competitor of political philosophy in our historicist times from Jacques Pirenne and Arnold Toynbee to Immanuel Wallerstein and the more recent Paul Kennedy, Niall Ferguson and Ian Morris (Morris, 2010). They are themselves not without a trace of 'philosophical history' in the Hegelian vein, illustrated by the once famous Francis Fukuyama.
2. That does not mean that the reverse stands true and that all the literary works have a philosophical and political dimension unless such a dimension is forced by the critic into the work, something very tempting and at times illuminating but much more often futile.
3. At least until Nietzsche and his fantastic call for the *übermensch*, a 'Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ', which leads *in fine* to the same metaphysical assumption underlying the 'artistic' self-mastery and self-transformation of human nature.
4. Hence the critiques levelled against the attempts to make philosophy the absolute 'true science' or against the philosophies of History that secularize the providentialist doctrines (Schlick, 2010; here the targets may be on the one hand Husserl and on the other the Leibnizian Christian Wolff and Hegel).
5. However, not all 'determinists' hold the second position since even though we are 'socially constructed' we cannot help asking ourselves the 'useless question', 'What should I do?'
6. Actually, Foucault, whatever the (dubious) qualities of his historical scholarship (Foucault, 1965, is a case in point) and of his more accurate critique of 'historicism' (long known before him as 'the whiggish vision of history'), is mainly appreciated for his insistence on the micro-foundations of power in the depths of a society (e.g. Laitin, 2004), a point made in quite different theoretical framewoks by Schelling and Goffman, without going so far as to consider every language game as defining identities and power through a system of 'tertiary relations', presupposed in the meaning of social things such as family, medicine, labour (Foucault, 1977a; Shapiro, 1981, 1989). His philosophical ideas on the status of truth and ethics, his statements on 'a political history of truth' and his allusions to 'the regime, the politics of scientific statements', that is, 'what governs the statements and the way they govern themselves one another to constitute a set of scientifically acceptable propositions' (Foucault, 1977b: 112), are ambiguous enough to go beyond a mere social history of science (and morality) and thus to be exposed to the suspicion of unfettered relativism, which would render void his own statements (Cohen and Arato, 1992; McCarthy, 1991; Taylor, 1986). Actually Foucault has an ethical sensitivity (Connolly, 1993; Guillarme, 2003). He may be right criticizing the definitive finding of substances such as transcendental truth and morality beyond the contingency of identities, but that does not exonerate us from the duty to search for the truth, without which any agreement should be considered as an agreement about truth (Wright, 1992).
7. Not to mention Jacques Derrida (1994), whose influence extended beyond the departments of literature to reach the anthropologists (Morris, 2007), and Emmanuel Levinas (1982, 1984, 1996), who oscillated between the deconstruction of liberal philosophy, a meta-political philosophy and a philosophy of meta-politics (Beardsworth, 1996; Butler et al., 2000; Caygill, 2002; Critchley, 1992; Herzog, 1997, 2002; Hoy, 1990; Laclau, 2000; Simmons, 1998), and Gilles Deleuze (Patton, 2000) and even Jacques Lacan (Stavrakakis, 1999).

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