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Ethics and Heritage

Essays on the philosophy of Ágnes Heller

Edited by
János Boros and Mihály Vajda

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Béla Bacsó

A Footnote to *The Concept of the Beautiful*

We, Hungarian aestheticians are in a very pleasant situation, because we have already read Ágnes Heller's excellent book about *The Concept of the Beautiful.* As usual, Heller gives a very strong interpretation of the unpeaceful and disappeared place of beauty in late modernity. We do not wonder after her very strict claim that in her analysis of the uncertain place of art in modern culture, disappeared all earlier destination of art: "Art became 'free' of substantive interference – that is, it is 'autonomous', free from religious, political, and other limitations and constraints – and in this sense the artist also became free. But a price had to be paid for this freedom."[1]

In her book, Heller has a critical position against the premodern analysis of the interpretation of beauty by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his lecture on 'The Relevance of the Beautiful'. But all the same, she formulated so: "The latest major proposition to reintroduce the concept of the beautiful into contemporary philosophy can be found in Gadamer's essay on *The Relevance of the Beautiful.*"[2]

The place where I am returning, from which point I would reinforce the thematic traversability of the book on a different trace is the series of considerations concerning Gadamer. At the beginning of the book, there is a short review of Gadamer's *The Relevance of the*

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[1] Heller, Á., *A Theory of Modernity,* Blackwell, 1999, 142.
[2] Heller, Á., *The Concept of the Beautiful,* manuscript, 29.

Beautiful written in 1974. Heller, like Gadamer, is guided by the possibility of the rethinking of the beautiful, as she puts it: "…the decline of the concept of the beautiful began when Beauty was attributed chiefly to works of art, and the concept of the beautiful was allocated to the world of art as to its proper, and perhaps sole, habitat."[3], and with this began the reservation, which severed the beautiful from the true and the good. Heller thinks that Gadamer brings the beautiful back into the thought of modernity by "returning to a pre-modernist (albeit already modern) perspective in his understanding of the beautiful."[4] Heller sets a task to us, as she does not claim that Gadamer, in a way, gainsays modernity; and what is relevant is near us in time, there is something to do with it, so it still preserves its significance for the present day. This is so, because it will be the beautiful by way of which we differentiate between high and low art, and, moreover, Heller also thinks that "'high art' is one of the niches where homeless beauty can find a foster-home."[5] If this is so, how is it possible, seen by Heller as a fault in Gadamer, that he "has somehow lost sight of the concept of the beautiful in the middle of his study."[6] And, as it also turns out, in the middle part of his study, Gadamer, while unfolding important thoughts, evoking mainly the Greek tradition, does not deliberate on them, and, in the end, what he exposes does not even touch upon art, he, we might say, digresses from his subject, he loses track of it.

In his new book, in *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk* (Beck Verlag, 1998), Hans Belting refers to an important idea of Karl Philipp Moritz's writing (*Über den Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendetes, Werke* Vol. 2, Aufbau Verlag, 1981), an idea, which has mostly been left unregarded, namely that a beautiful work of art is "complete in itself," and thus, as Heller also stated, the beautiful is confined to the artwork itself. It is not restricted to the mere masterpiece, which

[3] Ibid. 29.
[4] Ibid. 30.
[5] Ibid. 31.
[6] Ibid. 31.

Belting finds important in Moritz's writing, all the same – as he says –, the beautiful becomes the mirror of beautiful humanity in its ideality, or it is forced into this mirror, it forms henceforth its frame. Is this so? If we cast a glance at another writing by Moritz *(Die Signatur des Schönen),* published in 1788, then we may perhaps better see an understanding of the beautiful and the artwork, and this can even help us to understand Gadamer. Moritz says that significant artworks leave back a trace, but – as he says – it is not a simple print of the thing seen, however, even the biggest difference arising, even the trace differing from the thing to the greatest extent can lead us into a direction, from where something brings us from the extremes, the differences back to the identical, and this is none other than the thought born by the beautiful artwork, and though this thought does not correspond to anything else beyond this work, we can say that it *is there.* The artwork is so, it is beautiful in this way. (As Moritz says: "Das Allerverschiedenste kann daher immer in der letzten Spur, die es von sich zurückläßt, sich wieder gleich werden; wie denn alles, was da ist, sich auf dem Punkte gleich wird, wo seine äußersten Spitzen in unserm Denken zusammentreffen und dort eine gemeinschaftliche Spur von sich zurücklassen, die mit nichts außer sich mehr Ähnlichkeit hat und eben daher von allem, was da ist, ohne Hinderung sagen kann: es ist.")

What *is there* (the artwork), which is in this way and solely in this way, is not the identity of a preexisting pattern and an ensuing thought, but an absolutely unique possibility of something complete in and by itself to be *identical* even taken to the extreme. Herder, much earlier than Moritz, roaming the *critical groves* realized something similar: he criticised the "Schönphilosophen", who conceive of beauty as a kind of unspeakable *(arréton)* feeling, instead of trying to understand the confusion and bewilderment which can even lead to truth, so that in the place of beauty fallen into its pieces or elements (which is the artwork itself), all of a sudden there stands the artwork as truth, and this is none other than a trace coming about amidst the greatest confusion and the most extreme differences, and, *temporarily,* it can be read. The artwork is not identical with itself as a matter

of course, but it bears in itself its identity taking constantly different shapes, and changing in time. (see Herder's *Viertes Wäldchen* in. *Kritische Wälder,* Aufbau, 1990.: "Eben die schöne Verwirrung, wenn nicht die Mutter, so doch die unabtrennliche Begleiterin alles Vergnügen, löset sie auf, sucht sie in deutliche Ideen aufzuklären: Wahrheit tritt in die Stelle der Schönheit. Das ist nicht mehr der Körper, der Gedanke, das Kunstwerk, das im verworrenen Anschauen würken soll; in seine Bestandteile der Schönheit aufgelöset, soll es jetzt als Wahrheit erscheinen: das soll deutlich gesagt werden, was vorher verworren auf mich würkte – welche zwei Ende des menschlichen Geistes! Sie heben sich beinahe im Augenblick der Energie einander auf.")

The artwork drove, swung out thought towards the most extreme points of the "spirit", or, according to an even earlier wording, *confusio mater erroris,* as Baumgarten put it, so that it can more safely find its way to what is true; this is not the unique/single entity being forever in this way, but the one equal with it ("Gleichartiges", in Ernst Tugendhat's precise wording), and which is not given in advance and once and for all, but it *is there* all the same.

Ágnes Heller quoted Gadamer's sentence about the ontological relation of the beautiful stating that "this is not said about art."[7] I would like to defend Gadamer following the track outlined above. Perhaps the most frequently misunderstood place of his work is when he speaks of the "hermeneutic identity"[8] of the artwork, nevertheless the interpretation depends on the understanding of this. The identity taking shape through the reading of the most extreme traces left behind by the artwork, and thus recognized, is not prefixed, it is only a bridge forming above the fractures of the hidden interlocking, which

[7] Ibid. 32.

[8] "It is quite wrong to think that the unity of the work implies that the work is closed off from the person who turns to it or affected by it. The hermeneutic identity of the work is much more deeply grounded. /…/ In all likelihood, it will not remain a lasting work in the sense of permanent classic, but a certainly a 'work' in terms of its hermeneutic identity." Gadamer, H.-G., *The Relevance of the Beautiful,* Bernasconi, R. ed., Walker, N. transl., Cambridge U. P., 1986, 25.

bridge is to be created individually and so it becomes passable.

Gadamer is, of course, following the phenomenological thought. Already Husserl conceived of sensory perception as a way of "taking something as true" (wahr-nehmen). But what is true does not present itself through the mere sensory perception of the artwork; the identity of the thing as artwork is born amidst the changeability and the changing of the thing (see Zeit in der Wahrnehmung 1906–1907, in. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins,* Nijhoff Verlag, 1966.). Or it was precisely in connection with the fragility of beauty that Oskar Becker expressed the ontological notion of beauty in his essay written in 1929 to commemorate Husserl's birthday: "The most extreme paradox consists in the fact that all the brutality of life's reality can be changed into the peacefulness of classical beauty, which, 'ontologically', means that the creation (das Gebilde), in which this miracle takes place, is strained to the limits of fracture." ("Die äußerste Paradoxie, die darin liegt, daß alle Brutalität der Wirklichkeit des Lebens sich zur Ruhe klassischer Schönheit gestalten läßt, bedeutet ‚ontologisch', daß das Gebilde in dem dieses Wunder sich vollzieht, bis zum Zerbrechen gespannt ist." – Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen… in. *Dasein und Dawesen,* Neske, 1963.) Gadamer follows this phenomenological tradition with an apt word ("creation"); it is something that can be present by itself. That is why he emphasizes that what stands there is not simply something (the thing) prefixed for the understanding to be revealed, but it is a possibility for the individual to be, through the artwork, in the truth of and in relation to his being. This is how the artwork becomes something increasing being, yielding something additional; it is something never identical with itself once and for all. Every artwork conceived of as the counterpoint of "the recovery of meaning" indicates the manifolded possibility which is inherent in each *artwork,* as opposed to something merely used for a given purpose. (Already Moritz speaks of this in his *Über den Begriff des in sich Vollendeten:* "Das bloß nützliche Gegenstand ist also in sich nichts Ganzes oder Vollendetes, sondern wird es erst, indem er in mir seinen Zweck erreicht oder in mir vollendet wird." Gadamer also takes very seriously the artwork fulfilling and accom-

plishing itself, which quality, as a counterpoint of all utility, allows the artwork to shift into the unmeasurable spaciousness of its multiple possibilities. The artwork as *being there,* as existing in its factic possibilities eliminates all kinds of timeless fixing of meaning. The ontological rethinking of beauty, which, of course is not without the Heideggerian revaluation of the Greek beginnings, remained a standard for Gadamer too. In a much later essay, in *Wort und Bild* – "so wahr, so seiend", his sentences were even more clear-cut: "So ist das Kunstwerk da und ist 'so wahr, so seiend'. Es hat im Vollzug sein vollendetes Sein (*telos* echei)"[9]

This shows that what does not and cannot reach its end is still in motion, and can start moving over and over again, and the individual perceiving beauty is entirely outside the thing which offers to us different tracks of approach; the only question is how long we remain in the field of force *bursting open* our mind, or how soon we decide about the acquired and understood meaning as belonging to the artwork. We know Friedrich Schlegel's warning about our placing meanings!

It is in this writing that Gadamer speaks about aesthetics turning to art instead of beauty in modernity, and this shift resulted in the theoretical games of justification, and in an increasing emptiness. Ágnes Heller's judgement is entirely justified: Gadamer is indeed premodern, but, at the same time, he takes up a modern view, although it is also justified to say the same about her own standpoint.

"Something is beautiful when we do not raise the question 'why' it is so." – "Schön ist etwas, auf das nie die Frage trifft, wozu es da ist." (Gadamer, *Wort und Bild…* p. 380; Heller II. p. 93.) Gadamer's words clearly show that he was not naive as to the re-emerging legitimacy of the concept of the beautiful in modernity, however, by way of the tenable criticism of the aesthetic consciousness, and by highlighting the great insights of Greek philosophy, he finds it meaningful

[9] Gadamer, H.-G., Wort und Bild, "so wahr, so seiend," *Ges. Werke.* Vol. 8., Mohr (Siebeck), 1993, 389-390.

to think of beauty in the light of the Greek experience; of beauty which is inseparable from art, even if we have less and less experience of it. Beauty is not conceptual, and cannot be subsumed under a concept, and this is also the ultimate substance of Ágnes Heller's book.

Beauty in artworks, as Heidegger says quoting Plato, is none other for us either than *das Berückend-Entrückende,* something that enchants, captivates and displaces, something that entails unfolding meaning and something that is worth getting an insight into. Beauty is captivating even in its fragmented existence, and withstands all attempts to make it a concept.

My lengthy footnote tried to follow the track left by the book, and good books always leave diverging, not linear tracks. They leave the reader meandering undecided and searching, but they always provide or rather leave back the signs following which we at least do not walk in a circle, that is they show us signs of crossroads, of traces settling above and intersecting each other. And these traces, if we are not laggard, may lead us to recognition and fundamental insights.

János Boros

Ethics and Heritage
Remarks on the Ethics of Ágnes Heller

In my paper I would like to point out two aspects of Ágnes Heller's ethics, which will turn out to be two sides of the same coin. I would like to propose to Ágnes Heller a radicalization of her ethical theory which is summarized in the phrase, “philosophy is in first line practical philosophy or ethics”.My first point is, that Ethics is for Ágnes not theory but Personal Testimony and Heritage. If we accept this point, we can see in his ethical Trilogy the first part as a prolegomena, or as a clarification of some concepts, and the third part as an illustration. The main part will be the second volume, about which I make my remarks. And these remarks will lead us to the second part of my lecture, to Agnes' Kantianism. I would like to show that finally Agnes is a Kantian philosopher, his Testimony is a Kantian one. A radicalized Kantian Heller should say that every philosophy is practical philosophy.

Ethics as Testimony and Heritage

Ágnes Heller begins her book *A Philosophy of Morals* with the statement, that it is not our theoretical knowledge what we should primarily give over to our children, but it is the ethical practice. “We can give to our children theoretical knowledge but it would be ridicule to say we inherit it for them. … It is only practical knowledge, ethics, moral wisdom, what we *have to* inherit.”[1] Among many things this statement has

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[1] Heller, Á., *Morálfilozófia,* Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1996. 7. (Original *A Philosophy of Morals,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990).

an implicit message. Contrary to other areas of human culture, contrary to science, perhaps to art, practical knowledge, ethics, moral wisdom has something in it, perhaps its core, its basis, that does not change. This message involves the idea, that there is no development in ethics, there is no ethical evolution, or there is only a very slow evolution that cannot be observed from one generation to another. The moral is developing so slowly, if it develops, that Ágnes has her own father before her mental eyes when she describes the "ideal" moral personality which should be presented and inherited to her children.

The main points of interest are changing almost every year in science and in the arts, but the ethics seem to be a kind of eternal philosophy. But eternality in philosophy is suspicious for modern women and men and Ágnes Heller does not think, we should construct a kind of *philosophia perennis* of the ethics. To avoid this, she rejects very similarly to Kant to give a system of ethical rules and she prefers to describe the ethical personality, having before her mental eyes the personality of her father who died in Auschwitz. She uses not the concept "ethernal rule", but "universal moral rule", which means that although we cannot give any rigid, culture independent system for ethics, we can only encourage people to discover their own morality through choosing themselves as persons who try to live a valuable and rational life. For people who want to give moral sense for their life, we can give one foundamental principle, that of Kant, *sapere aude,* be courageous and rational, discover your own value as human being.

The heritage what we receive from Kant and from Heller is that we should accept and choose ourselves as human beings, who thinks, feels, evaluates and who as member of a greater community of mankind wants to have better life. And Ágnes proposes to accept Kant's categorical imperative which is applicable as an "absolute measure". As she says, "every maxime, every duty can be evaluated by it".[2]

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[2] Heller, Á., op. cit. 51.

Ágnes Heller's Kantianism

To eveluate which action is right or which maxime is ethically correct, we should apply the categorical imperative, Heller says. There is no better principle discovered until our day.[3] She proposes to use the content oriented formulation, that in our actions we should never see our fellow humans only as means but always also as ends. Although I see the formal version as the most general and always better applicable, I want to point out only one objection of Ágnes Heller, which could be solved with the help of the formal application of the categorical imperative. Kant himself says in the *Grundlegung* (Gr 4:436–437) that the different formulations have the same value and serve a better understanding, feeling or intuition of the law, with his words “so many formulations of precisely the same law”. Kant proposes also that we should test our maxims with all three formulations of the categorical imperative.

Ágnes says on different occasions that Kant's generalizations principle does not work in every case and she brings the example that Kant says, we should tell always the truth even when a murder asks us the whereabouts of her or his future victime.[4] Let us quote one of the relevant places. “The categorical imperative does not allow any exceptions. … If there is no exception from telling the truth, then we ought to tell the prospective murderer that his intended victim is hiding in our house.”[5] I mean we can give here an other interpretation very much in the spirit of Kant.

We can argue from a logical point of view and from the general formulation of the categorical imperative. From a logical point of view we must tell the truth, and we should not contradict to ourselves. But this contradiction has at least two faces. We should not contradict to the facts and we should not contradict to values. If foundamental values which

[3] Heller, Á., op. cit. 128-129.

[4] Heller, Á., *Általános etika,* Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1994, 113, *Can Modernity Survive?* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, 101.

[5] Heller, Á., ibid.

lead our actions contradict to the facts, then we should give priority to values. In general, life is the greatest value, consequently murder is the greatest sin. Life is even a greater value then logical non-contradiction. If there is no life, there is no possibility to formulate any logical rule or law. Life is the condition of possibility of the logical law of non-contradiction. If we should not contradict, it is clear that all presuppositions of non-contradiction should be fulfilled and in the first place there should be life, there should be persons who know and formulate this law. Consequently in our case we should tell the greatest truth to the murder. And the greatest truth is that our person whom the killer wants to kill should live and should not be killed. Consequently we tell to the murder that the person who is looking for is not in our house. For a murder this is the truth, since he is preparing to commit the greatest crime (against truth), and he can be only in truth if he does not kill the given person.

This leads us to the second type of argument. Kant says that we should ask, wheter the maxime of our action generalized would contribute to the greatest realm of the ends. The greatest realm of the ends is here obviously that there is no killing that every autonome person can live and follow his freedom and moral duties. Consequently if we tell to the murder that the person looked for is not in our house, we tell him then the truth which serves the realm of the ends. If we want to formulate otherwise, we can say, we do not want to have a world, where everyone always kills other people.

There is even a third argument for not telling the factual truth in the given situation. The categorical imperative is valid also in and for the act of our decisions. When I ask in the given situation: should I tell the factual truth and then in a mediated sense kill the searched person, or should I not tell the factual truth and save the life of the given person, then I have a decision case where I can ask which alternative would serve the greatest good, or which alternative would lead to the greater realm of ends or of values and the decision would be no question any more. It is clear that the decision of saving a life is the most important in this case.

If we consider again the formulation, use the other person always also as end and not only as means, we can see, that if we consider both people the murder and the envisaged victim as ends, it is no question that

to save the life of the menaced person is a haevier moral argument then to say the factual truth to the other.

Ethics: The state of the world[6]

In Kantian practical reasoning we should treat persons as ends who construct together in their autonomy, their freedom and their moral actions, the realm of ends. Practical reasoning at the same time involves theoretical reasoning. Kant and his followers the pragmatists say from Emerson and Peirce till Rorty and Putnam that all theoretical reasoning is finally tested in practice, all theory is ending in practice. And the general law of practice is ethics. I think, Ágnes Heller's remark that the ethics is the presupposition of the world, and without ethics there is no world[7] is her entry into the realm of pragmatists. Pragmatists, beginning with Kant, say, that we are acting people in the world and cognition and knowledge or knowledge acquisition are kinds of practices and practical reasonings. And if it is so, then every human theoretical activity can be judged and evaluated also in moral terms.

I would like to propose Ágnes Heller to think to the end the consequences of her proposition, that the ethics is the state of the world. Of course we should here clarify which kind of state she thinks here and what kind of world (social, natural, cosmological, psychologial, epistemological, ontological, etc.) she has in mind. But very briefly expressed here, if we accept, that our world is our theoretical construction as a coproduction in Kantian sense, which is at the same time a practical construction, then it will be clear, that we can use the concept world for all kind of worlds, mentioned here. The state of the world for us is always the state of our activity or practice in it. Our propositions or theories about the world can always be tested with the categorical imperative. Kant says that the typus of the moral law is the natural law. But as we

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[6] Heller, Á., *Általános etika,* Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1994, 58.
[7] Heller, Á., op. cit. 43.

know, natural law is a construct of the pure theoretical reason in interaction with the world "there", with the world "in itself". The typus of the law of pure practical reason is the law of pure theoretical reason. Both reasons are the two sides of the one, unique reason. Natural law and ethical law have the same roots. Ágnes Heller writes in the preface to the Hungarian edition of her *Theory of History* that after having chosen her personal philosophy, to replace abandoned Marxism, she will never join to any other "ism". Remembering this, at the end of my paper I would like to propose Ágnes Heller to become more radical Hellerian: she should help us think the concept of truth and the world in the terms of practical philosophy. As she says, "first we do something and then we try it in philosophy"[8]. After having done her philosophy, why not to try it in philosophy? Perhaps this could help us to think and imagine a better world and to give it as heritage to our descenants.

[8] Heller, Á., *A történelem elmélete (A Theory of History),* Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 8-9.

Zoltán Bretter

Learning Tolerance – An Essay Concerning Agnes Heller's Political Sense

I might as well admit right away that my presentation is a shameless endeavor to violate the thoughts of Ágnes Heller. I can only hope that you will regard it with tolerance and accept the usual defense of criminals saying that this was provoked by the victim herself and committed with her consent.

My draft aims to analyse some of Ágnes Heller's thoughts on liberalism, on tolerance and I will also dwell on some political consequences of these thoughts.

Heller defines and understands liberalism as a sort of language: a liberal grammar, and she goes as far as interpreting liberalism as the sum of legal procedures.

Then she emphasizes two things regarding this interpretation.

She argues that this grammar, this 'language' has a good and a bad side when we arrive to evaluate the achievements of liberalism.

It is right when liberalism is able to retreat towards neutrality, and thus is also able to regard particular aspects of different cultures. This way, cultural diversity is freed, and this is what we call multiculturalism, where everybody is entitled to the same judgement, regadless of gender, race or social position. Freedom of speech – just to recall the perennial question – is granted to everyone, to those who voice human values, as well as to those, who voice inhuman ones. And this very aspect represents the weak point – the vulnerability of the liberal grammar. The retreat into proceduralism leaves the individual without the support of a substantial view on what values the given community holds. Anything can be

chosen and any community, any politics is right, and at the end of the day, good.

The liberal procedure, being the contents, the meaning itself, did not have to face the danger of becoming empty, meaningless, thanks to the liberal consent. – what a happy 19th century.

The liberal grammar becomes a dead language in the 20th century. A sad century bordered by the end of the 1st World War (the fall of empires and the emergence of national states, the Weimar Republic and her infamous fall) and by the tragic events of nine eleven.

There is nothing new in this approach, repeating the communitarian criticism – as opposed to liberalism. By that time Michael Sandel, and Alasdair MacIntyre from one angle, Michael Walzer, Ronald Dworkin from another angle had already been blaming liberalism to have lost momentum and slowly becoming the shelter of non-liberals. The question is, whether we come to the conclusion that we need to pursue new visions and ideas in order to maintain the achievements of western culture – or rather say the accomplishments of the Jewish-Christian tradition.

There is certainly such a recommendation and it is a significant one. Most recently, ideas and the death of Pim Fortuyn have driven attention to it.

The substantive, communitarian liberalism has recently found a provocative, powerful self-expression, which radically and not so obviously differs both from right wing, racist extremism and of course is far beyond the traditional human rights liberalism.

We might call Pim Fortuyn a fundamentalist liberal. His proposal runs as follows: "The limits of tolerance are the same as the borders of our community." The constituted liberal community will defend itself at every cost, and thus tolerance, beyond borders, becomes the main threat for that very community.

Earlier, in liberal communities this proposal would have been considered unacceptable.

Pim's interpretation however oversimplified it might seem, provides us with a political solution of the ongoing debate between Lord

Patrick Devlin and H.L.A. Hart. Sir Patrick argued that there are limits to tolerance, and these limits are set by the community itself. Where disgust, revulsion and indignation reach a certain level, the community is entitled to defend itself, it is entitled to use the force of law to contain the dangers of that activity. When the man on the Clapham Omnibus – or Tram 6 as we would say –, the reasonable, ordinary man feels that unbearable disgust, the moral codex of the society has been harmed, therefore the society must act, the activity ought to be prohibited, banned. The man and his community is based on its prejudices and no community whatsoever can abandon them without the risk of falling apart – this is also Edmund Burke's understanding of society. At one point tolerance endangers the existence of society.

Hart and Richard Wollheim siding with him, argue, on the contrary. They believe that tolerance is the essence of community life, and there is a lot to gain from being tolerant. Individuals can develop their own character and a moral progress is possible when conceptions of good and evil have the opportunity to confront each other. But all this, told in the defence of tolerance is nothing more than what John Stuart Mill says, and needs a kind of utopic trust.

Fundamentalist liberalism does nothing else than takes its line of argument from Devlin while changes its point of departure. Disgust is replaced with a self-conscious, almost glorious liberal creed.

Fundamentalist liberalism becomes a critique of neutralist liberalism

Liberalism from the beginnings opened itself for such a criticism. Even the most ardent tolerance-belivers, formulated a definition that is unsatisfactory from a political point of view. D.D. Rafael for example says the following:

“Toleration is the practice of deliberately allowing or permitting a thing of which one disapproves.”, and then: “Although toleration is not simply identical with respecting liberty, it acquires its value from the value of liberty. The decision to tolerate is a decision that your respect for the excercise of choice by other people should have priority over your opinion that what they have chosen is bad or wrong.

This definition says only that *I have to* coach myself in accepting what in effect is unacceptable. *I have to* set *my* limits, to confine myself to certain rules imposed by myself. On the other hand *I have* or *we have to* extend the liberties of others. Overall the success of liberalism depends how successful *I am* in restraining myself, and how successful we are to persuade ourselves that such a restraint is a meaningful one. Can a society be constituted on the basis of such self-restraint, when our age and the whole historical development since the Age of Enlightenment march towards a self-assertion of individuals and individual autonomy. Even the liberal definition of tolerance seems to be self-contradictory.

Turning now back to the fundamentalist liberalism, this uses a conservative trick to get rid of such an inner contradiction. Assumes (what a tolerant and shy liberal would hide), that there exists a substantive definition for a political community, and traces the limits of tolerance where it does not coincide with this definition of political community. An example proposed by Irving Kristol, already suggested such a line of argument. Irving Kristol asked the liberals what they would do if in a stadium, built for the purposes to host football matches, somebody would host bloody gladiatorial conquests, and everybody could attend, with the perfect knowledge of what would be happening there – would a liberal legislature allow these conquests? Even Joel Feinberg, analyzing this example admitted that the answer would cause uneasy hours for a liberal, but would be easily answered by a fundamentalist liberal.

If we removed the self-restraint element from the above mentioned definition of tolerance, and thus we got rid of the respect that we had to feel for other cultures, traditions, moral arguments, we would gain free hand for fighting for our cultural heritage or a substantive definition of what we consider to amount to be our political community.

The question is not whether the world community of shared moral values is feasible, but whether our community's shared morality should be defended and we have to be fearless when defending them.

Multiculturalism is not anymore a worldview when we ought to bear respect for other cultures, but placing our own culture in that universe consisting of many cultures. This is the fundamentalist liberal proposal, that replaces the shallow universalist liberalism.

Heller rejects such an alternative. “A fundamentalist liberal approach is self-contradictory” – she says. Moreover, for a short second it would seem, that this fundamentalist view is subsumed to what she calls and defines as biopolitics.

But biopolitics is concerned with the human body, interests vitalized by desires, race and gender politics, where the definition of Oneself is inextricably linked with the definition of the Other Self.

My community is by definition different from yours, white and black people, by definition are doomed not to share the same community and community values.

But as the vocabulary of biopolitics immediately shows, we can instantly reject the assumption that for Ágnes Heller fundamentalist liberalism is a sort of biopolitics. Surprisingly enough, the vocabulary of fundamentalist liberalism is much closer to Hannah Arendt's republicanism and maybe even closer to Machiavelli's. The fundamentalist liberalism is not the politics of *oikosz* but that of *politeia.*

We are back again to our starting point. If neutralist liberalism seems to fail, has there remained any possibility of defining liberalism but avoiding its fundamentalist version? Is there any tolerance left for the intolerant, any liberty for the enemy of liberty?

An exciting answer is given to us here. An answer, that at first sight seems to be born out of despair. There must be hope. At the middle of the historical stage an empty chair is awaiting for somebody, who surely won't come, because it is impossible for Him to come. If anybody sits down on that chair, He wouldn't be the one as we have hoped for. The chair cannot be removed from the stage, or the hope would die, and the audience would be scattered. The empty throne is awaiting the coming of the Messiah. This is only one of the answers given by Heller to political philosophers.

At this point I could be easily accused that all what I wanted to say is no more than that Heller' position has shifted from a marxist mes-

sianism to a postmodern one. The political enemies of Heller would be blissfully happy with such a conclusion. But I must disappoint them. Instead we have to take a closer look, how Heller tries to redefine the postmodern condition, or with other words, the chances of the Enlightment to be continued.

When analysing Baudelaire's conception of modernity, Foucault arrives to the following conclusion: "The modern man for Baudelaire is not the man who wants to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth, but the man who wants to invent himself. This modernity doesn't "free the man in his substance", but induces him to accept the duty of creating himself."

Let us put aside now the voluntarism of such an endeavour, and let us just note, that Heller has many arguments in favour of such a definition of modernity, or better say, accepts this attitude of being characteristic for the modernity. For example she is advising the gypsies in the following manner. On one side the gipsies can follow the sadly fashionable way of biopolitics, the politics of bodyness. In this case they will regard themselves as a race, a group of people with their community already enscribed in their genes. On the other hand, .the gypsies should rather try to become a real political and cultural community. They should rather invent themselves as a political community.

Heller doesn't consider the problem if this political community, once established, would be a liberal and tolerant political community or something else. It seems that by definition it can't be otherwise: a political community is constituted by rule of law, symmetrical reciprocity, civil liberties, social justice.

Tolerance in this political community is a kind of *Gemütlichkeit,* as Goethe suggested and as Heller recalls this *dictum.* Tolerance should rule our temper, and not our thoughts.

As I mentioned, any political community *seems to be, by definition* a liberal and tolerant political community. Theoretical consistence is thus replaced with intuition. Heller once rejected the possibility of a substantive definition of liberalism, but it seems that she considers such a definition a practical possibility. She refers to a foot-

note in Kant's *Evige Frieden,* where Kant says that we have to assume that nature and freedom are pointing to the same end, and this intuitive assumption is far better than worshipping any tyrant and turning into traitors of mankind.

Theoretical commitment and the choice of values come very close to each other. Theory must give up something from its consistence and logical cohesion, while accepting advocacy and the political and moral consequences of that theory. This of course can be interpreted as her attitude inherited from Marx, but without the theoretical foundations of marxism.

Could this intuition be substantiated from theoretical point of view? Enourmous question, and the political philosophy of Heller Ágnes surely is a chain of essays in this direction.

To sum it up, Heller Ágnes has rejected the procedural republic on one side, and fundamentalist liberalism on the other side. Both proposals were subjected to criticism, from different reasons. The first, proceduralism from the point of view of conservative critics, lacks any reference to the meaning of good life. Her argumentation following Aristotle's *politeia* and Hannah Arendt's republicanism – the liberal neutrality cannot hold. On the other side liberal neutrality allows multicultural stupidity. The killers chasing Salman Rushdie cannot be acquitted just because we have to understand other cultures, and modes of behaviour.

Liberal fundamentalism is guilty because it rejects tolerance altogether, and thus leads to an inner contradiction within liberalism itself.

As a last resort although Heller's standpoint takes the shape of the liberal fundamentalism, in the last moment she escapes the final commitment. This is the point where one could find, in a naive way the cultural and political community. As Michael S. Moore said, analysing Michael Sandels work:

“The naive liberal admits that the (im)morality of practices like abortion and homosexuality counts in assessing political/legal institutions dealing with such practices. Such an admission is what makes him “naive” in Sandel's lexicon. What makes him a liberal is what else

he holds to count in assessing the rightness of laws dealing with homosexuality and abortion; namely the goodness of pluralism, tolerance, and autonomy. This familiar triad of values may be held to be intrinsically good, or only instrumentally so. In any case, the naive liberal holds that this triad of values has great weight in assessing the rightness of political institutions – indeed, such great weight that the furtherance of these values often outweighs the furtherance of other values, such as the moral badness of abortion or homosexual sodomy, if bad they be. But this triad of values does not have conclusive weight, which is what the exclusionary liberalism Sandel attacks would give it. The three liberal values can be outweighed by the badness of practices whose moral depravity is high."

And finally what regards the Messiah: we know how he or she looks like, even though he or she doesn't exist.

István M. Fehér

Ethics and Individuality

I.

One of the papers published in her book *Portrait Sketches from the History of Ethics* was dedicated by Agnes Heller to a theme she addressed in terms of "Kant's Several Ethics."[1] As indicated by the very title, one of the claims of the paper – or perhaps its central claim – was to show that Kant did in fact have, rather than one unified ethical theory which he laid down and developed in three subsequent ethical works, a changing or evolving ethical thought. In discussing the development and the unfolding of Kant's ethical theories, Heller came to underscore significantly a fact, central to Kantian thought and to gain special momentum in Heller's own ethical thinking in later years. This fact concerns a major difficulty intrinsic to Kantian ethics which can be summed up as follows: the more one becomes morally elevated the more one loses one's individuality. Since the reciprocal conditionality of morality and freedom are central to Kant's thought, the point was formulated by Heller in the following terms: "With regard to moral action, the freer the individual is, the less individual she becomes."[2] The moral perfection of the individual can thus be seen to paradoxically coincide, or to run parallel with, her depersonalization. Something such as personality has, as Heller points out in referring approvingly to Simmel, no place in Kant's ethical thought.[3] The price we have to pay for our becoming

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[1] Heller, Á., "Kant etikái," *Portrévázlatok az etika történetéből,* Budapest, Gondolat, 1976, 212-288.
[2] Heller, Á., "Kant etikái," 220.
[3] Ibid. 220.

moral persons, for our entering the intelligible realm of freedom and morality, is apparently that of losing our individual character. Heller refers in this context to Herder's critical remark stating that Kant's concept of freedom excludes the freedom of the individuality.[4] The emphasis is shifted to the freedom of the species of humankind. Our subordination to the moral law results thus in depriving us of our individuality.

While there are many ways of being evil, of departing from the good, goodness seems to be just one, Heller quotes Aristotle later at the beginning of chapter 10 of her *General Ethics.* This state of affairs seems to suggest that the individual, so as to preserve her individuality, must preserve her empirical character. But, as Heller does not fail to point out, there is for Kant no individuality in the empirical sphere either. The difference is one between unconscious and self-conscious identification with the species.[5] The fact of having no idea of the moral law, or of having no capacity to act morally, does not in the least enable animals to possess individuality.

The title of my paper, therefore, suggests a genuine or apparent opposition, a veritable dilemma, between the two notions, ethics and individuality, whereby the conjunction "and" suggests, similar to the "and" in Gadamer's *Truth and Method,* and contrary to the "and" in Heidegger's *Being and Time,* a conflict rather than a link. Inherent in or intrinsic to this formulation is the question: is there a way to be ethical, thereby remaining an individual? Or, put in another way: is ethics compatible with pluralism? These are questions I wish simply to raise and have, in the course of this contribution, no ambition to give definite answers to them. What I attempt to do is, rather, to follow up Heller's hints and substantiate them by showing how European philosophy, and especially Neo-Kantian philosophy, at the turn of the century reacted precisely to this dilemma and tried to give weight to the individual. The story I wish shortly to tell runs through

[4] Ibid. 214.
[5] Cf. ibid. 224.

the mediation of Neo-Kantianism, Dilthey, and Simmel and comes to the fore in the thought of the young Lukács – indeed, it is to be assumed that that is where Heller's sources lie in dealing with this problem.

II.

The issue I am addressing was characteristic not only for Kant, but Early Modern Philosophy inclusive of German Idealism as well, and can briefly be put like this. Enlightenment, Kant, and German Idealism were mainly concerned with the general, the universal, while they overlooked and neglected the individual or particular; humans were thereby treated and viewed as humankind. Indeed, in addition to Kant's *Bewußtsein überhaupt,* the main conceptual protagonists of the classical age were Fichte's I, Schelling's and Hegel's spirit – each constituting a general or universal structure. The individual was looked upon as merely particular, while particularity itself coincided with animal being; the destination and task of humans were seen to enter the realm of spirit or *Bildung,* to elevate themselves into the sphere of the universal. From the philosophers mentioned Hegel was the one later to be most frequently accused of ignoring, overlooking or despising the individual, and sacrificing her for the sake of the self-development of a universal structure. The accusations have, however, a point only in retrospect. It is simply a fact that the classical age, up to roughly Kierkegaard, was just insensitive to the individual as a value in herself.

The concern with individuality as an autonomous philosophical issue emerged substantially in the debate related to the epistemological justification of human sciences, as Dilthey and Neo-Kantians had come to conceive of this problem. One of their main philosophical concerns was the attempt to do justice to the specific character of human sciences by emphasizing the fact that, in contrast to natural sciences striving for the knowledge of universal concepts and laws, the primary cognitive interest of humans sciences lay precisely in

grasping individuals – be these events or persons or other objects.[6] Knowledge in natural sciences aims at grasping the general, Rickert said for example; history, by contrast, does make use of the general in order to be able to think and judge, but the general is for it but a pure instrument. It is an artificial device, a detour, so to speak, so as to reach the individual.[7] It is with regard to the individual and particular, by no means in view of the general, that history can ever represent reality. Human sciences, Dilthey claims in similar manner, are concerned with grasping the singular, the individual.[8] On the Neo-Kantian view, empirical reality becomes nature when viewed in regard to the general, while it becomes history when viewed in regard to the singular, the individual.[9] Knowledge of the individual *qua* individual – as the specific individual that it is –, rather than as an exemplar or exemplification of a given species or class of objects, constitutes for human science an aim in itself. It is moreover a value in itself – a value not only in science, but, more importantly, in life as well.[10]

The difficulty, in this perspective, that Emil Lask came to touch upon in Kant's theory of values was that the individual comes into consideration exclusively as a vehicle of general or universal values. This implies that the individual represents no value in herself; she does so only with reference to the universal value.[11] If the individual has any value at all, it is by virtue of her common qualities, that is,

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[6] Cf. Windelband, W., "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft," *Präludien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Einführung in die Philosophie,* 4th ed., Tübingen, Mohr, 1911, vol. 2, 144.

[7] Cf. Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung. Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften,* 2nd ed., Tübingen, Mohr, 1913, 217.

[8] Dilthey, W., *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, 26; Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften, Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 7, 87.

[9] Cf. Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* 244; Rickert: *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie. Eine Einführung,* 3rd ed., Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1924, 31ff.; Windelband, W., "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft," *Präludien,* vol. 2, 145.

[10] See Windelband, "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft," *Präludien,* vol. 2, 155f.

[11] Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Herrigel, E., Tübingen, Mohr, 1923, vol. 1, 10.

qualities or characters she shares with other individuals that fall under the same species. It is the commonality of the individual with others, rather than her unique, unrepeatable individuality, that grants her value. A philosophy centering around and dedicating itself wholly to doing justice to the individual and its unique value tends to distance itself from such a perspective. Emil Lask speaks thereby, significantly, about "Wertindividualität,"[12] i. e., the individuality of the value – a fruitful contradiction, one can say, in that values are viewed here, in a quite novel and unusual way, in their individuality rather than universality. It is plausible to assume that, in addition to Simmel, it was following Lask, that the young Lukács came to adopt the highly controversial perspective of uniting Platonism and Anti-Platonism or Nominalism in his essay "The Metaphysics of Tragedy." In a passage of this essay he argued as follows: "Tragedy gives a firm and sure answer to the most delicate question of platonism: the question whether individual things can have idea or essence. Tragedy's answer puts the question the other way round: only that which is individual, only something whose individuality is carried to the uttermost limit, is adequate to the idea – i.e. is really existent."[13]

The accentuation of and insistence upon the importance of the individual is the point that distinguishes and separates most life-philosophy and Neo-Kantianism from Kant and the perspective of German Idealism. For the latter the individual finds its consummation, fulfillment or self-realization in leaving behind her particularity (that is animality) and in raising herself up to the realm of the universal, of spirit, of the Absolute; for the former the individual may hope to find and defend her freedom and self-realization in providing resistance to and attaining her independence over against the universal.

The new realm of individuality, opposed to the universal, was also that of history. It is significant that for Dilthey and Neo-

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[12] Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, 16.
[13] Lukács, G., *Soul and Form,* Bostock, A. tr., London, Merlin Press, 1974, 162.

Kantianism, history falls under the concept of individuality.[14] Thereby two philosophical areas emerge and come to the fore that have equally been overlooked or neglected by Enlightenment and Classical philosophy. Since both Enlightenment and Kant failed to focus on individuality and history it is small wonder that their conceptual emergence ran parallel with, and became firmly linked, to each other. The value post-Hegelian and anti-Hegelian philosophy tried to attribute to the individual implied increasing the value of history too. While for Kant the more freely one behaves the less individual one becomes, the more one becomes morally good the more one leaves behind one's individual characters, Neo-Kantianism *attempts to conciliate freedom and individuality, freedom and history.* History had for Kant scarcely anything to do with the metaphysical realm of freedom and morality, while it did have quite a lot for Hegel inasmuch as it was in the course of history that spirit became wholly free and gained self-consciousness of its freedom. But, on Hegel's view, the kind of freedom that had something to do with history was the freeedom of the universal, whereby individuals had to be, as is well known, sacrificed for the self-development of such a freedom.[15] On the Neo-Kantian view, however, it is precisely the freedom of the individual that becomes linked to history (itself an individual process), and vice versa: history, far from assimilating and annihiliting individual freedom, proves to be the field of free and moral action for the individual.

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[14] See, e.g., Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* 101ff., 217, 302; Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik," *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 5, 330.

[15] See Hegel, G. W. F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte,* vol. 1: *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte,* Hoffmeister, J. ed., Hamburg, Meiner, 1955, 59, 105. See on this point Taylor, Charles, *Hegel,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, 375: Hegel "is not talking of the idea of merely human freedom, but rather of the cosmic idea." See further Glockner, H., *Hegel,* vol. 2, *Entwicklung und Schicksal der Hegelschen Philosophie,* 4th ed., Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1964, 566; Hösle, V., *Hegels System. Der Idealismus der Subjektivität und das Problem der Intersubjektivität,* Hamburg, Meiner, 1987, vol. 1, 234f., 271.

There is however a point where Neo-Kantianism and Kantianism decisively join hands. Neo-Kantianism does have by all means a character very much Kantian, namely the fact that what is free cannot be object of knowledge; in other words, the realm of knowledge and the realm of freedom (morality) reciprocally exclude each other. What can be known is phenomenon and is causally determined; what is free transcends the realm of experience and cannot be known. The price Neo-Kantianism has to pay for attributing importance to the value of the individual and history is, therefore, their exclusion from the realm of knowledge. It is a price, however, which already Kant himself had to, and was ready to, pay in order to save freedom. Indeed, Rickert remarks significantly: "If the future were object of our knowledge it would never be object of our will. In a world which had become entirely rational, nobody would be able to act".[16] He observed later that "only as long as we fail to grasp the world metaphysically [...] is history possible."[17] What is excluded from the realm of knowledge is called by Neo-Kantians to be irrational – a slightly misleading concept, coined by them and unknown to Kant.[18] To claim the irrationality of the individual and history is to claim that they cannot be known, for knowledge is related for them, just like for Kant, to the general. Irrationality, that is non-knowability, is therefore the guarantee of freedom.

Just as goodness seeems to be one, in like manner, one might say, there are many ways of departing from rationality, while rationality is just one. Since conceptual or rational knowledge seems to coincide not only for Kant, but also for the Neo-Kantians with knowledge of the universal or general, the philosophical concern with, or defense of, the individuality had to run the risk of embracing the position of irrationality. This risk was indeed readily assumed by the philosoph-

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[16] Rickert, *Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* 464.
[17] Ibid. 579.
[18] For more details on this point, see my paper "Lask, Lukács, Heidegger: The Problem of Irrationality and the Theory of Categories," *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments,* Macann, C. ed., London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1992, vol. 2, 373-405.

ical currents mentioned. An important aspect of Neo-Kantian thought is in fact the doctrine of irrationality, i.e., “the doctrine of the logical irrationality of the individual.”[19] For Emil Lask, the irrationality of the individual stands in strict connection to her value; indeed irrationality alone permits one to view the individual as a value in itself.[20] Lask even comes to speak in fairly positive terms about what he calls a “pathos of irrationality.”[21] Irrationality, that is, non-knowability, is, in this sense, a necessary preconditions of practical, historical activity.[22]

The accent on the importance of the individual, of its irreplaceable and unique being, in strict correlation with individual freedom, as well as the importance of history, are all characters which a significant disciple – and later a bitter opponent – of Neo-Kantianism was to embrace and wholly to share: Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger humans are characterized by what he calls *Jemeinigkeit,* “my own-ness.”[23] On this view, humans are always already individualized, they are particular Daseins – something such as a universal Dasein being a sheer impossibility. Dasein which is always my own, is characterized further by *Seinkönnen,* ability-to-be; that is, it is never real, ready, but always potential, that is free, in a sense able to shape its being: to gain it or lose it, or as Heidegger calls it, to be authentic or inauthentic. Accordingly, we find in Heidegger what may be called an ethics of authenticity (a wording Heidegger would definitely have rejected in accordance with his notorious aversion against ethics). Be it as it may, Heidegger’s theory of autenthentici-

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[19] Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, p. 27.

[20] See Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, p. 192ff., 226.

[21] Ibid. 227.

[22] Ibid. 154.

[23] Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit,* § 9, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1979, 41f. / *Being and Time,* Macquarrie, John and Robinson, Edward trans., New York, Harper & Row, 1962, 67f. Macquarrie and Robinson translate *Jemeinigkeit* by "mineness." I adopt here instead Michael Gelven’s translation, see Gelven, M., *A Commentary on Heidegger’s "Being and Time": A Section-by-Section Interpretation,* revised ed., DeKalb ill., Northern Illinois University Press, 1989, 50.

ty, i.e. authentic individuality, reaches its climax in his conception of history. On this view, authentic behavior or comportment lies in consciuosly or resolutely repeating or retrieving a given historical tradition.[24] That is how Dasein becomes wholly individualized and that is the highest possible way she can manifest her freedom in an individual way. Resolution and historical repetition-retrieval are always individual.

There is, however, a way Heidegger remains linked to Kant. Just like Kant's ethics is frequently characterized as being formal, in like manner Heidegger leaves the object of resolution (the "Wozu" of "Entschlossenheit")[25] undecided. It is something the individual must decide for him- or herself from time to time. The claim of having knowledge in this regard would suppress the individual's freedom; that is why ethics must remain formal. In fact, Heidegger is reported to have said in the 1920s: "Perhaps it is no accident that Kant determined the fundamental principle of his ethics in such a way that we call it formal."[26] Heidegger's rejection of the claim that philosophy should "provide guidelines for life [Lebensleitung]"[27] is in full accord with this view because it more directly expresses insistence on the individual's autonomy. If philosophy resigns *Lebensleitung,* it is because it addresses the individual in his or her autonomy.

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[24] See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit,* § 74, p. 385.

[25] The first to raise this objection was Karl Löwith. See Löwith, K., "Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l'existence chez Heidegger," *Les Temps Modernes,* November 1946, 347. ("l'indetermination du contenu"). See further Löwith, *Heidegger. Denker in dürftiger Zeit,* in *Sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 8, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1984, 134 ("Wozu man sich entschließt, bleibt in *Sein und Zeit* absichtlich unbestimmt [...]"), 64; Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Zur Kritik der Geschichtsphilosophie,* in *Sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 2, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983, 517

[26] Heidegger, *Der Begriff der Zeit. Vortrag vor der Marburger Theologenschaft. Juli 1924* Tietjen, H. ed., Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1989, 18. / *The Concept of Time,* McNeill, William trans., Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, 13.

[27] Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs,* Gesamtausgabe, vol. 20, Jaeger, P. ed., Frankfurt/Main, Klostermann, 1979, 110. / *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena,* Kisiel, Theodore trans., Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1985, 80.

III.

The tendency to bring together ethical action and individuality, or ethical action, individuality and history, was to remain alive beyond Neo-Kantianism and Heidegger, in the ethical theories centering around the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis.* As is well known, Gadamer dedicated important analyses to this concept,[28] which he explained in terms of “das Tunliche” (the feasible).[29] This explanation stresses, once again, the individuality of the situation in which the good action must be found and performed. And, last but not least, *phronesis* played an important role in the ethics of Agnes Heller too, who in her *General Ethics* rightly made the point: “Practical reason turns out to be *phronesis.*”[30] This way of viewing things offers us the outlines of a perspective to conciliate ethics and individuality.

[28] See Gadamer, H.-G., *Gesammelte Werke,* Tübingen, Mohr, 1985, ff., vol. 1, 317ff. See also *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 2, 448 and vol. 5, 244f .

[29] See especially Gadamer’s retorspective statement from the foreword to the second edition of his work: "Wessen es für den Menschen bedarf, ist nicht allein das unbeirrte Stellen der letzten Fragen, sondern ebenso der Sinn für das Tunliche, das Mögliche hier und jetzt," *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 2, 448. / *Truth and Method,* 2nd revised edition, revisions by Weinsheimer, Joel and Marshall, Donald G., New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, 1999, xxxviii: "What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now."

[30] Heller, Ágnes, *Általános etika,* Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1994, 128. (*General Ethics,* chapter 6). See also Heller, *Az igazságosságon túl,* Budapest, Gondolat, 1990, 25, 295f., 302.

John Grumley

Between the Normative and the Empirical: Heller on the Antinomies of Culture

Over 150 years ago Karl Marx forcefully expressed his discontent with the whole enterprise of philosophy. For this prospective revolutionary, the fundamental problem was the practical impotence of philosophy. Caught between simply reproducing the world as it exists or opposing to that world a merely subjective utopia that possessed no immanent power of realisation, philosophy lacked the capacity to generate the change that the young Marx believed was required. We all know where this critique led him and the less than satisfactory results that ensued. His new enterprise that united theory and praxis, the project of synthesising theoretical knowledge with critical historical analysis was beset with the inherent danger not just of attempting to anticipate the always unpredictable future but also of ascribing to that anticipation an epistemological privilege open to political abuse. While it is probably fair to say that the hard lessons of Marx's misadventure have been theoretically absorbed, it is clearly not the case that the philosophical dilemma that instigated it has disappeared. Those who shared Marx's frustrations but learned his lessons had to retreat to philosophy and construct their home somewhere in the dangerous no-mans-land between fact and norm, relying more or less on one or the other but always attempting to keep a grip on both. The debate over what philosophy can do, what is its limits, how far it can or should stray from the empirical reality of the world it hopes to reflect, express, influence or even change goes on unabated. All contemporary philosophers must negotiate the dilemma left to those after Marx and find their own personal equilibrium of commitment somewhere between the competing dynamic demands of the empirical and the normative.

In rehearsing these well known facts I ask your indulgence not to reconsider the issues involved in all their magnitude, complexity and generality but to see how the strain of existential commitment between the empirical and the normative works itself out philosophically in a very particular case. In the following I want to examine carefully Agnes Heller's account of the antinomies of modern culture in her recent comprehensive presentation of her theory of modernity *A Theory of Modernity*[1]. As perhaps the most well known student of the great Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs – whose work most potently expressed the impasse involved in the revolutionary version of critical theory – Heller's lineage to this constellation of issues is hardly surprising. Although she explicitly abandoned even her reformist "humanist" Marxism in the mid seventies, her desire to both preserve the social relevance of her own speculations and employ them in the cause of anthropological radicalism is one of the most constant impulses of her work. While in the last twenty years her philosophy has evolved from post-Marxist radicalism to "reflective" post-modernism, we will see that this link and tension between reflection on the contingent flow of historical experience and the will to utopia remains essential to her thinking.

The basic framework for Heller's analysis and diagnosis of modern culture is taken over from the theory of culture developed by György Markus. The key text is his 1997 paper entitled 'The Antinomies of Culture'.[2] From our perspective this is a fortuitous choice: he both shares her philosophical commitment to social relevance, but his adoption of a *radical historicising* approach to the prob-

[1] Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999.
[2] Markus, G., 'The Antinomies of Culture,' *Discussion Papers Series* No 39, Collegium Budapest, Feb. 1997.

lem of culture makes a striking contrast to the *integral utopianism* of hers. Heller openly acknowledges her heavy reliance on her old friend and fellow Budapest Schüler. But she is equally forthright in indicating that her employment of his categories is “quite free” and “highly selective”.[3] A careful reconstruction of the way in which she appropriates his framework brings into especially clear focus the demands of the utopian dimension of her own thinking. The following reconstruction sets itself several tasks: to explain the main features of Heller’s selective reading, to indicate the rationale that drives her own theoretical ingenuity, to point to some weaknesses in her normative concept of culture and to show how they are intimately related to the utopian dimension of Heller’s philosophical personality.

The Anthropological and Normative Concepts of Culture

Markus outlines two concepts of culture: the empirical anthropological concept of culture as a human universal and the normative concept of high culture. His argument is to show that both of these understandings of culture are beset with irresolvable antinomies. Culture in the first broad sense has both a *universal* and *differential* meaning. In the first it connotes that general attribute or generic realm that all humans share and in which they necessarily participate. The latter connotes that complex of characteristics, which unifies a partic-

[3] Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999. 275.

ular social unit and distinguishes it from all others. While this distinction seems clear enough, difficulties soon emerge. Theoretical efforts to empirically identify these "cultural universals" typically arrive at the rather paradoxical result that nature is identified as the only sure and legitimate ground for culture invariants. The differential meaning suffers a similar quixotic fate. It turns out to be little more than an idealised construct. The particularising use of the concept of culture runs up against the fact that every significant social unit is constituted from a set of distinct and often opposed socio-cultural positions and roles. Thus the moment of macro-cultural identity turns out to be little more than theoretical hypostatisation.

Our journey into antinomy does not cease when we move from the *general anthropological* to the narrow concept of *high culture.* Markus finds here another veil of illusions. The concept of high culture designates a specific set of social practice*s*-primarily the arts and sciences- generally regarded as autonomous and valuable in themselves. The concept of high culture was invented in response to the decline of religion and the destruction of the traditional concept of nature as a cosmos. High culture was conceived as a resource for making good the resulting *normative deficit.* Humans now declare themselves masters of the universe. In both external activity and knowledge they will be makers whose self-understanding is consummated in a whole system of symbolic meanings through which they determine their ends and interpret their activities.

This concept of high culture and its foundational aspirations is also linked to the increasing detachment and autonomy of these specific social practices from the everyday. It is therefore understandable that the concept of high culture is conceptually interrelated to its opposite: the inferior substitute ***low or mass culture.*** The elevation of high culture to the heights of human aspiration only makes sense in relation to an opposite mass or popular culture organically attached to the interests and perspective of the unenlightened people. In Markus' narrative this opposition would have remained latent and fixed in the pre-modern segregation of estates and human activities had it not been for commodification. Both "high" and "low" are brought to the mar-

ket and set into competitive opposition. The result of that competition is the performative rejection of the claims of high culture to be the bearer of universal significance and validity. This competitive unmasking has its corollary in the "culture wars" that lead to the progressive erosion of the substantive values of autonomous high culture. Even the claim of modern science to access a certain path to the discovery of objective truth is disputed. Is not the so identified truth nothing more than what is pragmatically serviceable for the general domination of existing powers whether this be in the scientific community o society at large? Similarly, the promise of modern art to create new works of beauty seems illusive and without content; on inspection the resulting "aesthetic quality" turns out to be little more than a means for renovating the old social distinctions in new and more subtle ways.[4]

This account of the antinomies of culture forms the basis and inspiration for Heller's analysis of modern culture. Yet, as foreshadowed, Heller's reading is both "free" and "selective".

Heller 's Antinomies of Culture

Heller's version of the antinomy of the anthropological concept of culture is focused on the bipolar distinction: *universality/difference.* The universality claim of the anthropological concept rests on an appeal to the *norm of equal recognition.* However, the claim that each way of life is unique does not mean that each is of *equal worth.* While whole ways of life are incommensurable, this does not mean

[4] Ibid. 17.

that we cannot compare partial aspects. The universal claim of empirical concept may represent a leap of the imagination insofar as it eliminates the denigration of the other as barbarian. However asserted dogmatically, it prohibits discussions of comparative cultural worth. At its most extreme the upshot of modernity's self reflexivity and capacity to relativise its own achievements is the resurgence of natural ethnocentrism with modernity disarmed by its own relativist convictions and authoritarian regimes trumpeting their suppression of human rights as a blow for cultural autonomy.

Heller's account of the antinomies of high culture is much closer to Markus' reading. However, she unfolds the antinomies of high culture from the concept of taste. Initially, taste was the property of social estates and not acquirable. However, once judgement and refinement could be acquired taste is actualised as mobile and changing. In our time this dialectic of taste comes to question the relevance of the distinction between "high" and "low" altogether. Democratisation has placed the question of cultural elitism permanently on the political agenda. However, the proposition that everyone's taste counts ultimately points to the annihilation of cultural standards and the collapse of the very idea of high culture and its custodial cultural elite. Yet, the mere logic of substantive democracy is not the end of the story. Even in our time pervasive post-modern scepticism questioning of cultural standards has not led to the death of cultural elitism. The authority of the cultural elite has persisted despite the fact that it has been divested of the theoretical ground on which it once stood. In contemporary culture it is certainly true that the market and its quantitative logic has a louder voice than ever before. Yet despite this, the opinion of cultural authority still carries more weight than the proverbial man in the street. Factions within this elite may be most responsible for the destruction of the idea of objective standard. However, this persisting authority only goes to show that the attempt to destroy the concept of high culture is untenable. Those pronouncing the death sentence on high culture are already its beneficiary and the bearers of its function. For Heller there is *no way* to resolve the paradox flowing from this

notion of high culture. She does offer some interesting avoidance strategies but I shall pass over these to concentrate on her main innovation.[5]

The Utopia of Cultural Conversation

The most radical innovation in Heller's reconstruction is her introduction of a *third concept of culture.* It the means whereby the paradoxes of modernity can be theoretically overcome. Like the normative and the empirical concepts of culture, this additional concept of cul-

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[5] This requires the abandonment of two of the decisive innovations of the modern philosophy of art. The first requires that concept of taste lose centrality and with it the distinction between "good" and "bad" taste. In its place, we reinstate the idea of "having" or "not having" taste. This preserves a standard but one that is no longer "elitist". This is because it is determined by *techne* or judgements of skill based on the assessment of perfection/imperfection within genres. Thus judgement is guided purely by technical considerations and not by subjective interpretation of the spirit of the work.
The second prong of Heller's strategy involves circumventing the problem of the relativity of taste without resorting to unsustainable objective standards. The key here is to mobilise both the functionalist character of modernity and inject historical imagination in the form of hermeneutic consciousness as the counterpoint to technical judgement to restore the other tie of the double-bind. From the time of the Renaissance, intellectuals functioned to provide standards of taste. This function was an interpretative one of providing meaning. Great works are almost inexhaustible in their capacity to engender meaning. Their constant interpretation renders more meaning as it increases the aura of the works and evokes feelings of nostalgia and recognition. Functional performance in rendering meaning can, Heller suggests, be the basis for discriminating between the great and the conventional work. The ranking of works would be determined not by beauty but by rendering meaning. What distinguishes the great work is the author's intention towards, and the created works realisation of, meaning. In modernity even great works find themselves on the market but this was not their inspiration. By contrast, the primary function of mass culture is entertainment. These products require the joint contribution of an author/creator, producer and distributor and are designed from the standpoint of quick absorption and easy consumption. But this does not mean that mass culture is without standards; on the contrary, it also has specific standards but these are not of meaning creation but linked to the specific functionality of consumption. Heller maintains it is essential to preserve the double bind of modernity. This marriage between functionality and interpretation allows the balance to be restored insofar as historical consciousness and the market are allocated their appropriate roles.

ture is also a universal. Heller calls this an *optative* concept because it provides *equal opportunity* for participation' in culture.[6] Cultural discourse is a conversation; this has no aim other then itself; it presupposes neither social nor professional qualifications, only a delight in dialogue, enthusiastic individuals who value it and perfect cultivated conversation. However, it does have historical preconditions. These are equivalent to the historical enlightenment that saw discourse become deeply embedded in everyday life and assume the function of critique. This made critique the main carrier of the dynamic of modernity.

While cultural discourse is an essentially unruly activity, it is nevertheless constrained by definite procedural rules. These constitute *a normative moment* exemplified by the single idea of *"disinterest"*. The ethics of discourse requires the *suspension of interests, making prejudices explicit an others listened to sympathically, their sincerity taken at face value.* These conditions constitute a sort of moral code of discourse that instantiates the *norm of equal opportunity.* Yet differential contribution by discussants do not infringe this norm. Because the realm of cultural conversation is a domain of suspended interests, a culturally constructed free space, no harmful consequences flow from unequal real participation. Insofar as it avoids bipolarism, commercialisation and commodification cultural discourse blunts the paradoxes arising from the other concepts of culture.[7] Take, for example, the value that for Heller is the leading value idea of modernity. Whereas modern freedom is a paradoxical foundational value that does not culturally ground because it does not provide certainty or self-evidence, free discussion unconstrained by power or interest produces a weak ethos that simply does not require foundation. Things are similar when we turn to the dialectic of taste that ultimately threatens to undermine the very concept of high culture. As mentioned, cultural discourse manages to stay afloat suspended only by its weak

[6] Heller, A. *A Theory of Modernity,* op cit, 134.
[7] Ibid. 132.

ethos of unconstrained conversation. At a time when truth has been eroded to the subjective and historical without absolute imprematur, a conversational judgement of taste can still claim universality despite contestation. Heller finds in the Kantian judgement of taste a model generalisable to all cultural discourse. The result is a utopian artifice of social sociability where all interests-pragmatic, theoretical and practical -are suspended for the sake of the dynamic alone, as its own end. This does not mean that such discussion can be value-free but only that interests and prejudices to the extent known should be openly declared. While this is another, quarantined world, many things flow indirectly from cultural discussion: certainties are undermined, beliefs are queried and tested as well as being enthusiastically embraced.[8] Heller is aware that such immunity has a down side. These same conversations can be frivolous and irresponsible but she is happy to risk these deformations for the sake of such overriding benefits.[9]

Heller is also reluctant to simply confine this utopia to the realm of the *virtual.* Culture discourse is not an impotent ideal but a fiction shared around the dinner table and amongst friends. This reluctance deserves some comment. In Heller's reflective post-modern mood she has resolutely resisted the sirens of the Hegelian dialectic of reality and actuality. This is most clearly expressed in her final repudiation of the Marxian philosophy of history. Yet, she freely admits she was always attracted to a philosophy where "everything clicks" and her thought turns to the sphere of cultural discourse perhaps she momentarily succumbs to this seductive melody. Discourse now becomes an actualised utopia, the coalescence of virtuality and actuality.[10] Her desire for the empirical confirmation of her utopian hopes is perfectly understandable. But when this hope struggles empirically to penetrate beyond the intimate sphere and finds its actuality reduced to con-

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[8] Ibid. 130.
[9] Ibid. 133-34.
[10] Ibid, 133.

versation "over the dinner table and amongst friends", then Heller's claim for the coalescence between the virtual and actual seems to stretch things too far. This could just as reasonably be described as a "divorce". The conversations of private space are not convincing confirmation of the health or even viability of modern cultural discourse.

Before going on to look more closely at this understanding of cultural discourse, to consider its presuppositions and its rationale, I want to return, momentarily, to Markus. He not only describes these so-called antinomies of culture but also unfolds their function and socio-cultural significance within a more comprehensive interpretation of modern culture. In the light of this background, we will be in a better position to probe the theoretical motives and consequences of Heller's innovative third concept of culture as cultural discourse.

The Paradoxical Functional Unity of Modern Culture

The primary theoretical motive behind Markus' reconstruction of the antinomies of culture is an attempt to explain the logic of modern cultural dynamics as a whole. This involves an appreciation of the lauded autonomy of modern culture. In the earlier pre-modern period, religion functioned primarily to articulate a complex ideational-symbolic system that simultaneously orientated and directly regulated the conduct of individuals by providing an overarching shared meaning and obligatory norms for their conduct. This function loses its meaningfulness when society comes to look like a vast causal-instrumental complex of patterned interactions, functionally co-ordinated subsystems conform to their own logic and everyday activities of the vast majority highly technical and bereft of any socially shared and experientially transparent meaning. No longer able to fulfil this cultural role of providing a binding, common standard and orientation, religion is privatised. The concept of high culture now steps in to make up for this normative deficit. High culture provides a dynamic reservoir of meanings from which modern individuals are able to draw in establishing their own identities and solidarities. Modern individuali-

ty is conceived as formed by personal choices. Modern individuals are makers who not only form the external human artifice but also sovereignly create the meaning of their own lives. In accordance with this model, the high and more broadly institutionalised culture of modernity objectively plays a larger role than ever before in organising the everyday but it can no longer be viewed as the highest expression or conceptual systematisation of the latter. This explains its partially ideological character. The grand illusion of self-creation masks the extent to which the spectrum of life possibilities is fundamentally constrained by the individual's location in the great functional-institutional subsystems that encompass them.[11] However, this tension is evident in the perpertual incongruence between the two.

This incongruence is the source of the perennial claims of cultural deficiency of modernity. For Markus, this diagnosis of loss of meaning allows two interpretations. The first assumes the shape of *disenchantment:* the triumph of a truncated rationality that reduces everything to the status of mere means and leaves the individual at the mercy of this self-created but uncontrolled "second nature". The alternative reading views the problem not as too little rationality but too much. It dwells nostalgically on spontaneous cultural unity of the past and wills the resurrection of the security and warmth of a particular organic community by means of a new mythology or reinvestment in fabrication of "tradition".[12] These diagnostic differences issue in fundamentally opposed ideologies, projects and practical attitudes. Thus we find evolutionism opposed to cultural relativism, cosmopolitanism opposed to primitivism or various shades of ethnic and cultural nationalism and general modernisation versus programmes for cultural separatism.[13]

[11] Markus, G., 'The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences,' unpublished Ms, 46.
[12] Markus, G., 'The Antinomies of Culture,' op. cit.
[13] Ibid. 10.

The dispute between the two diagnostic programs of Enlightenment and Romanticism underlies the whole history of cultural modernity. What is most distinctive about the Markus reading of this endless struggle flows from his conviction that neither programme can hope to succeed on its own exclusive terms. He finds the enduring but also paradoxical unity of modern culture to consist in the active competition for cultural supremacy between these two polar opposites. This is only possible because the two most significant and largely independent domains of this culture (sciences and arts) are constituted both categorically and institutionally as the polar opposites of each other.[14] Enlightenment stands behind the methods and practices of the sciences understood as an embodiment of rational, critical thinking, while Romanticism puts its faith in the enormous creative power of the arts as the cultural vehicle and model for the resurrection of culture's life orientating role. However, as these paradigmatic forms of meaning creation are culturally constituted as complementary, each actually functions as a form of compensation for the threatening one dimensionality of the dominant principle of the other. This fundamental oppositional dualism is not some incidental culture quirk but reflects and expresses the essentially antinomical nature of modernity itself. Under modern conditions the scientific and aesthetic attitudes have become universalised and are no longer are confined to a pre-established domain. Anything and everything can, in principle, become their object yet their requirements and criteria of validity exclude each other and lead to inevitable conflict.[15] Yet it is precisely this seesaw struggle that is the mechanism by which the cultural structure of modernity is reproduced and modernity achieves as much cultural integration as it is able.

This being the case it is understandable that Markus views the aspirations that have motivated the ceaseless struggle between these ideological combatants as illusory. In fact, Markus speaks of *double*

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[14] Markus, G., 'The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences,' op cit, 40.

illusions. Not only was this critique predominately expressed in terms of opposed and equally exclusive, totalising ideologies. These also nourished exaggerated ideas about their own social power and effectiveness. However, he is reluctant to reproduce such illusions by himself engaging in unqualified, total critique. It is certainly true that all recent attempts to practically realise these programs in a radical way have resulted in appalling social and human tragedies. While the criminality of these radical attempts is beyond question, Markus still wants to underline the *positive contribution* made by these illusions. It was primarily through the prism of these totalising ideologies that culture supplemented its compensatory function with a critical one.

Critique not only bewailed the apparent deficiencies of modern culture but also directed its animus at existing social arrangements that denied to culture the possibility of playing its ascribed leading, life orientating role. More than mere compensatory safety valve that allowed individuals to live with the fundamental structural contradictions of modernity, it also served as a modest corrective to their spontaneous tendencies. Not only does the endless contest of Enlightenment and Romanticism sustain the overall dynamics of modernity. More specifically, the universalising radicalism of these critiques makes its own special contribution. It drew attention to real ills and dysfunctionalities of modern development and supplied ideal resources from which individuals could draw in the process of mobilisation to assert their own autonomy and solidarity against the self-steering functional sub-systems of modern society.[16] It provided ideas that allowed particular grievances to be represented as matters of *common concern.*

Some startling theoretical and diagnostic conclusions flow from Markus' reconstruction of the paradoxical functional unity of modern culture. It is clear that, in his view, there is no attractive and viable way beyond the antinomies of modernity. Its antagonistic pluralism is the basic source of modern dynamism. All attempts to overcome these

[14] Markus, G., 'The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences,' op cit,

antinomies lead not to the overcoming of the contradictions of modernity but to the abandonment of modernity itself.[17] The exclusive domination of either pole erodes the equilibrium of a dynamic society committed to balancing contending immanent forces. In the light of these conclusions we must return to Heller and review the meaning of her claim that her third optative concept of culture as cultural discourse is a way of *overcoming* the antinomies at the heart of the modern concept of culture.

The Threat of Omnivorous Culture

It should be remembered that Heller attributes universality to each of the concepts of culture but only in a very definite sense. The empirical concept is universal in the most obvious sense that it encompasses everything; high culture is universal in the sense of setting the standard and cultural discourse is also universal because it provides" equal opportunity".[18] As we have seen, this latter universality of cultural discourse is especially crucial to Heller's account. For her, culture is the source *of spiritual sustenance.* While it is possible to live without cultural discourse, it is not possible to live the "good" modern life without it. A vital component of the latter is a "high living" that results from the suspension of everyday routine and the surrender to self-transcendence in the form of the absolute in the shape of sensuously dense and meaningful works. By selectively processing spiritual nourishment, the dominant cultural institutions create the reservoir of meaning that sustains modern individuals. However, Heller sees a threat to this cultural function with the emergence of *omnivorous culture.* This latter is the consequence of the multiple dynamics of modernity. Its culture moment is the threat of the de-legitimisation of the cultural authority and the increasing dominance of the market.

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[17] Markus, G., 'The Antinomies of Culture,' op cit, 19.
[18] Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* op cit, 134.

This leads to the homogenisation of cultural products and the challenge to all qualitative distinctions. The result is a hermeneutic democracy of all texts. On the fundamental questions of "who" is selecting and "which texts" are selected omnivorous culture answers with a smorgasbord. With the demise of cultural authority the market determines the menu. This frenzy of interpretation is ably assisted by the modern imaginations (historical and technical) that are only too willing to scour alien traditions and raid the past and future in order to feed the ceaseless appetite for innovation and new spiritual food.

As Heller sees it, the omnivorous tendencies of modern culture engender prospective crisis. First the hermeneutic feast leads to inklings of *cultural exhaustion.* This is already manifest in many features of modern culture. Take, for example, the modest expectations placed on modern art. Modern works are no longer required to be creations of fantasy but merely in-determinant objects for the precipitation of the private imagination. Originality gives way to the extraction of personal meaning. But this is not all. Even more severe is the fragmentation of cultural discourse that results from cultural rationalisation and professionalisation. In an environment of increasingly autonomous culture and professional specialisation, the circle of participants in cultural discourse is reduced to those who interpret to make a living. As a result cultural discourse becomes *fragmented* into insular, contingent and fluid mini-discourses. For Heller, the contemporary cultural milieu represents a new phase beyond avant-gardi*sm* where there is not only no community of interpreters to legislate standards where the shared dense cultural experience that once forged a kind of common home simultaneously familiar, evocative and novel is fast receding. The disappearance of cultural community leaves the individual interpreter as the sole mediator. In a cultural world reduced to individual mediation, the paradigms of language and hermeneutics are historically obsolete: there are no representative cultural horizons to clash and the individual is constantly changing cultural languages. The power of interpretation increasingly now lies in the hands of the individual speaker/interpreter; he/she is finally in the position to convey her own unique perspective in her own ineffable way. However,

this is only the power of a naked I. Because this meaning is ever changing, shifting with every mood and mutation, it lacks authority and has no real message. Bereft of stability and authority, the naked subject is poorly equipped to assume the major role in cultural selection. Whereas the modern quest for political freedom is always constrained by the common thing: the *res publica,* the modern thirst for meaning threatens to remain unquenched because the directionless, meandering of the indeterminate subject fails to provide sufficient spiritual sustenance.

It is not hard to see where Heller's concept of cultural discourse fits into this picture. Where the notion of cultural community seems in terminal decline, when the role of the cultural elite is under challenge and cultural discourse has fragmented into multiple specialist mini-conferences. Heller's "actual utopia" provides a normative measure that, setting aside the constraints of modern functionality and the market, allows us to reanimate the original aspiration of cultural communication and gauge its contemporary crisis. Moreover, we have seen that Heller is also reluctant to confine her model of cultural discourse to subjective fancy or regulative idea. Clinging to a dialectic moment, she, simultaneously, views this "actual" utopia as tantalisingly close as our friendly conversations yet sufficiently normative to do critical service.

Options and Choices: Immanent or Utopian

It is relatively easy to question both Heller's diagnosis and the role that the concept of cultural discourse plays in her theoretical solution. While no one can doubt the corrosive impact of the market and the problems generated by the increasing autonomy of culture, the omnivorous culture thesis tends to totalise these trends in an exaggerated way. On the empirical level, we might, along with the post-modernists, applaud the so-called fragmentation of cultural dialogue into mini-discourses not as restriction but as a differentiation that allows for the admission of many new, previously unheard voices that both

enrich and problematise the dominant culture. Obviously the *mere existence* of a spectrum of mini-discourse does not in itself infringe Heller's model of cultural discourse. This would be so only if the mini-discourses signified the cessation of cultural dialogu*e* in her equal opportunity sense. However, it could just as easily be argued that the phenomenon of mini-discourses exemplifies a more sophisticated system of cultural filtration. One that is more in keeping with a complex modern society composed of a ensemble of semi-autonomous subsystems. In such a society functional subsystems are essential; in the cultural domain they insure the flexibility that allows culture material to be selected and prioritised for specific audiences. There are also tensions in Heller's diagnosis. While she seems to view the contemporary scene as in the throes of qualitative rupture where only the market reigns and cultural elites under threat, she also insists that post-modern authors are still able trade on their own authority and that of the classics they interpret. But if the latter is true, then the former must be too simplistic.

For some time now Heller has evoked the *pendulum* as her favourite metaphor for the fragile equilibrium of modernity. Yet on the question of culture she anticipates a looming crisis. Clearly this cultural diagnosis sits oddly with her more comprehensive theory of modernity. This latter suggests that functionality plays an increasingly role in the dynamics of modernity. If the "heart" of modernity is, as she insists in *A Theory of Modernity,* the logic of allocation, it stands to reason that functional principles increasingly permeate all modern institutional systems including those of culture. However, amongst other things, the notion of culture discourse was initially conceived as a trans-functional antidote to the excesses of functionality. The problem with the colonisation of functionality into the cultural domain is that it violates the normative assumptions of Heller's notion of cultural discourse. It is hard to reconcile this normative idea of unconstrained, disinterested, open-ended dialogue with a functionalism that is the direct bearer of interests. Heller clearly views the disappearance of the connoisseur and the modern trend towards institutionalisation and paid cultural elites as signs of a threat to the possibility and

integrity of real cultural discourse. While there can be little doubt that increasing cultural autonomy and commercial pressure impacts on cultural discourse in many ways, the empirical evidence seems at least contradictory. Surveys suggest that markets have increased and not reduced the audience for high culture, cultural institutions still uphold the demand for excellence (even if the criteria for it are hotly contested) and, even on Heller's own reading, even post-modern critics still claim the authority to judge it.

So far what we have is at best a *disagreement* about *the weight* to be given to certain contemporary trends in the diagnosis of cultural modernity. Heller has marshalled her normative utopia of cultural discourse against what she sees as the most culturally debilitating of these tendencies. The negative consequence of her strategy is easily identified: the distance between her normative model and the dynamics of culture seems to render her vision even more utopian. Knowing that Heller has always ascribed a real utopian vocation to the philosopher, this is not disturb her too much but it does, all the same, remain in an awkward tension with her residual Hegelian desire, already noted, that this utopia be not only virtual *but also actual.*

At this point, it may be appropriate to return to my opening remarks about the dilemma that has faced all philosophers after Marx. We have seen that in Heller's theory of culture this issue is resolved in favour of normative priority with her commitment to change expressed in the hope that her utopia still has some grounds in actuality. Contrast to this Markus' quite different response. Giving priority to the Hegelian historcising moment, he abandons utopia in favour of a careful, empirically detailed reconstruction of the actual pragmatics of modern cultural institutions. As we have seen, he sees neither practical nor theoretical solution to the antinomies of modern culture. This is because the ideological poles of modern culture form a paradoxical functional unity that permit this culture both to express and negotiate its most extreme tendencies. As a consequence, Markus feels no need for a third normative concept of cultural discourse to relieve these antinomies. To be clear: this is not because we should relinquish normative requirements in the assessment of modern culture. Rather, in

true Hegelian immanentist fashion, he maintains that this culture already has its own normative requirements built into its cultural pragmatics.[19] This normative dimension of cultural exists not in any personal cultural utopia but is already immanent to the specific relations that exist in the various major domains of cultural activity. Markus has in mind here the cultural relations configured around author, work and audience. However, he cautions that this normative aspect of culture does not produce *constitutive norms* that would prescribe the actual character of practices and the effective evaluative criteria of their results but only *regulative principles* that orient an adequate understanding of them in terms of both reception and production.[20] The appropriate model of discourse cannot be determined outside specific historical relations. It cannot be imposed upon them but must be drawn from the analysis of the immanent cultural pragmatics. Markus maintains there is no special role for the philosopher here. In modernity the philosopher is no longer the bearer of any special gift for utopia, neither ancient *sophos* nor enlightenment representative of *everyman.* The contemporary philosopher is no better qualified than any other citizen to offer his/her private opinions as normative visions is. What is at stake here is more than a difference of opinion about the dynamics of modern culture. It also insinuates the respective views of the limits of philosophy. It expresses the need referred at the beginning of the paper for every modern philosopher to find their own equilibrium in balancing the competing claims of the empirical, the normative and commitment.

Heller's own particular resolution reveals one of the most distinctive aspects of her philosophical personality. Readers familiar with her work will know her much more traditional view of the role of the contemporary philosopher. For her, normative and existential questions are still essential to the job description. In a characteristic for-

[19] Unfortunately we do not have space to go further into the details of the Markus analysis. See the papers referred to above.
[20] Markus, G., ' The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences,' unpublished Ms, 2002, 10-11.

mulation, she suggests that " Philosophy wants to shake or shock the readers that they should be dissatisfied with their life rather than grateful for it'.[21] For her, even in the era of increased subjectivism philosophers are, amongst other things, primarily purveyors of competing rational utopias. This is the reason she invents her third concept of cultural discourse. Perhaps it is also the reason for her philosophical originality: she chooses not to follow the conventional wisdom of other philosophers but to take their problems as a basis for thinking through her own solutions. Taking Heller's life work as a whole, it is clear that although today an especially "untimely view" this not likely to worry her in the least.

Whether to find her or Markus' specific reading of the antinomies of modern culture more satisfying I shall leave up to you. By now my own preference should be obvious. I find Markus' historicising perspective more theoretically elegant and empirically compelling. It eliminates the demand for a definitive solution to the antinomies of modern culture while still allowing us to theorise a normative dimension within specific cultural relations. The question of whether this will provide sufficient critical distant and not fall into the potential Hegelian trap of simply expressing the existing modern cultural world is hard to answer abstractly. Theoretically, this would involve the analysis of specific cultural pragmatics.

While Heller also gestures to Hegel, her theoretical priority lies with the utopian moment. This produces a certain distance between her normative vision and contemporary cultural dynamics. Even emphatic critique loses potency if it loses contact with prevailing socio-cultural dynamics. With this remark we return to my starting-point but now I will somewhat extend my initial claim. Ultimately, how one weights competing empirical and normative demands and the arguments that flow from them is not just a question for the existential equilibrium of philosophers: it is a question that all thinking modern individuals must each negotiate for him/herself.

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[21] Heller, A., *The Concept of the Beautiful,* forthcoming, University of Pennsylvania Press, ms, 363.

Zoltán Gyenge

The Concept of Beauty or "die reale Schönheit"

In her treatise on the concept of beauty, Ágnes Heller lays special emphasis on Hegel's notion of beauty. She, then, compares this understanding with that of Kierkegaard, which, somewhat torn away from the concept, attempts to create a world of existing beauty.

In Hegel, the concept of beauty is always in relation with the idea (Idee), whereas in Kierkegaard it is the conduct of life, or more precisely the beautiful form, or beautiful life that makes beautiful itself really existing. But existing or real beauty is not even then independent of Hegel's notion.

Heller poses the question in relation to Luc Ferry's interpretation. This question is the following: If Kant's notion of beauty – in accordance with his Copernican turn – leads back to the earthly world, to things, then can it be justly said that Hegelian philosophy, in contrast to this, means the Copernican counterrevolution? "The Copernican revolution in philosophy was first spearheaded by the concept of the beauty. Instead of looking up at the source of all beautiful things, at the Idea of the Absolute Beauty, some witty Brits turned their gaze back from the transcendent world towards the earth of common sense to discover down there the source of beauty: in human faculties – particularly in the faculties of judgment, imagination and taste."[1]

The Copernican counterrevolution leads the concept of beauty, just the opposite way, from the things to the idea. Thus the absolute idea is at the same time an absolute point of comparison which sets

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[1] Heller, Agnes, *The Concept of Beauty* /C.B./ (manuscript) 1.

the form and place of beauty in the system. But Hegel's beauty is not a logical idea, as Heller points out. In fact, Hegel writes the following: "Denn das Kunstschöne ist weder die logische Idee, der absolute Gedanke, wie er im reinen Elemente des Denkens sich enzwickelt, noch ist es umgekehrt die natürliche Idee, sondern es gehört dem geistigen Gebiete an, ohne jedoch bei den Erkenntnissen und Taten des endlichen Geistes stehenzubleiben."[2]. That is to say, beauty is not a logical idea, but it is not a natural idea either, rather, the concept of beauty is tied to the absolute Spirit. How is it possible then to speak about this beauty in an effective way? For we are not to interfere with the affairs of science, beauty cannot be made the subject matter of science, but cannot be examined solely in its singleness. If we look at Hegel more attentively, we find that there the most important question is the relation between a single beauty and the idea of beauty. And it is a single beauty that is examined, because "only a single work of art can be beauty."[3]

What is then the main task of aesthetics (or rather philosophy of art) in Hegel? Besides, there is the further question of whether art has an aim, and if it does, what is it. Heller says: "Aesthetics Hegel begins to speak of beauty in such a direct, almost apodictical manner as a fighter who throws his glove hastily into the philosophical arena. The object of these lectures, declares Hegel, in one breath and immediately "ist das weite Reich des Schönen, und naher ist die Kunst, und zwar die schöne Kunst ihr Gebiet". By saying that much, he adds, he has alredy excluded the beauty of nature, for this topic is "rein das Schöne der Kunst". Purity (rein) means also "high". We must declare, he adds, that "das Kunstschöne höger stehe als die Natur" for this is "aus dem Geiste geborene und wiedergeborene Schönheit". And "Geistigkeit" means also "Freiheit"."[4] But we must immediately add that Hegel does not speak of aesthetics in the traditional sense. The

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[2] Hegel, G. W. F., *Werke* 13. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986. 130.
[3] *C.B.* 2.
[4] *C.B.* 4.

concept of aesthetics is rather substituted by another label, which is important, as Hegel mentions this at the very beginning of his lectures. "These lectures are "die schöne Kunst." Then he continues: "Wir wollen es deshalb bei dem Namen Aesthetik bewenden lassen, weil er als blosser Name für uns gleichgültig und ausserdem einstweilen so in die gemeine Srache übergegangen ist, dass er als Name kann beibehalten werden. Der eigentliche Ausdruck jedoch für unsere Wissenschaft ist Philosophie der Kunst und bestimmter Philosophie der schönen Kunst."[5] So here we see fine art which goes beyond criticism of taste and questions the ontological foundation of beauty: What makes beauty beautiful? Or what is the essence of beauty? Heller – justifiably – identifies the concept of "rein" with the concept of "high." She is also justified in saying that the "understanding of higher" stems partly from Platonic, partly from Schellingian legacy. In Schelling this thought relates to the fact that in his System des transzendentalen Idealismus, 1800, he conceives of a higher unity of art (poihsij) and philosophy (filosofia)[6].

The concept of "rein"/"high" is in connection with the concepts of freedom (Freiheit) and spirit (Geistigkeit) – as Heller also states –, and, at the same time, it refers to the difference between natural and spiritual. However, through this another concept emerges, which we cannot take for granted, but which needs more thorough analysis – the concept of truth. At first sight truth is the total unity of subject and object. "Here we arrive at the subject-object identity (totality, full determination) that is the Truth. Everything that is, is the existence of the idea" – says Heller. Beauty is the idea, so beauty and truth are one and the same. The concept of truth, however, means more than this, for it refers to the aim (teloj) of art. As to the aim of art Hegel first speaks of what cannot be the aim of art:

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[5] Hegel, *Werke* 13. 13.

[6] Schelling, F. W. J., *Sämtliche Werke* /S.W./ I./3. 619. hrsg. von K. F. A. Schelling, I.Abt. Bde. 1-10; II. Abt. Bde. 1-4. Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856-1861.

to inspire delight
to educate or improve morals
to teach

Hegel describes the aim of art with the very concept of truth: "... die Kunst die Wahrheit in Form der sinnlichen Kunstgestaltung zu enthüllen, jenen versöhnten Gegensatz darzustellen berufen sei und somit ihren Endzweck in sich, in dieser Darstellung und Enthüllung selber habe".[7] But what is the essence of truth? To answer the question we should turn to two terms. These are: "presentation" ("Darstellung") and "revelation" ("Enthülung"). Presentation takes sensuous forms, that is something perceived by our senses (sight, hearing). (Hegel, for that matter, acknowledges these two senses only as relevant to art, and not the others like the senses of smell or touch.) Thus beauty as truth manifests itself in certain sensuous things. But it not only manifests itself, it also reveals something. And revelation (Enthülung) has truth for its aim. Revelation can happen when something is hiding as secret. I do not want to examine this problem in more details than justified, so I only mention that a secret is never a riddle. A secret, as opposed to a riddle, cannot be solved, a secret is rather hiding, a riddle is showing mysteriously, a secret, as opposed to a riddle, does not call for being solved. That is why a secret (the truth) "only" appears. If, in this respect, we take the Greek notion of truth (aletheia) as our starting-point, then, perhaps, we get closer to finding an answer to the question: What is this truth?

Plato speaks of the essence of aletheia by telling a myth, the story of Er, Pamphylian by birth, in his Republic.[8] Er, the soldier, returns to life after twelve days as he is lying on the funeral pile, and says that he did not die, only his soul departed from his body for a time and visited the underworld, and now, returning back, he tells about what he saw for the people to draw a lesson from it. He says, among other things, that he saw human souls after their death, he witnessed what

[7] Hegel, *Werke* 13. 82.
[8] Plato, *Republic* 614c-621b.

happened to "just" and "unjust" souls. The unjust soul is punished, the just soul ascends by the heavenly way. After the set time has passed, the souls appear again from beneath the earth and from the heaven to meet in front of the Fates, goddesses of destiny, to choose a fate for themselves before their second lives. That is, Plato says that humans choose their own fates, which is a very important fact viewed from responsibility. After choosing their fates, the souls march in a scorching heat to the plain of Forgetfulness, which is a barren waste, then, before being born, they drink from the water of the river of Unmindfulness and forget all things. Which means that humans forget their fates? And this forgetting of fate is grace for them, because we know that in the eyes of the Greeks the worst thing for a human being is to know her/his fate. (This is what is expressed in the story of Prometheus bound to a rock, who knows others fates – the fate of Zeus too –, only he must not tell about it, and cannot become free.) The Greek concept of aletheia means the rupture of this forgetting of fate, the revelation of fate. In the concept of aletheia (a – léthe – ia) the "a" privative refers to things before "Léthe" ("ia" being a formative suffix), to the moment when the human being, before the state of forgetting, knew her/his own fate. She/he knew it, then forgot it.

If we compare this with the truth-concept of Hegel's art, and add to it that this truth cannot be solved, only "revealed in representation" (in der Darstellung kann enthült werden), then it becomes clear that Hegel's concept of truth means fate revealed in the work of art. Heller does not speak of this in this light, but she also says that "the expression of revelation is important", and that "it is the truth that it reveals". Heller thinks that truth is "full determination of thinking, knowing, existing," which by no means contradicts the relation between truth and fate. At the same time she adds to this that it is impossible to speak of the truth of the idea, only of the truth of art, and this truth is philosophical. It is very interesting that Martin Heidegger, in his Ursprung des Kunstwerks, when speaking about truth, he, first and foremost emphasizes the concept of being. That is exactly why here forgetting relates to being. Truth is the expression of "Unverborgenheit", its revelative manifestation. In this work

Heidegger follows Hegel's train of thought almost word for word, but of course, as is usual with him – and as far as forgetting is concerned –, he again "forgets" about indicating what source he is using.

The situation of the real concept of beauty in Kierkegaard's philosophy is quite different. Kierkegaard is by all means the counterpoint of Hegel's way of thinking, but I do not believe that it holds necessarily true in respect of Hegel's concept of art as well, for there are numerous traits that they both share. Heller also points out one of these shared concepts: the concept of freedom. In Hegel, freedom is of course a rather spiritual element (as in the analysis of "Herrschaft und Knechtschaft"[9] in his Phänomenologie des Geistes – Phenomenology of Spirit), whereas in Kierkegaard it always relates to the individual. In Kierkegaard beauty can be a "conduct of life" and not a "way of life" because this concept becomes timely in human life (in the sense of the Greek energeia). In his work, Kierkegaard never discusses theoretically the general concept of beauty. He – as Heller rightly observes – prefers telling stories. He is telling stories in Either-Or[10] as well, which Heller often refers to. Of course we could say that Kierkegaard usually tells stories, and not only in connection with beauty. Of the aesthetic stage he says that the beauty of it lies in it being in connection with beauty: the beauty gender, and belles-lettres. It is, of course, ironic, but telling. For it refers to the fact that Kierkegaard is not interested in the concept of beauty; what he is interested in is beauty coming into being. That is, as contrasted to Hegel's seemingly static thought, we might say that for Kierkegaard only the dynamic concept of beauty is interesting. Beauty is something that can be experienced. Experience (Erfahrung) plays an outstanding role already in Schelling's late philosophy. "Erfahrung" as opposed to the concept of "Denken". Thus beauty is first of all a relation. Relation to life lived by me, relation to myself. Life is beautiful

[9] Hegel, *Werke* 3., 145-155.

[10] F.e. *Diapszalmata* in *Enten-Eller,* 5., 7-9. etc., Kierkegaard, Sören, Samlede Vaeker I. /S.V./ udgivne af Drachman, Heiberg og Lange. Kobenhavn, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1920.

life, which is tied to single things appearing temporarily through my senses, and apart from temporal relation it is also tied to eternity. Beauty is something that comes into being in life. People themselves shape their own lives. They themselves may make it meaningful, empty, interesting or boring. In this lies the temporality of life where there is no real repetition. Repetition only exists for future-oriented people, who want to be absolute in every deed, because they know that real repetition (Job) only exists in connection with the eternal. As we well know, Job received back twice as much as he had before with the exception of his sons and daughters (Kierkegaard wrote: "Her er kun Aandens Gjentagelse mulig, om den end i Timeligheden aldrig bliver saa fuldkommen som i Evigheden, der er den sande Gjentagelse.")[11], because individual life cannot be repeated. That is, repetition cannot be perfect in the everyday life of humans; only "by virtue of the absurd". This is the true conclusion of the story of Regina Olsen too, which Kierkegaard so wonderfully analyzes in his book on The Repetition.

What is, then, beauty? What is the concept of beauty? In fact, there may be several answers to this question, but there is not one true, ultimate answer. But then, it is not yet settled, whether it is possible to speak of a "concept" in connection with "beauty". Is not it a contradiction in terms to bring beauty and concept together? Sure enough, both Hegel and other representatives of German Idealism are much less categorical in this issue, they take it much more relatively. However, they are in accord in one thing: the question of beauty is much more a question than an answer. The question of beauty is a philosophical question. It can be justifiably posed in philosophy, because philosophy and art share origins. It is perhaps most beauty worded by Schelling when he says:

[11] *S.W.* III., 283.

"Nehmt, kann man sagen, der Kunst die Objektivität, so hört sie auf zu sein, was sie ist, und wird Philosophie; gebt der Philosophie die Objektivität, so hört sie auf Philosophie zu sein, und wird Kunst."[12]

And what more can be said about art in the language of philosophy?

[12] *S.W.* I/3., 630.

Judit Hell

Biopolitics and "gender studies"

The objective of the present study is to analyse the point of view represented by both *Ágnes Heller* and *Ferenc Fehér* in the context of the problems referred to in the title of my lecture. I will rely on the following studies by the authors:

Heller–Fehér, "Biopolitika," *A modernitás ingája (The pendulum of modernity),* Budapest, T-Twins, 1993, 205–275.

Heller, "Megváltoztatta-e a biopolitika a politika fogalmát?" (Has biopolitics changed the notion of politics?), *Világosság XXXV.,* 1994, 11., 5–15.

Fehér, "A modern és a posztmodern politikai állapot. Összehasonlítás és szembeállítás" (The state of modern and postmodern politics. Comparison and counterposing), *A modernitás ingája (The pendulum of modernity),* Budapest, T-Twins, 1993, 51–68.

Fehér, "Biopolitika a kommunizmus romjain" (Biopolitics on the ruins of communism), *Társadalmi Szemle XLIX.,* 1994, 10, 3–11.

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It is a well-known fact that Agnes Heller spoke rather disapprovingly of the academic status and scientific study of "gender studies". In one of her essays, which can be considered as a summary of her ideas (in *Világosság*), she states that the fact that there is a post at a university department for "gender studies" legitimates the scientific character of "gender studies", and the other way round, science legitimates the post; the work legitimates science, and both legitimate the commitment to and the ideology of gender and race identity (10). Thus what is done under the name of "gender studies" at universities or, to say the least of it, at most American universities, is practically

pseudo-science.

In the following part of my talk I intend to prove that the standpoint represented by Heller is not really hostile to the problems mentioned on the one hand in the framework of "gender studies" and on the other hand as being independent of it; and that the subject matter can be discussed in a scientific way. On the contrary, Heller is hostile only to a certain kind of treating the problems, which she, together with Fehér, terms as "biopolitics" stating that "gender studies" is a pseudo-science, brought about to serve this particular purpose.

1. State of modern and postmodern politics

Heller and Fehér find the essentials of the basic difference between modernity and postmodernity not in the fact that postmodernity is a kind of independent historical period following modernity and thus being its successor and negation, but they state that the basic difference between the two is that postmodernity means the time of taking an inventory and critical appraisal within mature modernity.

The first and perhaps most important result of this postmodern critical evaluation is that the so called "great stories" of modernity have completely disappeared from politics, better to say, from politics as well. The universal character of modernity has manifested itself as false universalism from different points of view, and one of them was the recognition that universalism has developed at the cost of making the differences disappear (62). A most important sign of action against this false universalism was the expansion of "multiculturalism" and these differences multiplying themselves gave rise to "mini-discourses" in the framework of postmodern politics. Later their existence led to paradoxes of specific character: while the dissimilarities wanted to make themselves recognized according to the rules of law, (although "the language of the laws" is an universal medium), they negated the fact that these mini- discourses could be translated into any universal language. This unsolved dilemma, that perhaps cannot be solved, will lead us to the most serious problem of the political

agenda of the state of postmodern politics: to biopolitics – Heller says (64). In the following part I will discuss what biopolitics is.

2. Biopolitics

In their influential study of biopolitics Heller and Fehér define – or rather circumscribe – the basic difference between politics and biopolitics as follows: the former takes freedom, the latter takes life (the biological side) as the most important value. After giving a detailed description the authors describe the various forms characteristic of the manifestation of biopolitics in different fields of life, for example in the field of ecology, health policy, sexual- and race policy. It is evident from the list, that the value of putting biology into the foreground will diverge greatly, for example when we compare ecology to race policy. What is more, there might be differences even within biopolitics itself, based on what is supported in the conflict of the two values (freedom or sensuality): either freedom (the autonomy of the body), or life (which might mean that the body is alive, or the fact that the body lives well, which in certain connotations might bring the two values together), or the harmony of the two – Heller says (215). Certain biopolitical movements definitely show a Janus-face: it is characteristic of feminism for example, which we will describe in more detail later.

In general, the program of the liberation of the body remained one of the unfulfilled promises of modernity, since in the end it led to the fact that racionality brought corporality under discipline (as described by Elias and Foucault), and within this program we can find the programme of the liberation of women and that of women's body. This last project resulted in a paradox: The sexual revolution of the 60s was a failure. The relationship between the sexes was based on authority again, and the discrimination of women continued, since the spread of sexual freedom did not mean automatically the improvement in their career, including possibilities at their jobs and at home. The greater part of society "went underground", but it did not change anything at

all in the opinion of the majority concerning the genetic inferiority of women – Heller says (258). When feminism protested against this situation, it showed that at that time, in the 80s, perhaps the feminists were the first to understand what a great significance human rights have in politics (257).

Problems of biopolitics have or might have liberal or radical alternatives, the latter of which are open to totalitarian temptations. Feminism represented the liberal alternative whenever this movement presented an unified front against the discrimination of women in various fields of life, defended women's autonomy of choice in the debate about abortion, took measures against the harassment and rape of women in general as well as in the family, against molestation of women at their jobs and what is more, defended the free formation of sexual roles in sexual relationships. But feminism has its radical alternative as well, in which "front-line amazons" both theoretically and in practice take up forms of behavior and gestures hostile to men the system of which in everyday life turns the surrounding world into barracks in a totalitarian way (228). Anyway, their attitude reminds us of the communist front-line troops. Totalitarian inclination appears on theoretical level in such a way that – in spite of the anti-universalist attitude of postmodernity – "the history of the Woman" is written by the feminists at universities, while the intended *petit récit* changes quite unnoticed into a comprehensive historical system of myths (231). The famous book by August Bebel entitled *The Woman and Socialism* even in the time of writing (like feminism) demanded equal social and political rights for women: the first-line radical feminists representing the fact that biopolitics and corporality are absolute could not have anything to do with this classical system of thought at the moment.

3. Biopolitics on the ruins of communism

The highly influential study about biopolitics by Heller and Fehér, some relevant features of which were analyzed above, obviously has

western, first of all American scientific experience as its basis. In contrast, the essay by Ferenc Fehér published in *Társadalmi Szemle* in 1994 (which, tragically enough, is at the same time the author's last and posthumous work) faces the situation formed in the Eastern-European countries after the collapse of communism. Pointing out in the beginning of his essay that he represents the same standpoint as Heller and referring to the manuscript by Heller published a month later in *Világosság* (which we are going to discuss below), Fehér asks the question: If we suppose but not agree with the fact that the statement by some American analysts who confirm that biopolitics as a novice entering the big and old world of politics does not deserve special attention because of being snobbish and artificial, might be true, then what role and function can be attributed to biopolitics in a region which after the collapse of tyranny is dominated over by extremely commonplace problems, very often the ones of survival and civil war (3)?

Well, conservatism rising violently to the surface in these countries paves the way for the dangerous type of biopolitics, which first of all intends to find the alleged genetic roots of culture and political attitudes (4). But in this context a kind of demographic biopolitics is also formulated and proclaimed either in an open or a hidden form and it is joined with undisguised hostility to women's freedom (7), which would deprive women of their elementary freedom and turn them to machines multiplying themselves (8). Taking into consideration that in the world of the communist system full of hypocrisy once it already happened that the "guerilla war" for the sexual liberation of (men and) women gained victory, we can take it for granted that – as Fehér points out – the rights and legitimate role of women – who are both culturally and legally autonomous and recognized personalities in society – will be placed on the public agenda (11). This obviously well-established prophecy has not seemed to be really fulfilled up till now. That is why we are entitled to suppose that it must be having deeper causes.

4. Biopolitics and politics

In the title of her study in 1994 – also referred to by Fehér – Agnes Heller raises the question: Has biopolitics changed the notion of politics? In other words: Can biopolitics be considered as politics in the classical sense of the word? Let us put forward how Heller answers this question: According to Arendt's standards biopolitics is not politics in the real sense of the word, but according to Schmitt's standards it is (15). What does it mean?

According to Hannah Arendt, who is the follower of Hegel's classical tradition here, politics essentially is an activity concerning "common affair", and that is why she states that a term like "biopolitics" would obviously have been contradictory to itself: We have to interpret it as either "bio" or "politics", but it cannot be both (8). In the case of Carl Schmitt the situation is quite different. When Schmitt sets up the category correlation "friend/enemy" the one determining the world of politics, what he does is to introduce a view corresponding to the world-view of biopolitics into the world of politics. Since nowhere else is the friend/enemy dichotomy as emphatic as in biopolitics. Biopolitics corresponds to Carl Schmitt's notion of politics, that is, to the confrontation of "we" and "they" (12). Schmitt's logic suggests that a group usually defines its identity on the basis of features opposite to its own, what is more, on the basis of the image of its enemy, e. g. the blacks and the whites, women and men, etc.

On the basis of this the model represented by Arendt and Habermas becomes impossible, because a definite group of Afro-American women are of opinion that what a white man says cannot be anything but false and it needs not at all be dealt with. Of course in reality Afro-American women do not share this point of view, but this is what Afro-American women-theoreticians who speak in their name think. Those who speak in the name of "women" substitute themselves for all the women, half the human race, whereas those women might have and often do have different ambitions, their image of themselves is also different and they perhaps refuse the image attributed to them by the radical feminists right away. Instead of the

attached class consciousness here we are faced with the attached race- and sex consciousness, but without accepting this fact as frankly as Lukács did – Heller says (6). And this is the point where the two basic ideas of the influential study on biopolitics become obvious and concrete: the fact that all kinds of problems can be discussed, and the other fact, namely the one that the manner of discourse is determined by the fact, whether biologicum or freedom is considered to be the basic value. Biopolitics does not necessitate that freedom should be practised. So freedom is not an objective but a means, which serves a purpose: the greater power of a biologically constituted group as comparing itself to others: against its enemies – Heller says (12).

The right way of discussing the problems is to discuss them in the framework of a free and public discourse and not in one of the mini-discourses. But in that case the manner of discussion cannot be the dichotomy of friend/enemy and what is more, it cannot be determined by the notional framework of the dichotomy of we/they. It is the other way round: they should be and can be discussed in the framework determined by classical notions of politics represented by Hegel and Arendt. Almost all the important questions of biopolitics, like the problem of women, of the minorities, the situation of the immigrants or the protection of the environment can be discussed as social problems. These are questions that really have to be raised – Heller says (14). What I intended to show in this lecture is that the fact that Heller might be hostile to the scientific discussion of the questions raised in the framework of "gender studies" is out of the question. The point is, that she is of opinion that these questions can be discussed not as the specific biopolitical questions of gender studies interpreted as parts of biopolitics, but as social questions belonging to free and public discourse.

Of course, in Eastern Europe there are impediments to this type of discourse. Until we free ourselves from the captivity of mini-discourses and while our political life is labelled on the basis of the opposites friend/enemy and the powerful logic of "either we or they", the free and public debate will continuously come up against obstacles. As Heller puts it needless to say: a country cannot be saved from the

rule of biopolitics only by making a social problem political. Other basic factors, like cherishing of history, quality, high culture, independent thinking and distinction all belong to the preconditions of escape (13).

Ferenc L. Lendvai

Postmodernity, Globalization, and Philosophy of History

In several of her writings, Agnes Heller expressed a conviction that *postmodernity* isn't an era after or even within modernity, rather it is a new way of seeing within the modern or a new and critical synthesis of the experience accumulated in modernity. She also argued (e.g. in the introduction of her *Can Modernity Survive?*) that postmodernity itself has two versions: a reflected and a non-reflected one.

Postmodernity *non-reflected* believes that denying the truths of the classical modern and of the enlightenment, and replacing false universality by difference make it possible to leave their corrupted circle thereby escaping logocentrism and dogmatism. By doing so, however, this postmodernity becomes a true disciple of its opponent, i.e. classical modernity, because it sees everything that preceded it as outdated (except the tradition of its own choice), and now it is proud to know what is right and what to do. While postmodernity *reflected* also treats critically the postmodern turn itself. It doesn't celebrate difference as opposed to universality, the lack of illusion as opposed to the evil illusions of reason, it doesn't say that both justice and injustice are humbug, or that every culture is equally valuable, or that no one standing outside a mini-culture or mini-discourse has authority to judge anything or to make an order of value. With respect to the philosophy of history Heller has strong aversions for Fukuyama's or Huntington's theories.

In what follows I intend to argue that Heller's position is already present in her classical work on the philosophy of history, in *A Theory of History* (1982), and on the other hand that it is useful in understanding current affairs and global problems.

1.

In a key chapter of *A Theory of History* Heller discusses universal progress as a basic category of the philosophy of history. According to Heller, philosophy of history needs to create an unity that in principle involves all human structures and events in history. However, this unity isn't closed but open, and its logic cannot be reconstructed from the perspective of the final result as it is not given in advance. Philosophies of history therefore need to incorporate the future into their basic logic, as if future would be known or at least knowable.

Therefore, a philosophy of history needs to offer an ordered sequence of cultures that appeared in history and to interpret them according to the place they occupy in their own view within the life of mankind in order to understand history as an unity and continuity characterized by an unique logic and evolutionary tendency. From this perspective, theories of progress, of regress, or of eternal circularity are all the same. When Leopold von Ranke said that every civilization is equally close to god (which is pessimistically turned into its contrary, i.e. equally distant from god, in the young Lukács' Dostoiewski notices), then, as Heller points out, he makes a statement about History with capital H, and classifies every civilization as belonging to a single circle that includes future civilizations as well because he presupposes that they will be homogeneous parts of the same circle: it will be as close to, or as distant from god as the preceding epochs.

Heller, who relies on both Collingwood and Danto, points out: each philosophy of history of this kind gives an ontological flavour to progression or regression, or to eternal circularity. These trends of history are understood as real and factual. For this reason these theories provide a sequence of cultures by using one or more standard in virtue of which it justifies its own results. Although the number of possible variations in producing an ordered sequence of cultures is unlimited, only those can be meaningful that respond to real questions of and produce real answers to the idea of historicity. Thus the number of possible standards is fairly limited, even though any social phenome-

na can be used as a standard. Eventually every applied standard can be traced back to two basic types: to the application of either some kind of knowledge or some principle of liberty.

Now what can a *theory of history* do with these standards if it wants to replace the philosophy of history but doesn't want to make these phenomena to be ontological? A theory of history wants to meet the challenge of thinking about history historically. While doing so, it must consider that our present is not a present tense only for our culture but for several significantly different cultures. If one can talk about their belonging together then this is about every person who lives on Earth. Therefore, belonging together includes different cultures and social structures that have different pasts and histories.

But a theory of history doesn't make the principle of universality invalid altogether. The philogenesis of *homo sapiens* is common to the origins of every women and men, to every society and culture. As both philosophy of history and theory of history contain an anthropology, we can't overlook the fact that human beings are born to be free, and have reason. Although a theory of history declines these schematisms based on the historical emergence of such properties, it still can presuppose that the "logics" of a modern civil society like progress towards liberty and reason are historically fairly well established. This is not because of the necessary evolution of historical forms, but on the basis of some properties of *homo sapiens* that are common to every member of humankind.

2.

Let's turn to a serious contemporary problem, namely to globalization and apply what went above. The process through which different regions and cultures of the world get in closer and real touch with one another and experience more or less unified, but at least continuous trends has ancient roots. Critics are not entirely mistaken in saying that colonization was a violent (early) form of globalization, today globalization is nothing but a peaceful (mature) form of colo-

nization. Obviously, there are differences among countries insofar as the level of development is concerned, and the process of unification favours more developed regions and countries. They don't necessarily play an unfair game, its enough to take it to the limit: this results in a global problem that Huntington calls "the clash of civilizations".

The relation between rich and poor countries runs parallel with the relation between rich and poor citizens of a society. This latter problem has been long debated in political philosophy, indeed, there is an ongoing debate between John Rawls and Robert Nozick about the just distribution of social goods. It may well be that during the process of redistribution it is unjust to take away a part of the income of the rich in order to give it to the poor, but it is rational for the rich to accept this avoiding thereby serious social conflicts. Furthermore, it is clear that if the rich subscribe to collective decisions then they can't debate whether they are just or unjust. Theoretically, of course, they are not obliged to do so: they can also emigrate, as Locke advised the poor to do so. His proposal wasn't a fantastic one as it was then a mass phenomenon to emigrate from England (and elsewhere) to the New World.

Nowadays an employee of British Telecom or General Motors could decide to leave for the Scottish Highlands or the Great Basin to be a farmer or hunter but this would be hardly possible on a larger scale. The countries entering globalization, among them those forced into the process by colonization, may choose with more freedom. It isn't impossible to exclude the influences of colonization, or to return to the state they were in preceding colonization – only they would have to pay the price. It isn't possible to enjoy the benefits of colonizations without its shortcomings, and vice versa, it is impossible to exclude its negative effects without excluding its benefits.

Surely: the tension between the rich North and the poor South induces the feeling of *ressentiment* in the poor and under-developed non-Euroamerican countries. But the violence of those opposing globalization doesn't differ in character from the anarchists' war against wealth and the rich in developed countries. The fact that I'm a homeless and suffering from hunger while someone lives in a cottage and

enjoys his life may make my antipathies understandable, but it doesn't entitle me to burn him along with his house. The fact that poverty is prevalent in Afro-Asia while the West conducts a wasteful life can explain hatred but doesn't provide justification for blowing up the World Trade Center.

It would hardly make sense or be right to urge the inner transformation of these traditional societies and cultures towards a modern civil society. As I mentioned, due to not voting for isolation, sooner or later these transformations will take place. The fact that these societies, despite all their traditionalism or anti-West feelings, acknowledge the superiority of Western societies has a – problematic – symptom. And this is the seemingly irresistible flood of migration towards developed countries. The cause behind this migration is not exclusively the higher standard of living, but the fact that it is possible only in these countries to conduct a civilized, *that is* really human life.

Therefore, without making an ideal of Western societies and culture or exempting it from all charges in advance, I would like to emphasize: those who are enemies of Western societies and culture, including those of the United States, are enemies of civilization in general. In this context Dostoiewski's words gain new relevance and a different meaning. When Chernyshevski claimed that "Westist" Russians don't want to adopt this kind of Western society, Dostoiewki replied: yes, they want it, as there is no other. Anyone in Eastern Europe talking about the decline of the West, following either Spengler or Lukacs, and believing that it is possible to develop a new model is simply an idiot. Similarly, it is also nonsense to say that we will make a hard but cheaper deal as to the price of European integration. Given our position, the result can hardly be anything different from the "hard deal" of Tarquinius Superbus with the Sybilla of Cumae.

3.

Can Modernity Survive? – asks Heller in the title of her book. Well, we may not know, she replies, but it matters to us if it will. Modernity is a present state of our world and we if don't see anything to appear on the horizon of present, then the survival of modernity means the survival of an ordered world whose only opponent is chaos. We shouldn't want the whole world to be similar to Africa, therefore we must want modernity to survive. Even if due to the collapse of "great narratives", including great philosophies of history, an idea emerged, namely that the history of the Western political and cultural depleted all its resources. Though the project of modernity has spread worldwide, there are still cultures that resist it, and try to redirect the tendencies of spreading modernity – and Heller quotes Khomeini's example. Above I tried to show that this attempt can't be successful.

The horizon of present is open and this allows several projects, some of which is threatening. But several forms of rationalism, as well as of universalism, as Heller points out, are viable. For post-modern thought, great philosophies of history seem to be mere myths: but philosophies of history, as philosophies in general, differ from myths. Myths can be alive until they are timeless, and their time-boundness leads to their death. Philosophies, including philosophies of history, are time-bound as well, but this is not alien to or hostile against them. In our case, personal experience influences acceptance or decline qualitatively, as well as in the case of myths: a commitment to philosophy is always a personal affair.

The modern human fate is not represented by a kind of philosophy. Philosophy of history doesn't give us an Archimedean point from which to have an absolute view on history. But there are Archimedean points in the individuals' world view from which they personally can choose the great narrative of the philosophy of history. Modernity comprises several traditions, several narratives, "tales" of cultures. They are all different – in order to have a common spirit among them we need some common conditions. A con-

dition of common spirit: the political framework of liberty – democracy. But this is only a condition which must be realized and fulfilled. Modernity (die Moderne), is an unfinished project, one that may be unfinishable. As Heller says: we have to write the next part of the story.

Allan D. Megill

History-Writing and Moral Judgment: A Note on Chapter Seven of Agnes Heller's *A Theory of History* (1982)

The past we make presumes us
as pure invention might, our being here compels it:
an eye cries out for an eye, a throat for a throat.
...
Must the past we make consume us?[1]

The convention by which historians avoid the making of moral judgments is deeply rooted in disciplinary tradition. In a much-quoted statement in the preface of his *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations* (1824), the young Leopold Ranke remarks that "to history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages." Ranke demurs, telling his readers that he "wants only to say what actually happened."[2] Moral judgment – at any rate, *explicit* moral judgment – is to be excluded from the discipline of history.

An example of such an exclusion is in order. One historian of Germany, Richard J. Evans, has criticized another historian of Germany, Michael Burleigh, for engaging in explicit moral commen-

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[1] Alexander, Meena, "Translated Lives," *Illiterate Heart,* Evanston, Ill., TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press, 2002, 45, 46.
[2] Ranke, L.,"Preface" to *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations from 1494 to 1514; The Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present,* 2nd ed., ed. Stern, F. New York, Random House, 1972, 55-59, at 57.

tary in Burleigh's book *The Third Reich: A New History* (2000).[3] Evans writes:

Michael Burleigh's *The Third Reich...* delivers over 900 pages of moral judgment, eschews treatment of topics that are not easily susceptible to moral judgment, such as the economy, or social structure, and provides not one single explanation of how it was that Germans came, as he says, to abrogate their moral responsibilities in a fit of collective madness. This may be history as moral instruction, but it is scarcely satisfying or even stimulating as an intellectual exercise, or as an interpretation... In the end, those who advocate, or practice, history merely as a form of moral rhetoric have no defense at all against those who disagree with them and practice a moral rhetoric of another kind, one which for example praises Hitler as a friend of the Jews, or damns Churchill as a warmonger and mass murderer.[4]

Evans's language suggests that he thinks that the historian's stating of a moral judgment has the status of an expression of a "feel" that the historian has. Evans of course does not object to Burleigh's distaste for the Third Reich. Rather, his objection is to Burleigh's expressing those feelings in a historical work. For, given that the feelings in question are subjective, if such historians as Burleigh, who rightly hold that Nazism was despicable, register those feelings in their historical writing, how can we object when other authors, less sound in their instincts, state contrary (and deeply reprehensible) feelings about the Third Reich? In the final sentence of the passage quoted above, Evans alludes to the speeches and writings of the

[3] Burleigh, M., *The Third Reich: A New History,* London, Macmillan, 2000.
[4] Evans, R. J., "From Historicism to Postmodernism: Historiography in the Twentieth Century," *History and Theory,* 41 February 2002, 79-87, at 87.

Holocaust-denier and pro-Nazi propagandist David Irving, who has indeed praised Hitler as a friend of the Jews and damned Churchill as a warmonger and mass murderer.[5]

But is the sort of *Normverbot* advocated by Ranke and practiced by most professional historians adequate to the historical situation in which we find ourselves today? Should historians make it a policy to avoid expressing moral judgments and the evaluations that presumably follow from such judgments? I shall argue in this paper that the answer to these questions is "No." If taken seriously, the exclusion of normative judgments from history would preclude the kind of designation of the past that we find in, for example, Agnes Heller's *A Philosophy of History in Fragments,* where she refers to "the evil of the twentieth century."[6] Heller is far from the only philosopher or historian to refer to the "evils" of the past century. But what sort of social-material reality is designated by the term *evil?* Better to concentrate on what actually happened, and to attempt to discover what caused it to happen, than to fall into language so blatantly evaluative – or so the argument goes.

Some rules of history-writing are absolutely required, at least if the historical work is to stand as a contribution to knowledge. These are the epistemological rules of history, such as: historians' claims need to be supported by evidence and argument; argument should be explicit, and the historian should not conceal evidence; causal claims can only legitimately be made if the historian has gone through a

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[5] Evans was an adviser for the defense and expert witness in a trial held in London in 2000, defending the writer Deborah Lipstadt (and her British publisher, Penguin) against Irving's claim that she had defamed him in her book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory,* New York, Free Press, 1993, and London, Penguin, 1994, by claiming that he was discredited, that he was a Holocaust denier, and that he had grossly misused evidence. Evans discusses the trial and related matters in Evans, R. J., *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial,* New York, Basic Books, 2001. For Irving's objections to Lipstadt's several references to him, see Lying About Hitler, 6; for Irving's views on Hitler and the Jews, see 45-46, 72-74; and for his views on Churchill, see 121, 143.

[6] Heller, A., *A Philosophy of History in Fragments,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, 138.

process of counterfactual reasoning in asserting those claims; and the historian needs to be explicit about her perspectives, interests, and focus of attention if these might plausibly be seen as affecting the conclusions reached. If, in one's writing, one wants to be understood as making true claims about the past, such rules as these, along with various associated practices, simply cannot be avoided.[7]

But many rules of history writing are suggestive guides rather than absolute commandments. The rules having to do with the expression of moral judgments in history-writing are of this sort. Whether the historian actually offers moral evaluations in the course of her writing will depend on a number of contingent factors. These factors include: the character of the historical reality being dealt with; the character of the audience being addressed; whether the historian has chosen to focus more fully on description or on explanation; whether the historian has chosen to focus more fully on the doings of human beings or on what constrains those doings; and the distance of time and attitude between the historical reality within which the historian lives and the historical reality being dealt with.

It seems plausible to suggest that historians probably ought to hold back from making ethically judgmental statements in such situations as the following: when there is nothing egregiously bad about the historical actions being examined, but only a normal, everyday, non-extreme badness; when the historian's audience is not more than normally in need of ethical guidance; when the historian is more interested in saying what caused things to be the way they were than in describing them; when the historian is more interested in analyzing social, cultural, institutional, or material determinants of human behavior than in analyzing human actions and motivations; and when the events in question are in a past that is temporally – and, more importantly, ideologically and emotionally – distant from the present (Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, vs. Nazi criminality).

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[7] I address these matters in detail in Megill, A., *Historical Knowledge – Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Historical Practice,* Chicago,University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, 2007.

It is my claim that one would never be justified in saying, "Historians always ought to deal explicitly with the ethical issues raised by the aspect of history about which they are writing," in rather the same way that one would never be justified in saying, "Historians always ought to deal explicitly with the role played by class in history." It is merely the flip side of the coin to add that, by the same reasoning, one ought to judge historical works individually, according to what each work actually achieves in its own particular instance. In other words, the key question is whether the work in question manages to say things that are interesting, insight-producing, and well supported by evidence and argument. So, to say that Evans is not justified in his sharp exclusion from history of ethically-evaluative language is *not* to say that all works dealing with Nazism, or with any other historical topic, ought to offer explicit ethical valuations of whatever it is they are discussing. One thinks of Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews,* a work whose spare account of the mechanics of the destruction process is classic.[8] The rule, then, would be along the lines of, "It is permissible, and sometimes desirable, for historians to offer explicit moral judgments about the past."

Note how profoundly different our post-twentieth-century situation is from the situation within which Ranke issued his famous anathema. First, there is the sheer awfulness and terror of important aspects of the history of the century just past. A disturbing feature of twentieth-century history is the scale and variety, and often also the novelty, of the atrocities that occurred during its span. How ought such atrocities be described and interpreted? How ought the historian relate to them? The disagreement between Evans and Burleigh highlights these questions. Second (and here one turns from an all too material history to cultural and intellectual reality), it is clear that in many quarters the world has come to appear as a plurality of conflicting spaces, temporalities, situations, and norms. Whether or not one is

[8] Hilberg, Raul, *The Destruction of the European Jews,* 3rd ed., New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2003; originally published in 1 vol., Chicago, Quadrangle, 1961; and in subsequent editions with other publishers in 1978 and 1985.

"postmodern" (whatever that means), the kind of authoritative ethical framework that Ranke could just *assume* has gone by the boards. Ranke could reject the historian's making of explicit moral judgments in the confidence that other people, or God himself, would take up the slack. This is not our situation now.

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In her discussion of "Moral Judgments in History," which occupies chapter seven of *A Theory of History,* Agnes Heller offers us some guidance on these matters. To my knowledge there is no equivalent to her discussion anywhere else in the literature on the theory of historical writing; it is not a topic that has been much discussed there. Heller begins by invoking what she refers to as Athe double task of historiography" – namely, the fact that on the one hand past historical periods are to be understood "in terms of their own systems of values embedded in institutions and in the consciousness of actors socialized by these institutions," while on the other hand "we have to communicate with the actors of all past-present ages on equal terms, as human beings with human beings." To restate this in simpler language: Heller is here pointing out that there is a tension between, on the one hand, understanding the past in its own terms and, on the other, communicating in a universal way. As Heller notes, the double task of the historian – I would rather call it the historian's *double orientation* – has the problem of moral judgment in history as one of its aspects. As Heller defines it,

the problem of moral judgment in history is the problem of the possibility or impossibility, and of the desirability or undesirability, of passing moral judgments on actors or actions in the past.[9]

In discussing the problem of moral judgment in history Heller helps us to move beyond the intra-disciplinary squabble between Evans, who wants the historian to withhold moral judgment, and Burleigh, who wants the historian to deliver it. (It should be noted that Burleigh delivers moral judgments in a form that lacks theoretical reflectiveness. Instead, he implicitly appeals to what he assumes will be his readers' commonly shared abhorrence of the crimes committed under the Third Reich.) The question of moral judgment in history, Heller reminds us, is not one that admits of a simple answer. (Thus the conflict between Evans and Burleigh cannot be resolved in a way that would unequivocally favor either historian.)

It is first of all obvious that there cannot be moral judgment in historiography unless there is human action. It is equally obvious that some works of history do not focus on human action but instead on the settings that constrain human action. Think of Braudel's classic *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*[10] How could moral judgment be relevant to such a work, given that intentional human action is so marginal an element in it? However, it

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[9] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, 117. I believe that in focusing on the doubleness of history-writing, Heller has struck upon one of its fundamental features, namely, the *unresolvability of its dialectic.* In classic philosophy of history, as exemplified in Hegel and Marx, everything important is part of the dialectic, and dialectic's contradictions always resolve "at a higher level." But in history-writing, unresolvability is the order of the day. For this reason, narratives about the past that are "too logical" tend to provoke, almost *a priori,* skepticism on the part of well-trained historians. (I first became consciously aware of my own skeptical orientation toward "too logical" would-be historical narratives when, many years ago, I happened to run across, in the University of Iowa Library, a copy of the philosopher Richard H. Popkin's hard-to-find book, *The Second Oswald,* introduction by Murray Kempton [New York, Avon, 1966]. The sheer logic of the book led me to conclude, rightly or wrongly, that Popkin's account of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy simply could not be true.)

[10] Braudel, Fernand, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* trans. Reynolds, Siân , 2 vols.; New York, Harper & Row, 1973.

should be noted that the immensely long descriptions of the material world that Braudel gives us – hundreds and hundreds of pages – have their justification only insofar as there is at least some *minimal* possibility of free human action. Otherwise, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* would be a work not of history but of geology or of nonhuman geography. In other words, in spite of its relative absence from Braudel's masterpiece, human action is what enables us to define the work *as* a work of history. But it is nonetheless hard to imagine anything significant being contributed to *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* by the addition to it of any sort of moral evaluation.

There can be no history-writing without the assumption that there is at least a minimal degree of human freedom. Likewise, moral judgment can be applied only to beings to whom we attribute freedom – specifically, the freedom to have acted differently than they actually did. But note that morals do not necessarily loom large in our attempts to understand human dealings in the world, whether past or present, for not everything is a question of morality. In this regard, Heller deploys an indispensable distinction between morals and mores. "Morals" refers to human doings of a type that makes them legitimate objects for moral evaluation. "Mores," on the other hand, refers to collective patterns of behavior that individual human beings in a given culture reproduce in a more or less automatic way. Heller's notion of mores is close to the notion of "habitus" that the French sociologist and sociological theorist Pierre Bourdieu developed around the time that Heller was writing A Theory of History. In Bourdieu's theory, habitus is an "immanent law" of behavior "laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing"; it is the basis for the "common code" of a culture; it is a "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations."[11]

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[11] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Nice, Richard, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, especially 78-87 ("Structures, habitus and practices"); quotations at 81, 78. To be sure, Bourdieu was preceded in this notion by various other writers, most notably Norbert Elias.

Evident in the mores–habitus notion is a setting aside of the assumption of human freedom that would make moral judgment applicable to history. Much recent work in cultural history, following along a line suggested by Bourdieu, has been indifferent to anything smacking of voluntarism, and this includes an indifference to "moralities."[12] Heller's mores/morals distinction is useful because it helps us keep in mind a limitation that is very much part of contemporary professional historiography. Indeed, a largely reductionist tendency is powerful throughout this historiography, and not only in cultural history; it constitutes a diffuse and non-dogmatic form of historical materialism.[13] (One should note, however, that the reductionism in question is not characteristic of "popular" historiography, which has never lost its preference for focusing on willful, acting human individuals. Popular historiography has its own distinctive set of limitations.)

Any attempt to deploy moral judgment in history necessarily involves an anti-reductionist moment. This is because judging the goodness or evil of past actions and actors requires a disentangling of historical agents from the contexts in which, otherwise, responsibility or even culpability for their actions would be lodged. The moment of disentanglement is the moment in historiography's double orientation that involves, not understanding the past in its own terms, but communicating "as human beings with human beings," as Heller puts it.[14] Insofar as the historian sees the doings of human beings as a variable that is dependent on something other than free decision of those

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[12] There of course exists an older genre of cultural history that took as its object things that it regarded as products of free human creativity: see Jacques Barzun, "Cultural History as a Synthesis," in *The Varieties of History,* 387-402. The cultural history that dominates professional historiography today has nothing in common with – indeed, is almost the antithesis of – this older, "high" cultural history.

[13] Thus, intellectual history and history of ideas, in dominant sectors of the discipline, have gotten reduced, respectively, to the history of intellectuals (currently a preoccupation among some French historians) and the history of ideologies. The key point here is that any sense of innovation and autonomy is a priori excluded from the objects on which these fields focus.

[14] On disentanglement as one aspect of historiography, see Megill, Allan, *Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason,* Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, xvi-xvii.

human beings themselves, moral judgment is excluded. But as Heller notes, “morality can become the subject matter of historiography... where the historian reconstructs a particular historical *event* as the outcome, the consequence, of human will, individual or collective.”[15] Assuming human will is exercised, there would be the potential for discrepancies between the then extant system of behavioral rules (the habitus of the time and place in question) and what people – perhaps unexpectedly – actually decided to do.

As Heller notes, there is a reciprocal relation implied in the historian’s willingness to morally judge past human beings. Clearly, to morally judge past human beings is to attribute to them the capacity for freedom: otherwise it would make as much sense to judge them morally as it would to judge a shark or a piranha. But what would justify the historian’s attribution of a capacity for freedom to past historical actors? This attribution, Heller claims, is justified on grounds of reciprocity. The professionally-committed historian – Heller points out – regards herself as being a “relatively free” actor in the present. Indeed, Heller goes so far as to claim that “anyone who undertakes to write historiography in line with the most elementary norms of this venture, such as personal disinterestedness” is aware of the moral commitment that she is making. In claiming disinterestedness, the historian logically *cannot* see herself “as imprinted upon by circumstances and genetic codes... “ Consequently:

Even if the [historian-]author conceptualizes society in deterministic terms, the same terms cannot be applied to his/her own activity. The historian is ready to accept moral judgment in the present and that is why he/she has to accept the moral judgment of an ideally existing future historian as well... The historian must assume that [historical]

[15] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 119. It should of course be noted that one form of decision is the decision to simply “go along with” the culture's “immanent law” of behavior. Here the historian hypothesizes that it would have been possible for people to go against the habitus, but that they chose not to. Clearly, this is a different case from “going along with” *simpliciter.*

actors...would raise exactly the same claim, were they alive. As a result, while communicating with them on equal terms, the historian is obliged to judge them morally also.[16]

In other words, any historian who claims to be a disinterested, a.k.a. objective, observer of the past *must* have a positive relation to morally judging the past (I shall run through this argument again below).

But there still remains the other, negative side of what we are obliged to see as the unresolvable dialectic of moral judgment in history. Having argued for the necessity of moral judgment, Heller also points out its problematic character:

the situation of the historian who chooses to pass moral judgments on actors of the past is awkward. Whether the historian is involved in epochs of homogeneous or heterogeneous value-systems, he/she cannot live up to the task in an unambiguous way...[17]

There are a number of reasons for the awkwardness. For example, the historian is obliged to attend to the fact that the historical events that she is judging occurred in an earlier period, with different moral standards from hers. Yet it is impossible for her to abstract herself *entirely* from her own morality. There is also the fact that the methodology of history claims to judge the actors of a period "according to their own value-systems" – that is, in terms of their own *mores* ("every age is immediate to God," as Ranke put it). But if a past historical actor acted "in keeping with the *historian*'s *mores*" rather than in keeping with the *mores* of his *own* time, the historian will be inclined to approve of the historical actor's actions, and at the same time, at least implicitly, to disapprove of the *mores* of the past time – even though this disapproval violates the Rankean rule. (Hence, a Aprogressively" oriented historian, finding an example of progressive, forward-looking behavior in an earlier period, may well be inclined to let her approval of that behavior become known, even

[16] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 118.
[17] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 123.

though the mores of the past time disapproved of such behavior. For example, such a historian might well be inclined to pass a positive moral judgment over an eighteenth-century Briton who was tolerant of homosexuality; but in that time and place homosexual behavior was regarded with horror and was subject to horrible punishments.) There is a further problem when the historian attempts to judge not just past *actions*, but the *motivations* of past actions – which means judging the actors themselves, and not just the actions that they carried out. This puts the historian into a problematic territory, given the difficulty of getting at what the individual motivations of actors actually were.

Overall, then, Heller is forced to conclude that:

except for moral monsters, and at least according to our historical consciousness and its limits and theoretical norms, we are unable to pass moral judgments over actors of the past *consistently* and *methodically* [my italics]. All the same, it would be desirable if we could do so, for we cannot set down norms for future historians we are not ready to follow ourselves.[18]

In the perspective of someone who could know and judge how the past led seamlessly to the present and how the present will lead seamlessly forward into the future, one would find, to be sure, no such unresolvability. But this is not the historian's situation. On the contrary, the historian is caught on the horns of a dilemma. The dilemma that Heller has so presciently identified might be schematized as follows:

1. As a professional historian, I am committed to the norms of scholarly historical investigation.
2. Accordingly, I see myself as a freely thinking and freely acting agent and not as the purveyor of an ideology or as a mere ventriloquizer of the *Zeitgeist.*
3. Accordingly, I see myself as legitimately subject to being morally judged by others, given that I am a freely acting agent and not an automaton.

[18] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 124.

4. Given the principle in ethics that reciprocity ought to prevail, I am obliged to grant to other people, including people in ages past, the same privilege and the same responsibility that I grant myself.

5. Accordingly, I am *obliged* to subject to moral judgment the people in the past about whom I write.

6. In morally judging people in the past, I must do so in terms of the moral norms that, as a free ethical being, I regard as valid.

7. It is a methodological norm of scholarly historical investigation that the historian is to judge people in the past in terms of the moral norms prevailing in the past.

8. Insofar as the moral norms of people in the past are different from my norms, I am forced, in the writing of history, to violate a central rule of the historical discipline.

How is one to deal with the dilemma? Heller's solution is to introduce something in addition to "historiography proper." Historiography proper, she suggests, generally withholds moral judgments in history, "only passing moral judgments in exceptional cases." Indeed, she declares, "moralizing historiography is wrong." It is wrong, she holds, not because it is "more objective" or "more scientific" not to make moral judgments, but because it is "more moral," since, she suggests, "only someone who took all the sins and sufferings of humankind upon himself has the right to judge the living and the dead." To gloss this: it is arrogant for the historian to presume to sit in judgment on all that has happened in the past, grading each occurrence as if she were God. But on the other hand, it is not at all Heller's claim that historians should affect a stance of complete moral neutrality. Instead, historians should show "a partiality for those who suffered the most" in history:

Those who suffered the most cannot be regarded as the morally better ones; they usually are not. They cannot claim moral approval but they can claim *empathy.* And they ought to get this empathy from historiography proper.[19]

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[19] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 124-25.

In short, Heller holds that the historian can offer explicit moral judgments unproblematically *only in extreme cases* – in the case of Amoral monsters." (This would authorize Burleigh's making known his moral judgments concerning the Third Reich.) In other, more normal cases, however, the historian should decline to moralize. (This would neatly exclude from the ranks of legitimate history-writing the William J. Bennetts of our world – those who want to use history as a source of inspiring exemplars calculated to support an existing polity or way of life.[20]) The genuine historian who is ethically engaged would empathize with history's victims, but except in really exceptional cases would hold back from offering moral judgments.

But this is not the end of the story, for historiography, Heller insists, is not the only approach that we have to the past: we also have what she calls "historical literature." At this point Heller evokes R. G. Collingwood's famous paralleling of historiography to criminal investigation. The implications of this parallel have been little remarked upon – least of all by Collingwood himself.[21] Collingwood's police inspector (whose procedures, Collingwood holds, are the same as those of the historian) makes no moral judgment on the crime during the course of his investigation of it: after all, such judgment is not relevant to the task of discovering what happened. Still, one can imagine the inspector saying, perhaps after he has completed the investigation and feels able to think about the world in a more reflective way, "I do not approve of murder." Under similar circumstances the historian might say, "I do not approve of looting, exploitation, plundering, oppression..."

But as Heller points out, it seems out of place for the historian *qua* historian to make this sort of statement unless "a concrete historical drama can be reconstructed as the story of particular historical actors,

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[20] See Bennett, J. William, ed., *Our Sacred Honor: Words of Advice from the Founders in Stories, Letters, Poems, and Speeches,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997.

[21] See Collingwood, R. G., *The Idea of History* (1946), rev. edition with *Lectures 1926-1928,* ed. with an introduction by Dussen, J., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, 266ff.

whose participation in and responsibility for a concrete action and its consequences can be established." However, Heller contends, such historical drama can only be fully constructed in historical literature, not in historiography. In historical literature, action can be "completely ascribed to actors, to their will, motivation and personal character traits," since a poetic license to invent is accorded to writers of literature. In historiography proper, on the other hand, evidential problems arise that impair the offering of such dramas. The historian is rarely able to reconstruct such matters as will, motivation, and character well enough to make justified moral judgments concerning historical actors (as distinguished from making justified moral judgments concerning historical events themselves). Historical literature does not fall under this constraint.[22]

* * *

Heller here hits upon a true and important point. But the point needs to be extended, for reasons that were not entirely obvious when *A Theory of History* was written but are much clearer now. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s it has become a commonplace that the quintessentially nineteenth-century notion that a "grand narrative" somehow underlies and makes sense of all of History has collapsed.[23] Of course, the historical discipline long ago diverged from explicit commitment to any such notion, while still retaining a functionally equivalent principle of coherence in its commitment to a single historical methodology. But such a position is inherently unstable, given the absence of unity at an ontological level.[24] And when one adds to

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[22] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* 126-27.

[23] The commonplace was first put into wide circulation by Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Bennington, Geoff and Massumi, Brian, foreword by Jameson, Fredric, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [original French edition, 1979], xxiii.

[24] The argument for these claims is laid out in Megill, Allan, "'Grand Narrative' and the Discipline of History," *A New Philosophy of History,* ed. Ankersmit, Frank; Kellner, Hans, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, 151-73, 263-71.

this mix the heterogeneity that permeates so many aspects of our wider culture, the instability of a purely methodological conception of historiographical unity multiplies.

Accordingly, the notion of "historical literature" that Heller evoked as a means of confronting the problem of moral judgment in history needs to be understood in a very broad sense. This sense would go beyond the memoirs and historical fictions that Heller seems to have had in mind in *A Theory of History* – such works as Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limits,* and Primo Levi's *If This is a Man.*[25] A historiography within the confines of grand narrative is primarily oriented toward disciplinary consensus; it is both sharpened and blinded by such a focus. Further, when commitment to grand narrative recedes, disciplinary consensus loses its theoretical grounding. A post-grand narrative historiography would have to involve connection with a *variety* of ways of understanding the historical world, going beyond the ways both of the historian and of the novelist or memoirist. This is all the more so in view of the fact that a vast, virtually unmanageable body of primary historiography now exists, oppressing us by its weight. The existence of this vast body of historical writing creates pressure for a historiography that would have the character of meditation, reflection, and commentary. Such a reflective historiography would take upon itself the task of unearthing the significance of the extant body of primary historiography for our lives, now.[26] Within the framework of such a post- and extra-disciplinary historiography, the question of moral judgment and evaluation in history can more readily be taken up than within the confines of disciplinary history alone.

[25] Tolstoy, L. N., *War and Peace,* trans. Edmonds, Rosemary, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982; Améry, Jean, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities,* trans. Rosenfeld, Sidney and Rosenfeld, Stella P., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980; Levi, Primo, *If This is a Man,* trans. Woolf, Stuart, New York, Orion, 1959.

[26] These points are made at greater length in Megill, "'Grand Narrative'," 168-73.

In other words, the "double orientation" of history ought not only to be keyed internally, to the various places where tensions *within* historiography do not resolve (here one thinks firstly of the tension between offering and withholding moral judgments, but this is far from the only unresolvable tension in history). It also ought to be keyed externally – and externally in *more than one way* (not just to literature narrowly considered). Such matters are clearer now than they were in 1982 – and not only because of the momentous events of 1989-91. For example, in the last few years a substantial body of writing has come into existence that we might best designate as *para*-historical. Such writing is not "historical literature" (at least not in the narrow sense), and it is not "historiography proper" either. Think, for example, of two recent books that have tried to come to grips with twentieth-century atrocity: *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century,* by the ethical philosopher Jonathan Glover, and *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies, and History,* by the journalist Erna Paris.[27] Neither work is satisfactory as history, but both have things to teach historians.

Glover's book is oriented to philosophy; Paris's, to that vague something that we can call memory. Historiography proper ought not to capitulate to "memory," the danger and destructiveness of which are now entirely clear. Nor ought history to bow down before philosophy, whose capacity to reconstruct the past adequately is limited. Nonetheless, the kind of explicit attention that a philosopher like Glover gives to ways of categorizing and evaluating human motives and patterns of behavior is certainly a contribution to moral judgment. In this regard Glover takes us well beyond Burleigh, who offers us his moral *reactions* to the Third Reich but hardly enables us to cultivate moral *judgment.* On the other hand, the history that Glover gives us is entirely superficial, lacking the richness and depth

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[27] Glover, Jonathan, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1999; Paris, Erna, *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies and History,* New York, Bloomsbury, 2001.

of the work of a good historian – e.g., that of Burleigh or of Evans. As for Paris's memory-oriented approach to the past, while historians have a duty to stand up against the unverified claims of "memory," they also have a duty to try to understand it from the inside, and this Paris attempts to do.

It is in this sense that we need to carry Heller's insight further than she thought to take it in *A Theory of History.* The question of moral judgment in history-writing is of course only one aspect of a larger question: the question of how there can be a *critical* element in history, as distinguished both from disciplinary professionalism on one side (perhaps too beholden to historians' own consensus politics) and from the burnishing of myths, memories, pieties, and grudges on another. A critical history would involve, first of all, retention of the best epistemological conventions of the discipline. But it would also involve a willingness on the part of historians, at least when dealing with the most difficult historical cases (the easy cases can look after themselves), to engage in an encounter with philosophy, with literature, and with "memory" – without ever abdicating in favor of, or capitulating to, these other orientations and ways of looking at the world. In a book finished in 1979 and published in 1982, Heller identified the dependence of one aspect of historical criticism, namely, moral judgment, on a willingness of historians to seek insight and help from outside their own discipline. This prescient insight is still in need of appropriation and development.

Gabriella Paolucci

"Everyday Life:" a *sui generis* ontology? Some considerations about Agnes Heller's theory of daily life.

"Tomorrow is already today:" a re-evaluation of everyday life

Everyday Life[1] was published at a time in which the interest shown by the social sciences in the everyday dimension of life was rapidly increasing.[2] Historiography, philosophy, psychology, and sociology all began to embrace everyday life as a new area on which to focus theoretical attention and empirical research. It would be interesting to analyse the reasons underlying this renewed attention for a theme that had long been misunderstood and often denigrated, but this would take us too far away from the topic on which I will be focusing here. Suffice it to say that the period during which *Everyday Life* was published was characterised by the end of the crisis of the 'grand narratives' and of the eschatological vision of historical becoming. As has already been widely recognised, it was at this time that the criticism of a linear and progressive vision of history broke out of the confines of philosophical debate to spread at a much wider mass level and become one of the most widespread leitmotivs of collective political action.

The loss in legitimisation to which the philosophy of progress and its effects were subjected led unavoidably to a revision of the underpinnings of the modern political project. This latter was centred on an emphasis on the future, viewed as the dimension in which all ends

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[1] Heller, A., *A mindennapi élet,* Budapest, Akadémai Kiado, 1970.
[2] Douglas, J. D., *Understanding everyday life,* Chicago, Aldine Pub. C., 1970.

would be realised, with a consequent devaluation of the present, and from which emerged an increasingly sharp imbalance between paths and objectives, and ends and means. However, the collective movements of the sixties and seventies against the status quo reintroduced the idea of *becoming-in-the-present,* and this began to take on its own stature as a political project that was not necessarily dependent on realisations located in the future. In addition, the loss of the symbolic power of the future also injected life into projectual forms that were less rigidly teleological, and which were more highly focused on the possibilities that the *here and now* offered. As a result, it was natural that this reorientation of the telos towards the present would shift the attention of History onto everyday life, from macro social changes to the individual, private and subjective dimension of change. As Heller wrote in 1980 in *A Theory of History,* if there is no 'tomorrow' that is already today, there is no tomorrow at all." This change in the political projectual horizons sparked off the creating and proliferating of research directions that were therefore concentrated on everyday life – at this point no longer marked by the negative connotation that had it singled out since it had come into being, at the onset of bourgeois society, and now viewed as a sphere crucial for the analysis of social change.

Heller's theory of everyday life finds its rightful place in this environment, already extremely rich with prominent theoretical structures thanks to the Marxist school, which Hungarian philosophy still followed at the time,[3] but thanks also – as is widely recognised – to the theories put forward by phenomenology.

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[3] Although Agnes Heller has consistently claimed that there are no theoretical breaks in her work, I believe, in line with other scholars, that a radical discontinuity can be perceived in her recent work with respect to that of her earlier publications (also following this line of argument, cf. Rivero, A., Agnes Heller: politics and philosophy, *"Thesis Eleven"* 59, 1999,17–28.; Murphy, P., The existential stoic, *"Thesis Eleven"* 59, 1999, 87–94.). The first phase of Heller's work can be described as starting with her meeting with Lukács in 1940 and ending in 1977, when she left Hungary. This period was characterised by her work with the 'Budapest School' and her close relationship with Lukács. It was in this period that the Hellerian reading of Marx's 'humanism' had such a strong cultural and political impact on the Western left wing. *Everyday Life* (1970) was one of the most important texts of this phase.

A theoretical project versus the ontologies of everyday life

The philosophical system underlying Agnes Heller's theoretical aims can be understood as a means for detracting the legitimacy of other alternative visions that hypostatised everyday life, rejecting their construction of a negative ontology of everyday life and their exalting of everyday life independently of its socio-historical definitions, as was typical of a particular branch of recent French sociology.[4]

The first theoretical move that Heller made in this direction consisted in establishing the category of 'reproduction' as a fundamental concept of everyday life. This allowed for a notion based on both objective criteria (those objectively observable activities that a subject carries out in order to self-reproduce) and subjective criteria (the processes of symbolic construction that attribute meaning to self-reproductive activities). In this way, it should be pointed out, a substantial difference with respect to phenomenology can be pinpointed, since the latter mainly used criteria that were symbolic.

The second move can be identified in the distinction that she drew between 'everyday life' as an *analytical category* and 'everyday life' as *historically determined,* a distinction that was fundamental to work by Heller as well as other Marxist authors, such as Lefebvre. The function of this distinction was clearly anti-ontological, in that it was capable of overcoming the flattening of the *concept* of everyday life onto the idea of everyday life as *concretely determined,* something that was close to the heart of the other alternative ontologies of everyday life, the most important theoretical example of this clearly being that of Heidegger's *Being and Time.* The conceptual instrument that Agnes Heller used to do this was the notion of 'alienation', and it also allowed her to make her third conceptual move: the developing of a *critique of everyday life* as this was conceived in capitalist society; towards, that is, the contemporary conditions, historically determined, of the self-reproduction of individuals.

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[4] Maffesoli, M., (1979) *La conquista del presente,* (Italian translation) Roma, Ianua, 1983.

The fourth move was the least successful, but, it should be recognised, also the most difficult. Using Lukács' ideas in *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*[5] as a guide, Heller developed a theory of *dialectics between the everyday and the non-everyday,* which took into account, on the one hand, the distinction between analytical category and the factual reality of everyday life and, on the other, incorporated her radical criticism of the alienation of capitalist society. The greatest theoretical problems with the Hellerian approach lie in precisely this last move, which clearly represented the decisive means by which she aimed to launch a victorious attack on the alternative approaches that were also rightfully defined as ontological. However, as I will go on to show, Heller's lack of success in constructing a solid theoretical relationship between the everyday and the non-everyday led her approach to be ranked with the other ontological approaches, even if it was *sui generis.*

Everyday life as self-reproduction

Let us begin with the first point. The notion of reproduction is one of the basic concepts of everyday life, as Heller explains at the beginning of the book:

If individuals are to reproduce society, they must reproduce themselves as individuals. We may define 'everyday life' as the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu,* make social reproduction possible.[6]

Her use of this definition of reproduction – which links the Hellerian proposal to that of other Marxist scholars like Henry Lefebvre, allows her the possibility of anchoring the analysis of everyday life to the possibility of living, to its reality, and of creating in this

[5] Lukacs, G., *Ästhetik. Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen,* Berlin, Verlag, 1964.
[6] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of A mindennapi élet, 1970), 3.

way a basis for a criticism of those theories that hypostatise everyday life as banality. It is as well to remember that, although the Marxist authors borrowed the concept of reproduction from a single source – from the Marxist analysis of capitalist society, the use of the category takes on different connotations for each of them.

Heller's own use of the term is probably the least literal with respect to the original Marxist formula, despite her respect for the substance. Even though in Marx the notion of reproduction, in in its twofold form of 'simple reproduction' and 'extended reproduction', refers exclusively to relations of production, all the same, as for many concepts of the Marxist criticism of political economy, the implications of the term are such as to involve the entire set of social relations. Since for Marx relations of production are not exclusively economic, but are also *social,* the reproduction of relations of production is also the *reproduction of society.* As a result, the Marxist concept of reproduction includes the set of actions that determines the preservation and the reproduction of capitalist social structures.

Heller takes on this wider approach of the concept and applies it to the content and structure of the individual's everyday life, viewed as the moment of the most general reproduction of society:

Persons can reproduce society only by reproducing themselves as persons. But reproduction of society does not follow automatically from the self-reproduction of persons, in the same way as a breed of cattle is spontaneously reproduced by reproduction of its individual members. Man can reproduce himself only by discharging his social functions, and self-reproduction becomes the impetus to social reproduction.[7]

[7] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 4.

In other words:

When we say that in everyday life the 'person' directly reproduces himself and his worls (his local world) and, indirectly, the social aggregate, the 'wide world', we are using concepts in a very loose and figurative fashion.[8]

It is useful to observe that Heller constantly underlines the historically determined nature of everyday self-reproduction, which should be understood as the set of activities of historical man, set in a concrete 'world'. In order to self-reproduce, the individual must, in every society, take possession of the world in which he lives. He must understand the system of habits and is called on to acquire the capacities and faculties that are asked of him in that world. It is during the process of appropriating this world that the subject *objectivises* himself: he gives form to himself and to his world, a world that does not go beyond the limits of the *immediate environment* in which he lives each day. All the objectifications of everyday life therefore concern only the immediate environment and the single individual, otherwise they *transcend the everyday.* By contrast, all the abilities and 'affections' by which the individual transcends his immediate environment through their reference to the world in its totality, *are acquired during the course of each day,* on the terrane of everyday life.[9] As we will see below, the emphasis that Heller places on the distinction between everyday objectivisa-

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[8] Ibid. 8.

[9] "(...) All the basic skills, the fundamental affects and attitudes by means of which I transcend my environment and which I correlate with the total world accessible to me, and with the aid of which I objectivize myself, are appropriated by me in my everyday life. Here I only mention some of these fundamental affects and attitudes – courage (...); self-control (...); coping with problems (...); feeling pleasure in success; loyalty; gratitude; etc. So, what matters is not merely that the influence which I exert on my environment should continue tacitly and covertly: what matters ios that, without the skills I am to appropriate in this environment, without objectivizing myself in everyday life, I would not be able to objectivize my abilities in higher forms (Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 7.).

tion and non-everyday objectivisation gives rise to a sense of ambiguity that is significant in the successive construction of the theoretical system.

Posing the question in terms of self-reproduction, it is worth pointing out, allows Heller to distinguish between everyday life as it is historically given and everyday life as an analytical category: what we define as 'everyday life' does not have the same or identical connotations consistently, everywhere and all the time. The everyday life with which we are familiar nowadays is different to what it was yesterday and how it will be tomorrow, although, despite these differences, it is recognisable as 'everyday life'. It was on the basis of this fundamental distinction that Heller was able to structure a theory that was in constant and polemical tension with all the other ontologies of everyday life, whether they exalted it as an authentic environment or whether – on the contrary – they saw inauthenticity as typical of it. Regarding this point, due debt must be paid to Heidegger since, in *Being and Time,* he proposed a particular hypostatisation of everyday life as the kingdom of the *cure.*[10] Maintaining that everyday life essentially consists in the activities aimed at individual reproduction, as Heller does, allows for a theory that is free from normative inclinations and for conceptual instruments that are appropriate for a *non-metaphysical philosophy of everyday life* to be developed.

I would also like to add that focusing attention on the activities of everyday self-reproduction could also open up some very fertile areas of work for the kind of *sociology* that aims to locate the driving force

[10] Constantly polemical with Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, Heller picks up and widens the thinking that her teacher Gyorgy Lukács developed in *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* (Lukacs, G., *Ästhetik. Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen,* Berlin, Verlag, 1964.). Come e noto, Lukacs critica la visione di Heidegger, il quale, a suo avviso, impoverisce e deforma la struttura e l'essenza della vita quotidiana. In particolare la critica lukacsiana si concentra sulla relazione tra quotidiano e conoscenza. Se la vita quotidiana perde la sua connessione dinamica con la conoscenza e con la scienza, sostiene Lukacs, come accade nella visione heideggeriana, essa perde con cio stesso il suo carattere piu genuino, poiché la conoscenza emerge dai problemi posti dal quotidiano e il quotidiano si arricchisce ininterrottamente dei risultati della scienza.

of social change in the *transformations* of the activities necessary for individual reproduction, and which believes that it is useful to pose questions about the *variety* of everyday actions within the same social system to give substance to differences in class, gender, age, and so forth.

The particular man, alienation and the individual: towards a sui generis ontology?

Heller dedicated much attention to defining the characteristics of the main subject of everyday life, and it is from these characteristics that the entire theoretical system of *Everyday Life* falls out.

In everyday life, the individual considers his immediate environment as "already made" and "taken for granted." He spontaneously adopts the system of habits and techniques that are characteristic of his own surroundings. To extricate himself from the heterogeneity that is typical of everyday activities, he behaves in a pragmatic way,[11] while the concepts that he uses are, typically, clichés. His knowledge in fact, when compared to the gnoseological parameters of science, are nothing more than "opinion", *doxa.*

Moreover, the subject of everyday life is a *particular* person; that is to say, a person who lives every day of his life through the ways of mere *existence.* The meaning that Heller attributed to the notion of "particularity" was borrowed from the young Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,* where he distinguished between two scenarios of work and awareness: the "particular situation", of man as pure existence, and the "individual situation", of man who reveals the

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[11] In viewing everyday activity as essentially pragmatic, Heller aligns herself with the broad lines of the theories deriving from phenomenology (Berger and Berger, 1972) which identify pragmatism as one of the most important characteristics of everyday life. The Hellerian conception comes very close to that of Lukács, who bases the characterisation of everyday thought on precisely this 'close connection between theory and practice' (Lukacs, G., *Ästhetik. Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen,* Berlin, Verlag, 1964.).

strength of his essence. Heller, however, took this one step further. While Marx used the concept of "particularity" to define the human condition uniquely in the presence of estraniated work, Heller widened the meaning of the notion to modify its original connotations to some extent. According to the Hellerian perspective, then, everyday life is built – in every case and no matter how – on particular points of view, even in conditions of non-alienation. Particularity is thus a constituting aspect of everyday life. Only in the scenario of alienated society will we find, so as to say, an *excess* of particularity.

This description of the concept presents such normative connotations as to constitute a kind of explosive unpredictability in relation to the very same anti-ontological premises posed by Heller herself. As we will see below, this is not so rare in *Everyday Life.* But now let us see how the question is handled from a more analytical perspective.

Every individual possesses "particular" characteristics and points of view, ties, that is, to the singularity of his existence in the world. What Heller defined as the "appropriation of everyday life" would be simply impossible without a certain cultivation of these "particular" qualities and characteristics, just as it is natural for every person to perceive and manipulate the world starting from himself, with the aim of self-preservation and self-reproduction. Together with these particular characteristics and points of view, everyone also possesses *particular motivations* – or *needs.* Heller distinguished at this point between "motivations that are *purely* particular" and "motivations that are *also* particular". The first are when the point of view functions as a mover of action ('I'm hungry so I'll take my neighbour's piece of bread away from him'). Envy, vanity, cowardice, jealousy and selfishness all count as examples of motivations that are *purely* particular; those that are *not purely* particular can refer to both particularity and *individuality,* or even directly to genericity, i.e. to an awareness of the characteristics, aspirations and history of the human race. Here, Heller wanted to underline the fact that particular motivations can also be dictated by values that are higher than simple self-preservation, as she illustrated through a long series of arguments and examples.

In alienated society, which pushes the subject to construct his life around the mere preservation of his existence, particularity becomes all the same a *general way of behaving,* a *system of life* that informs the sets of actions and thoughts of each day.

"Up to now – Agnes Heller wrote – during the course of history, for most relationships and social strata, *the subject of everyday life has been particularity.* More precisely: the individual "organised" around particularity has been *enough* to carry out everyday activities and to reproduce. This does not mean that those people who managed to elevate themselves to individuality were no longer able to carry out these tasks. It simply means that it was unnecessary to become an individual in order to carry out these tasks; moreover, the world offered most individuals *limited possibilities* to order their lives on the basis of individuality. Millions of men have carried out their work and have done what there was to do, without understanding their role in the world, without being aware that their faculties were generic faculties, and without imposing the signs of their individuality on the world."[12]

Heller dedicated many interesting sections to the analysis of the *enrichment of particularity* and to the intimate relation that it holds with alienation. She exemplified this slow and complex path, from particular behaviour as a simple "base" for everyday life to particularity as the unique perspective that, in alienated society, inhibits the free unfolding of the human essence. The subject of alienated everyday life, she observed, identifies spontaneously with all the conventions and requests of the social system that enable his simple self-preservation

[12] Heller, A., *A mindennapi élet,* Budapest, Akadémai Kiado, 1970., my translation of Heller, A., *Sociologia della vita quotidiana,* Roma, Editori Riuniti (First Italian edition, one reprint), 1981. 67.

and relieve his life of conflicts, rendering it "convenient".[13] The particular man, in other words, is nothing more than "pure existence", moved as it is by the preservation of existence *oriented towards having and not towards being.*

The everyday subject, and therefore the same everyday life, can also, however, be more than this. If nowadays, for most people, it is *only* this, this should not be debited to the *ontological* reality of everyday life, but to the historical and social conditions of capitalist society, which push people to sacrifice their *essence* to the needs of their *existence.*[14] In a society that is not dominated by alienation it should be possible for everyone to live an everyday life where the *essence,* which is the *aim of existence,* does not become a mere *instrument for survival.* Although in the alienated society this is very difficult and unusual, it can happen that some people who do not limit using their essential strengths as an instrument for their own needs of self-preservation. Those who manage to do this, despite the constraints placed by the alienated society, are those who undertake what Heller calls "the process of appropriation of individuality".

The *driving force* of this process is represented by those *needs,* such as the "societal need", whose satisfaction implies the transcending of alienated everyday life. The subject of such a path is the indi-

[13] "In defending my particularity I am, of course, not merely defending my particular motivations and other motivations bearing on my particularity, but the whole system which is founded on these as its basis. To this system belong my actions in the past, my views, my thoughts, the various attitudes I have adopted. I have to defend everything that I have done – or everything the group has done with which I identify myself: otherwise I cannot successfully defend my particularity. I rationalize my past. My mistakes were due to other factors – heredity (which I can't help! – another rationalization), the intrigues of others, tracks of fate, or, just 'bad luck'" (Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 14).

[14] This is here once again a change in Marxian terms (Marx, K., (1844), *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript,* (English translation), Penguini, 1975.).

vidual, “the person for whom his own life is consciouIsly an object, since he is a conscious species-being.”[15] *Individuality* is therefore not a definitive status, but a process:

“Individuality is a development; it is the coming-to-be of an individual. This coming-to-be takes different forms in different ages. But whatever form concrete individuality, or its ideal, takes in a given age, individuality is never complete but is always in a state of flux. This flux is the process of transcending particularity, the process of ‘synthesization’ into individuality.”[16]

The individual does not identify with alienated forms of behaviour. He does not subordinate all his life, *in any case and no matter what,* to self-preservation. An individual is thus a person who “is aware in his relationship with the generic and who, on the basis of such awareness, gives homogeneity and hierarchical order to the heterogeneity of everyday life. The process of appropriation of individuality is conditioned by the concrete situation in which the subject finds himself, given that the path from particularity to individuality is created by the aspiration to satisfy “social needs, historically conditioned and socially codified”, as Grumley observed in a recent paper on the theory of needs by Heller.[17] The first and most important need of this type is the *radical need*[18] to overcome the alienation of everyday life:

“Even within the framework of social alienation, subjective rebellion against alienation is always a possibility. In such circumstances, the origination of a bujectively non alineated everyday life is a declaration of war on alienation.”[19]

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[15] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 17.
[16] Ibid. 15.
[17] Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999.
[18] As is widely recognised, the theory of radical needs is one of the strong moments of the philosophy of Heller’s Marxist period, cf. Romero (1999).
[19] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 258.

We thus find ourselves facing a conception that, although placing a normative emphasis on the distance between behaviours and subjective attitudes towards alienation, does not move beyond the environment of the analysis of the everyday dimension. It is limited, that is, to linking the relation between everyday life as an *analytical category* where everyday life is the *materially determined* factual entity. In other words, we find ourselves facing the interpretation of different tonalities that the life of every day can empirically take on in the modern world, according to the objective and subjective conditions in which the individual finds himself living. Even if a certain normative emphasis risks annulling the objective foundation of the concept, we continue to remain with the boundaries described by the category of “everyday life” as the environment for self-reproduction. Theoretical problems that are much more serious arise however when Heller set herself the objective of establishing the links between everyday life and what transcends it.

What is Thomas Mann’s everyday life like?

As her starting point, Heller took the binary pair particular/individual to lead the discussion to one of the most complicated questions that every theory of everyday life must handle: the relation between the everyday and the non-everyday. She declared more than once that she did not intend to juxtapose the everyday dimension against the non-everyday. On the contrary, given certain socio-historical conditions, this last could, in her opinion, be structurally installed *within* everyday life. The key to accede to the non-everyday dimension is therefore to be found inside everyday life and it consists in a process of orientation and discipline by the individual. This is a process in which morality (practical morality and not abstract morality) plays the role of guide. It is in this way that the status of non-everyday life appears to be, in a certain sense, twofold: on the one hand, it *transcends* the everyday, but on the other it drives its roots into the concrete dynamics of everyday life. Everyday life constitutes the actual foundations of the non-everyday,

the starting point of the process that allows the individual to reproduce himself above and beyond his mere alienated particularity and to conquer in this way that aware relationship with the indefiniteness that substantiates individuality. The non-everyday dwells therefore, as Heller discussed in her long and complex articles, in the everyday life of those who are capable of equipping themselves with a unified and homogeneous personality, of initiating a process of externalisation of themselves that leads to the stamp of a personality, objectifying themselves in activities that, in themselves, transcend the everyday: *generic objectifications for themselves,* which can be distinguished from *generic objectifications in themselves,* also through the fact of activating oneself only through the human intention that is consciously directed towards these.

Any exit from the everyday takes the form of a complex process of construction of the self, which takes on different characteristics and manages to achieve different levels of success according to the different historical and social conditions in which it finds itself taking place. Virtually impossible and very rare in the alienated society, easier to achieve in social systems that do not come under the dominion of alienation/estrangement, the transcending of everyday life remains today, following the Hellerian vision, the prerogative of the few, although it is beginning to take on the shape of a possible condition that will be collectively shared in the future by the disalienated human condition.

Now, to me, this seems to place such a strong emphasis on the personal and subjective dimension that it contradicts the objective bases which Heller wanted to attribute to the concept of everyday life. To base the distinction between the everyday and the non-everyday on the construction of the self, or, to use Hellerian terminology, on the level of subjective awareness of the relationship with indefiniteness, risks bringing unobtrusively back the ontological approach that the use of the concept of reproduction had previously openly rejected. Moreover, the strongly normative approach that Heller adopted to place the 'superior' activities beyond the boundaries of everyday life risks leading her theoretical system into the reassuring channel of the hypostatisations of everyday life.

To better understand this step, it is useful to clarify two key notions of her argument: the concept of *objectivisation* and the binary pair *heterogeneity* and *homogeneity.* In order to raise himself above the level of everyday life, the individual must, in the first place, concentrate on a sphere of homogeneous activity that goes objectively *beyond everyday life and thinking.* The process of homogenisation is for Heller, following Lukács, "the category of 'emergence' from everyday life:"

"Homogenization means that the individual is 'absorbed' in a given homogeneous sphere of objectivation, and concentrates his activity upon one single objective homogeneous sphere of action. In this case, a man's activity is not only indirectly but directly also, a component part of general human praxis: from being 'a whole man' the subject becomes 'man-as-whole' – by which we mean an individuality who concentrates all his steght and ability on discharging a task within a homogeneous sphere of objectivation. The human activity which takes place in the process of homogenization is creation or re-creation."[20]

Second, the subject's actions must be placed within the sphere of objectivisation *for itself.* That is, it is necessary that he "carry out aware generic activities" at the highest level. In hierarchical order, these are: work, morality, religion, politics, and the law, sciences, art and – finally – philosophy.

In my opinion, an approach of this type risks invalidating and contradicting the conceptual premises of the Hellerian theory of everyday life, which consist in the reciprocal anchoring of the two concepts "everyday life" and "self-reproduction." If, in several cases and for several people, the indefinite objectifications which effectively constitute the basis for their own self-reproduction as socially and historical-

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[20] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970), 57.

ly situated subjects are excluded from the scenario of everyday life, there is a serious risk of limiting both the understanding of the social determinisms of everyday life and the analysis of social change.

In reality, already at the beginning of the book[21] there is a first taste of what I consider to be, if nothing else, a serious ambiguity. In one of the notes at the beginning of her book, she stated that:

"It is widely known that Thomas Mann used to write several pages every day, but this does not mean that this was an 'everyday activity'"[22]

Already in this quotation it is possible to perceive a certain normative flavour to this approach, which, while aiming to base the definition of the concept of everyday life on objective criteria (reproduction), in reality reproposes depreciating everyday thinking and action. What does Thomas Mann's life consist of if one of the main activities in which he is involved – writing – is not understood? Can we reasonably maintain, *without falling into a new negative ontology of everyday life,* that Thomas Mann, like all writers, scientists, artists and philosophers, leads a daily life that can be defined as "halved" given that he dedicates a great deal of his day to activities that are higher than those of eating and sleeping? If everyday living provides the framework for self-reproduction, why exclude from it those activities that, although finding their place at one of the higher levels of the hierarchy of human objectification, constitute in factual reality an occupation that is repeated on a daily basis?[23] Why, in other words, exclude the activity of writing from Thomas Mann's everyday life, since Thomas Mann would

[21] L'osservazione sull'attivita di scrittore di Thomas Mann, alla quale faccio qui riferimento, non appare in realta nell'edizione in lingua inglese (Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul plc., 1984, (English translation of *A mindennapi élet,* 1970).), ma soltanto in quella ungherese (Heller, A., *A mindennapi élet,* Budapest, Akadémai Kiado, 1970.) e nella traduzione italiana (Heller, A., *Sociologia della vita quotidiana,* Roma, Editori Riuniti (First Italian edition, one reprint), 1981.).
[22] Heller, A., *A mindennapi élet,* Budapest, Akadémai Kiado, 1970, (my translation of Heller, 1981, 23.).
[23] On the importance of repetition to define the concept of everyday life, cf. Jedlowski, 2002.

certainly not be able to self-reproduce Thomas Mann without writing? All in all, it would seem to me that the distinction made between the different levels of objectification cannot be used to draw a line between the everyday and the non-everyday, even though it is indispensable to capture the effective difference between the different modalities of self-reproduction that socio-historical determinations favour or hinder – unless, of course, one wants to reject the actual presuppositions underlying a theory of everyday life as the self-reproduction of the individual.

Questions of this kind involve not only the issue of normativity that is so common to the different approaches, but also the problem of the operational features of a theory whose aim is to study society and its changes. How can a concept of everyday life that excludes a priori some of the actions that are actually carried out every day be used to study society? How can we read the differences that exist between the everyday life of subjects belonging to different classes, genders, and ages if *we exclude from our enquiry exactly those activities that in many cases determine precisely these differences?*

The ambiguities that come into being as a result of the normative emphasis of Heller's theoretical approach also pose important questions on the wider theoretical plane. Constructing a relation between the everyday and the non-everyday on a normative basis normative already means in some way reproposing a negative understanding of the everyday and giving space to theoretical outcomes that in one way or another hypostatise everyday life at a hierarchically lower level than other dimensions of human life. It means, in reality, flattening once again the *category* of everyday life onto *factual everyday life.*

Moreover, on a completely different level, are we really so sure that *other* dimensions are so distinct and different from everyday life as to transcend it? Or would it not be more appropriate to maintain that the life of every subject, including here the "criticisms" of everyday life as it is and any aspirations to change, is played out exclusively on the level of everyday life, as Lefebvre claims? Paraphrasing Deleuze, should we be asking ourselves on what other level of life we can count apart from that of everyday life? To answer these questions would

clearly necessitate a completely different approach to the one that I have used in this short paper. What is certain is that it is a task that the social sciences will have to take on if they aim to use the conceptual tools offered by the theories of everyday life to analyse and interpret social reality.

The antinomies of autonomy

Several aspects of *Everyday Life* can be better understood by investigating the thinking of Heller which followed this work. Although when referring to her theoretical path, several clearly distinct phases are often singled out, particularly regarding her abandoning of Marxism, it is possible all the same to highlight several common traits that contribute towards an understanding of certain ambiguities of the theory of everyday life in the two periods.[24] This kind of operation, although not really correct from the methodological point of view, can all the same be legitimised in the fact that she, as far as I can see, has never critically revised *Everyday Life,* as she has done other works.

First, it is useful to ask ourselves if the reconciliation between "the essential dynamism of modernity" which went hand in hand with her moving on from the categories of the Marxist analysis of capitalist society takes away from the theory of everyday life the basis on which the whole construction was constructed. Naturally, the problem that this leads to is not limited to the theory of everyday life, but concerns more in general the relationship between her Marxist period and the

[24] Tormey observes: "Looking back over her work it is interesting to note the continuities in her thinking about the necessary constituents of the just society. Despite the apparently dramatic nature of the shift from a humanist Marxist to a post-Marxist and then a postmodernist position, we find the equation of the values of life and freedom with the call for the development of 'symmetric reciprocity' for 'radical tolerance' and 'self-management' and up until relatively recently, even 'positive abolition of private property'" (Tormey, S., (1999), *From radical utopia to "will-to utopia": on the "post-modern" turn in the recent work of Agnes Heller* (forthcoming).7).

new theoretical framework that she went on to adopt. Other scholars, more competent than myself, have dealt with this point.[25] I will here restrict myself to suggesting a few points for reflection that are closely linked to the question of everyday life.

The *reconciliation with modernity* that marked the second phase of Heller's work was undoubtedly influenced by the weakening of social philosophy as a *criticism of the present.* The subject of *The Postmodern Political Condition*[26] is dissatisfied because modern society offers an excess of abstract possibilities with respect to those that he can concretely realise in his lifetime. However, this condition is very different to the kind that is determined by alienation: the state of perennial dissatisfaction in which the modern *contingent* subject lives has no perspective of being transcended. On the contrary, the sense of dissatisfaction is the actual driving force of the process of conservation and reproduction of modern society. Dissatisfaction, in other words, is the device par excellence for maintaining modernity and is not, as in the Marxist period, the basis for its overcoming. It is "the mechanism of a discontinuity within continuity"[27] as Murphy defines this, commenting Heller's theoretical shift. We can therefore also infer that dissatisfaction represents the dynamic lying at the basis of the reproduction of the individual. Besides, even radical needs, in this new definition, are no longer "temporalised" in the project of a grand narrative, as Heller herself went to great pains to underline: "What I now reject is temporalization in the project of a grand narrative."[28] In her revised formulation the "recognition of needs", which constituted a radical aspiration in her first phase, was now placed in the framework of the celebration of the market as the impersonal regulator of desires, as Tormey observed.[29] Reflecting once

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[25] Tormey, S., (1999), *From radical utopia to "will-to utopia": on the "postmodern" turn in the recent work of Agnes Heller* (forthcoming).; Rivero, A., Agnes Heller: politics and philosophy, *"Thesis Eleven"* 59, 1999,17–28.; Vajda, M., 'Is moral philosophy possible at all?' *'Thesis Eleven'* 59, 1999, 73–85.
[26] Heller, A., Fehér, F., *The postmodern political condition,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1988.
[27] Murphy, P., The existential stoic, *"Thesis Eleven"* 59, 1999, 67.
[28] Heller, A., 'A theory of needs revisited,' *Thesis Eleven,* 35, 1993, 33.
[29] Tormey, S., (1999), *From radical utopia to "will-to utopia:" on the "postmodern" turn in the recent work of Agnes Heller* (forthcoming).

again on the theory of needs, Heller claimed in 1993:

"The ideal-type of a modern democratic society is a population where there are rich and poor, or at least where some people have more money than others, but there are no single other distinguishing features among men and women. The way of life, taste and everything else that one encompasses in the term of 'system of needs' becomes identical – it is just that satisfiers can be of greater or lesser monetary value."[30]

In the new theoretical scenario that emphasises the personal rather than the social dimension of *autonomy,* how is the device that should allow the subject to be released from the enriching of the particularity of alienated everyday life formed?

If we think about the ethical anthropology that has been developed by Heller over the last few years, particularly the concept of *responsibility,* we can identify several traits of the theory of *individuality* that were developed in *Everyday Life.* Postmodern men and women – who accept living in radical contingency – take on responsibility for the present by assuming responsibility for building a "meaningful life" for themselves and their contemporaries, *independently of the prospect of its transcendence.* As Heller wrote in *A Theory of Modernity:*

"A responsible person is in charge. But one cannot be in charge of an unknown and unknowable future. One carries responsibility for the present. This means roughly that one is in charge of one's contemporaries, of one's Togetherness."[31]

The *responsible* individual does not wait for his own and others' realisation to be entrusted to the train of history which will take him forward into the Future, using the striking metaphor in a *Theory of Modernity.*[32] He will accept the provisionary nature of "life on the railway station" since he knows that the historical future is absolutely unknown and unknowable, and that it makes no sense to take responsibility for things that are unknown. Heller's abandoning of Marxism,

[30] Heller, A., 'A theory of needs revisited,' *Thesis Eleven,* 35, 1993, 21.
[31] Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, 10.
[32] Ibid. 7–9.

with the consequent disappearance of the prospective of transcending alienated society, pushed Hellerian philosophy to emphasise the autonomy of the individual in the construction of individual *paths* towards the 'good life' even more than in the past .

So, even if the shift in social philosophy detracts the theoretical framework of reference from the system of *Everyday Life,* we can all the same identify in the postmodernist period a pattern of development that is coherent with the premises of moral philosophy that can already be found in the theory of everyday life. The category of the individual, for example, is mainly built on an ethical basis that is analogous to that supporting the *ethics of responsibility* of the following phase. From this point of view, suffice it to remember even only the guiding role played by morality in the process of conquering autonomous individuality, and of its exit from the everyday dimension. Observed from the viewpoint of the theory of everyday life, those needs for the realisation of which the everyday subject is pushed towards achieving autonomous individuality, do not have, so as to say, any theoretical need for the perspective provided by the 'grand narrative'. We can ask ourselves, then, to cite yet another of the metaphors used in *A Theory of Modernity,* whether ensuring that the chair around the table of modernity stays empty can really stop the reduction of the present to a mere interval as a function of the future from constituting an alibi for detracting ourselves from the practical criticism – severe and rigorous – of the lack of humanity and authenticity characterising the concrete everyday lives of the majority of people living on the earth today.

Ángel Rivero

On Agnes Heller's Republicanism

In what follows I would like to reconstruct the main features of what I sees as Agnes Heller´s most recent political philosophy. Although this political philosophy is very original and idiosyncratic, it shares many of the features of what is called contemporary republicanism. So I will give a summary of this political philosophy, republicanism, both in and beyond Agnes Heller and, at the end, I will address some critical remarks.

By political philosophy I mean here a view or a theory of what a good polity should by. The good polity for Ágnes Heller is a Republic, but no a mere republic, it should be a Great Republic or even, perhaps, a radical Republic. This position was not so clear in her past work, when she was in a prominent way a *radical democrat.* What I would like to point is that her republican stance can be seen both as a reconciliation with liberal political institutions but also as a critique of the limits of democracy. When negative freedom is o.k. but is not enough and when, simultaneously, democracy alone can be a threat, then we are in the track of republicanism.

I will explain later what republicanism is. By now it is necessary to make clear that she is not a liberal (although there is, in a sense, a reconciliation with liberal political institutions) because *negative* freedom, liberty *from,* liberty as the private sovereignty of the individual is not enough. For she, this is personal freedom but is not *political freedom.* And, on the contrary, she is no longer a radical democrat because she realised that, as stated by Tocqueville, a totally democratic society can be a threat to freedom: democracy can became, under certain conditions, the tyranny of the majority (in fact it can be a real threat to the above mentioned personal freedom). Then, democracy as such is no longer her utopia.

To sum up, Agnes Heller is a republican in political philosophy because she is not a liberal, o better, because she is not just a liberal, because she is no longer a radical democrat *without qualifications,* but mainly because she defends a republican understanding of freedom as the core of her vision of the good polity.

At the beginning of her book *A Theory of Modernity* she states that Aristotle remarked in his *Politics* that "Europeans developed the love of freedom", that "Machiavelli, in his *Discorsi* presented the European political mind as the inventor of the Republic´s model, as the creator of free spaces for the constitution of liberties." For Agnes Heller, "freedom became the foundation of the modern world."[1] Europe, the Republic, Freedom as the foundation of the political, these are the issues of her republicanism. But Heller warns us that freedom is "the foundation that ground nothing." Thus we are no longer in the theoretical space of the *Grand Narratives.* But also Machiavelli, before the emergence of the Grand Narrative, pointed to the fact that it is in Fortune´s hands half of our lives but the rest is in ours. Political freedom is about the political action of the citizen facing contingency and not the acceptance of the necessity of a, so called, grand narrative.

Freedom is political action, is *freedom to, positive freedom.* Or, in Heller´s words, political action is "every act, discussion, decision and so on, concerning the determination of freedom if elevated to the public sphere... [this] kind of politics can be called *republican.* In the modern world *republican politics* is essential politics because republicanism is about the *politicization* of the issues of freedom by carrying them into the public sphere. Republicanism is not identical with being *democratic* or *liberal* although republicanism uses the opportunities offered by democracy and liberalism."[2]

Paraphrasing Pocock, Heller even speaks of a *republican moment,* the *moment of liberation* that precedes *the constitution of liberties.* This republican moment refers to the type of political activism that

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[1] Heller, Agnes, *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1999. 12.
[2] Ibid. 113.

accompanies those especial moments in which citizens commit themselves in political action by putting aside their particular involvement in everyday life. The republican moment is highly visible during the processes of transition to democracy, like in 1989 onwards in Hungary or like 1975–78 in Spain. The republican moment is "the liberation that precedes *the constitution of liberties*" in the sense of "liberation from tyranny,"[3] so, it is the liberation that triggers transition in the way of political democracy. A process that is accompanied by active citizens political participation. This is almost the same of what another prominent republican thinker, Hannah Arendt, called in her book *On Revolution, Constitutio Libertatis*[4].

Heller´s *republican moment* can be seen also as a "rejuvenation of the political body," that is, a revolutionary moment that produces "a political world in *statu nascendi.*" This foundational or constitutional moment, a revolution, is republicanism at its best: "the power *lies* on the street; men and women are actively involved in exercising their freedom." But it is crucially important to retain that for Heller the republican moment is not confined to the revolutionary-foundational moment: "citizens can always open up a republican space where they can take initiative and do politics."[5] So political freedom is about doing politics and doing politics is the proper task of the citizen.

Surprisingly enough this public understanding of freedom is not something totally new in her work. Her republicanism is not only the result of her realisation of the impossible reform of socialism in a democratic way, or of her criticism of the paternalism of regular post-war socialdemocracy. Her understanding of freedom as political action can be traced back to her book on Aristotle and it is directly connected with Lukács and Marx.

Both Heller and Lukács (and Marx) share the Aristotelian understanding of human nature: man is a social/political animal, so freedom has a essentially public dimension. Hannah Arendt, again in *On*

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[3] Ibid. 113.

[4] Arendt, Hannah, *On Revolution,* NY, Viking Press, 1963.

[5] Heller, Agnes, *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1999. 114.

Revolution, stresses an important point for those that consider that political freedom has a basic public dimension: political liberty should not be confused with the *non* political activities (i.e. negative freedom) allowed and warranted by the political body to its members.

Heller´s republican stance can be seen as a refurbishing of her old sympathies for Aristotle´s conception of human nature, although this time what is stressed is not so much the social but the political dimension of this view.

It seems to me, that it is already time to pose the question, what is republicanism? By positing this question we will be in better position to highlight the features of Heller´s political philosophy.

Republicanism is about the *Res Publica,* that is, "the common thing". Thus, it is about the public dimension of us as citizens. Agnes Heller said that the *Republic,* the city is or should be "the sum total of its citizens". Quentin Skinner, on his part, stated that, for classical republicans "the will of the people ... mean nothing more than the sum of the wills of each individual citizen."[6] In XVIIth Britain, James Harrington said that "the people, taken apart, are but so many private interests, but, if you take them together they are the public interest."[7]

So, republicanism is about the preservation of our common good, of our political community. But it should be clear that republicanism is not about the preservation of every political community, it is about the preservation of a *free polity,* the one that permits political participation and allows non political freedom. That is, a polity in which positive and negative freedom are both possible.

Curiously enough, republicanism originated in the History of Ideas as a critique to democracy. In fact, for Aristotle, democracy is a corrupted form of government in as far as it is a government not oriented to the common good but to a particular good: the good of the poor, the good of the majority. I have the feeling that Heller, not in a

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[6] Skinner, Quentin, *Liberty before Liberalism,* Cambridge, CUP, 1998. 29.
[7] Ibid. 28–29.

Aristotelian but Tocquevillean mood, shares now this suspicion on democracy: democracy can be, specially in America, the tyranny of majority.

For Aristotle, the main threat to freedom was political corruption or *anacyclosis.* Political corruption means basically the weakening of the city and there can not be a free citizen if the polity is not free. According to the doctrine of anacyclosis (first formulated by Plato, elaborated by Aristotle and interpreted according to republican lines by Polibius), all pure forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy and politeia) are good in as far as they serve de common good. But all three tend to degenerate and serve a particular interest instead of the interest of all, the common good. Thus, monarchy degenerates in dictatorship (the interest of one particular); aristocracy tends to degenerate in oligarchy (a government serving the interests of a few); and the politeia tends to degenerate in democracy (the resentful government of the poor or of the many in their own interest). According to Machiavelli, in the *Discorsi,* these three good forms and these three degenerated are all bad. The latter three because they are corrupted, the former three because they are weak, short lived, and tend to corrupt. To sum up, both to Aristotle and Machiavelli, all six are bad forms of government. It should be noted that since then, *pure democracy* has a negative meaning (Pure democracy as something positive was promoted only by Robespierre and, since then, by the revolutionary left: Lenin and so on). Agnes Heller is also on the side of Aristotle and Machiavelli.

The republican solution to the instability of the polity under the pure forms of government is a mixed constitution. Thus, in order to achieve stability, a strong polity, what is needed is the political participation of all citizens (but only of citizens). And this virtuous and unanimous participation of all citizens is what permits the common good being preserved and corruption avoided. A republic, a mixed government, is a balanced polity in which all parts of society (citizens) are committed to its defence on equal terms.

This goal of the preservation of the common good can be served in two distinctive ways.

For conservative republicanism, stability in the polity is achieved when the aristocratic element is dominant and the popular element of citizenship is under its subordination (Cicero and the Federalist, are on this line). Anacyclosis is the great threat to the polity and it is the people the element that tends to trigger revolution, change and, as inevitable effect, destruction). For conservative republicanism, what is essential is to remove as much as possible the political activism of citizens from the taking of political decisions (through limiting the political competence of citizens, by enforcing the aristocratic features of the political system or, simply, by enforcing mechanisms of political representation).

On the contrary, radical republicanism is suspicious of aristocracy. It is aristocracy, not the people, that tends to mingle its particular interest with the common good. So the way of controlling aristocracy (a minority by definition) is by empowering majority. So radical republicanism has a much more qualified rejection of pure democracy. In fact, in radical republicanism, the will of the people tends to be seen as the common good. And more, as in Machiavelli, conflict and change are seen not as threats to freedom but also as opportunities for enlarging freedom. Machiavelli and, with much more qualifications, Hannah Arendt, can be seen as radical republicans.

Agnes Heller is also a radical republican (although in her recognition of a proper sphere of personal freedom versus unlimited democracy she is almost a conservative republican or, at least, a Tocquevillean). This radical republican character can be best seen in her republican utopia "The Great Republic". Published in 1985, this text can be seen as a draft of what is for Agnes Heller a good polity. But, accordingly with the practical spirit of republicanism from Aristotles to Machiavelli and from Cicero to the Federalists, the "Great Republic is a utopia in the least possible degree", that is, "it is a socio-political model ready for implementation." This may sounds rather frightening, specially after a century, the XXth century, almost dedicated to utopia implementation, with the terrible effects known by all. But we should not panic given that republicanism is always, by definition, a doctrine that cares specifically about realisation and about avoiding turmoil and panic (at least in princi-

ple).

I mentioned, at the beginning of this paper, that Heller´s republicanism is highly idiosyncratic. One of its most striking features is that it is not inspired by the Roman Republic, nor by the Free Italian Cities of early modernity. It is not inspired also by such momentous revolutions like the American or the French and neither by the political systems crafted after them. Agnes Heller´s Great Republic is inspired by a Central European Tradition, let us call it the Central European Republicanism (CER). CER is nurtured basically by traditions proper to the East side of river Elbe, that point to a peculiar and non-liberal understanding of political participation and of the conception of the political community. CER is best seen in momentous events like Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1980. In all these events, *revolutions,* a peculiar vindication of freedom, direct political participation, and direct management of the social world was displayed: *councils* was the magic word. CER has not only a spatial referent, but its own authors: the Kant of *Perpetual Peace,* Rosa Luxemburg and her defence of councils plus representative democracy, and, of course, the Hanna Arendt impressed by the Hungarian revolt of 1956 and the short lived council experience that followed.

Agnes Heller built her Great Republic on CER. The Great Republic is a combination of direct and representative democracy thus has a *dual structure* of power that she defines as dual sovereingty. In this dual framework, the person has a three-dimensional status in socio-political interaction: a) the citizen as the bearer of civic and political rights; b) the citizen as active member of a social body; c) the citizen as active member of a political body. The participation of the person-citizen in these three spaces defines public freedom.

The first of the three spaces is defined by “the status of the person qua person”. This is the domain of rights and personal freedom and the link with the others is shaped in the form of a society.

The second of the spaces is defined by “the status of the person as participating member in a social body”. This is the sphere of proper-

ty-holding and welfare. It deals with the social question from the vantage point of self management and it is able of an ample range of realisations: from Kibbutz to regulated markets. The relation with the others is community like.

The third refers to "the status of the person as a participating member in a political body". This is the realm of direct political participation, where direct democracy operates and in which only "the main political issues are discussed".

This three spheres define a kind of citizen that combines the rights dimension of liberalism plus two other spaces of public freedom as participation: the social and the political. The model can be implemented and the evidences for this can be seen, according to Heller, in the very tradition of CER: "the utopian character of this utopia is however relativized precisely because there have been social movements which have, time and again, raised it as a realistic (achievable) goal." So utopia does not refer here to the abstract or undesirable character of the model but to the possibility of its realisation and thus, the Popperian utopian engineering, is according to Heller, non utopian. If something has ever been tried, then there is no utopia. So, according to this line, Heller goes on in the implementation of the model. And the implementation of the model can be very demanding in a utopian way: "Although the utopia [the Great Republic] allocates primary rights to persons qua persons and it does not make participation (in social and political bodies) obligatory, the model con only work if the great majority of the populace is actively willing to participate." So a huge amount of public participation is needed, but it is important also the quality of the participation: "the model works if one simultaneously presupposes the emergence of a strong public virtue, a citizen´s virtue. Only on such a condition can willingness for active participation be both enthusiastic and continuous."

Agnes Heller concedes that her model of the Great Republic can be very demanding. She says that it is not too demanding on the participation side, given that participation is optional, but it should be noted that without a massive participation the model can not operate properly. Nonetheless, for her the model is basically demanding because presupposes the ability of citizens to participate: the citizen should be virtuous

and politically educated.

In her militantly republican article "Citizen Ethics and Civic Virtues" (published in the book co-authored with Féher, *The post-modern political condition,* 1988), Heller delivers a full catalogue of the civic virtues needed for the operation of the Great Republic: "civic virtues are related to the *res publica* ... which literally means *the common thing* ... the common thing shared by all the citizens are ... the goods regarded as the conditions of the good life."[8] Common things are "constitutions, laws, public institutions, decision-making bodies, general (that is, commonly shared) frameworks within which social institutions, economic or other in character, operate."[9]

For the operation of the Great Republic, composed by participatory bodies, civic virtues are needed. These virtues are according to Heller: "radical tolerance (recognition of needs), civic courage, solidarity, justice, and the intellectual virtues of readiness to rational communication and *phronesis.*"[10] "The practice of such virtues makes the *city* what it is meant to be: the sum total of its citizens... Civic virtues contribute to the good life of all."[11]

Up to this point I descrived Agnes Heller´s republican political philosophy. Now, in order to conclude, I would like to pose some critical remarks, not on the plausibility of the model, but on its desirability under the present, post modern, circumstances:

1) The model totally neglects the negative implications of revolution. Revolution is seen as the incarnation of political freedom but never as a tool that can destroy a civilisation. Utopian engineering is equally accepted without criticism and, lastly, although there are some critical remarks, scattered, on the French Revolution, French Republicanism (in fact really existing republicanism) is never under

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[8] Heller, Agnes, "Citizen Ethics and Civic Virtues," Heller and Fehér, *The Postmodern Political Condition,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988, 80.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid. 82.
[11] Ibid. 88.

scrutiny.

2) Heller concedes that her model, the Great Republic, is very demanding in cultural and ethnic terms, but this point is never elaborated. Civic Virtues can been a heavy burden on the identity of persons. And patriotism, the effect of the on going practice of civic virtues, can easily be a source of conflict inside the Great Republic. Republics, even Great Republics, tend to the homogenisation of citizens in cultural and ethnic ways and this can be resisted and be a source of conflict. Civic virtues can became a state creed and, as such, the justification of vicious practices.

3) The citizen, in its origin, was the dweller of a city, although not all the dwellers of a city were citizens. Political freedom as political participation was in Athens, in the Free Cities of Renaissance Italy or in the Free Cities of XVIth Century Spain a pleasant conversation on the common good. But under post modern conditions it is really difficult to know where are the limits of our political community. In fact it is really difficult to know what the common good is. Under post modern conditions our values are in conflict but also are in conflict our loyalties, our identities, our communities (if such a word is still useful in defining our membership binds). So how is freedom as active political participation possible today?

In my view, under present post modern conditions, freedom can not be defined as direct political participation because it is, simply, not possible. The founding fathers of the United States of America were able, already by their time, to neglect civic virtue as the foundation of a Great Republic. A large Republic in a pluralist society can not longer relay on civic virtues but on constitutional arrangements. In such a society there is not a discernible common good but, us much, a set of institutions that permit the common goods, or better, the plurality of goods present in society. This means that political freedom exists in us much we are able to preserve full control on our negative freedom. And in order to protect the institutions that warrant our liberty we no longer need public participation on community basis, what we need is an active civic society that renders political accountability possible. Thus, freedom as rule and being ruled in turn is not longer

our world. In fact, can be a very inhuman world compared with the much more simple and historically effective ideal of negative freedom. Paraphrasing G.B. Shaw, republicanism can be fine but it takes too many evenings.

Erzsébet Rózsa

"Psychische Charakter", "emotionelle "Persönlichkeit. Von psychisch-emotionellen Aspekten der Identitätsprobleme der modernen Persönlichkeit zu Herausforderungen der Globalisierung in Ágnes Hellers früher Philosophie

"Shakespeare ist kein Moralist; er interessiert sich zu leidenschaftlich für die Bewegung der feinsten Motivationen der menschlichen Seele, um Moralist zu sein." (Ágnes Heller)

1. Psychischer Charakter und Emotionalität in der Studie Theorie der Gefühle von 1978 als philosophische Distanzierung zu dem zeitgenössischen Marxismus[1]

Mit dem als Motto gewählten Zitat von Heller möchte ich die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Charakteristik ihrer Philosophie lenken, dass sie kein Moralist ist, weil sie sich für die feinsten Motivationen der menschlichen Seele zu sehr interessiert, um Moralist zu sein. Damit sollte das Thema signalisiert werden, worauf ich mich im Folgenden konzentriere. Um so mehr ist es von Wert, uns damit zu befassen, weil die vorliegende Problematik heute ebenso wie früher, nicht im

[1] Ein Band von Ágnes Heller erschien unter dem Titel *Az ösztönök. Az érzelmek elmélete (Triebe. Theorie der Gefühle)* 1978 in Budapest. Das war kurz nach der Emigration von Ágnes Heller nach Australien, die 1977 stattfand.

Zentrum der Rezeption von Hellers Philosophie steht.[2] Die Vernachlässigung dieser Aspekte der praktischen Philosophie im damals durch den Marxismus als politische Ideologie bestimmten östlichen Teil Europas ist kein Wunder, obwohl Hellers Studie eben dagegen aufgetreten war, was an sich schon eine Erklärung und angemessene Bewertung verdienen würde.[3] Es ist r ist bemerkenswert, dass Hellers Leistung auf diesem, damals boykottierten Gebiet der Philosophie bis heute nicht geschätzt wird, obwohl ihre Leistung durch in Mode gekommene, interdisziplinäre Kooperationen im breiten Feld der verschiedenen Wissenschaften auch heute Anregungen liefert. Auf dem Gesagten folgt, dass ich im Folgenden Hellers Überlegungen nicht einfach in Details rekapituliere, sondern die Ecksteine ihrer Stellungnahme aufzuzeigen versuche, um die Gültigkeit und die Aktualität ihrer damaligen Position für heutige Diskussionen über einige Grundfragen nach dem guten Leben im breitesten Sinne, auch Geburt und Tod inbegriffen, zu belegen.

Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, habe ich auf die herkömmliche Weise verzichtet. Statt eine Menge von Zitaten und Berufungen zu präsentieren, werde ich mich auf einige Schlüsselbegriffe aus der

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[2] Die kulturell-wissenschaftliche Marginalisierung der Lukács-Schule, die Lukács selbst gerne Budapester Schule nannte, hat schon 1973 begonnen. Diese Marginalisierung hat bestimmt eine Rolle in der Vernachlässigung von Hellers *Theorie der Gefühle* auch eine Rolle gespielt. Es ist auch mehr als interessant, dass sich der Verleger in dem Vorwort von dem Band distanziert hat. Aber vor allem war die Emigration von Heller, Márkus und Fehér, die dazu wesentlich beigetragen hat, dass der Band über die Triebe und Gefühle in Ungarn keine bedeutende Rezeption hatte.

[3] Es wäre außerordentlich wichtig, die Gründe der Verdrängung des Umgangs mit dem Marxismus nach der Wende im Osten Europas aufzuzeigen. Die Lukács-Schule hat das teilweise durchgeführt. Mihály Vajda und Ágnes Heller haben ihr eigenes Verhältnis zu dem Marxismus in verschiedenen Phasen ihres Lebens geklärt. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür ist Ágnes Hellers Biographie, in der die Aufarbeitung der persönlich-biographischen und der politischen Aspekte und Komponenten der Geschichte der Budapester Schule teilweise stattfand. Siehe dazu: *Ágnes Heller: Affe auf dem Fahrrad.* Eine Lebensgeschichte. Bearbeitet von János Kőbányai. Aus dem Ungarischen von Christian Prezin und Irene Rübbert. Berlin-Wien 1999. – Vgl. aus der ungarischen Literatur: *Rózsa Erzsébet: A marxizmus reneszánszától a "filozófus perig".* (Von der Renaissance des Marxismus bis zum "philosophischen Prozess".), *História,* 1996, 9–10. sz. S. 39–41.

reichen Terminologie konzentrieren, die ihre gültig gebliebene, bis heute konkurrenzfähige, kooperativ-interdisziplinäre Position nachweisen. Zu diesen Begriffen gehören die im Titel angegebenen Ausdrücke wie ‘psychischer Charakter’, ‘emotioneller Charakter’. Durch den von Heller oft verwendeten Ausdruck ”pychischer Charakter” hebe ich ein Problem heraus, welches zwei grundlegende Aspekte hat, die für die Erläuterung ihrer praktisch-philosophischen Position von besonderer Bedeutung sind. Dieser grundlegende Begriff hat einerseits einen theoretisch begründeten und gekennzeichneten Stellenwert im Rahmen eines bestimmten Begriffskreises, dessen Erörterung man in der vorliegenden Studie *Theorie der Gefühle* findet.[4] Andererseits ist auch ein darüber hinausgehende Status dieses Schlüsselbegriffs zu erkennen, insofern ihm eine Bedeutung als Attitüde und Grundhaltung zugeschrieben wurde, die man in Termini “Emotionalität”, “emotioneller Charakter” umschreiben kann. Der zweite Aspekt ist mit dem Ausdruck “Emotionalität” als grundlegende Komponente der vorliegenden Attitüde und Einstellung näher zu kennzeichnen, die eine über den Begriffsstatus hinaus gehende Bedeutung hat, insofern sie zu der Grundstruktur der praktischen Philosophie von Ágnes Heller überhaupt gehört. Die Erläuterung dieser Dimension der Hellerschen Philosophie eröffnet die Möglichkeit, eine Kontinuität zwischen den früheren und späteren philosophischen Werken, bzw. zwischen den philosophischen Schriften im engeren Sinne und den literarischen Analysen, so zB. dem Shakespeare-Band aufzuzeigen.[5] Dadurch kann die Leistung dieser Philosophie angemessener und korrekter bewertet werden, und nicht einfach im engen Horizont der Aufteilung auf marxistische und nachmarxistische Etappen, wie es in Bezug auf die Geschichte der Lukács-Schule oft der Fall ist. Die Korrektheit erfordert, die wirkliche

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[4] Die erste deutsche Auflage der vorliegenden Studie lautet: Ágnes Heller, *Theorie der Gefühle, Hamburg,* 1981. In diesem Beitrag wird folgende Auflage verwendet: Ágnes Heller, *Theorie der Gefühle,* Hamburg, 2000.
[5] Vgl. Heller, Ágnes, *The Time ist Out of Joint. Shakespeare als Philosopher of History,* Cambridge, 2002.

philosophische Leistung von Heller in den Vordergrund zu stellen, in der zum Ausdruck kommt: sie hat sich seit den 60er Jahren von der offiziellen Ideologie, aber auch von der politisch-ideologisch beeinflussten Position ihres Meisters, *G. Lukács* deutlich distanziert. Eben solche philosophischen Fragestellungen und Themen wie die Problematik der Gefühle und deren Berarbeitung durch eine über die damalige Philosophie hinausgehende Methode tragen dazu bei, dass Heller sich in diesen Jahren philosophisch in vieler Hinsicht auf eigenen Weg getreten war.

Zunächst zum ersten Aspekt des Schlüsselbegriffs “psychischer Charakter’. Den eigentlichen Ort der Erörterung und der Ausführung der Problematik des psychischen Charakters, des emotionellen Charakters und der emotionellen Persönlichkeit findet man in der frühen Studie *Theorie der Gefühle.* Es ist augenfällig, dass dieser Text mit einem starken theoretisch-wissenschaftlichen Anspruch geschrieben wurde. Heller hat hier ein Thema aufgenommen, welches früher im philosophischen Interesse der Lukács-Schule kaum eine Rolle gespielt hat. Die psychisch-emotionelle Dimension des Menschenbildes hat sie aber im Horizont thematisiert, den man mit der philosophischen Anthropologie von *G. Márkus* und dem Lukács’schen Programm der, *“Renaissance des Marxismus”* doch verbinden kann, wie sie es auch betont.[6] Hellers Auslegung der Gefühle geht auch über die neomarxistischen Thesen hinaus, die sie mit G. Márkus, M. Vajda und anderen in den 70er Jahren teilte. In diesem Punkt kommt in dieser Studie zum Ausdruck, wie eine Distanzierung zu den Varianten des Marxismus entstand. Hellers Deutung der Gefühle und der Welt von Emotionen zeigt deutliche Spuren des beginnenden Abschiedes nicht nur von der Marx’schen Narrative und dem Programm der, Renaissance des Marxismus’, sondern auch von den Neomarxismus auf. Die Distanz zu diesen

[6] In der vorliegenden Studie beruft sich Heller mehrmals auf die *Philosophisch-ökonomischen Manuskripten* von Karl Marx und die Arbeiten von G. Lukács, in denen er sich mit dem Programm der "Renaissance des Marxismus" befasste.

Positionen und der beginnende Abschied davon bereiten eine radikale Wende der philosophischen Position vor. Es ist für die Kennzeichnung ihrer Grundhaltung in der zweiten Hälfte der 70er Jahren viel sagend, dass Heller nun eine Menge von Theorien aufnimmt, und zwar nicht nur philosophische, sondern auch psychologische, soziologische Konzepte bzw. empirische Forschungsergebnisse, die sie entweder kritisiert oder doch aufnimmt und als Bausteine ihrer Theorie verwendet. Der Text von 1978 ist in dieser Hinsicht sehr komplex und reich. Trotz der deutlichen und absichtlich-konzeptionell engen Verbindung zu der zeitgenössischen Wissenschaftlichkeit, und trotz den in vieler Hinsicht veralteten Details, ist die überlieferte Stellungnahme doch nicht veraltet, im Gegenteil. Es zeigt sich in Hellers Studie eindeutig: sie hat Ende der 70er Jahren eine Theorie der Gefühle und der Emotionalität ausgearbeitet, die nicht nur durch den Abschied von den "salonfähigeren" Varianten der marxistischen Philosophie vorbereitet hat. Darüber hinaus geht es auch darum, dass diese Studie auch im Vergleich mit späteren Interpretationen der persönlichen Identität von besonderer Bedeutung ist: sie kann auch heute eine konkurrenzfähige Deutung darstellen. Man denke nun an die Frage, die *Ch. Taylor* Anfang der 90er Jahren in seinem Buch über die *Quellen des Selbst* in Bezug auf die *Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Identität* eingehend thematisiert hat.[7] Es war für mich eine Überraschung, als ich feststellen musste: fast alle von Taylor beschriebenen Komponenten der Identität der modernen Persönlichkeit im Blick auf Moral, Innerlichkeit, gewöhnliches Leben, Natur, wurden schon in der vorliegenden Studie von Ágnes Heller angesprochen. D.h. nicht nur in den viel späteren Werken, so z.B. in den Bänden ihrer Theorie der Moral aus den 90er Jahren, sondern schon in den frühen Studien und Büchern über Moral, Triebe, Emotionen.[8] Das bedeutet nicht wenigeres, als dass Heller schon in

[7] Taylor, Charles, *Quellen des Selbst.* Die Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Identität. Frankfurt am Main 1996.

[8] Heller hat ihre Theorie der Moral in folgenden Bänden ausgeführt: *General Ethics,* Oxford-Boston, 1988, *Philosophy of Morals,* Oxford-Boston, 1990, *An Ethics of Personality,* Cambridge, 1996.

den 70er Jahren die Umrisse der Konzeption der persönlichen Identität ausgearbeitet hat, die sie dann als Bausteine der in den späteren Werken ausgeführten Konzeption verwenden konnte.[9] Inhaltlich handelt es sich um eine Kontinuität: die vorliegenden Probleme der modernen Persönlichkeit treten in der frühen Studie im Grunde genommen im gleichen Horizont auf: die Umgänglichkeit der problematisch gewordenen modernen Persönlichkeit stellt für sie die zentrale Frage schon in den 70er Jahren dar, die bis heute ein Leitfaden ihrer philosophischen Stellungnahme ist.[10] Heller hat also Ende der 70er Jahren die bis heute aufbewahrten Umrisse einer Theorie der persönlichen Identität ausgearbeitet, wobei sie sich damals noch in vielen Punkten an die Terminologie des Neomarxismus und der Marx'schen "großen Narrative" angeschlossen hat. Aber inhaltlich hat sie schon die Hindernisse überwunden, die aus der Vertretung dieser ideologisch geprägten Terminologie entstanden. Damit war sie den Weg getreten, auf dem für sie die philosophische Relevanz das höchste Kriterium bedeutete. Es ist eine andere, weiter zu untersuchende Frage, dass der frühe Marx und seine philosophischen Texte für Heller von besonderer Bedeutung waren und sind. Ebenso wie andere Philosophen und philosophische Texte. Auch die stattgefundene 'Desideologisierung" hat für sie offensichtlich erleichtert, mit Marx philosophisch angemessen und korrekt umzugehen.

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[9] Es geht nicht nur um den Abschnitt *Die Bewahrung der Identität,* in dem Heller die Identitätsfrage der modernen Persönlichkeit unmittelbar anspricht, sondern um die Grundfragen der vorliegenden Studie.

[10] SDen Ausgangspunkt des dreibändigen Unternehmens über die Moral bildet der moderne Mensch als Persönlichkeit in seiner Kontingenz, mit seiner existentiellen Wahl, mit seiner Entscheidung über das Gute und das Böse, mit seiner Komplexität und Widersprüchlichkeit. Dasselbe Grundthema findet man in der Analyse und der Deutung der Figuren von Shakespeare. Man kann sagen, dass das Grundthema wie die Grundposition bliebt, aber das Medium, worin dasselbe Thema thematisiert wird, hat sich verändert. In dieser Veränderung hat die Tatsache eine Rolle gespielt, dass Heller über die Möglichkeiten der Einheit der Persönlichkeit vorsichtiger und zurückhaltender geworden ist.

2. Das Emotionelle als konstitutive Komponente der Philosophie der Phronesis von Heller

Der Ausgangspunkt dieser komplexen Theorie der persönlichen Identität ist eine tief greifende und alles durchdringende Antinomie: die Einheit des Menschen als Ideal einerseits, andererseits die Spaltung der Persönlichkeit als *brutum factum* der Moderne sind es, die die Antinomie der menschlichen Existenz in der Moderne darstellen. Die Einheit des Menschen und die Spaltung der Persönlichkeit prägen das Menschenbild von Heller: sie machen die zwei Extreme dieses Bildes aus. Die, Einheit des Menschen” manifestiert sich in der Studie von 1978 in dem philosophisch-anthropologischen Grundgedanken über die Einheit des psychischen, des moralischen und des intellektuellen Charakters. Die Spaltung und die Zerrissenheit der Persönlichkeit sind viel komplexer: sie zeigen sich in Trennungen, Kollisionen und Konflikten des Inneren, d.h. des Psychischen, des Moralischen und des Intellektuellen der Persönlichkeit. Damit werden das Psychische und das Emotionelle in die grundlegenden Strukturen einer philosophischen Anthropologie eingeordnet, die den breiten Horizont der Philosophie der, Phronesis’, d.h. der praktischen Philosophie von Ágnes Heller überhaupt darstellt.[11] Sodann werden die psychischen und die emotionellen Strukturen zu Bausteinen der Philosophie von Heller, was ihrer Philosophie auch im Rahmen der Lukács-Schule einen eigenartigen Charakter verleiht. Ohne in diese Eigenschaft in Details eingehen bzw. die vielschichtige und differenzierte Analyse des Emotionellen

[11] “Phronesis” ist ein Schlüsselbegriff von Ágnes Hellers praktischer Philosophie, den sie nicht nur im Aristotelischen Sinne verwendet. Sie hat der Phronesis eine vielschichtige Bedeutung zugeschrieben, die über Aistoteles hinaus in der modernen praktischen Philosophie wurzelt. In meinem Buch habe ich Hellers Philosophie als Philosophie der Phronesis gedeutet. Vgl. dazu auf ungarisch: Rózsa, Erzsébet, *Heller Ágnes – a fronézis filozófusa* (Ágnes Heller – eine Philosophin der Phronesis), Budapest, 1997. – An der Tagung über Hellers Philosophie von 2001 hat István M. Fehér diese Philosophie, zwar in einem anderen Deutungsrahmen, auch als Philosophie der Phronesis ausgelegt. Vgl. dazu seinen Beitrag in dem vorliegenden Band.

und dessen Abtrennung von den Trieben rekapitulieren zu können, werde ich mich im Folgenden nur auf die Grundidee und deren Bedeutung für Hellers praktische Philosophie beschränken.

Über philosophische Anthropologie habe ich gesprochen, wobei Heller in der Einleitung des Bandes von 1978 über "Sozialanthropologie" redet, die eine wissenschaftliche Disziplin ist, in welche sie ihre Konzeption der Gefühle einordnet. Damit verknüpft Heller ihre Position mit der von G. Márkus, der in den 60er Jahren die Umrisse einer geschichtlich-sozial kontextualisierten Anthropologie als philosophische Disziplin ausgeführt hat.[12] Aber die von Márkus angesprochene Disziplin thematisiert nicht die Aspekte der Anthropologie, die bei Heller im Zentrum stehen. Das hat nicht nur mit der bekannten Aufteilung der philosophischen Themen im Rahmen des Lukács-Kreises zu tun, sondern auch mit der Einstellung von Heller: sie hat sich für die Ergebnisse der zeitgenössischen Fachwissenschaften (Soziologie, Psychologie, Biologie usw.) sehr intensiv interessiert und sie in ihre Theorie miteinbezogen. Demzufolge wurde ihre Auffassung der Gefühle zu einer von mehreren Seiten aus unterstützten Theorie, die damals zugleich eine neuartige, kooperative philosophische Einstellung darstellte. Es ist bemerkenswert, dass diese Theorie von vielen Fachwissenschaftlern nicht ernst genommen und sogar abgelehnt wurde. (Das Vorwort ist auch ein Dokument dieser Distanzierung zu Hellers Leistung. Das hatte natürlich auch politisch-ideologische Gründe.) Die Eröffnung einer philosophischen Position vor den Fachwissenschaften war doch von großer Bedeutung. Das wurde aber weder von Heller noch von den Fachwissenschaftlern ausgenutzt. Die Emigration an sich hat es verhindert, und auch eine andere Richtung ihrer Philosophie gegeben. Die Rekonstruktion von Hellers damaliger Position mit deren inhaltlichen Schwerpunkten könnte zu einer neuen Kooperation von Wissenschaften beitragen, die sich heutzutage mit der Bestimmung

[12] Márkus, György, *Marxizmus és antropológia,* Budapest, 1966.

des menschlichen Wesen von Geburt bis Tod auseinandersetzen müssen. In diesem Sinne geht die Bedeutung dieser Studie weit über die konkrete geschichtliche Situation hinaus.

Die Offenheit und die kooperative Einstellung von Heller zeigt sich auch darin, dass sie vor dem Hintergrund der biologischen Konstitution bzw. der Triebe die Gefühle thematisierte. Es ist kein Zufall, dass eine Studie über die Triebe der *Theorie der Gefühle* vorangeschickt wird. Hellers Konzept über die biologische Konstitution bzw. das Verhältnis der Welten der Triebe und der Gefühle wird darauf gegründet, dass man in der Umgestaltung der "zweiten Natur" (psychisch-soziale Natur), und nicht in der der ersten Natur die Möglichkeiten der Menschheit suchen und finden soll. Die Folgen dieser Überlegung im Bereich der Gefühle hat sie nicht nur im Horizont einer philosophischen Anthropologie gedeutet, sondern auch aus phänomenologischer und geschichtlich-soziologischer Perspektive.[13] Zugleich hat sie die Relevanz der philosophischen Anthropologie nicht in Frage gestellt, im Gegenteil: die häufigen Berufungen auf die Position von Márkus belegen es eindeutig. Dennoch nimmt die Stellungnahme von Ágnes Heller eine andere Richtung, die sich eben aus dem kurz aufgezeigten komplexen Interpretationsrahmen der Gefühle ergibt, der vor allem aus der Rezeption der zeitgenössischen Naturwissenschaften herkamen. Das Verhalten als "psychisch-soziale Struktur" des Menschen wird das Medium, in dem die Identitätsprobleme der modernen Persönlichkeit mit ihrer emotionellen Sphäre bzw. mit ihrer biologischen Konstitution, zugleich aber auch in ihrer soziokulturell geprägten Lebenswelt zu untersuchen und zu deuten sind. In dem komplexen Schnittpunkt von naturwissenschaftlichen, sozialwissenschaftlichen und psychologischen Feldern findet man den Schlüssel für die

[13] Dafür spricht die zweiteilige Einordnung: in dem ersten Teil erörtert Heller die Phänomenologie der Gefühle, in dem zweiten liefert sie einen Beitrag zur Soziologie der Gefühle.

Erläuterung der Existenz der modernen Persönlichkeit, d.h. für die Auslegung der letzten Frage der praktischen Philosophie von Ágnes Heller. Darin besteht das auch heute Anregende ihrer Position von 1978.

3. Zur Kontextuierung der Emotionalität im Blick auf die autonome, innere Welt und die Identität der modernen Persönlichkeit

Den Text der ersten, ungarischen Auflage eröffnet nicht die Studie *Theorie der Gefühle,* wie man es vielleicht erwarten würde. Den ersten Teil des Bandes bildet eine eingehende Erörterung der Triebe, die für Hellers philosophische Anthropologie auch von Bedeutung sind. Diese Reihefolge und dieses Verfahren stehen im Zusammenhang mit konzeptionellen Überlegungen über die Sphäre von Gefühlen und Emotionen. Zunächst ist diese Strukturierung *ex negativo* konsequent, insofern Heller durch die vorherige Erörterung der Triebe die Gefühlen und die Emotionen deutlich abtrennt. Zugleich wird mit dieser Strukturierung und dieser Reihenfolge zum Ausdruck gebracht, dass die Gefühle und die Emotionen mit den Trieben verbunden sind. Anders gesagt: die erste Natur als biologische Konstitution des Menschen stellt ein unausweichliches Fundament für die Gefühle und die Emotionen dar, die aber durch ihre soziokulturelle Einbettung und Charakteristik doch von anderer Natur sind. Diese fein differenzierte Unterscheidung und Verbindung der ersten und der zweiten Natur im Menschen ist eine grundlegende Kennzeichnung der philosophischen Anthropologie von Heller. Das führt aber nicht zu irgendwelchem Dualismus, und bringt auch nicht eine Vereinfachung der vorliegenden Problematik mit. Hellers Differenzierung zwischen Trieben und Gefühlen trägt vielmehr zu der Erläuterung der Gefühle und der Triebe bei, ohne aber ihre vielschichtigen und sogar spannungsvollen Verbindungen und die oszillierenden Bewegungen zwischen diesen Sphären vor Augen zu verlieren.

An dieser Stelle gibt es keine Möglichkeit, Hellers vielschichtige Analyse des Verhältnisses zwischen dem Reich der Triebe und der Sphäre der Gefühle eingehend zu rekapitulieren. Auch eine erschöpfende Erörterung der Gefühle von Heller kann in dem gegebenen Rahmen nicht abgezielt werden. Stattdessen habe ich vor, einige Grundgedanken der Studie *Theorie der Gefühle* in Erinnerung zu rufen und deren bis heute gültig gebliebene Bedeutung für aktuelle Diskussionen zu signalisieren. Das besteht vor allem darin, dass Heller durch und mit komplexen Strukturen von Emotionalität, Moral und Intellektualität das Innere als Zentrum der modernen Persönlichkeit hervorhebt und beschreibt. Die Hervorhebung des Inneren als autonome Welt ist aber nicht einseitig: die Verbindung dieser inneren Welt mit der ersten und der zweiten Natur ist ebenso von besonderer Bedeutung. Diese autonome, innere Welt mit ihren ausdifferenzierten Strukturen ist weder von der biologischen Konstitution noch von der Einbettung in die erste Natur nicht abzutrennen. Diese breite und komplexe Kontextualisierung der Gefühle kann somit auch für heutige Diskussionen solche Überlegungen und Einsichten anbieten, mit denen auseinanderzusetzen eine nicht nur spannende Herausforderung, sondern auch eine philosophisch und wissenschaftlich viel versprechende Möglichkeit darstellt.

Eine ihrer auch heute aktuellen Überlegungen ist, dass weder die Moral noch die Intellektualität an sich für das Thematisieren des Inneren als eines der Zentren der modernen menschlichen Existenz hinreichend ist. Zum Verstehen des Inneren hat Heller die Sphäre von Emotionen als seine intern-strukturelle Komponente unausweichlich gefunden. Auch die viel später geschriebene dreibändige Theorie der Moral widerlegt diese frühe Stellungnahme nicht, im Gegenteil: die vorliegende frühe Überlegung setzt sich in diesem neueren, umfangreichen Unternehmen auch fort: nah wie vor ist die Moral aus dem Komplex der inneren Welt nicht herauszureißen.[14] Heller hat den Grundgedanken dieser frühen Konzeption auch in dem vor einigen

[14] Vgl. Anm. 8.

Jahren geschriebenen Shakespeare-Buch gefolgt. Sei hier nur ein einziges Beispiel erwähnt: der Ausdruck “innerer Raum” ist ein charakteristischer Terminus dieses Buches, den Heller vor allem für die Analyse der Figur von Hamlet verwendet.[15] Hamlet ist die Figur, die für die Erläuterung von Hellers Auslegung der Shakespeare-Dramen einen ausgezeichneten Stellenwert hat.[16]

Diese Stellungnahme über das Innere als interne Komponente der modernen Persönlichkeit wird schon 1978 in Bezug auf die Einheit des Menschen und die Spaltung der Persönlichkeit aufgefasst und ausgeführt. Diese Fragestelle richtet sich damit auf die Identität der Persönlichkeit mit sich, die in der Moderne durch Umwege, Differenzierungen und Spaltungen in sich, aber auch bezüglich der Welt und der Umwelt anzustreben ist. Man muss aber zwischen den verschiedenen Dimensionen dieser Ausdifferenzierungen und Identitäten unterscheiden können. Auf diesem Weg ist einer der entscheidenden Schritte, dass man moralische Fragen stellt. Aber die Einbeziehung der moralischen Dimension in die menschliche Existenz in der Moderne ist an sich nicht hinreichend.[17] Dies gilt auch in der

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[15] Das Problem des “inneren Raums” hat Heller im kultur– und philosophiegeschichtlichen Kontext exponiert: die Philosophie von Machiavelli ist die der Handlung, die Philosophie von Montaigne ist die der Anschauung. Dagegen lebt Shakespeare in beiden Welten. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist der “innere Raum” bei ihm zu deuten: seine wichtigsten Helden vertiefen den “inneren Raum ihrer Persönlichkeit’. Der Schlüssel der Persönlichkeit von Hamlet ist der “innere Raum’, der bei ihm mit seinem Lutheraner Glauben im Zusammenhang steht.

[16] Im Hintergrund der Darstellung und der Deutung der Figuren von Shakespeare kann man den theoretisch-philosophische Hintergrund des psychischen und des emotionellen Charakters der Persönlichkeit in der *Theorie der Gefühle* von 1978 entdecken. Es liegt auf der Hand, eine thematische Kontinuität zwischen den philosophischen Büchern und dem Buch über Shakespeare zu entdecken. Heute wie früher ist die entscheidende Frage für Ágnes Heller nichts anderes als die Frage nach der Lebenslage und dem Spielraum der modernen Persönlichkeit.

[17] Es ist nicht hinreichend, Hellers Philosophie als Moralphilosophie zu deuten, wobei sie sich mit Problemen der Moral und der Sittlichkeit sehr viel und intensiv befasst hat. In seinem Buch hat R. Ruffing den Schlüssel von Hellers Philosophie in der Moralphilosophie gesehen. Vgl. Ruffing, R., *Ágnes Heller. Pluralität und Moral,* Opladen, 1992. S. dazu die Rezension der Verf.: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie,* 1993/6, S. 112–114.

Sphäre der Rationalität und der Intellektualität. Über die intellektuelle und moralische Dimension der menschlichen Existenz hinaus soll man auch auf die emotionelle Sphäre aufmerksam machen, die mindestens seit der Hauptrichtung der Aufklärung in den Hintergrund geschoben wurde. In und durch diese zwar implizite, dennoch deutliche Polemik gegen die Moralisierung und Intellektualisierung des Menschenbildes hat Heller eine Alternative aufgezeigt und angeboten, die auch als Kritik an der zeitgenössischen marxistischen Philosophie zu deuten war. Diese Studie *Theorie der Gefühle* war 1978 als eine Alternative mit kritischem Akzent zu der zeitgenössischen marxistischen Philosophie auszufassen. Sofern, dass Heller den Gefühlen als eigene Welt der Individuen eine konstitutive Bedeutung eingeräumt hat, hat es notwendig zu einer andersartigen, dem offiziellen Marxismus deutlich widersprechenden Grundposition der praktischen Philosophie geführt.

Einen der Bausteine dieser praktischen Philosophie, der Philosophie der Phronesis stellt Hellers Überlegung dar, dass das Innere als Zentrum des modernen Individuums in und durch eine komplexe Struktur von Emotionalität, Moral und Intellektualität zu kennzeichnen ist. Diese Position der praktischen Philosophie hat unter anderem darum ihre Relevanz nicht verloren, weil sie auch die theoretischen Zusammenhänge vor Augen hat, was man heute z.B. bei den amerikanischen Neopragmatikern nicht oder selten erfahren kann. Die *“Praktiken”* waren und sind für Heller von grundlegender Bedeutung. Aber es kommt gar nicht in Frage, ihre philosophische Begründung und die dazu gehörende Argumentation beiseite zu stellen. Anders gesagt, Heller hat die theoretische Dimension der praktischen Philosophie nie aufgegeben oder auf Kosten des Letzteren vernachlässigt. Bei ihr stellen zwar das praktische Verhalten, die komplexen Bewegungen zwischen dem Inneren und den Verhaltensmanifestationen der Persönlichkeit im Vordergrund. Aber Heller reflektiert ständig Fragen und Zusammenhänge, die die Begründbarkeit der jeweiligen, an sich amorphen Praktiken erhellen und erklären.

Im Rahmen der Philosophie der Phronesis lenkt Heller die Aufmerksamkeit darauf, dass die Selbsterkenntnis und die Ausprägung der eigenen Welt der Persönlichkeit eine theoretisch-

reflexive und eine unmittelbar-praktische Dimension des Selbst bilden. Die mit theoretischen Elementen durchzogene praktische Beziehung auf die eigene Welt bzw. auch auf das Andere und die Anderen manifestiert sich in dem zuerst amorphen Komplex des praktischen Verhaltens, dem die Triebe wie auch die Gefühle gehören. Das bedeutet für eine philosophische Betrachtung, dass man die Konstituente des Inneren, d.h. des Moralischen, des Intellektuellen, des Emotionellen als Konstituente der eigenen Welt *nur* theoretisch voneinander trennen darf. Moral, Emotionalität und Rationalität sind im Selbst und in seiner eigenen Welt als seine eigene Wirklichkeit in der Tat immer im Gefüge des amorphen Verhaltens anwesend. Diese Eigenschaft und diese Begebenheit sind es eben, die auch theoretisches Verfahren erfordern, um es überblicken und überlegen zu können, wie man sich in einer konkreten, besonderen Situation angemessen verhalten soll.

Die Beziehung der Philosophie auf das amorph-praktische Verhalten hat eine spezifische Art in der Moderne gewonnen. Vor allem darum, weil sich das praktische Verhalten selbst radikal geändert hat. Im Hintergrund dieser Wende erkennt Heller die Quellen der Identitätsprobleme der modernen Persönlichkeit sehr früh. Man denke an den frühen Termin "dynamischer Mensch', mit dem sie die historische Entwicklung des modernen Menschen als Individuum und dessen soziokulturelle Situation gekennzeichnet hat. Dieses Problem wird in den späteren Schriften in den Vordergrund gestellt, so z.B. in ihre dreibändigen Unternehmen über die Moral. Inhaltlich geht es darum, dass nicht mehr die vorgefundenen und gegebenen Formen, die tradierten Verhaltensmuster und Normen sind es, die das Verhalten der Persönlichkeit vorschreiben und bestimmen. Nicht mehr die überlieferten Formen, sondern das eigene Verhalten ist es, worin sich die Persönlichkeit in und mit ihrer eigenen inneren Welt entfaltet und manifestiert. Das eigene Verhalten stellt die neue Gestalt der Existenz als Manifestation der modernen Persönlichkeit dar, in dessen Vorfeld Kollisionen, Spannungen, Konflikte ständig auftreten und Auflösung fordern – oder eben nicht. Darum werden sowohl die Konflikte als auch ihre Lösung variabel und individuell. Es stehen Optionen zur

Verfügung: es wird uns nicht mehr genau vorgeschrieben, was wir tun müssen oder sollen, um ein angemessenes, gutes Leben führen zu können. Nun wird höchstens erfordert, meistens nur empfohlen, aber nicht mehr in Details vorgeschrieben, was man tun oder eben meiden sollte. Die moderne Persönlichkeit befindet sich in einer Lage, in der sie über all das nachdenken soll. Das findet im Gefüge von Praktiken und Akten statt, in denen die Funktion der Moral, der Gefühle und der Intellektualität radikal umgedeutet wurde. Heller erläutert in der *Theorie der Gefühle,* dass die Orientierungsgefühle oder die moralischen Normen uns nicht mehr vorschreiben, was wir tun oder eben nicht tun sollen, um ein gutes Leben zu führen. Ein richtiges Leben zu führen bedeutet für die modernen Individuen mehr nicht als das, was der “existentiellen Wahl” im Grunde genommen nicht widerspricht. Das ist aber nicht wenig – fügt Heller hinzu. So sieht sie dieses Problem auch in den letzten Jahren. Das Gewicht der Wahl und der Entscheidung zwischen den Optionen belastet zwar die Persönlichkeit sowohl intellektuell als auch moralisch und emotionell. Die zur Persönlichkeit sich entwickelnden Individuen bezahlen einen hohen Preis für die Autonomie, die ihnen in der Moderne zukommt. Heller betont nachdrücklich schon in den Frühschriften: es gibt keinen Königsweg zur existentiellen Wahl der freien Persönlichkeit. Es ist schwierig, zu Individuum zu werden – schreibt sie es in *Theorie der Gefühle,* als sie die partikularen und individuellen Gefühle erörtert. Diesen frühen Gedanken hat sie in den letzten Jahren eingehend thematisiert.

Durch die Einbeziehung der Emotionalität in die Identitätsprobleme der modernen Persönlichkeit eröffnet Heller einen Weg, auf welchem man die Sackgasse der Moral als höchste Instanz für das Thematisieren der Lebenssituation und der Lebensführung der modernen Persönlichkeit vermeiden kann. Hellers Stellungnahme, wie man es auch in dem als Motto gewählten Zitat erfahren kann, ist keine von einem Moralist: sie interessiert sich zu sehr für die moderne Persönlichkeit und die Komplexität ihrer “feinen Motivationen’, um Moralist zu sein. Diese komplexe Sichtweise schützt sie, und darum kann sie der Versuchung eines extremen Intellektualismus oder eines rigorosen Rationalismus widerstehen. Dabei spielen auch ihre method-

ologischen Überlegungen eine wichtige Rolle. Eine davon ist, was oben hervorgehoben wurde: sie stellt keine starre Hierarchie von Emotionalität, Rationalität und Moral auf. Sie arbeitet vielmehr mit einer Konstruktion, die mit ihrer Komplexität und Flexibilität dem wirklichen Leben, dem Verhalten und der Lebensführung des wirklichen Menschen der Moderne näher kommen kann. Eben durch diese Wirklichkeitsnähe kann Heller den abstrakten Konstruktionscharakter einer Theorie relativieren – zugunsten der Thematisierbarkeit des praktischen, individuell unterschiedlichen Verhaltens.

Die gegenseitige Beschränkung bzw. die gegenseitige Bereicherung des moralischen, des emotionellen und des intellektuellen Charakters der modernen Persönlichkeit bilden eine Brücke zwischen der existentiellen Wahl, dem "Sprung" bzw. des jeweiligen konkreten Verhaltens in einer konkreten Lebenssituation. Dieses Verhalten thematisiert Heller nicht rein "theoretisch': die existentielle Wahl kann zwar der vorherigen Lebensführung widersprechen, aber sie wird doch nicht daraus vollkommen herausgerissen: die Persönlichkeit mit ihren Wurzeln wird auf irgendeine Weise doch auch aufbewahrt. Das kommt auch darin zum Ausdruck, dass Heller die Einbettung des 'Sprunges' in den Komplex des Alltagslebens der Persönlichkeit betont. Damit ist die Theorie über den psychischen, moralischen und intellektuellen Charakter ohne das Alltagsleben als letztes Fundament sowohl der existenziellen Wahl als auch der konkreten Lebensführung, der individuell unterschiedlichen Verhaltensweisen nicht vorzustellen.[18] Das bedeutet auch, dass nicht

[18] Es ist kein Zufall, dass der am meistens zitierte Heller-Text in den Studie *Theorie der Gefühle Das Alltagsleben* ist. – Vgl. Ágnes Heller, *Alltag und Geschichte.* Neuwied 1970 bzw. Ágnes Heller, *Das Alltagsleben.* Frankfurt a.M. 1978. – Wie der Untertitel zeigt, hat die Autorin noch gedacht, dass sie eine marxistische Theorie des Alltagslebens ausführt. In der Tat hat sie die letzten Prinzipien und wichtigsten Kategorien des Marxismus aufgegeben. Sie hat nicht das Produzieren als Ausgangspunkt und Basis einer angemessenen marxistischen Theorie des gesellschaftlichen Seins in das Zentrum gestellt. Stattdessen hat sie das Alltagsleben als Fundament des menschlich-individuellen Seins aufgefasst. Es war kein Zufall, dass sie einige Jahre nach der Veröffentlichung der Theorie des Alltagsleben "Revisionist" aus dem offiziellen philosophischen Leben ausgetrieben wurde.

die Konzeption der Moral den breitesten Horizont der praktischen Philosophie von Ágnes Heller ausmachen. Das Alltagsleben ist es, das sowohl für die existentielle Wahl als auch für die jeweilige konkrete Lebensführung und das jeweilige Verhalten, die immer rationell, emotionell und moralisch geprägt und dementsprechend gemischt sind, das weiteste Fundament darstellt. Hellers Konzeption der Moral wie auch ihre Auffassung der Gefühle thematisiert die moderne Persönlichkeit in ihrer Komplexität und Individualität, deren “Kern” nicht die Moral oder die Intellektualität an sich ist, sondern die Tatsache, dass sie sich selbst durch und in der existentiellen Wahl frei bestimmen kann, und dass diese Wahl von ihrem Alltagsleben nicht zu trennen ist. Der intellektuelle, der emotionelle und der moralische Charakter haben zusammen, in ihrer gegenseitigen Verbindung eine Funktion für diesen “Sprung’, der die Persönlichkeit tief greifend prägt. Diese Funktion ist darum von besonderer Bedeutung, weil sie die existentielle Wahl nicht nur unterstützen, sondern auch hindern kann: die existentielle Wahl muss und sogar kann nicht mehr inhaltlich vorbestimmt sein. Die inhaltliche Bestimmung hängt vor allem von der Persönlichkeit selbst ab, was Kontingenz der existentiellen Wahl verleiht. Aber die die Persönlichkeit auch “erhebende” Funktion wird auch nicht beiseite gestellt: sie realisiert und manifestiert sich auch in konkreten Lebenslagen, Verhaltensakten, d.h. in dem Alltäglichen der jeweiligen “eigenen Welt” von Individuen mit “prosaischen” Zügen. Heller verbindet das “Hohe” des Lebens, was die Philosophie bevorzugt, immer mit der “Prosa” des gemeinen, alltäglichen Lebens, und zwar auch im Blick auf die geschichtlich bedingten Aspekte der modernen Existenz.

Darum sind die “irdischen” und die “himmlischen” Sphären des Lebens in Hellers Philosophie nicht zu trennen. Diese Einstellung hat ihre Philosophie vor den Extremen der Ideologie geschützt. Schon in den 60er und 70er Jahren war sie der Meinung: um ihre Identität und Integrität hervorzubringen, ist es für die konkrete Persönlichkeit unausweichlich, den Akt des “existentiellen Sprungs” mit seinem ausgezeichneten Status im Leben auch mit der konkret-alltäglichen Lebensführung zusammenzubringen und zu verknüpfen. Nicht im

Himmel, d.h. in der Welt der abstrakten Idealen, sondern nur auf der Erde, im Rahmen seines Alltagslebens kann man seine Identität erreichen. Dennoch haben die Ideale und die Werte bestimmte Funktionen, worauf man nicht verzichten kann: sie gehören sowohl zu dem Sprung als auch zu der konkreten Lebensführung. Sie sind Bausteine des intellektuellen, moralischen und emotionellen Charakters und funktionieren als Wertorientierungen im Leben der Einzelnen.

4. Ausblick: Emotionalität, persönliche Identität und Globalisierung

Es ist nicht beiseite zu stellen, wie Heller die vorliegenden Texte komponiert hat. Diese Komposition ist ein auch inhaltlich wichtiger Aspekt ihrer Philosophie. Es ist mehr als interessant zu erfahren, dass der Aufbau der Texte von 20–30 Jahren eine eigenartige Offenheit hatte. Das kann man im Nachwort der *Theorie der Gefühle* besonders deutlich beobachten und feststellen.[19] Hier findet man eine auf ersten Blick überraschende Ausführung über das Leiden der Menschheit. Unter "Menschheit" versteht sie keinesfalls irgendwelche abstrakt-philosophische Idee. "Leiden" wird nicht auf einer Redeweise thematisiert, die falsche oder irreführende Gefühle erwecken will: Heller, abweichend von der herrschenden Ideologie, verspricht nichts. Sie verschönt die Welt auch nicht. Sie beobachtet, registriert und den Leser anstrebt, mitzudenken und nachzudenken. Sie weist hier auf Tatsachen hin, mit denen sich ein jeder mal auseinandersetzten muss. Damals hatte man es in Ungarn nicht geahnt, dass das, was Heller 1978 schrieb, nach 20 Jahren eine schmerzhafte Tatsache wird, die unser Alltagsleben provoziert und uns nicht los lässt. Diese Tatsache erzwingt uns, eine deutliche Stellung zu nehmen, ohne aber die Hoffnung zu haben, die Heller damals noch hatte. Ohnmacht und

[19] Vgl. Heller, Ágnes, *Nachwort. Über das menschliche Leid.* Ebd. S. 335–337.

"Involviertsein" durchziehen die Grundstimmung dieses einmaligen Textes, die auch den heutigen Leser nicht ungerührt lässt. Hellers liefert sozusagen eine Liste: auf den ersten Blick scheint es als eine nüchterne Registrierung von Schwierigkeiten und Katastrophen der Menschheit, die man heute der Globalisierung zuschreibt. Hellers Ausführungen sind aber alles andere als nüchtern: sie sind durch tief greifende Leidenschaften durchzogen, denen sich auch der heutige, durch Medien gut informierte Leser nicht entziehen kann. Heutzutage redet man überall über die Globalisierung – und man hört oft nicht mehr zu. Aber damals war etwas ganz Neues, was Heller angesprochen hat. Besonders im Osten des aufgeteilten Europas hat man die Schwierigkeiten verschwiegen oder nur als Problem gezeigt, was die kommunistische Welt in der Zukunft natürlich lösen kann. Man muss aber auch feststellen: auch in anderen Regionen der Welt tauchten Vorstellungen über die Folgen einer globalisierten Erde nur sporadisch auf. Hellers Ausführungen sind eben darum von besonderer Bedeutung.

Das hat auch mit der philosophischen Wende zu tun, die man nun feststellen kann. In dem Text von 1978 geht es Heller nicht mehr um die "große Narrative des Marxismus': sie identifiziert die Menschheit nicht mehr mit der marxistischen Vision: Heller verspricht nichts, aber will echte Gefühle erwecken, die sie als Involviertsein in Sachen des leidenden Teils der Menschheit nennt. Es handelt sich hier um die brutale Realität der Welt, um Leiden und Schmerzen, Not, Übel und Armut, die wir, so Heller, nicht übersehen dürfen. In diesem kurzen Text wird all das angesprochen, was für die Mehrheit der Menschheit schon damals das tägliche Leben bedeutete. Heller klagt hier nicht über ihre persönliche Schwierigkeiten, die Austreibung aus dem offiziellen, philosophisch-wissenschaftlichen Leben, die 1973 begann. Sie blickt auf andere Menschen und redet über Menschen, deren Lebenslage sie unvergleichbar schwieriger findet. Dadurch wird aber nicht nur ihre eigene Lebenssituation relativiert, sondern auch das von Philosophen favorisierte Verhalten: die von ihr angebotene Einstellung, das Involviertsein geht über die eigene Lebenssituation hinaus.

Sie macht darauf aufmerksam, was für ein Kontrast zu erkennen ist, wenn man den 'Luxus' der existentiellen Wahl der freien Persönlichkeit mit der Lebenslage der Mehrheit der Menschheit vergleicht, die leidet und hungert. Heller konstatiert mit scharfem Blick: in der Perspektive des Übels der hungernden, leidenden Menschheit sieht die Fragestellung der Philosophie ganz anders aus. Damit relativisiert sie das Verhaltensmodell, welches die Philosophen gerne als das höchste annehmen und empfehlen. Das gute Leben und ein guter Mensch sind in der mit Spannungen und Leiden belasteten Perspektive der menschlichen Existenz nicht mehr zu identifizieren. Das "repräsentative Individuum" der modernen Zeit ist nicht mehr als Typ, als allgemein verfolgbares Muster aufzufassen. Heller signalisiert in diesem Text die unausweichliche Relativierung der Position des Philosophen und des Intellektuellen, die die europäische Kultur über Jahrhunderte favorisiert hat. Sie macht nun aufmerksam darauf, dass die psychische Struktur eines freien Individuums immer gewisse aristokratische Züge hat. Ein Leben, welches sich an Werten und Ideen orientiert, hat immer einen elitären Charakter.

Die existentielle Wahl der freien Persönlichkeit gewinnt von diesem Gesichtspunkt aus eine ganz andere Bedeutung. Diese Wahl zeigt sich nun als eine Art Luxus von wenigen. In diesem Zusammenhang ergibt sich der höchste, zugleich inhaltlich konkrete Imperativ vor allem für Philosophen: "fühlen" bedeutet, in etwas involviert zu sein. Involviertsein ist nichts anderes als über uns hinauszugehen und in der vorliegenden Angelegenheit der leidenden Menschheit involviert zu sein. Ohne dieses Involviertsein kann die Persönlichkeit in der Moderne ihre Identität nicht mehr erreichen: dieses Involviertsein ist zu einer der Bedingungen und der Komponenten der persönlichen Identität geworden. Heller drückt das schlechte Gewissen der Intellektuellen 1978 aus, was für heute zu einer weit verbreiteten Position, mehr noch: zu Mode geworden ist. Bei Heller geht es um Menschlichkeit des Involviertseins, was ein jeder praktizieren kann. Zugleich ist sie realistisch und macht auf eine Gefahr der modernen Gesellschaften aufmerksam, die für

heute in dem Populismus von verschiedensten politischen Richtungen zur Wirklichkeit geworden ist. Damals hat man das “Demagogie” genannt.[20]

Die Eröffnung der neuen Dimension der leidenden Menschheit setzt die Selbstidentifikation der modernen Persönlichkeit in eine andere Perspektive um, aus der die Identitätsfrage von den täglichen, wirklichen Problemen wie Sorge, Not, Übel, Leid, Katastrophen, Zerstörung der Umwelt nicht mehr zu trennen ist. Diese Einsicht stellt einen wichtigen Schritt für die philosophische Entwicklung von Ágnes Heller dar: darin erweist sich der Übergang von der marxistischen Narrative zu einer neuartigen Position, deren Umrisse Ende der 70er Jahren zu erkennen sind. In diesem Übergang wird aber das zentrale Problem des intellektuellen, des moralischen und des emotionellen Charakters der Persönlichkeit als Kern der Identität der Persönlichkeit nicht in Frage gestellt: diese frühe Intuition hat die vorliegende Änderung überlebt. Zugleich hat das Thematisieren des Leidens der Menschheit als Grundproblem der globalisierten Welt einen neuen und breiten Horizont eröffnet, in dem der Emotionalität, der Moralität und der Intellektualität neue Bedeutungsebenen zugeordnet werden. Das bereichert auch die Erörterung der Problematik der persönlichen Identität. Darum ist es nicht übertrieben, folgendes festzustellen: die *Theorie der Gefühle* hat nicht nur für die gegenwärtige Diskussionen über die Selbstidentität, sondern auch für die Diskussionen um die Globalisierung höchstaktuelle Gedanken und Gesichtspunkte überliefert. Sei hier nur ein berührender Gedanke in Erinnerung gerufen: “In der Zeitspanne nach der Geburt verursacht die Unterernäherung – besonders an Einweißstoffen – irreversible Schäden in der Gehirnentwicklung des Kindes. Heute sind 70 % der Kinder der Erde unterernährt.

[20] Heller zeigt auf, dass die partikularen Gefühle ihrer Natur nach der Demagogie ausgeliefert sind. Ebd. S. 239–241.

Fühlen bedeutet, in etwas involviert zu sein.

Wir sollen das Leid in Schmerz verwandeln, um in der Sache der Menschheit involviert sein zu können. Hilf den anderen, hilfst dir selbst."[21]

Hellers Gedanken wurden keinesfalls nur Intellektuellen adressiert. Ihre Auffassung enthält die Möglichkeit, den sog. einfachen Menschen als "Subjekt" der modernen demokratischen Gesellschaften und der globalen Welt anzusprechen. Dieses Subjekt ist ein besonderes. Nicht nur in dem Sinne, dass der Mensch in der Moderne ein intersubjektives, kommunikatives Wesen ist, den über die rationellen Reflexionen hinaus auch andere Motivationen treiben.[22] Das Involviertsein des Subjekts der modernen Gesellschaften auch darum ein besonderes, weil es durch die innere Betroffenheit, Gefühle und Emotionen, bzw. ihre Kommunizierbarkeit und deren praktische Konsequenzen geprägt ist. Das Verhältnis zwischen emotionellen, moralischen und intellektuellen Sphären wird auf das gegenseitige Ausgleich- und Korrektionsprinzip basiert. Das weitere Folgen auch auf kommunikative und pragmatische Relationen von Subjekten mit sich gebracht, was über die Grenzen der Länder und der Regionen geht.

Diese Theorie über die Gefühle im Komplex des "Subjekts" der modernen Welt weist durch das Ausgleichsprinzip auch darauf hin, dass die Emotionen an sich, ohne die Kontrolle der Moral und der Vernunft dem "Prämenschlichen" im Menschen einen freien Weg öffnen können, die die individuell hervorgebrachten, in Kommunikationsformen und Institutionen aufbewahrten kulturell-geschichtlichen Sphären von Moral und Rationalität gefährden. Die Ausgleichung und die gegenseitige Beschränkung als Prinzip stellen unter der Kontrolle des höheren, eigentlich Menschlichen die Schwerpunkte dieser Auffassung dar. Aber die Ausgleichung hat eine

[21] Ebd. S. 337.

[22] Zu der kommunikativen Dimension der Gefühle vgl. den Abschnitt *Motivation und Information, Ausdruck (Expression) und Mitteilung*. Ebd. S. 68–84.

besondere Bedeutung nicht nur für die persönliche Lebensentscheidung und die konkrete Lebensführung im Privat-Persönlichen, sondern auch eine ausgezeichnete Aktualität für die Garantie des normalen Funktionieren des öffentlichen Lebens und seiner Institutionen, was für heute zu einem der wichtigsten zu lösenden Probleme nicht nur der Regionen mit europäischen Wurzeln, sondern der Menschheit geworden ist. Hellers Nachwort inspiriert uns, über die angesprochenen Probleme der modernen Persönlichkeit in der Perspektive der Menschheit nachzudenken. Damit weist Heller *Theorie der Gefühle* über die Bedeutung des Emotionellen im Leben der einzelnen Menschen weit hinaus. Die mehrfache Kontextualisierung der Gefühle ermöglicht, über die das persönliche Leben unmittelbar berührenden Komponenten hinaus auch Komponenten mit einzubeziehen, die für die institutionalisierte Öffentlichkeit mit Integrationsformen wie die EU, aber auch für gemeinsame Probleme der globalisierten Menschheit von besonderer Bedeutung sind.

Heller hat aufgezeigt, dass die modernen Gesellschaften in eine globalisierten Welt eingeordnet werden. Sie hat vorausgesagt: es kommt die Zeit, als ein jeder in ganz verschiedenen Welten leben wird. Die Zeit ist gekommen, ihre “Prophetie” ist erfüllt. In Europa oder in den USA bedeutet es, dass die Institutionen des Rechtsstaates können nicht stabil genug funktionieren, wenn das Ausgleichprinzip des moralischen, intellektuellen und emotionellen Charakters in den Einzelnen nicht zur Geltung gebracht wird. Der Populismus gefährdet die Demokratie, deren Zukunft im großen Masse davon abhängt, ob der ‘Gefühlshaushalt’ der Einzelnen in den modernen Gesellschaften in Ordnung ist. Und wie Heller damals schon auch aufgezeigt hat, ist auch das Involviertsein in den Angelegenheiten der leidenden Menschheit in diesen Gefühlshaushalt einzubeziehen. Das gibt uns vielleicht noch Chance und Hoffnung. Die Aktualität dieser fast vor einem viertel Jahrhundert geschriebenen Studie kann kaum bezweifelt werden.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

Ágnes Heller on Literature

Ágnes Heller's field is philosophy; mine is literary history. Although I have followed her career and read most of her works since my undergraduate years, I cannot claim to have any competence in assessing her activity as a whole. In what follows I will briefly characterize her approach to literature on the basis of an early book and a much longer work written in her later years. The two books I shall focus on are on Dezső Kosztolányi, an author whose works I have discussed on numerous occasions and in several languages, and on Shakespeare, whose works I have been teaching for some years.

Let me start by quoting one of the basic hypotheses of Heller's *The Dissolution of Moral Norms: Ethical Issues in the Works of Dezső Kosztolányi,* a book written at the end of 1955 but not published until 1957: "The ethical and the aesthetic spheres cannot be separated without serious distortions. To understand them we have to view them in their interrelations. (...) The arts in general and literature in particular demand a careful study of basic moral issues. Only kitsch can do without this."[1]

Some would regard this hypothesis as dated. I do not share this view. Heller's atitude to literature is undoubtedly based on preconceptions but I accept this as a sine que non of any interpretation. My preconceptions are somewhat different from Heller's, and because of the difference between her view of literature and mine, I would call hers somewhat didactic. Her characterization of Kosztolányi's way of writing as decadent and modern seems valid insofar as it is in tune

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[1] Heller, Ágnes, *Az erkölcsi normák felbomlása: Etikai kérdések Kosztolányi Dezső munkásságában,* Budapest, Kossuth, 1957. 5-6.

with the definitions of these concepts given by Baudelaire and Nietzsche. In Heller's interpretation Kosztolányi's outlook was anarchistic. Although this conclusion may be called exaggerated and too general, it would be difficult to refute it. My disagreement is not with her assumption that some of the works discussed in her book could be associated with nihilism. What I find somewhat problematic is her assumption that this is a pejorative term.

Of course, it could be argued that Heller's approach to literature originates in the definition of the role of literature given by the representatives of the Realist movement of the nineteenth century. To mention but one example, Anthony Trollope in his autobiography gave the following description: "the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own system of ethics."[2] This characterization of the task of the Realist novelist is less sophisticated than Heller's view of literature, but the family resemblance is undeniable. The strongly moral approach goes together with an emphasis on biography. Kosztolányi's works are examined as documents that illustrate the value system of the author. The intepreter cannot resist passing a moral judgment on Kosztolányi; she ascibes to him "a weakness of character."[3] As the conclusion of her book suggests, interpretation is linked to social prophecy: "a writer can do full justice to his/her artistic talent only if s/he has a solid world vision and principles, and can draw the line between good and evil."[4]

Written in the 1950s, Heller's early book is peppered with such clichés as "class interest," "the imperialist phase of decline," "class struggle," "exploitation," and "a politically engaged attitude to reality,"[5] relics of an outlook that Heller came to disown in later years.

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[2] Trollope, Anthony, *An Autobiography,* Leipzig, Berthard Tauchnitz, 1883. 206–207.
[3] Heller, Ágnes, *Az erkölcsi normák felbomlása: Etikai kérdések Kosztolányi Dezső munkásságában,* Budapest, Kossuth, 1957. 9.
[4] Ibid. 140.
[5] Ibid. 14, 77, 81, 140.

"Everything I had written before 1956 was bad," she said in 1996.[6] The terms just quoted belong to what could be called "the language of forgetting." As Heller herself admitted in her autobiographical work, in the decade following 1945, Marxism served as a means of forgetting the memory of the holocaust.

The subtitle and title of Heller's book stand for a pars pro toto relationship: the analysis of Kosztolányi's work is presented as a case study. One of the shortcomings of this parabolic approach is the temptation to make declarations without supplying evidence. As is well-known, Kosztolányi expressed anti-revolutionary views in the 1920s. There is good reason to believe that in the 1950s Heller had enthusiasm for the ideas of Communism, so it is quite understandable that she disapproved of Kosztolányi's anti-Communism. What is more open to criticism is her claim that "during the dictatorship of the proletariat of 1919 Kosztolányi the journalist was an ardent supporter of dictatorship"[7] – a claim made with no supporting evidence. Four decades after the publication of her book on Kosztolányi, Heller went even further by declaring that "Kosztolányi betrayed 1919, which he loved and supported."[8] It would be interesting to know why she believed that Kosztolányi ever had sympathy for the régime of Béla Kun. In view of Kosztolányi's aversion to consistency, I would hesitate to make sweeping generalizations about his attitude, but I have to admit that I cannot cite evidence that would contradict the statement made by András Veres that "Kosztolányi could not betray the 1919 Commune, since he never approved of it."[9]

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[6] Heller, Ágnes – Kőbányai, János, *Bicikliző majom,* Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 1998. 113.
[7] Heller, Ágnes, *Az erkölcsi normák felbomlása: Etikai kérdések Kosztolányi Dezső munkásságában,* Budapest, Kossuth, 1957. 34.
[8] Heller, Ágnes – Kőbányai, János, *Bicikliző majom,* Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 1998. 149–150.
[9] Veres, András, "Olvasatok Heller Ágnes Kosztolányi–könyvéről: Értelmezéstörténet hét tételben," András Kovács, Sándor Radnóti, Mihály Vajda eds., *Diotima: Heller Ágnes 70. Születésnapjára,* Budapest, Osiris-Gond, 1999. 545.

The assumption that Kosztolányi "meditated on the practice of moral relativism and foresaw a political nihilism that was later realized by fascism"[10] may have relevance but it is inseparable from the idea that literature has not even partial autonomy. Such characters in Kosztolányi's narrative works as Seneca, Moviszter, and Kornél Esti are viewed as representing the author's views, and the lyric is considered to be a form of self-expression. The idea that a fictional narrative statement may be immune to judgments of truth and falsity is never considered. Language is regarded as transparent. Understandably, Realism is taken as the norm, most conspicuously in the analysis of the novels: "The creation of longer epic works is possible only if a writer can distinguish essence from phenomena, the more from the less important, if he can present a mirror of what is essential in society in an objective sense."[11]

Almost half a century after its publication, Heller's book on Kosztolányi seems full of ambiguities: on the one hand, her failure to distinguish between author and work could be regarded as problematic; on the other hand, by focusing on nihilism she may have put her finger on one of the most important distinguishing features of the art of a Hungarian author whose reputation has grown considerably in the last decades. Her perspective must have changed radically since the 1950s, when she failed to see that Kosztolányi had anticipated the loss of credibility of great narratives.

As we all know, the concept of a virginal, bias-free first reading cannot withstand critical reflection. Lukács had a highly selective approach to Hungarian literature based on a philosopher's preconceptions and a somewhat limited acquaintance with Hungarian texts. The same could be said of Heller's activity. The highlights are the emphasis on János Erdélyi's theoretical insight and the observation that in Berzsenyi's verse "the philosophical vision is not put into verse, *it is*

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[10] Heller, Ágnes, *Az erkölcsi normák felbomlása: Etikai kérdések Kosztolányi Dezső munkásságában,* Budapest, Kossuth, 1957. 47.
[11] Ibid. 95.

itself verse," a perceptive remark that is the conclusion of a highly subjective essay first published in 1996.[12] The drawback is the relative absence of the cultural context. Just as in the book on Kosztolányi, so in the much later essay on Berzsenyi no comparison is attempted with other Hungarian authors. The references to Celan's language and Beethoven's ideas may shed light on certain elements of Berzsenyi's poetry but the originality of Berzsenyi's work can hardly be pointed out if historical evolution is not considered.

The verbal analysis of literary works was a field largely unexplored by Lukács. In this respect Heller rarely departed from the legacy of her master. To be sure, my reading of her work on Shakespeare is limited by the fact that I could have access only to the Hungarian translation. In a presentation given in English it would be difficult and even pointless to argue that this translation may fail to do justice to the intellectual standards of the author. Many publications, especially those printed in Hungary, have numerous misprints. I do not know to what extent translation and copy editing may have distorted the original text. The only reproach that I could make to the publisher is that no one checked the translation. In the detailed analysis of *Henry VI,* the three-part work that is often neglected, the scene in which Queen Margaret is mourning over the head of the Duke of Suffolk is compared to Mathilde de la Mole's mourning over the head of Lucien Rubempré.[13] It is a pity that the copy editor failed to replace the name of Balzac's character with that of Stendhal.

Although such oversights do not cast doubt on the value of the work, I feel awkward when I translate quotations from a book that must have been written in English. Since I cannot claim to be a Shakespeare scholar, in contrast to the author of a rather unfavourable

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[12] Heller, Ágnes, "Az én Berzsenyim," *Költészet és gondolkodás,* Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 1998. 19.

[13] Heller, Ágnes, *Kizökkent idő: Shakespeare, a történelemfilozófus I–II.,* Budapest, Osiris, 2000. II. 108.

review, I intend not to point out so-called philological errors but to examine how a literary historian can profit from interpretations developed by an influential thinker.

The subtitle suggests that the focus is on the autonomy of historical thought with respect to other forms of thinking. No one can deny a philosopher's right to approach verbal art from such an angle. Even literary scholars would acknowledge the claims of history to a unique place among the semantic levels of Shakespeare's plays. What at the end of the second volume is called "the poetic truth of history"[14] is an important aspect of Elizabethan drama, and the fact that Heller regards it as self-referential clearly shows how far she has moved from the far more explicitly didactic conception of her early years. It is not surprising that a work on a poet's interpretation of history nowhere deals with language, except for some passing references. Nor can one object if such a work places a heavy emphasis on character and plot, following an old and distinguished tradition. No understanding of Heller's work on Shakespeare is possible unless we are aware that her interpretations are deliberately one-sided. Her analysis of the Roman tragedies, for instance, is limited to the political aspects of these plays, but she warns her reader that there are other perspectives from which they can be read.

What I intend to examine are some assumptions underlying Heller's arguments that deserve special attention form the perspective of literary history. One of these is also characteristic of the book on Kosztolányi: the writer's output is considered to be a homogeneous whole. When Heller disagrees with Harold Bloom, her interesting counterargument is introduced by the following sentence: "This is not in tune with Shakespeare's way of thinking."[15] Such a biographical argument posits a somewhat monolithic self, an idea that Heller herself deconstructs in her discussion of the characters of the plays.

[14] Ibid. II. 331.
[15] Ibid. I. 174.

The hypothesis that the works of an author constitute one entity may be especially vulnerable in the case of an "oeuvre" which includes texts composed by more than one author. Heller is absolutely right in observing that *Henry VIII* is not a great play but decides not to mention that much of this work is attributed to John Fletcher. Since other co-authored plays (e. g. *Macbeth* or *Pericles*) are also discussed, one may ask why no mention is made of works by other Elizabethan or Jacobean authors. A comparison with texts by predecessors, co-authors, and contemporaries could have supplied a historical context and strengthened some of the points made in the two volumes. A consideration of *The Jew of Malta,* for instance, could have helped the reader to understand the Elizabethan anti-Semitism underlying *The Merchant of Venice.*

The other preconception I wish to discuss is more complex and may need a more careful explanation. The distinction between the language of the plays and that of the interpreter is not always made clear. To take one example, the illuminating analysis of "nature" and "natural" is exceptionally nuanced and reveals very important components of some plays. However, the reader is not always told when the argument refers to what is called "nature" in the text of a play (*King Lear* is a prime example, the word "unnatural" appears in crucial passages of *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*) and when it is the interpreter who talks about a "natural state" (as in the discussion of *Henry VI*). Edmund's first monologue is compared to Falstaff's speech on honour and the words spoken by Juliet in the balcony scene. In the first of these cases the text itself is about nature, whereas in the two other cases it is the interpreter who maintains that the passage is about natural law. Another interpreter could argue that the worlds of *King Lear, Henry IV,* and *Romeo and Juliet* are radically different. The bastard speaks in the name of nature; Sir John parodies knightly virtues; Juliet refers to the gap between two generations. "Nature" may be a key term in *King Lear,* one of those components that William Empson called "complex words." Its ambiguities can be explored with the methods of close reading as well as with those of a philosopher whose main interest is ethics.

As is well-known, New Criticism was a far cry from the legacy of Lukács. In Heller's work, too, psychological considerations often overrule structural ones. Textual issues are often ignored. It is not mentioned, for instance, that the quarto text published in 1608 under the title *The History of King Lear* is not only much shorter but also radically different from the folio text entitled *The Tragedy of King Lear,* so that some editions include both. In other cases, too, much depends on which version serves as the basis for the interpretation. At any rate, Heller seems inclined to view the plays as works performed rather than as poetry read. What may be surprising is that theatrical conventions are not taken into consideration. Actors and directors are rarely mentioned. “Wirkungs-” and “Rezeptionsgeschichte” are rarely considered. Among the relatively few exceptions are the valid suggestion that the holocaust has changed the interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* and a reference to the audiences' association of Richard III with Hitler and Stalin.

“Rezeptionsgeschichte” reveals the complexity of the characters. The danger of overemphasizing the distinction between good and evil can be avoided if we listen to Heller's urge for constant reinterpretation. T. S. Eliot's essays, for example, have made us aware of the merits of Claudius as monarch and the melodramatic aspects of Othello's rhetoric. I feel more comfortable with Heller's warning that “every one of Shakespeare's evil characters represents a specific form of wickedness”[16] than with her characterization of *Richard III* as an embodiment of “radical evil.” Her point that Richard lives in “existential solitude”[17] is more than accurate, but the conclusion of the chapter on Richard III may be less convincing: “It is quite possible that the simple yet firm confidence in divine retribution makes us love this play.”[18] Some people in the audience may have this feeling at the end of a performance of the play, but I would be reluctant to generalize. An outstanding actor may convince some members of the audi-

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[16] Ibid. II. 128.
[17] Ibid. II. 149.
[18] Ibid. II. 193–194.

ence of the sublimity of the character of the monster. Is it forbidden to have at least pity for Olivier when he dies and is replaced by a rather unsophisticated Richmond?

A consideration of theatrical conventions could have made the investigation more historical and could have added to the complexity of the arguments. The subtle analysis of changing identity, for instance, can be given a further twist if we remember that in Shakespeare's England female roles were usually performed by young boys. "If I were a woman," says Rosalind in the Epilogue to *As You Like It.* These words remind the audience of the fictive and even artificial nature of the plot. At the same time, they suggest an open ending that links the imaginary world of the pastoral romance to the life of the audience.

What we have here is an old dilemma: while it is true that no interpretation is possible without preconceptions, strong preconceptions may be risky, insofar as they may lead to two sorts of temptations. The first is to see characters who differ in certain respects as belonging to the same paradigm. "No one can have doubts about the evil character of Shakespeare's villains," says Heller, and she continues by emphasizing that "no one can defend Angelo, Macbeth, Claudius, or Iago."[19] Angelo is called "precise," that is, a Puritan. The title refers to *The Gospel According to St. Matthew:* "with what measure ye mate, it shall be measured to you again." Angelo's fate is a parable that illustrates the Biblical warning: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Like Portia, he cannot live up to the standard he sets. Iago is intelligent but is much closer to being a villain. Accordingly, Iago's end is different from Angelo's. The history of the reception of Shakespeare's plays tells us that few, perhaps none, of the characters can be described in terms of black and white. "Evil is inseparable from despotism and self-destruction."[20] If this were quite true, literary works would be relegated to the status of moral tales. Of course, parallels can be made on the basis of

[19] Ibid. I. 233.
[20] Ibid. II. 53.

one aspect, as the following sentence suggests: “Juliet and Desdemona reject all appearances: they have a secret marriage; they do not ask for their parents' permission.”[21] This observation draws attention to one important element at the expense of others; it is not qualified by a reference to the role race plays in *Othello.*

The interpretation of the character of the Moor is continued in two other chapters. Pressing the question of a possible analogy between the fates of Othello and Shylock, Heller describes these two characters as embodying the alien who cannot assimilate. The analogy holds, although it is carried a little too far. The remark that “in all probability Shylock is lynched, for in the last scene we are told about his testament”[22] is a shade exaggerated. Here I cannot open a discussion of Elizabethan anti-Semitism. Within the scope of this paper I have to restrict myself to saying that *Othello* is a tragedy, whereas *The Merchant of Venice* is not one, although Shylock's isolation does have profoundly tragic connotations. The Moor dies on the stage. The duke grants Shylock his life and gives half of his wealth to Antonio, half to the state. Antonio surrenders his claim if Shylock will turn Christian and make over his property on his death to Jessica; to which Shylock agrees. Of course, this forced assimilation can be taken as a very high price (for I cannot find any evidence in the text that would indicate Shylock's desire to leave his religion), but no lynching is mentioned in the text. With this minor qualification, my overall reading of the play is very close to Heller's. I wholeheartedly agree with the reservations about the Christian characters. Portia expects Shylock to be merciful, while she herself cannot have mercy for the Jew. In short, the Christian falls below her own standard. In this sense, Portia seems to be no superior to Angelo. Race plays an undeniably important role in the work. This is even supported by an element that seems to have escaped Heller's attention: one of Portia's suitors is African; and she is relieved when this suitor fails to make the right choice by not selecting the casket which contains her portrait.

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[21] Ibid. I. 48.
[22] Ibid. I. 132.

The ultimate question is whether a line can be drawn between valid and invalid interpretation. Let me rely on three brief quotations. “Claudius never suspected that Gertrude was willing to die for her son, whom she had betrayed for her husband's sake.”[23] “Hamlet pretended to be mad in the scene with Ophelia because he realized that the girl had become unfaithful to him.”[24] “Macbeth gives in to his wife, because he is impotent, and he tries to conceal his impotence by so-called 'manly' deeds.”[25] In such comments the interpreter's language seems to dominate. I would welcome a textual analysis before such conclusions are reached.

Yet most of the comparisons Heller makes offer an eye-opening lesson. The only other exception is a parallel drawn between a late romance and a problem play: “*Measure for Measure* ends with a (problematic) judgment. *The Tempest* ends with forgiveness.”[26] This statement is based on a somewhat one-sided interpretation. In our age of post-colonialism Caliban's fate raises delicate questions. Because of this, the conslusion of *The Tempest* may appear no less problematic than that of the earlier dark comedy. In view of the fact that *The Tempest* refers to a letter written by William Strachey on 15 June 1610 about the shipwreck of “Sea-Adventure” near the Bermudas, it seems difficult to accept the suggestion that Caliban is “the barbaric component of Prospero's soul.”[27] More credible is the New Historicist interpretation that links Caliban and his mother to the native population of the newly discovered Western continent. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that the name of Caliban's god, Setebos, is taken from Magellan's account of his experience in Patagonia. Heller herself mentions Montaigne in other chapters of her work. Chapter XXX in the first book of the French author's *Essais,* “Des

[23] Ibid. I. 153.
[24] Ibid. I. 174.
[25] Ibid. I. 184.
[26] Ibid. I. 110.
[27] Ibid. I. 168.

Cannibales," was certainly an important source of inspiration for the author of *The Tempest.* The problematic relationship of Prospero to Caliban is inseparable from an inquiry into the nature of the barbaric. Robert Browning's dramatic monologue *Caliban Upon Setebos* (published in *Dramatic Personae,* 1864), Audens's commentary on *The Tempest,* written in 1942–4, Stephen Greenblatt's studies, and recent performances testify to the legitimacy of such an interpretation.

Whatever disagreements one may have with certain details of Heller's two-volume work on Shakespeare, the conclusion is inescapable that a philosopher who has made a significant contribution to ethics can also make a decisive impact on literary scholarship. It is a refreshing experience to have an interpretation of Shakespeare's plays that relies on Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. I am happy to concur with Ágnes Heller that "a Shakespearean character is not guilty in general but guilty in one respect or innocent in another,"[28] and so "we share with the characters of Shakespearean dramas a sense of the hopelessness of giving a definitive interpretation."[29]

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[28] Ibid. I. 240.
[29] Ibid. I. 5.

Katie Terezakis

Heller on the Ancients

Agnes Heller once made the comment that all philosophers, after the ancient Greeks, fall into one of two essential groups: philosophers follow either Plato or Aristotle. However refined and extensive one's classical interests might be, as a philosopher one finds oneself *either* in the train of Aristotle *or* of Plato. In 1966, Heller published a book on Aristotle's ethics; her moral works continued to rely upon readings of Aristotle thereafter. Yet Heller has not written a single book, to my knowledge, that is not peppered with references to the Platonic corpus. *An Ethics of Personality* hinges on a distinctive reading of Plato that underscores both his immanent ethics and his responsibility for the metaphysics of transcendence. In recent essays, Heller has extended her claims for Plato's modernity, for his unique ethics, and for his unparalleled and founding aesthetic creation of at least two literary genres, one of which is philosophy. Beyond the usual truisms at least as old as Raphael's *School of Athens,* what accounts for such a stark divide between Plato and his student? And where does Heller see herself? Although Heller often addresses different branches of each Plato's and Aristotle's thought, I will focus almost exclusively on Heller's understanding of the concept of justice in both thinkers. It is my hope that, by more closely following her analysis of justice in both Plato and Aristotle, some of the depth of Heller's engagement with the ancients, and of their presence in her decidedly modern thought, can be made manifest.

Heller's 1996 *An Ethics of Personality* is the third and last work of her moral philosophy.[1] Joachim, an interlocutor in the dialogues that form its middle division, plays, in part, the role of Heller's Kantian

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[1] Heller, Agnes, *An Ethics of Personality,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1996.

mask. Joachim's comments about Plato's ethics are telling, for Joachim follows Kant himself in tracing a genealogical trajectory from Kant back to Plato. This trajectory will prove indispensable for understanding Heller's reading of Plato. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant credits Plato with first recognizing that Ideas are culled neither from sense experience nor from the understanding.[2] Ideas are cognitive archetypes, mental markers that allow us to grasp the regular arrangement of natural structures and that become efficient causes in moral decision-making, when reason jointly posits the guiding maxim and the universal imperative to test its merit. A transcendental Idea, Kant argues, *shows* its effective presence where human reason proves to be causal, whether in providing the unity necessary for scientific explanation or the orientation in thinking necessary for free, ethical action. Yet ultimately, Kant admits, transcendental Ideas are neither arbitrarily invented nor evidentially certain. The Ideas that ground our moral bearing in the world are *problems,* given necessarily to reason by reason itself; while the origin of transcendental Ideas cannot be proven, their fecundity and their inexorability in guiding our actions cannot be legitimately denied. Kant enjoins his readers, therefore, to preserve the term *Idea* in its founding, Platonic sense, which he takes to be crafted to express precisely the cognitive composition that he too elaborates.[3] Even if, Kant writes, Plato did not understand his own position on the nature of Ideas in just this way, then Kant claims to understand Plato better than Plato understood himself.[4] Plato may have sometimes written in a way contrary to his intentions; but just these deeper intentions, Kant declares, are also his own.

Heller, or her mask Joachim, agrees. Joachim argues that in the two paradigmatically ethical dialogues, the *Gorgias* and the *Republic,* Plato shows Socrates deploying the furthest reaches of rational argu-

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[2] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason,* Guyer, Paul, Wood, Allen W., tr/ed., Cambridge, Cambridge Unievrsity Press, 1998. B370 ff.
[3] Ibid. B376
[4] Ibid. A314

ment in order to prove, definitively, that it is better to suffer injustice than it is to commit it.[5] But Socrates fails. Via Plato's staging, it becomes clear that the founding statement of moral philosophy (it is better to suffer than commit injustice) cannot be proven. Yet this assertion is the *arche* that will potentially ground and extend our moral thought and action; if it is untrue, then morality is impossible. Plato presents Socrates' rational failure as well as his real commitment to the moral assertion; he presents Socrates' lived philosophy. As such, Plato pushes us to consider the value of an unconditioned absolute, together with the knowledge that our internal principle rests upon a pre-philosophical, even tautological position. All the while, Joachim goes on to ask, virtually quoting Heller's *General Ethics,*[6] good people and bad people exist – so how are they possible? He concludes, with Plato's Socrates, "We must go ahead and prove that which avoids proof."

Plato invented the supreme Idea of the Good to point the way out of this riddle. In Joachim's words: He invented the philosophical myth of recollection to prove his point, and in the same act he invented the language game which we have since been calling metaphysics. Through this detour he finally succeeded in connecting knowledge and morals. If you know the idea of the Good – you are good. The idea becomes the source of knowledge and of goodness.[7]

In Joachim's telling, Kant replaces the Platonic Idea of the Good with the moral law, severing the umbilical cord between knowledge and morality. Yet what else, the reader is led to ask, *is* the Good if not the practical, regulative principle that we access when seeking the best answers to our moral questions? Heller's take on the matter emerges in a subsequent exchange between Joachim and his interlocutor, Lawrence. Lawrence asserts "If you probe … deeper into the beauti-

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[5] Heller, Agnes, *An Ethics of Personality,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1996. 120.

[6] Heller, Agnes, *General Ethics,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1988.

[7] Heller, Agnes, *An Ethics of Personality,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1996. 120.

ful sentences… of Plato, you will see that he too often settled arguments with metaphors."[8] Joachim counters: "He invented better metaphors."

Heller, like Kant, asks us to regard the conceptual initiatives of the Greeks as symbolic indicators. Heller's affinity with the Platonic figurative imagination notwithstanding, her intention is to probe the development of Plato's imagism. Heller, that is, does not just deploy a genealogist's investigation of ancient initiatives; she makes a claim for the application of Platonic ideas, as regulative ideals. Her *Beyond Justice* makes this program explicit. In a section titled "The philosophical idea of justice and the paradox of reason," Heller clears the dead wood from the ground of a Christian, or Christianizing Platonism: to interpret Plato's ideal republic as the vision of a redeeming paradise, to identify Plato's concept of justice with a real, if otherworldly 'just city', is to miss "both the complexity of Plato's argument and the perplexing *modernity* of his approach."[9] In Plato, Heller claims, man-made justice concludes in the paradox of reason; it is Plato's genius to fully articulate this paradox. Here again, Heller focuses on the *Gorgias* and the *Republic,* seeing in them the clearest concentration on the question of how 'righteousness is possible within the framework of pure practical reason.' On Heller's reading of the Platonic paradox, Plato discovers and presents the insight that *evil* involves a misuse of reason. Had he spoken directly, rather than through Socrates, the force of this insight would have dissipated.

Instead, Plato the stage-designer or tragio-comic poet embeds his insight into the argument itself, presenting "the argument of the action."[10] Plato knows that we know that Socrates, unable to prove that it is better to suffer than commit injustice by rational argumenta-

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[8] Ibid. 179.

[9] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 64.

[10] Seth Benardete's phrase (Benardete, Seth, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.; Benardete, Seth, *The Bow and The Lyre: A Platonic Reading of the Odyessey,* Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1997.).

tion, all the while lived and died by his beliefs. In reading the Platonic dialogues, we are interested not merely in the machinations of logical or dialectical procedure; we are fascinated, as is Plato, by a Socrates who ultimately obeys only the voice of his own conscience, and who does not yet know the fate that its principles will occasion. Knowing of Socrates' end, we are captivated by his course, and Plato exploits or invents every literary trope and form necessary to present Socrates to us in all of his captivating idiosyncrasy. In Heller's words, Plato captures the essential Socratic *gesture,* the act of authentic righteousness, which no argument can justify and which lurks behind all of his arguments.[11]

But beyond this separation of writer from subject, dramatic narrator from committed ethicist, Heller takes the Platonic innovation, 'the perspective of this gesture of the future', to be itself a moral imperative. For Socrates is pictured in dialogue with men – in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* they are Polus, Adimantus, and Glaucon – who, while somewhat inclined toward right action or moral goodness, are also compelled by the arguments in favor of injustice by Callicles, Thrasymachus, or their inheritors. Socrates' younger companions are men who stand in the middle of ethical possibilities, and are hence their focal points. Heller thinks of the clash between Socrates, with his arguments in favor of justice, on the one hand, and Callicles or Thrasymachus, favoring injustice on the other, as a *wager.* The wager is staked by the warring representatives of righteousness and malice, but they do not bet their own souls, for they are already decided. Rather, the ante is the men standing in the middle of ethical possibilities, inclined toward the just but also intrigued by the unjust. The wager between Socrates and the purveyors of injustice, in Heller's telling, is all about convincing the average person to choose, finally, one alternative over the other.

This is Socrates' wager, and it is staked and fought out in the realm of dialectics. But what is ultimately convincing, if anything, is Socrates' rousing and application of what Heller calls the "charisma

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[11] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 65.

of goodness."[12] The invitation that Socrates issues, to a just life and its defense, is performative. Even where Socrates explicitly summons us to the good life, the sense of his words is constructed, by Plato, in the context of Socrates' own life. And Heller finds that the portrayal of Socrates' life, as well as the presentation of the myths that fill the Platonic dialogues, are "placed in the scales in an attempt to win the wager for the souls of these men of the middle ground."[13] It is images, finally, whether of mythologized philosophers or their mythic offspring, on which we fix our sights when caught up in the turmoil of real ethical difficulties. From out of the darkened tangle that mind and world have cast about, the clarity of one good person magnetizes us; one symbolic image may draw us on more unerringly than any logical proof. It is no accident, then, that Heller's Joachim connects Plato with Kant, but Heller seems to favor Kant's reading of Plato even over Joachim's: for the moral law does not finally sever the tie between knowledge and goodness. On the contrary, Kant's revaluation of the regulative power of Platonic ideas is on par with Heller's appreciation of the same. Though we cannot *prove* the supersensible origin of reason, the good will, or the moral law, our utilization of them, via transcendental or regulative ideas, continues to extend knowledge within the bounds of immanence and to support goodness without the guarantee of earthly recompense. Moreover, just as Kant will go on, in the third *Critique,*[14] to argue that aesthetic appreciation of the Beautiful prepares us for the rigors of transcendental argumentation, Heller sees in the Platonic portrayal of beautiful, harmonious souls, and in the beauty of the Platonic dialogue as a unified whole, a route of emotional access and hence a method of aesthetic education which speaks to the facets of the psyche that reason either fails to reach or fails to sway.

[12] Ibid. 66.
[13] Ibid. 66.
[14] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* Paul Guyer ed., Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews tr., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

But Plato also stages his insight that evil, originating neither in human nature nor human conventions, is nothing other than *perverted reason.*[15] In Socrates' respective clashes with Callicles and Thrasymachus, each of the men proceed logically, and each argues well. Even if Thrasymachus is quickly reduced to a foolish emotional outburst, Heller finds Socrates' claim, at the close of Book I of the *Republic,* that he still does not know what justice is, to be a corresponding comic jest. The point, for Heller, is that while Socrates' arguments, his wager, issue from the "clownish knight of righteousness," their support of the proper use of reason will only come to light *insofar as he wins the wager.* Plato knows that Socrates cannot win by argument alone; if he is to stage Socrates' wager, successfully linking reason with goodness, and the misuse of reason with evil, then Plato must "tip the balance" in favor of Socrates and thus in favor of the long route into philosophy.

So Thrasymachus, presaging one Nietzschean theme, is written to argue that *law* or convention *(Nomos)* is nothing but an expression of power, laid down by those who have the strength to set values, and the interest in extending their rule. Thrasymachus's righteous person, in obeying the law, unwittingly acts in the interest of the unjust, the lawgivers. Since injustice is nothing other than a person's own profit and interest, and since we are born into a world of injustice, Thrasymachus concludes that we would be happier and freer if we too were unjust, disregarding the laws of others and looking only to our own interests.

Callicles, anticipating another Nietzschean line, that of the 'slave revolt in morality', argues that the weak band together in mutual fear and hatred of the stronger, and devise rules for keeping the strong in check. The weak want an equal share of all resources, although *nature* would have provided them with far less. Still, truly strong individuals will respond to nature and not to human law; they will smash con-

[15] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 69. ff.

ventions and crush their written and institutional control centers. With this, the strong will remind us of the real justice of nature, against which any argument for human righteousness pales.

Heller argues that Plato, the dramatist, is curious to see how deep the arguments of the sophists may go, to test their strength for himself. What Plato's Callicles and Thrasymachus hold in common is that, in making the case for injustice, they each make a case for human "*freedom* as against the *slavery of being subjected to norms.*"[16] Happiness, each sophist aims to show, is incompatible with the virtue or the freedom of the citizen. Callicles and Thrasymachus argue that we can only be free, and happy in our freedom, insofar as we rid ourselves of external authority. This is their shared political position. And both Thrasymachus and Callicles, with different levels of sophistication, argue that any internal authority which might command obedience to external laws is but a byproduct or a shadow of external authority, which must be shed for the sake of freedom and happiness. Essentially, no real internal authority exits; this is the sophists' shared moral position.

What Plato grasps, according to Heller, is that his representative sophists are right – insofar as they prefigure the awareness that *evil* stems neither from human nature nor from human laws. Rather, people become evil by following evil principles; people become evil by reasoning themselves and others into the position that injustice is preferable to justice. Heller again chooses Kantian concepts to explain a Platonic insight: evil is a *maxim* for acting in an evil way. The shared maxim of Plato's sophists is 'no norm is valid'; and, if no norm is valid, one should disregard all norms and expect all others to do the same. The fact that laws are bad, or that we may observe evil rewarded and goodness ignored or punished is not evil in itself; what is evil is "arguing on behalf of these things." It is in this sense that evil is nothing other than perverted reason, and that Plato's position, in Heller's words, is "breathtakingly modern." The paradox of reason is

[16] Ibid. 69.

sharpened not only at the limits of rational argumentation confining Socrates, in his attempts to argue that it is better to suffer than do injustice, but also here, where corresponding arguments allow the counter-position to shine. Callicles, in particular, does not argue irrationally; on the contrary, his perversion of reason manifests in his ability to poison conscience and respect with well-argued reasoning. Without Plato's authorial 'gesture of the future', without his tipping of the balances that convey to us the charisma of Socrates' goodness, we would have no good reason to reject Callicles.

Heller, it was said, claims that Socrates can only win his wager for the rational and moral commitment of all of us occupying the middle ground, if his arguments for the right use of reason trump those for the misuse of reason. She also claims that, given the paradox of reason he identifies, Plato must therefore tip the balances, or provide another sort of argument in and through the action of the dialogue. Once again, Heller links Plato's method with Kant's: for Socrates is written to argue for good, as against perverted reason, by proceeding from common sense to philosophy – just as Kant does two millennia later in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.*[17] Working through the arguments Socrates defends in the *Republic,* Heller shows how Socrates' position, while remaining consistent, also consistently bottoms out; Socrates cannot make his case on common sense alone. Beginning together in the commonsensical, Socrates takes his interlocutors to the logical conclusions and mythic counterparts of his arguments, while Plato takes the reader into the slowly emerging necessity of philosophy.

Upon realizing that he still does not know what justice is, at the close of Book I, Socrates asks us to consider the city – if only metaphorically, as the soul writ large. Making the city-soul connection will allow Socrates to address the dual shortcomings – both political and ethical – of the arguments of perverted reason. On Heller's

[17] Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* Mary Gregor ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

reading, the republic Socrates builds can be understood as a polysemic symbol, offering three versions, of increasingly rational sensitivity, of the vision of justice as authentic righteousness. In the first version, Socrates presents the "utopia of the city," in which the justice of the body politic, like that of its corresponding soul, relies upon the strict separation of its different, internal elements (whether social castes or virtues). But Socrates is motivated by the question of whether it is better to do or suffer injustice, and in the utopian city, this question has been circumvented, not answered. No one suffers or commits injustice in the ideal city, and justice is discernible only formally, in the merit of the city as a whole. Presented with this utopian figure, we find that we can press still harder on our common sense assumptions about justice, for the fundamental question sustaining them has not been answered.

In the second version of his symbol, a city ruled by philosophers is founded, in other words, philosophy is institutionalized. Plato tells us that in philosophy, one may set up as many cities as one likes; indeed, each philosopher sets up his own "city in the sky." Philosophy, here, already is the utopian ideal made real; whoever lives within it is already righteous. Still, the truth behind our commonsense assumptions about justice is thwarted, for the philosopher raises questions about doing or suffering injustice not because he does not know what to do – for he does know: he is already just. The philosopher either raises these questions ironically, as a rhetorical exercise he practices on himself, or sincerely, but then only for others – in the battle for the ethical commitments of other people who lack his unflappable security. So the philosopher stays within philosophy, essentially unruffled by the question of justice, having sufficiently answered it, or he leaves the city of philosophy, on a rescue mission to bring others back into it. The parable of the cave most sharply underscores this option.

The third and most sublime version of the republic returns to Socrates' assertion that he only wanted, in envisioning a city, to view the soul writ large. Here again, the city is the psyche, but in order to think about it, we have used, and climbed free of, the conceptual lad-

der first developed to make sense of the obscure soul. In this soul, there is no circumscribed difference between discrete elements whose virtue is to keep to themselves. On the contrary, now with clear notions of courage and temperance in mind, we also have the wisdom to combine them. Unity is the mark of the complete soul; it is indestructible on account of its internal cohesion. The harmonious soul is without violent regimentation. This soul belongs to the person of conscience – he follows laws strictly, but only laws he himself, with philosophical acumen and deduction, prescribes. Plato's Kantianism, in Heller's telling, is once again at the fore.

But Heller's intention is not merely to exhibit the continuity between the two great idealists; her point is that, unlike in Kant's writing, Plato means to show that, at all three levels of interpretation, Socrates' republic fails. We *never* know why it is better to suffer than do injustice, for even at the third, most sublime level, philosophical wisdom, concerned with the unity of the soul, lays down the law. Reason posits and follows its own law, wherever the soul, in its internal unity and freedom from external constraint, is just and sovereign. The paradox of reason is that reason will lead to unreason; Plato shows that this paradox can be productive depending upon the type of faith to which it leads. As Socrates admits in Book VII of the *Republic,* anyone who merely follows the principles of morality prescribed by parents, state, religion or another external authority can be swayed by the anti-authoritarianism of a Thrasymachus.[18] Reasons may always be met head on with contrary reasons. Yet none of the three versions of Socrates' republic gives way to *aporia* or *epoche.* Heller argues that the first utopia of the city, with its avoidance of the primary question of justice, must lead to faith in an otherworldly or utopian justice. The second city ruled by philosophers, or philosophy itself, leads to faith in the authority of the philosopher, or to the

[18] Plato, *Collected Dialogues,* Hamilton, Edith and Cairns, Huntington ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989. 538c-e; Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 73.

philosopher's faith in the authority of his own knowledge of goodness. In philosophy, it is always true that it is better to suffer than do injustice; for so the authority of philosophy speaks. And again as regards the city within, the psyche, the paradox of reason leads to faith in a revelation, viz. to the surety granted by having gained sight of the Ideas.

Heller's Plato sets the paradox of reason into three configurations, each of which give way to a kind of faith: in other-worldly justice, in philosophical authority, and in spiritual revelation. Each form of faith speaks with power to reason. So the question is not whether reason can resist power, it cannot. It remains only to decide *which* power we will introduce to reason. Socrates has no argument against obeying his own daimon, or the laws of the state, or the edicts of gods or their oracles. Heller's Plato, though, is most interested in studying the pith of the command-obey configuration in souls and cities; for with it, he uncovers and gives voice to a crisis in the ethico-political concept of justice. It can never be proven that it is better to suffer than do injustice, yet in philosophy, this is always already granted as true – for the founding of the city of philosophy is itself the demonstration of this truth. Plato is not simply saying that moral and rational maturity require philosophy; he is asserting, even more specifically, that *only* through, in Heller's words, "firmness in the acceptance of an external authority can internal authority (conscience) truly develop as pure conscience."[19] The faith we have in an external authority, whether it is the moral law, the philosophical wisdom of our forebears, or a transcendent ideal, provides the orientation necessary when reason fails to guide us. Hence, Plato paints a day's picture of Socrates always against the backdrop of his life and death; he fills Socrates' speeches with myths that underscore the value of resolve, justice, and of the influence of other worlds upon this one, in order to inspire our faith in one of the paradigms of external authority necessary for internal development.

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[19] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 73.

The wager that Plato stages Socrates making, and the paradox of reason that occasions it, fade from view in Aristotle's work. For Aristotle, justice is a mean between doing and suffering injustice – the definition fairly clearly guides the deliberative process that any actor should undertake when faced with an ethical issue. In Stoicism and Epicureanism, the wager and the paradox are completely absent. By the time of late antiquity, Heller writes, righteousness has become a purely ethical concept; in committing acts of justice, people are advised to be indifferent to all injustices they may have suffered.[20] The story Heller tells about the development of the concept 'justice' may be appreciated for the twists, turns and subplots of its historical happening. Heller finds that, even more than Plato, Aristotle understands that the philosophical *concepts* he addresses are more like *characters* in our lives or on the world stage we have before us. Indeed, the idea that concepts may be better addressed, in all their dramatic, historically saturated individuality, as characters, is taken on most explicitly in Heller's 1993 *A Philosophy of History in Fragments,* in which she introduces, and puts on display, "Reason, Will and Other Characters" – to borrow the title of one chapter.[21] Heller finds that Aristotle, beholding the spectacle of the philosophical characters that a couple hundred years of philosophizing performed, had to "compose his play on an entirely new set."[22] Aristotle took up the One, the Many, the True, Motion, Rest – the whole company – and revolutionized their interactions and their purpose. The conclusion of Aristotle's dramatic revolution is his metaphysics, which Heller goes on to critique from an ordinary language perspective. In order to appreciate how Heller stands between Aristotle and Plato, though, more must first be said about one of Aristotle's central characters, the character of Justice.

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[20] Ibid. 74.

[21] Heller, Agnes, *A Philosophy of History in Fragments,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1993. Chapter 3, 79–113.

[22] Ibid. 79.

For all of Plato's thinking-through of justice in regards to the city of the soul or the city in the sky, Heller is developing, particularly in *Beyond Justice,* a viable socio-political position, and she thus requires more practical guidelines (or crutches, as she might call them) to stand with and against. So Heller turns to Aristotle, who presents the paradigmatically formal response, the response of 'static justice', to the question of how social conflicts should be judged and treated. While 'finding the mean' for right action involves a deliberative process of weighing opposing extremes, and while justice itself is weighed as a mean between doing and suffering injustice, Aristotle is unambiguous on questions of how to judge and treat wrongdoers. The Aristotelian idea of *proportionality* involves the use of a common measure to be employed in comparing or contrasting individuals or social groups. Proportionality, in other words, only exists where there is a clear commonality between people; insofar as people may be consistently compared, they are, in some respect, equals. Just as we exchange commodities according to a shared, consistent judgment about their worth, the common value between them, we judge people and groups only with a common standard against which they actually measure up.

The problem with the imperative of proportionality, for Aristotle, arises when there can be no proportionality between social groups, for in such cases, the clarity and consistency allowed by proportionality becomes useless. As it turns out, many more people fail to enter into relations of proportionality than achieve them. Slaves cannot be compared with free people, men cannot be compared with women, adults cannot be compared with minors nor parents with their children.[23] The asymmetry or social hierarchy that thus results functions according to another proportion: where right action means treating equals equally, it also means treating unequals unequally. One treats others, therefore, always according to one's relative placement on the all-inclusive social hierarchy; equals can treat one another justly, and people in higher social positions may choose to be just to those of lower social

[23] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 17. ff.

strata, but there can be no question of 'justice' when a lower-ranking person does anything for one higher-ranking. Slaves, women and children, in regard to freemen, men and adults, may be obedient, faithful and submissive, but never just. In Heller's words, "Under the conditions of the all-embracing social hierarchy, both being just and being unjust are prerogatives allotted to the repositories of social authority."[24]

Justice, then, occurs when an offense is disciplined or dismissed by a higher authority. The authority judges according to the norms of his own social group. In an asymmetrical social configuration, any form of the so-called 'golden rule' (A should treat B as B should treat A), is meaningless. Heller identifies several conflicts that tend to arise from such an asymmetrical hierarchy, such as when people personalize their social conflicts, targeting, e.g., the tax collector instead of the tax system. People may also fight to establish 'rights' for lower strata, and, in cases in which legal rights are not yet firmly established, may exchange rights for rituals of supplication. But while Heller might be the first to allow that certain absolute, even if inexplicable, differences of the spirit may exist between individuals – while she endlessly appreciates the aristocracies of intelligence, wit, integrity and creativity – Heller nowhere tolerates social hierarchy. Asymmetry in the social, political or legal realms exacerbates relations of conflictual dependency and personal mediocrity; no viable social theory or practice may withdraw from the establishment and complete application of exactly the same norms and rules to human beings.[25]

Heller's criticism of Aristotelian social asymmetry, then, is obvious. But what is particularly interesting is the way that Heller then uses the Aristotelian elaborations of retributive and distributive justice to think-through her own suggestions. In his *Politics,*[26] Aristotle clarifies the reasons for criminal behavior, which were also discussed, in

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[24] Ibid. 18.

[25] Ibid. 21.

[26] Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* Barnes, Jonathan ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984. 1267a14.

terms of virtues and vices, in both of his *Ethics.* Theft, for example, may be practiced to alleviate the burdens of poverty, out of an acquisitive desire improperly controlled, or for the sheer enjoyment of its criminality. Aristotle, therefore, proposes three distinct, officially authorized responses to theft: helping to alleviate the burden of poverty through employment or other legal means, teaching self-control, and the introduction to philosophy, which alone can teach people how to covet nothing but their own virtue and excellence. Heller returns to Aristotle's cluster of causes in order to identify three essential reasons for crime. She identifies: 1. strong and primary social constraints; 2. strong interests or passions of a morally negative bent; and 3. the pleasure or kick of committing a crime. It is important to notice that that the first category, social constraints, does not include purely psychological constraints. Although people do commit crimes for solely psychological reasons, and although psychology plays a part in each of the three primary categories Heller distinguishes, she lauds Aristotle for recognizing that crimes committed only under psychological constraints can no longer be attributed to free and rational actors. Without the psychological category, a crime may never be fully explained, but it can, via the application of one of the three feasible categories, be sufficiently understood for judgment, correction or punishment.

Heller's unique utilization of Aristotle manifests as she puts her three borrowed categories to work. On the one hand, she absolutely insists (and this is emblematic Heller) that all people are unique and cannot be ranked or compared as wholes. The distinctive biography of each actor is the ground for any interpretation of her actions, and no biographies are identical, or proportional. In Heller's words, "To grasp the single case is a great theoretical challenge and the need to meet that challenge is perfectly legitimate."[27] Practically speaking, *explaining why* any one person commits a crime results in an infinity of interpretations, many of them com-

[27] Heller, Agnes, *Beyond Justice,* Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1987. 171.

plete and even mutually exclusive. Yet, while psychologically fascinating, and stimulating for the purposes of artistic exploration, Heller gives two reasons for *not* dwelling on a psychological assessment of the criminal act. In the first place, uniqueness cannot, by definition, be ranked or compared, and ranking or comparison is precisely what is necessary for making judgments and meting out punishments. Secondly, explaining the unique actions of a unique character only through psychological motivations means, again, robbing the person judged of her rational choice and freedom. So on the one hand, Heller rejects Aristotle's social asymmetry uncompromisingly, while on the other, she returns to the Aristotelian imperative of proportionality, as well as to an Aristotelian notion of agency, to develop a position on the necessary rights and obligations of citizens. Via a relatively rational, decision-making process, which Aristotle identifies with *prohairesis,* each person can be understood as able to perform a mental act, which itself entails accountability for authorship of her deeds.

Yet here is the rub, in Heller. A judge encountering a criminal whose reasons for crime fall under either the second or third of Heller's categories (strong interests or passions of a morally negative bent, or the pleasure of committing a crime) may hold the criminal fully responsible for her behavior. Whatever the details of the criminal's biography add to the explanation of her crime, the judge has at her disposal a proportionally equivalent legal standard and a rational agent to whom she can apply it. However, if the criminal act took place as a result of the first category, strong and primary social constrains (such as extreme poverty), then the agent may be held only partially responsible for her actions. Moreover, it takes an impartial judge to decide whether the criminal act was the result of severe constraints, as well as to judge the particular criminal actor appropriately according to those constraints. Yet, as a member of a shared community, the judge is also jointly responsible for the said severe constraints on the criminal. It is generally not the case that people jointly responsible for the constrained person's actions are concurrently judged, in proportion to their responsibility, together with the social-

ly constrained person.[28] But if they are not present, or cannot be judged, especially if that is because they are the judges, then there can be no just, practicable form of retributive justice. As long as the first category of 'criminals' exists in a society – as long as people act criminally in response to strong, primary social constraints that have not yet been alleviated by the whole community together – then judging criminality retributively cannot be fully just. And, in Heller's words, "Only full justice is justice."

So once again, Heller returns to Aristotle. She takes up, finally, the Aristotelian notion of 'distributive justice' to recommend a relative equality in resources and procedures as conditions for the good life of the citizen and city. And she goes on to argue that *all* ethical-political concepts of justice – and this applies most of all to her own – must be backed up by the sustained ethics, morality and moral practices of real people, even if few in number. Although Aristotle's asymmetric reciprocity provides occasion for critique, his political and ethical theory also provides shoulders to stand on, for Heller is ultimately to conclude that the best possible socio-political world is not just in itself, but operates by just procedures.[29] She argues, having concluded her examination of Platonic and Aristotelian justice, that the establishment and defense of just procedures will entail the validation of norms and rules through value discourses guided by the universal maxim of dynamic justice. Heller's proposal of dynamic justice is crafted from her rearrangement of traditional and contemporary notions and practices, including those Platonic and Aristotelian, *given* her *own* insistence that humanity be viewed as the essential social group and that this group's internal relations must be that of symmetric reciprocity. In a way that cannot but remind the reader of Aristotle's discussion, at the end of his *Nicomachean Ethics,* of an outstripping notion of human decency, which may rectify even the ostensibly just law, and of his elaboration of the vital human friendship, which incorporates

[28] Ibid. 171. ff.
[29] Ibid. 270. ff.

all of the virtues but has no need of justice – Heller concludes her book on justice with the assertion: *"the good life, as an undivided and indivisible whole, is beyond justice* […] *the goal of justice is beyond justice."*[30]

Heller's vision of the good life is a life of honesty, of the development of our best endowments into talents, and of the strength of our personal attachments. It is honesty, the goodness and righteousness of an individual, which binds these elements. Heller's whole enterprise, she readily admits, in reaffirming a definition of the good life with which almost no one could argue, has been all about answering the question as to how an honest person is possible here, now, in this world today. Yet answering that question, for Heller, involved a return to the ever-charged ancients. The question, as the scope of Heller's work makes clear, also has a counterpart: how is it possible to extend the good life to others, to all others, to recreate the conditions for the development of honest people? Heller answers this question too by juxtaposing her position to that of the Greeks: "Equal life chances for all, equal freedom for all, and the regulative idea of the best possible socio-political world" are to be conceived of as a goal. Though we must insist, in the here and now, on the life chances and freedom of all, we may posit and strive toward the best possible socio-political world as a condition for sustaining those freedoms. Like a Plato who 'tips the balance' to help his Socrates win a wager for our commitment to moral goodness, and who posits a 'city in the sky' to guide our political imagination, Heller's theory entails the unprovable insistence on the charisma of goodness and the methodical use of the regulative. Like an Aristotle who defines and delimits justice in order to correctly judge its every possible application, but who finally leaps free of the conceptual ladder of justice in arriving at the most complete notions of human virtue and virtuous relation, Heller presents a

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[30] Ibid. 326.

meticulous philosophical genealogy of the character of Justice, in order to present the possibility of its still dynamic philosophical development.

I began by relaying Heller's comment that each philosopher follows *either* in the train of Plato *or* of Aristotle, and perhaps this was unfair, for it may have created the expectation that, by paper's end, Heller could be proved a Platonist or an Aristotelian. It would be at least as unfair to allege, now, that Heller's work belies her claim, for indeed, I believe that Heller, like all of us, does follow one train more than the other. With further examination of her assessment of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics and aesthetics, one might gain a clearer sense of which train it is. Here, the focus has been only on the question of justice in Heller's readings of Plato and Aristotle. In both cases what is most just, or complete justice, requires reference to a viable ethics and a moral philosophy; Heller's presentation of both must likewise be further examined in order to finally appraise her standing as a moral philosopher as a reader of the ancients. Nevertheless, from Socrates' unprovable first principle of justice to Aristotle's discussion of the decency and friendship that flourish beyond justice, we have seen Heller captivated by and committed to the notion of the whole person – unique, irreducible, and, in any real dedication to external justice, also intensely engaged in self-discovery and self-creation. So it is fair, I hope, to urge an attentiveness not just to Heller's discussions of the aesthetics and metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, but to her appreciation of the distinctive temperaments which unify these fields of investigation. Heller would not make the psychologistic claim that we can infiltrate a thinker's ideas by first understanding his psyche. She would not claim that we ever have transparent access to the minds of characters of our thinkers, or that, given certain psychological clues, we could do any more than speculatively interpret them. But Heller would, I believe, agree with Foucault's contention that philosophers and philosophies are best characterized not by epochs, but by attitudes. Beyond what philosophical ages or doctrines can typify, there is a positioning, a stance, and an approach that is like the bearing of a theory and its thinker. Through Heller's reflections upon

and utilizations of the Greeks, through her embracing as much as her rejection of their ideas, her awareness of the attitudes of Plato and Aristotle becomes discernable. It is in her appreciation of each attitude, and in the manifestation of her own, that the character of Heller's love manifests.

Simon Tormey

The Two Faces of 'Democracy' in the Work of Agnes Heller

As someone who spent many months and years grappling with the trajectory of Agnes Heller's thought, particularly here political thought, what finally struck me was the pendulum like movement her work evinces: sometimes hopeful; other times grimly realist.[1] Some of her work is characterised by what Bloch would describe as the utopian impulse, a desire to give vent to the ideal of a better world. at other times it is marked by caution, even fear. Heller walks along the edge of the cliff – on one side the the abyss of the unknown, on the other the safety and security afforded by firm ground. Her work is in this sense 'human' in the Nietzschean sense. It is replete with reminders of her own existence. It shifts between the euphoria of possibility and contingency and the longing for comfort and 'home'. Her political philosophy is just as much witness to these pendulum movements as is her work in moral philosophy, aesthetics or the theory of modernity from whence the trope of the pendulum derives. Yet understandable as such an orientation is, it also a matter for regret that the pendulum became stuck at the top of the 'realist' swing. We are living once again in 'dark times', times of oppression, war, terror and poverty. In such times we need images of something better, something hopeful and empowering. My view is that Heller's politics once spoke to this need. Yet in the quest for an orientation to the world 'as it is' she allowed realism to reign, thereby cutting herself

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[1] Tormey, S., *Agnes Heller: Socialism, Autonomy and the Postmodern,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001.

off from those to whom it once addressed: the new social movements. It is thus pertinent to ask why this happened – what happened to utopia, hope, expectation?

In trying to provide an answer to these admittedly vexatious questions it is difficult to ignore the pivotal function that the terms 'democracy' and 'democratic' play in throughout her work, and in particular the gap or distance between her normative theorising about the nature of the democratic and the extant forms of democracy we see around us in the contemporary world. What has become evident over the work since the 1980s is the degree to which in a sense Heller has accepted the self-image and legitimating basis of liberal-democracy as opposed to the forms of democratic participation she once enthusiastically extolled. What I would like to suggest is that far from becoming irrelevant or passe as her more recent work would suggest, Heller's earlier thinking on the nature of democracy is, if anything, more relevant and more pressing now than it was at the time of her greatest enthusiasm for it. I suggest that her grounds for thinking that such models have become redundant are questionable, particularly given the character of current struggles against neoliberalism and elite politics more generally. We therefore need to allow the pendulum to swing back in favour of the normative critique of existing liberal democratic systems.

Marx, Radical democracy and the good life

Let us start with why the obvious question which is what is radical democracy as Heller conceived it in her work up to and including *Beyond Justice* and, secondly, more pertinently why did this conception give way in her thought as it unfolded over the 1980s and 1990?

The positing of a need for 'radical democracy' in Heller's earlier work was the response she offered to the much discussed problem of 'politics' in Marx. Even in her earlier 'humanist' phase she argued that there were certain tensions in his account that served to undermine the libertarian message she thought lay within his thought, and

which rendered it problematical from the point of view of democracy. This is particularly so in relation to the teleological nature of his philosophy of history that posited an ideal endpoint or goal as the rational outcome of the historical 'process'. This came into conflict with what she terms Marx's 'ontology of Praxis' as articulated in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* where he famously asserted that 'men make their own history'. The necessity Heller thought was appropriate to the Marxist project was what might be regarded as *ethical* necessity: the injunction to fully develop our species potential. Communism was necessary because it held that the free development of each was the condition for the free development of all. Those who held that the task of a progressive politics was to develop the conditions whereby humanity as a whole could take advantage of 'wealth' should thus be 'communists'.

Heller's rejection of Marxism stems initially from her disappointment that the kind of *radical* Marxism she had in mind, which was to say a *humanist* Marxism, failed to establish itself as 'Marxism' *tout court.* It is as if having staked everything on a widespread acceptance of her humanist reading of Marx, the indifference towards the radical promise contained within it forced a reconsideration of the desirability of maintaining a Marxist 'front'. The world had moved on. Marxism had become the stultifying doctrine of bureaucratic regimes and parties, whilst the proliferating new social movements had largely rejected Marxism as an irrelevance. Heller thus felt she too needed 'to move on' to reflect as well as fully embrace the concerns of this new constituency for radical ideas. In *A Theory of History* Heller fully announces her break via what will become a familiar theme: the rejection of historical materialism as an overall account of the development of rationality and as a philosophy of history.

If, Heller argued, Marxism meant the ability to comprehend the totality of the historical process from inception to goal then this implied the death of human action, of contingency and the possibility of morality. If history is a foreordained process then how could we be considered the authors of our own actions? How could we ascribe

blame or guilt to actors? Historical materialism destroyed any basis for understanding the human in action and thus destroyed the project of emancipation as the *self*-emancipation of ordinary men and women. In Kantian mood she now asserted that that the philosophy of history 'annihilates freedom' for 'it transforms us into mere effects and thus leaves no scope for human action, for exercise of the will'.[2] The philosophy of history is a philosophy 'beyond good and evil'. It takes responsibility from the human subject and posits it in the flow of the historical, in process. Philosophies of history thus posit a form of meta-utilitarianism in which actions are judged not in accordance with moral criteria, but in terms of whether they serve to advance or delay the realisation of the historical *telos,* namely the construction of communism. From here it is, she argues, but a short step to the kind of moral reductionism of the kind displayed by the Bolsheviks. 'Eggs' are to be 'smashed' to make 'omelettes' and 'generations sacrificed in order to build socialism'. Interestingly, Heller thinks these expressions of 'Bolshevik' ethics to be entirely inconsistent with Marx's ethics which posited *all* class morality as deeply alienated. This again demonstrates the degree to which Heller separates 'her' Marx from that of Lenin and his followers, thereby preserving the hope that Marx would one day be read as the radical humanist thinker she evidently still took him to be. It was not a case of valorising the morality or values of one class over all others, but on the contrary valorising the morality of the species, of humanity as a whole. In this sense Marx's intention was to celebrate in Enlightenment fashion the possibility of a truly *human* society and ethics, not a partial or self-interested class vision of the kind associated with Bolshevism and, indeed, most later Marxisms.

Nonetheless (as Heller was to insist) if this is what Marxism had 'become' then it had not merely to be rejected, but opposed as a pernicious and debilitating doctrine. Her view articulated initially in *A Theory of History,* is that genuinely progressive individuals needed

[2] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. 263, 173.

to recast themselves as socialist not communist. Socialism is a partial position. It offers its doctrine in terms of a 'theory' of human development among other theories, not a 'philosophy' that admits of no competition, let alone refutation.[3] Socialists fully accept the contingency and historicity of human action and thus the availability of choices to situated actors. To this end she urged left radicals to embrace Kantian thought, just as an earlier generation of 'Austro-Marxists' such as Otto Bauer had done before her. Left radical practice certainly could not be a holistic and 'totalising' doctrine without destroying the very possibility of freedom read as self-directed activity. Socialism had to be recast as a utopia of the present, not a science or doctrine for some far off Tomorrow. It had to be an explicitly normative schema that individuals could reject or embrace – but whether they embraced it or rejected was not, Heller insisted, a question of class position or class interests. It was a question of whether the normative vision on offer was felt to articulate the values we possess as concerned individuals.

In view of the above it comes as little surprise to find the Heller of the late 1970s and 1980s tinker with various schemas in 'utopian' manner. Some of these reflected her own experiences in the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and come close to the descriptions of self-management offered by Castoriadis, among others. A common feature of these schemes was, firstly, the embrace of plurality and diversity of values, norms and visions of how the world should look. Critique could not proceed from the standpoint of an anticipated or actual coalescence around one ideal. Differences of opinion, of outlook and needs necessitated recognition of the inevitably *political* character of social life. This necessitated rights to protect the freedom of speech and minorities. It necessitated a judiciary to enforce rights against the state. Secondly, she argued that it was a task of socialist theory to enumerate the manner by which conflicts and disputes were to be resolved. This lead to the elaboration of institutions,

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[3] Ibid. pt. IV.

procedures and practices of a necessarily constitutional and representative kind, though at this stage Heller was insistent on at least some deliberative and participatory dimension to determine social policy. Some of her models of this time embrace the notion of a 'mixed' constitution with both representative and participatory mechanisms ensuring that the ritualistic aspects of democratic and communist 'governance' were avoided. Thirdly these schemes had to embrace the contingency of arrangements, laws and procedures. A self-governing community would be one where 'governance' was not restricted to house-keeping, but extended to the very terms and conditions of 'politics' itself. Heller was insistent that in a socialist society, private property should be 'positively' abolished, which is to say displaced by the communal-collective governance over the means of production to ensure that social ends and goals could be realised.

The 'Great Republic' as she termed one of these normative experiments thus fully embraces the demand for political discussion over the form and nature of all aspects of social functioning as opposed to ordering the latter on the basis of some unquestionable maxim of justice ('distribution according needs').[4] Indeed a major theme of Heller's attack on Marxism becomes the reduction or elimination of the political under the burden of satisfying needs however expressed. For Heller, scarcity is part of the human condition. Our needs and wants will always outstrip whatever it is that we can collectively produce. In this sense we are condemned to having politics on a minimal specification of that term, which is to say we need to elaborate and refine the basis upon which goods are distributed according to agreed maxims of justice. There is no 'outside' or 'beyond' of justice, as there is for Marx. As she sees it the danger of allowing the pursuit of 'abundance' to guide radical activity is that it leads to an eternal 'transition', a state of affairs in which politics is 'postponed' pending the realisation of a society in politics is in any case rendered as

[4] Feher, Ferenc and Heller, Agnes, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom, and Democracy,* Cambridge, Policy Press, 1987. 104 ff, 87 ff

'administration'. On these terms the Marxian philosophy of 'super-enlightenment' becomes an ideology of deenlightenment. The dream of absolute abundance, absolute freedom and absolute autonomy and a world beyond justice becomes 'schlaraffenland', 'a negative utopia: a nightmare.'[5] It becomes a mechanism justifying global enslavement rather than emancipation.

Towards a (humanist) post-Marxism

As should be evident, Heller's embrace of utopian socialism was intended to show up the paradoxical quality of Marx's own project: a philosophy of history that was itself built on utopian expectations concerning the nature of the revolution to come. Her idea of utopia was 'reasonable' and 'realistic' as opposed to the hyper-rationalism of Marx's. In the work of the 1980s Heller challenged the anthropological assumptions as much as the productivist ones that underpinned Marx's position. If it can be said to be built from any particular insight or contention then it was the idea of the inevitability of contestation and pluralism. The problem with Marx's outlook is that it collapses the gap between subject and object. It makes the goal of social life the elimination of contestation, and thus of the possibility of different views and subject positions. It did so out of the belief that such contestation was contingent and based on scarcities that could be swept away in the advance of technology and industrial production. What would there be to argue over once everyone's needs were satisfied?

In a sense what Heller aimed at was a re-politicisation and re-valorisation of radical politics. It was to celebrate the diversity of human life whilst at the same time elaborating mechanisms by which indi-

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[5] Heller, A., *A Theory of History,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. 320.

viduality could be protected and promoted. If Marxism ultimately succumbed to the lure of an image of life ‘after’ politics then Heller returned to the classical image of politics as the site of the good life, of the *civitas* and of the engaged individual. This was as much ‘conflict management’ as ‘self-management’ – providing the means by which a diversity of positions and beliefs could be accommodated within a form of society dedicated to keeping hierarchy and subordination at bay. This radical ambition to had two distinct iterations in Heller’s work of this period: the first associated with *Radical Philosophy* involved the elaboration of a system of deliberation not unlike that of Habermas; the second announced in *Beyond Justice,* sought a radicalisation of the presuppositions of liberal egalitarian theory to uphold a collective commitment to a deep egalitarianism of the kind found in nineteenth century radical writings. How do they work?

In *Radical Philosophy* Heller articulates her distinct approach to ethical and moral contestation by insisting that disagreement – if not antagonism – is part of the human condition. We cannot – and should not seek to – escape contestation. The attempt to do so is fatal to the project of embracing and celebrating what it means to be an individual. Yet this observation alone should not be taken to imply that Heller simply abandons Marx’s position for that of liberal thinkers such as Mill and Berlin who insist that all value positions are of equal value. They are not. As in earlier work, Heller insists that it is clear that some values are in fact more rational than others, and some *interpretations* of those values are more rational than others. For example, justice and equality are values that every modern individual recognises as valid. The problem is that we do not agree on what is required to ‘realise’ them. People differ as to what kind of arrangements are just or which kinds of equality are important. But this is where Heller’s radical humanism is affirmed: unlike the Berlinian liberal, she does not regard all interpretations of core values such as these to be equally valid. A facet of modern consciousness is, she thinks, the progressive universalisation of values. Thus in any contest between conceptions of equality (say), it will be the view that uni-

versalises or generalises equality to the greatest degree that will 'win'.[6] Such a conception may not win today or tomorrow, but – as Hegel implies – since universalisation is modern consciousness, such a development is at some level implicit in the way we conceive ourselves and others. In this sense contestation has meaning and legitimacy insofar as it pushes universal values in the direction of radical universality, radical equality and radical democracy. Institutions and practices that do not allow of universalisation will eventually find themselves in contradiction with the *ratio* of modernity itself. Today it is an anachronism to hold that some men are natural slaves or that women are inferior to men. Tomorrow it will be an anachronism to believe that some people should hold more power or influence than others in setting the political agenda. We should all have 'power' – this is what the radicalisation of democracy *means*.[7]

It is this latter point that provides the basis of Heller's critique of bourgeois institutions in this iteration of her post-Marxism. Heller agrees with Weber and Habermas that under capitalist conditions the function of parliamentary debate is not to permit the opening up of a fully fledged discourse on the value rationality of social practices and procedures, but its *containment* on terms dictated by the functioning of the system. Thus public-political discourse had the character of an administrative allocation of tasks and procedures rather than a fundamental contestation on the ends of social production. Such a contestation would be essentially participatory in nature rather than representative. It would be far-reaching and involve all aspects of social and economic functioning. It would be one that fosters and promotes an active form of citizenship as opposed to that of the passive periodic voter found in present systems. It would be one that 'abolishes' all forms of domination and dependence so that the crude and impoverished variant of equality of contemporary society would be

[6] Heller, A., *Radical Philosophy,* Oxford, England, New York, N.Y., B. Blackwell, 1984. 96.
[7] Ibid. 157.

replaced by a deep equality that promoted genuine engagement in social life.[8] This in turn implied that formal equality has to be matched by substantive equality if the discussion is not to be distorted in the Habermasian sense by the exercise of economic or any other kind of power. As she was to reiterate, a *radical* democracy presupposes the 'positive' abolition of private property and the collective-communal ownership of the means of production. This was not endorsement of the presuppositions of liberal-democracy with the formalised distinction between public and private realms.[9] It was a radical republican model of the kind promoted by Rousseau, a world in which politics has no limits, and where the citizen sees in collective life the means by which her own individuality can come to fruition.

The schema outlined in *Beyond Justice* retains the radical thrust of earlier schemes but it is one that is posed in opposition to liberal egalitarianism, which by the early 1980s had become the dominant mode of discourse in political philosophy. She wanted in particular to address the disparity between the desire to redress the chronic inequalities that attend advanced capitalism and the affirmation of a free market order, one that marked the work of Rawls and his followers. Retaining the radical thrust of her earlier approach, Heller notes that liberal egalitarians privilege the view of the individual inherited from earlier 'inegalitarians'. They maintain the idea of the individual as a discrete 'atom' with differential needs, talents and abilities. For egalitarians some of these talents and abilities are 'arbitrary' from a moral point of view and thus undeserving of the rewards that the operation of the market and rules of just acquisition will otherwise bestow on them. Here then the desirability of the state to ensure that what we receive is from the point of view of justice fully deserved. The state needs to intervene to ensure a redistribution of goods in accordance with accepted or 'intuitive' understandings

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

of how society should 'look'. It should guarantee a certain pattern or outcome in conformity with our understanding of what is owed to individuals as opposed to what the market determines we are 'worth'.[10]

Quite apart from agreeing with Nozick's point that such schemas involve a conflict between the upholding of liberal rights and the desire to redistribute in accordance with maxims of justice, Heller attacks the underlying presupposition of such accounts. This is that equality should be defined in terms of the distribution of 'goods' as opposed to the kind of life chances and opportunities that are presented to us. If we were really serious about equality, she argues, we would encourage human excellence in whatever way it manifests itself.[11] We would be neutral as between the value of artistic production and the value of medical research. This in turn would necessitate a reversal of the liberal starting point. Society would be regarded as the repository of social wealth and each individual would be treated as a genuine equal irrespective of the particular talents and abilities they display. Since each individual's *ipseity* is unique and all expressions of human excellence are of equal merit, every person should receive what they need to develop their talents and abilities irrespective of the gain to be had for society generally. Once her individuality has been so recognised, each would then receive an equal amount from the social pot, the respective contribution of each being on this view irrelevant from the point of view of determining who should get what. The desire to develop a true 'equality of life chances' would determine who should get what, not market based criteria. Such a plan would cut against the grain of liberal 'intuitions' concerning the necessity for 'incentives', measures to ensure the smooth functioning of the economy. But this is Heller's point: if we are really serious about equality then it must be as equality of life chances; if it is equality of life chances, then we cannot allow the market to determine how and what conditions each individual develops her own talents and abilities.

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[10] Heller, A., *Beyond Justice,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1987. 182.
[11] Ibid. 191.

Although *Radical Philosophy* and *Beyond Justice* set out quite different normative arguments, the radicalism of each suggestion is striking, notwithstanding the 'abandonment' of Marxism as their guiding force. Both still depend on 'the positive abolition of private property', that is the transfer of all the productive resources of society into social ownership. They also depend to a high degree on an active citizenry committed to the development and maintenance of the 'Man rich in needs', as opposed to the impoverished subject of bourgeois liberal society. All of this is mediated by the requirement to prevent such schemas degenerating into the 'dictatorship over needs' she saw lurking within the Marxian project – or at least the Marxism of the Second International and beyond. There is here a formal separation of private and public realms, of state and civil society, even if the model of the state is the Rousseauian participatory polity as opposed to that of liberal-democracy. There is an ever-present stress on the necessity for rights and constitutional guarantees against abuses by the state or the community that controls it. There is also a concern with heterodoxy and the possibility of conflict that emits of the need for institutionalised mechanisms of conflict resolution. These are in short 'realistic' utopias; normatively derived visions that retain a certain scepticism as to the possibility and desirability of moving 'beyond justice' in the manner described by Marx.

What is also evident in the works of this period is a deep hostility towards 'Jacobinism' and the putschist schemes of the kind associated with Leninist politics. Heller was insistent: without a *'consensus omnium'* there could be no transition to socialism, nor could a socialist society maintain itself for long without descending into tyranny.[12] What Heller offered was a revolutionary vision (or set of visions), but without the revolution – at least as far as that term has been thought about and practised for the past two centuries. What sustained Heller's politics was, on the contrary, an almost Hegelian

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[12] Feher, Ferenc and Heller, Agnes, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom, and Democracy,* Cambridge, Policy Press, 1987. 229.

faith in the necessary radicalisation of universal values to emit of an immanent critique of liberalism-capitalism. The radicalisation of the values of freedom and equality did not have to be *fought* for so much as *argued* for. Radical universalism is in this sense the embodiment of the modern: it 'enframes' the modern in a manner that makes resistance to it as anachronistic as resistance to the idea of the equality of women, or the equality of peoples and races. This is not to say that everyone will agree that women or ethnicities are equal; it means that modernity contains its own logic of 'unfolding' that can be expected to make the radicalisation of values appear rational and progressive, even as it leaves some 'behind'. In short, what sustained Heller's radicalism at this time is a belief in the autotelic unfolding of radical interpretations of justice, equality and freedom. What, arguably, was missing was the subject of the unfolding – a paradoxical lack for one who berated Marxism for its reduction of the human subject to a mere bearer of historical logic.

Radical politics and the postmodern political condition

In the wake of the victory of neo-liberalism around the globe in the 1980s and 1990s the expectation that left to its own devices modernity would happily evolve in the direction of the kind of normative schemas she advocated were confounded at least in the short term. Faith in the universalising tendencies of the modern gave way to a kind of pessimism of what Heller and Feher termed 'the postmodern political condition'. The postmodern was a distinct 'mood' or stance in relation to the modern, as opposed to a distinct time or place 'after' the modern.[13] It was marked in particular by a wariness to all redemptive schemas and particularly those associated with 'metanarratives' such as Marxism. In terms of normative theory, this

[13] Heller, A. and Feher, F., *The Postmodern Political Condition,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988. 3.

meant giving up the belief articulated above: that socialism represented the transcendence of liberal-capitalism, as opposed to the expansion of the possibilities and potentials contained *within* liberal modernity.[14] For postmoderns there would be no 'transcendence' of the given – no dramatic break of the kind hoped for by generations of radicals, not just Marxists. 'Socialism' would not after all be something markedly different to capitalism, but rather a kind of remodelling of the modern in conformity with a radicalised interpretation of the values of equality and freedom. In this sense the politics of redemption – of a world beyond justice – had to give way to a form of politics relevant to a world in which class identity and the class politics associated with both communism and socialism was giving way to various forms of self-identity and self-definition. The politics of emancipation to which her earlier work spoke, was in some definitive sense over. How could this be?

An important aspect of Heller's later work is her stance on the nature of modernity which is now revealed as the site of 'symmetry', as opposed to a site of exploitation and exclusion as implied in her earlier work. With modernity comes 'symmetrical' relations in the sense that the spirit of the modern is closely bound up with the displacement of the idea of predestination according to the norms of stratification extent in earlier periods such as feudalism and slave society by the contingency of the functional division of labour.[15] Modern societies *are* still hierarchical, but the hierarchy is with increasing social mobility one that is itself contingent. Whether one gets to the top of the 'pile' is less a question of birth or lineage, but of one's ability to acquire marketable skills. In turn whether one gets to be a lawyer or doctor is a question of education and opportunity. The greater the equality of opportunity, the more merit comes to determine who is at the top and who is at the bottom. The key battles

[14] Ibid. 117.

[15] Heller, A., *Can Modernity Survive?,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990. 152; Heller, A., *A Philosophy of History in Fragments,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1993. ch. 3; Heller, A., *A Theory of Modernity,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999. 59.

of 'postmodern' society are not, then, aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society, but with increasing opportunity and access to education – among the many other 'services' that aids social mobility. These struggles are far from over; and in some places in the world have only just begun. But the point is the desire for far-reaching change once necessitating the creation of mass socialist parties has been displaced by an essentially social democratic concern to ensure that everyone or as many people as possible benefit from the erosion of those practices and institutions that prevent stratification giving way to the protean meritocratic possibilities of modernity.

If all this implies that Heller felt that 'left radicalism' was a redundant position politically then a note of caution is required. As Heller recognises, the battle for equality and self-determination is a long way from having been 'won' even in the most 'advanced' societies. The terrain of such struggles is now local rather than world historical. These struggles are, as Foucault might say, 'micro-political'. They concern the applicability and interpretation of values that are generally accepted as valid. Gone is the large-scale conflict over fundamentally different conceptions of how we should live. As Lyotard might put it, progressive politics has ceased being a politics of the *differend,* and has become one constructed around the constant and immediate amelioration of the 'present'. Nor is power so entrenched that it cannot be challenged or resisted by those affected by the decisions and policies of government. What is needed therefore is concerted action by individuals acting on a number of fronts, not by 'masses' seeking to overturn 'the system'.

What such an analysis suggested is that liberal-capitalism is open or at least amenable to critique and reconfiguration, a point Heller doubted in earlier work where 'actually existing democracy' was regarded with almost as much suspicion as 'actually existing socialism'. In *Radical Philosophy,* for example, democracy was seen as a realm of instrumental action and administrative decision-making. It was a form of containment of the value rational and far-reaching discussion of the kind that she felt to be immanent to the notion of a fully-fledged democratic community. In her work of the 1980s and

1990s however liberal democracy emerges as the ground of possibility – not of closure or containment as it appeared in earlier work. Since nothing is in formal terms ruled out in democratic discourse, it follows that all visions of how society should look can be discussed and their merits debated.[16] As she puts it, a democratic state can be transformed into a socialist one 'without being altered one iota'. As makes clear elsewhere, "[t]he principles of formal democracy do regulate our way of proceeding in social affairs, the manner of delivering our conflicts, but they do not impose any limitation on the content of our social objectives".[17] It follows that the demand to overthrow such a system would be tantamount to the demand to replace an open, contingent set of relationships with one that is closed to debate. It is to forsake the possibility of progress towards more rational or enlightened ways of living with the certainty of regression to some pre-modern and stratified model such as the 'dictatorship over needs'. It thus follows that the subject of left radical thought and action is not a revolutionary subject, one who will overthrow liberal-capitalism; but one who will work within liberal-capitalism to enlarge the sphere of possibility. The progressive subject is a citizen, not a revolutionary. Such a citizen is led by a set of ethical commitments to oppose injustice and to open up otherwise closed processes and institutions to equality of opportunity and access. This implies valuing 'radical tolerance', that is intolerance towards all forms of discrimination; 'civic courage', or a preparedness to act in the name of left radical ideals even where this may disadvantage oneself. Finally it means acting in 'solidarity' with others, being prepared to act with and for those in need.

[16] Feher, Ferenc and Heller, Agnes, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom, and Democracy,* Cambridge, Policy Press, 1987. 229.
[17] Heller, A., "Past, Present and Future of Democracy," *Social Research* 45 (4), 1978. 869.

As becomes clear then, Heller wants to stress that progressive politics represents an orientation to the 'here and now' rather to some far off 'Tomorrow'. The 'good life' is not a project that has to be formulated and campaigned for. It is a practice and even more an *ethics* that should and can permeate all our relations with others and that can be a guide for life. Here of course the strong Kantian emphasis that marks her later work even more than the earlier. To be 'on the left' is to have a particular comportment to the world. In preferring 'to suffer wrong than inflict it', in seeking to treat others as ends in themselves, in confronting injustice, the individual 'embodies utopia' rather working for the realisation of a utopian or ideal world.[18] Thus even the individual acting alone can and does make a difference. As she puts it: 'I choose the world in which I live since I can act only in a world in which I live. My freedom is my gesture of "turning around", of accepting that challenge of contingency, of life, in contributing to the actualization of such-and-such a possibility and not others. Freedom then is pre-eminently practical. It is praxis'.[19] Perhaps ironically, Heller's recent work thus returns us back to some of her earliest meditations on the role of the individual in generating critiques of the system and an exemplary comportment to the world. This in turn highlights the essentially individualistic basis of her work. What counts is in the end the life and struggles of individuals acting together or acting alone. The important point for Heller was and always has been to act and not to have others *act* on your behalf or in your name.

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[18] Heller, A., *A Philosophy of Morals,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990. 221.
[19] Ibid. 127.

Towards a 'postmodern' radicalism?

As should be evident, Heller's position strongly resembles the position of radical democrats such as Laclau and Mouffe. Her work is animated by the 'disappearance' or perhaps non-appearance of the revolutionary subject, the proletariat, and its displacement by a profusion of subject positions and identities some of them given, others self-chosen. The politics of the new social movements was taken to be a sign of the dissipation of the possibility of a universal 'project' able to countermand the centrifugal forces found in modern societies. There is also the concern with demonstrating the radical and emancipatory potential of a form of politics that was avowedly not revolutionary. Indeed there is a shared sense in which only by abandoning the rhetoric of traditional revolutionary politics that left radicalism could uncouple itself from the totalitarian dead end in which many such experiments ended. Most pertinently, they share the sense in which contemporary democracy offers the possibility of incremental transformation as opposed to the putschist strategies of the insurrectionary wing of radical thought. It was, so they argued, not merely possible but also necessary to work within the existing framework of democratic institutions and practices to secure the universalisation of equality and freedom. On this reading radical democracy means a radical democratisation of present arrangements, not their supplanting or displacement by some other model. This is to say that the critique of liberal-capitalism is posited as an immanent critique of modernity rather than one that is posed from 'outside' the logic of the modern itself. Whereas Marx and the early Heller advance the case for a 'total social revolution', in her post-Marxian phase critique is advanced as universalisation of the present. There is no rupture in the present, merely a continuation and elongation of present trends and tendencies.

We could of course go on to examine Heller's affinities with other contemporaries. There is the shared 'incredulity' at metanarratives associated with the work of Lyotard with its attendant politics of incremental change in the face of the *differend.* But there are also

glimmers of a rapprochement with the more radical conclusions of Castoriadis. As we have noted, Heller shared the hope that generalised self-management could provide the model needed to animate social movements who lacked a faith in the redeeming qualities of Marxian revolutionary practice. Even Castoriadis's later 'turn' to the model of the *polis* as a basis for thinking through communal self-definition is mirrored in some of Heller's own writings of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly *Radical Philosophy* and *Beyond Justice*. Nevertheless there are substantively novel or idiosyncratic aspects of Heller's 'post-Marxism' which we should not lose sight of. These could be summarised as follows.

Firstly, much of her work is concerned with the attempt to recuperate the ethical thrust of Marxian 'humanism'. This meant acknowledging the pernicious nature of all forms of social stratification and the necessity for the development of relations of 'symmetric reciprocity'. Whereas in her work up to the 1990s this translates into a need for the 'positive' abolition of private property, with her reworking of the concept of modernity comes the notion that modernity equates to the 'flattening' of social structures and relations to the point where the only kind of hierarchy tolerated is that based on norms of merit or desert. As we noted above, a key consideration in Heller's rethinking of her position is thus her growing reluctance to think in terms of a confrontation with the logic(s) of modernity. Modernity represents – or is equivalent to – the drive towards the universalisation of the values of equality and liberty. The desire to extend and radicalise these values is one that takes place *within* liberal-democracy, the political form of the modern.

Secondly she argued for the growing displacement of a collective left radical *politics* with an individualised left radical *ethics*. The subject of political change and transformation is no longer the class or the larger aggregate subject, but the unencumbered individual. In Heller's view the macro-political aspects of left radical politics had to give way to a micro-politics of concrete activity in the everyday. The point is not to defer action for some far off point in the name of Utopia, but to bring utopia to bear in the present. Another way of

reading this transition is to say that Heller argued that in a sense the radical or revolutionary aspects of left radicalism had already been achieved with 'the democratic revolution' announced in early the early modern period (1689, 1776, 1789). Under modern conditions there are no institutional or structural obstacles to self-definition or self-advancement. Thus the point of political action is not some transcendence of the given, but its continual opening out so as to embrace greater possibility for individual and social self-definition.

Finally in her view the dichotomy between socialism – or 'left radicalism' – and capitalism has become an irrelevance. The contingency and openness of democratic procedure means that any socio-economic model can be argued for and created as long as enough fellow citizens agree with it. This in turn means that a political strategy based on the notion that such institutions and procedures should be by-passed or transcended is by definition illegitimate as well as potentially despotic. This further illustrates the importance of exemplary acts and an engagement with the 'everyday' as the terrain of left radical practice. Progressives need to show in their activity the nature of the world they wish to see created. This means displaying civic courage, solidarity with others and radical tolerance. It also means acting with others to achieve shared goals; but this is acting on the basis of alliance and affinity, not as representatives of the interests of the class or humanity or any other collective agent. To act is to take responsibility for acting which in turn can only make sense if the individual sees herself as a fully moral actor.

Heller and the problem of democracy

Looking at the above, the distance from most variants of Marxism is striking. But then Heller set little store by the appellation 'Marxist'. As we remarked above, once it became clear to her that little was to be gained by trying to rescue 'Marx' from the 'Marxists' she was quick to drop it. Heller's position is not one framed on the basis of a regret, but on the basis of perceived necessity. To be rad-

ical meant 'forgetting Marx'. But of course this gesture does not of itself ensure a radical position, and there are reasons for thinking that it does not.

Firstly, as with Laclau and Mouffe, Lyotard and others it is pivotal for everything Heller says about the nature of a progressive politics that liberal-democracy offers an open and contingent realm of possibility. Assuming liberal-democracy can be so described, then the rest of what she says in relation to the nature of progressive thought and action follows. In particular if all outcomes really are possible under democracy, then not to be 'democratic' on this reading is to show a contempt for the very values and beliefs that have animated left radicals for the past three centuries. Yet, interestingly, this description of possibility comes up against both the theory and practice of liberal-democratic politics, which is and was preoccupied with *containing* majoritarian rule. The example of the United States is perhaps instructive here. The doctrine of the separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches of government was devised to make it difficult if not impossible to advance a radical agenda. The same rationale led to the vesting of sovereignty in the Constitution rather than the People. It is not the voice of the *people* that counts in the final instance, but the voice of the *judges* who are appointed with the express purpose of 'protecting' the Constitution. We can add that the idea of federation was also designed to disperse power and by extension make it more difficult to supplant the liberal-capitalist given with an alternative social or economic logic.

Looking more closely at democratic theory the critique of representation associated with radical left thought is that the latter was designed to keep power at one remove from those being represented. As Mill himself argued in his famous *Essay on Representative Government,* the purpose of representation is not to allow people to govern, 'but to prevent them from misgoverned'.[20] It is for this reason that left radicals, not least Heller herself, have been almost unit-

[20] Mill, J. S., "Considerations on Representative Government," *Three Essays,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972. 291.

ed in voicing the complaint that representative government is elite government. Since elites do not generally act in ways detrimental to their own interests, it an be expected that any further 'expansion' of equality and liberty will be achieved on the same laborious and grudging basis as it has been to date. The idea that liberal-democracy offers a space of unlimited possibility is thus one that would come as a surprise to those who designed it, who have offered a defence of it, *as well as* those who sternly criticise it for the reason that it offers a narrowness of political choices heavily mediated by the needs and interests of elites.

Even if it is accepted that the intentions of those who created and defended earlier incarnations of liberal-democracy was to contain 'contingency' it might still be objected that contemporary democratic practice has broken out of this narrow range of possibility. Suffrage is now more or less universal, the range of interest groups is much larger and the political class is now itself more open and subject to the processes of social mobility that Heller is keen to acknowledge as the basis for her rethinking of the nature of modernity. Liberal-democracy might once have been constrained, but now it is more amenable to the views and wishes of all sections of society, offering not merely the possibility, but the prospect of meaningful change along lines associated with left radical critiques. The difficulty with such a reading is that it relies on a view of democracy that is regarded with scepticism from across the political spectrum, as well as by marginalised electorates increasingly turned off by the spectacle of party politics. As Heller herself once argued, extreme economic inequality is corrosive of democracy since it loads outcomes in favour of those with the most money to spend.[21] If money were not essential to securing votes and influencing the behaviour of the political elites then businesses and wealthy individuals would

[21] Heller, A., *Everyday Life,* London, Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. 157.; Heller, A., "On Formal Democracy," *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives,* J. Keane, London, Verso, 1988. 134–8.

keep their money to themselves instead of lavishing it on political parties and presidential campaigns. Left radical causes and groups have an in-built disadvantage in the increasing commodification of political life for the simple reason that they cannot afford to mount the kinds of expensive campaigns that pro-business parties generate. This means exclusion from debate, from the media and 'the mainstream', in turn fuelling disaffiliation and alienation from official politics.

More generally, the realities of global politics militate against regarding domestic liberal-democratic politics as a realm of 'contingency' and 'possibility' of the kind that Heller and Feher document in essays such as 'Class, modernity, democracy'. It is not just Marxists after all who complain that global capitalism is not itself constrained by global political institutions that could offer a way in which 'contingency' and 'possibility' could be made meaningful.[22] Those global institutions that do exist such as the IMF and World Bank do so expressly to advance the needs and interests of transnational capital and the Global North. They are not forums in which different models of development, different priories, different political options can be debated and enabled. Even Bill Clinton lamented the fact that their role is to enforce a particular view ('the Washington Consensus'). Any challenges to that world-view are regarded as grounds for disinvestment, the imposition of fiscal penalties and structural adjustment policies. Far from a picture of openness and possibility, global politics offers the contrary image: a closed world where a numerically small group of 'masters' dictates the contours and content of the lives of the global majority. If modernity is indeed to be equated, as Heller argues, with the displacement of hierarchy and relations of dependence, then perhaps it would be accurate to describe global politics as 'pre-modern'. Indeed so extensive are the

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[22] Held, D. and McGrew, A., *Globalization/Anti-Globalization,* Cambridge, Polity, 2002.

relations of bondage, serfdom and vassalage between North and South that it would perhaps be more accurate to describe them as 'feudal'.

So the notion that modernity equates to openness and contingency in political terms should probably be regarded as an over-stating what is certainly true: that there are greater possibilities for individual self-advancement in advanced industrial society than there were under feudal societies. But this is a long way from implying that those inspired by progressive values and ideals should confine themselves to action aimed at expanding the opportunities available within the horizon of liberal-capitalism, particularly given the growing conviction that national and sub-national politics is becoming emptied of relevance to the lives of ordinary citizens. The nation state is much less the locus of political, social and economic life than it was. The set of expectations to which Heller and other 'radical democrats' are attached thus needs to be rethought. Whether this rethinking equates to a belief in the necessity for the elaboration of global political structures or to the reining in of the operation of transnational capitalism through, for example alliances of supra-national 'blocs' such as the EU and ASEAN is a matter that need not detain us here. What we need to note is that such observations point to the crisis of state-centric normative thought that posits the nation state as the primary unit of social and political life. It is no irony to note that Marx was well aware of such developments, and indeed of the coming redundancy of the state as the site of 'justice' however defined. Marx never discusses in detail the form and nature of 'global governance', but in a sense he did not need to. The idea of communism as an internationalist movement implies that any solution to the problem of overcoming capitalism has to begin from a recognition of the international or 'global' dimension of the political, however defined. Whatever one thinks of Marx's characterisation of such a movement and the chains of causality that underpins it, his belief in the necessarily global character of the struggle between capital and labour is one that is arguably more compelling as 'globalisation' intensifies and the battle over its effects moves into 'global civil society'.

Where on the other hand, Heller might be thought to be on firmer ground is in her rejection of the teleological imperative that some have read into Marx's work in favour of one that favours the development of an ethics which can act as a guide for concerned individuals. It is a hotly debated point as to whether Marx can be said to have an ethics as such; yet the mere fact that there is a debate should alert us to what is at stake. It is not clear that Marx extolled an *ethic* of left radical practice as opposed to a notion of how changes in the material base would be reflected in openings and possibilities for the advancement of the class struggle. One of the features of life in advanced industrial society over the past thirty or more years is the ebbing of a class-based politics and thus of a politics of the kind that Marx and his followers invested in. Of course one response could be to lament the fact and urge greater efforts to generate increased class consciousness. Another response would be to develop alternative ways of seeking to develop and broaden left radical activity through engagement with progressive groups and causes in society. It is this latter kind of activism that Heller's thought has always spoken to, one based on a common concern with 'new social movements'. It is one that seeks alliances and allegiances to alleviate suffering in whatever form it takes – not just that which can be understood in terms of class oppression. It is one that starts from the humanist admonition to regard every person and their oppressions as of equal 'value'. It is one that says matters can be improved in the here-and-now, as opposed to after the much promised 'revolution'. From this point of view it is a position that emphasises that being 'active' is less about building a party which will itself take power in some moment of 'transcendence'. It means working on myriad fronts, for myriad causes with myriad groupings, individuals and organisations.

This is surely not an irrelevant characterisation of the possibilities of 'activism' given the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the struggles and oppressions extant in the contemporary world. Nor is it irrelevant for thinking about where 'democratic movements' may be taking us. Thinking about recent examples, the Seattle protests of 1999 which led many to talk about the birth of a global anti-capital-

ist or anti-corporate movement was characterised as one involving 'Turtles and Teamsters', or environmentalists and trade unionists. This was followed by other protests that gave witness to the enormous diversity of struggles in the world, as well as diverse views on what kind of world should be created. It was followed by the creation of the World Social Forum in 2001, an event that led to the proliferation of regional, national and local social forums mirroring the original in giving witness to the multiplicity of oppressions and the multiplicity of means by which they could be countered. The notion that all of this could be subsumed within an over-arching narrative of class struggle is naive, as Heller's critique implies. On the other hand, what unites these various struggles is a shared sense of the futility of working *within* existing constraints and definitions of 'possibility', highlighting the paradox of Heller's schema. Whilst the kinds of activisms her work speaks seem to be proliferating, many of those struggles are either by necessity or by design outside 'mainstream' political processes. They are DIY or unofficial responses to the lack of ways in which people can meaningfully participate and as such symptomatic of a widespread and well-documented process of disengagement from liberal-democratic politics. It is not a case of an expansion or radicalisation of liberal-democracy, but its rejection by those whose views, identities or politics are systematically or informally excluded from consideration.[23] What is noticeable is that in their practices and outlook they resemble in form and content the kinds of 'utopian' schemas documented two decades ago by Heller and Feher. They are heavily 'deliberative' in form, 'horizontal' and inclusive of many different subject and value positions. They are embryonic spaces of experimentation and creativity. They are also self-consciously 'anti-capitalist' which should not be lost sight of either. Finally, as commentators noted in the UK, social forums are full of young people attracted by a more participatory, inclusive and

[23] Tormey, S., *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide,* Oxford, Oneworld, 2004. ch. 2.

engaged form of democratic politics. By contrast liberal-democratic politics looks and feels 'old' and tired. We are losing interest, and it shows.

So Heller's response to the crisis of Marxism contains its own ambivalence. On the one hand, there is a clear sense that rejecting an historicised and deterministic Marx allowed her to develop varieties of normative theorising that were very much in keeping with what many libertarian minded Marxists thought was indispensable in Marx in the first place: a commitment to a radically participatory, democratic conception of self-management. That she had to 'leave' Marx in order to develop these interlocking visions perhaps tells us more about what 'Marxism' had become over the latter half of the twentieth century than about Heller's idiosyncrasy as a thinker. On the other hand, her work of the 1990s shows a clear determination to escape the contortions of left radical thought altogether. At one level this can be understood as a personal gesture. Heller was evidently ready in her professional life to commit to moral philosophy and ethics as opposed to *political* philosophy. But on the other it could be read as part of the 'exhaustion of utopian energies' lamented by Habermas amongst others. Yet this reading would only at best be partially accurate. More to the point Heller spotted two trends that have since been widely commented upon: the death of ideology and the post-industrial revolution. The latter in particular seemed to erase the problematic underpinning Marx's work: the growing polarisation of classes in advanced industrial society. Her resort to an ethics of responsibility was the response of someone who wished to maintain the ethical core of the left humanist position whilst acknowledging that the terrain of struggle had shifted from the collective struggles of classes to the discrete struggles of unencumbered individuals.

As seems clearer today, the bi-polar struggle has not 'disappeared', but been exported onto to the terrain of global politics, as predicted by Marx. If there was a thought here that a politics informed by crisis and the travails of the working class had become redundant then the re-emergence of industrial militancy in the global periphery and semi-periphery over the course of the 1990s was

also a valuable corrective. On the other hand, as Heller's analysis implies, Marx did not account for 'post-industrial' society at the 'core' and nor did his political strategy. Heller's response, which is to accentuate the possibility for those in wealthy countries to act, to make a difference, to suffer wrong rather than commit it, is one that should not therefore be dismissed as another form of 'resignation', but the logical working out of her own analysis of widely remarked upon trends. But such an individualised and individualistic conception of active 'citizenship' also requires a recognition that one of the struggles taking place is that over the very parameters of 'possibility' and 'contingency' itself. To struggle against 'sweatshops' is to embark on a form of 'ethical' activism to which Heller's thought clearly speaks; but it is *also* to insist that it is possible to contemplate a world without sweatshops, without exploitation, without the erasure of the dignity and respect for the individual which was once such a key refrain of Heller's own critique of liberal-capitalism. It also to struggle for *spaces* in which such resistances and oppositions can be documented, retold, analysed, and where strategies can be deliberated upon. Here of course the pertinence of social forums and the development of global civil society more generally. Here too the pertinence of Heller's 'utopian' democratic theory which spoke quite self-consciously to the desire manifested by the first wave of new social movements to have develop mechanisms of participation and 'voice'. The individualisation of political struggles documented by Heller has not in this sense lead to disengagement from collective action. Far from it: it has led to a renewed interest in developing deliberation and participation that is meaningful, which is to say, that challenges the right of elites and big business to run the world as if it was a private resource. It is an other worldly, 'utopian' politics. It is 'beautifully ridiculous'. But this, as Heller once argued, is exactly the point.

Mihály Vajda

Fragments on the Ethics of Ágnes Heller's personality

It was 1965. I stood with Ágnes in the *Wiener Kunsthistorisches Museum,* in front of Vermeer's *The Painter at his Work.* Ágnes – as was her custom – began to interpret the painting. What is the meaning of this work of art?

> The painter treats his model as means, he "uses" her as means. Does he have the right for this? Of course not, because nobody has the right to consider any other person as means, not as an end. That man, however, who has chosen himself as an artist under the category of difference, cannot help acting like this after all. And if he realizes himself as an artist, if he attains his own art, if he presents mankind with his singular, unrepeatable art...

I do not remember how she finished the sentence-which, of course, did not sound exactly like this, hence Ágnes had not worked out her ethics of personality yet, even if its basic idea was already born-and I still do not know how it has to be finished. ...he will be forgiven? ...he will be treated as an exception, he will be exempted from the categorical imperative that is binding on every other human being? ...he will not be judged by the same ethical standards? Today I feel that Ágnes was thinking on our master, György Lukács. I do not know whether she has ever asked herself the question: has Lukács chosen himself, under the category of the universal, as a decent (good?) man? I think she did not. I think it was evident for her that the answer must be "yes", and it was evident for her that

Lukács had accomplished an existential leap, chosen himself under the category of difference, chosen himself as a philosopher. But at that time, in spite of his titanic life-work, Ágnes was not sure that Lukács had been able to realize himself as a philosopher, that he had not ceased to be a philosopher when he set himself the "philosophical" task to overcome the age of ultimate sinfulness by any available means-which included, as the only possible way for him, serving the communist movement. Did not he become hereby a fallen existence? On the one hand, he who fails to fulfil his existential choice, made under the category of difference, becomes a fallen existence. And the choice of Lukács was not instrumental in overcoming the age of sinfulness, the age of nihilism. It was just the opposite... On the other hand, he was clear that his lifelong "tactical" choice has nothing to do with morality. He thought, similarly to Hebbel's *Judith,* that if God has placed sin between him and the act inflicted upon him, then he does not have the right *not* to commit that sin. He knew very well that he will commit a variety of sins and, what is more, he regarded sin as a measure of the rightness of his choice. It will show the rightness of his choice-as he put it in his *Taktika és etika (Tactics and Ethics),* with reference to Boris Savinkov-if he sacrifices his purity, his morals and his soul to mankind. But what will happen if his choice turns out to be radically wrong in terms of tactical ends? I think it is no exaggeration to say that in front of Vermeer's painting all those problems were conceived by Ágnes which have been formulated and investigated later in her *An Ethics of Personality.*

I am perfectly sure that Ágnes was always concerned about the risk of existential leap accomplished under the category of difference. But it does not contradict the statement she made in the "interview-novel" *Biciklizű majom (Cycling Monkey),* and that she formulated for the first time thirty years after the above dialogue, in another museum. In the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington she realized that she had been dealing with questions of ethics and the philosophy of history all in her life because she wanted to understand Auschwitz and the Gulag.

> Why did I leave what really interested me? Beauty, poems, secrets of the starry heaven? The question of the existence of God? Since these interested me permanently until I became fifteen. Why did I always return maniacally to the philosophy of morals and to the philosophy of history? Why did I want to build a whole world? Because I felt that I had obligations. Obligations towards the dead-my dead. Towards the victims of the modern world; first of all towards those who died in Auschwitz, but also towards those who died in the Gulag.

* * *

And now another leap-back in time. Once upon a time I took a course in general ethics, and another one in the ethics of existentialism, both conducted by Ágnes. The former was later published as *A szándéktól a következményig (From Intention to Consequences).* I was very fond of these lectures; I was fascinated by her knowledge, her overview on connections, her highly committed manner. And, of course, it was not a subordinate circumstance that she knew and tried to understand things which just a few wanted to know and understand in those times. As she writes in *Bicikliző majom,* “At that time there were no lectures on contemporary philosophy, or if there were, their only aim was to criticize imperialistic philosophy”. Heller's lectures have a significant role in that the questions of philosophy or, more precisely, putting of questions in a philosophical way did not leave me alone anymore. But curiously enough one thing never came to my mind, namely, to deal with the problems of ethics. If I ask myself the banal question, “Why?”, I will have many answers, but one of the main reasons is certainly the following: at that time I thought [that] all the problems belonging to this field had their own places in the well-considered scheme of Heller's general ethics, so there was nothing left to think about them. The author herself also seemed to think like this for a long time, and maybe she still does. Again I quote from *Bicikliző majom:* “My ethical lecture notes which were written after that [after the Hungarian revolution in 1956] are almost exactly the same as *General Ethics* that I wrote in Australia, and that had recently been published. They have different language but similar line of thought.”

My final engagement towards philosophy, however, was motivated not only by the personality of Ágnes as a philosopher, but also by a particular piece of advice or suggestion of hers. During her course on existentialist ethics, the name of Edmund Husserl was mentioned several times, because two of the three protagonists (Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre) regarded him as an intellectual father figure. But the relation between Husserl and existentialism-as she remarks in *Bicikliző majom:* “I presented Heidegger as an existentialist”-was not perfectly clear, even for Ágnes. What did these thinkers, so deeply engaged in revealing the secrets of human existence, find advisable in the thought of Husserl who chopped thinking off not only from any particular human existence, but from man as such, indeed from any possible rational being? I think this question motivated Ágnes when she suggested that I should study the work of Husserl. I took her advice. And, in spite of the fact that I found Husserl dry, indigestible and unchewable, I could not spit him out. He keeps me confined even today: in the past two years I have carried out a research programme with Ágnes and other friends of mine under the title *Husserl's Philosophy and the Continuation of Phenomenological Thought in the 20th Century,* in the scope of which she made a new attempt to understand the relation between Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre.

However, as I have already mentioned, I really closed the file of general ethics and that of the theory of morals as such. It is possible that it happened because I felt that the most essential problem remained unsolved, or, what is more, suppressed. This is shown by the very fact that in the second half of the seventies I initiated a debate with Ágnes on the basis of ethics. We disputed in writing. I wrote something, she answered me, and I made answer to her reply. Today the whole thing reminds me of the children's game in which the first child writes something on a piece of paper, folds it back, and then the second child-who cannot see what is already written on it-writes something else, and folds it back, and so on. In the end they unfold the paper, read the whole text, and laugh together at its fuzziness. I also wrote many fuzzy things. Ágnes was the one who put them in their correct places. But I have to relate that twenty years later, when I

found the text in my closet and I published it in the Hungarian periodical *Gond,* I still had the impression that finally Ágnes had circumvented the question which I formulated in the light of her replies as follows:

> What is the confident superiority of morals based on, that goes with the rejection of "inferior" motives, even in a world-and, apart from the world of organic communities, every world seems to be like this-in which the particular decisions made by human beings have different sources, rather than ethical ones? Why are the "men of morals" entitled to regard their own aristocratism as the one and only real democratic conduct?

There is no denying that the question, in this form, is a bit fuzzy. But I do remember what my point was. If there is no God, if tradition has lost its significance, then what might induce anyone to choose Good, even *against his interests?* What might induce anyone to be convinced that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice? The only possible answer is: here I stand and cannot do otherwise. But if I stand here because I cannot do otherwise, because I am not able to act differently, then how could I vindicate my motives representing something noble, something universal in contrast to the particular motives of others?

So that was my point. But when I asked this from Ágnes, my aim was not to get an answer. I did not even hope that she would be able to answer it. I thought that the question was unanswerable. This fact, in my view, did not involve the one standing there because being unable to do otherwise being "mistaken". It did not involve their "not having the right" to hold others in contempt. The unanswerability of the question, however, did involve somebody standing there because they cannot do otherwise, holding others in contempt (or, oppositely, holding them tight!) being obliged to take full responsibility-in the absence of God-for his or her ungodly stubbornness. There is no general ethics aimed at understanding what morality is and how it works that might prevent being ridiculous while one is working on self-

deceptive moral theories. In my ungodly stubbornness I did not realize for a long time that she was simply sitting there, writing her general ethics and philosophy of morals because she could not do otherwise, even if she knew that the whole building of ethics would necessarily collapse when the third story, the ethics of personality, was erected on the former two. I came to know this only when I read, as is right and proper both for professional and for amicable reasons, all the three volumes of Ágnes Heller's trilogy, *A Theory of Morals.* I was urged to do this not only by the recent anniversary, but also because of Heller's *An Ethics of Personality,* the reading of which had given me great pleasure earlier.

The third part of Heller's moral theory also consists of three parts. The first one is composed of five lectures which represent, as it follows as a matter of course, the point of view of the author herself. There is no place for incognito here; this part, however, does not explicate all questions of the ethics of personality (if there are such things as questions of the ethics of personality at all-I will come back to that later) which are, according to the author, worthy of consideration. These lectures deal with Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral,* which Heller regards as Nietzsche's ethics of personality, written-in the form of an opera-as an answer to Wagner's *Parsifal.* Their title is *Nietzsche and Parsifal.* This part of *An Ethics of Personality* (EP) was completed before the other two. By the time I was reading the second and the third parts, the lectures contained by the first had already been published in Hungarian. Nonetheless I could not become acquainted with the ethics of Ágnes Heller's personality through them. The lectures present the ethics of Nietzsche's personality in the light of certain doubts raised by Heller. "There is no ethics of personality-there is no such ethics; [...] [b]ut [...] you will see his ethics of personality." "It is impossible to write a treatise on the ethics of personality. One must illustrate it in order to speak about it. Or rather, one must take a paradigmatic case, a single person, a single life to exemplify its essence and its meaning." (EP, 251. and 11.) Then I read the other two parts, *Vera, or Is an Ethics of Personality Possible? and Letters Concerning Moral Aesthetics: On the Beautiful and Sublime*

Character, on Happiness and Love. The second part is a debate on the question posed by the title, with three participants: the Kantian Joachim, the Nietzschean Lawrence-both from the audience of the lectures on Nietzsche-and Vera, a new incognito of Soren Kierkegaard, created by Heller. And finally, the third part is a correspondence between Fifi, a colleague of Lawrence, who is a naive alter ego of the young Heller, and her grandmother Sophie Meller, a retired teacher. Ágnes's grandmother was indeed called Sophie Meller, and her way of thinking was said to be exactly the same as that of the fictional writer of the letters. Heller's book is a tribute to *her* ethics of personality. (Yes, she had such, even if she felt very suspicious about the ethics of personality as a theoretical stance.)

The book, with its tripartite structure, is an excellent piece of reading, and I found so much pleasure in it because it did not want to teach me anything. When a character in this philosophical novel wanted to convince me of something, there was another one who refuted her arguments, while a third was watching both of them and their dogmatic na?veté with an indulgent smile on her face. If there was a moral in the story, it would be the following: it is only you who can find out how to be a decent person-if you would like to be one at all. You might choose material values, you might obey the categorical imperative, you might try to live up to others' expectations, or you might simply choose a star and follow it. But beware! If you have chosen yourself as a decent person and you fail to be one, then you will be fallen for a lifetime. But this is not sure either. Granny-only her? or Heller, too?-allows you to try it again.

When I was reading the book with aesthetical and intellectual enjoyment-as I have mentioned earlier, I first read the lectures, and one or two years later the other two parts-the question concerning the relation of *An Ethics of Personality* and the first two parts of moral theory had not yet emerged. I was not concerned about the architecture of the building of moral theory, maybe because I was simply looking for pleasure; maybe because I did not want to be a spoilsport. If *An Ethics of Personality* as a work of art is so fascinating, and I have no aversions to its contents, then why should I deal with the

question of the theory of morals as a whole? To be honest, I was not only unable to treat *An Ethics of Personality* as the third aspect of a complete moral theory, but I was perfectly sure that *An Ethics of Personality* is definitely incompatible with the other two parts of the trilogy-with *General Ethics* (GE) and, in particular, *A Philosophy of Morals.* The introduction to *General Ethics,* the title of which is *The Three Aspects of a Theory of Morals,* begins with the following words:

> Moral philosophy has always involved three aspects. The first can be termed *interpretative,* the second *normative,* and the third *educational/self-educational* or *therapeutic.* The interpretative aspect attempts to answer the question of what comprises morals, the normative aspect attempts to answer the question of what people should do, and the educational or therapeutic aspect attempts to answer, on the one hand, the question of how the innate propensities of people can be moulded to enable them to live up to moral expectations, and, on the other hand, the question of how a way of life conforming with the standards of goodness can be secured against the threat of misery and unhappiness. (GE, 1.)

Does it mean that the third aspect should be *An Ethics of Personality?* I could not even find any similarities between the aim and its achievement. Perhaps I was not careful enough when I was reading the first part of the book, *Nietzsche and Parsifal.* Since here-and, as far as I know, only here-Heller declares that the choice of decency (or good) is not the choice of our particular individuality, but the choice of the individual *as such,* so the choice of decency (or good) is impossible on the grounds of any ethics of personality. I skipped this because I took it for granted. But the case soon became slightly complicated. The author or "teacher" takes a backseat; the creative tension that is characteristic of *An Ethics of Personality* stemmed from the fact that all of its protagonists (Nietzsche and Parsifal included) have their own point of view or, more precisely,

their own ethics of personality. And it follows from this that we cannot speak about *the* ethics of personality as a theoretical discipline, either about Heller's ethics of personality; thus the question concerning the compatibility of the philosophy of morals and the ethics of personality loses its significance.

As I have mentioned before, I read the different parts of *An Ethics of Personality* at different times, and so I did not read the introduction of the whole that-as I suppose-was written by Ágnes afterwards, when she had finished all the three parts. Here the author of the book lets us know that when she published the second volume of the trilogy, *A Theory of Morals,* she wanted to start working on the third one, namely on *A Theory of Proper Conduct,* “but this time - unexpectedly - the subject matter itself began to resist my efforts. It was if the 'spirit of our age' spoke to me and warned me against deadly dangers such as being untimely, too rhetorical, boring, and what is worst, assuming the authority of a judge without having been authorized.” (EP, 1–2.) So she left the field of ethics for a while, revised her own philosophical ideas, and wrote *Philosophy of History in Fragments* with the following result:

> I came to the conclusion that, although there is nothing essentially wrong with my preliminary ideas concerning the essential message of the third volume, there is a serious problem with the genre. [...] In order to remain true to the message, I had to seek new forms of communication. I re-baptized the third volume *An Ethics of Personality.* [...] *An Ethics of Personality* is the third volume of my theory of morals. It does not invalidate the first two volumes, but reinforces them in its own way. (EP, 2.)

Well, I see it differently. I am sure that Ágnes wrote the third volume not only in a different manner, but she wrote *something different.* She did not write a theory of proper conduct. She realized that she should not be a judge without having been authorized. That means we have to face two separate conceptions of morals rather than two com-

plementary ones. “Moral philosophy and the ethics of personality never meet, they can never fight an ultimate struggle, for they do not enter the same ring, they do not play the same game.” (EP, 21.)

* * *

> I wanted to understand Auschwitz and the Gulag. The result is that I could not understand them because they *cannot be* understood. But there are certain things that *can be* understood: the circumstances which rendered them possible. One can understand *something,* even if the phenomenon as a whole is impossible to understand. And I try to share with others what I was able to understand on my part. *(Bicikliző majom)*

Should I make out of this Heller's answers to my unanswered questions? What can be understood? The circumstances. Modernity. It is not accidental that paying the debt always meant to Ágnes not only the practice of ethics, but also that of philosophy of history. And what is more, she still feels herself a debtor who owes a theory of modernity that she has to write. What cannot be understood? It cannot be understood that there are some people who undertake the “leap”, who choose themselves as decent (good) persons under the category of the universal, who think that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice; there are people of *amor fati,* and there are others who do not undertake the leap, who are out of morality-”one-dimensional” persons. And it cannot be understood that among those who convert their contingency, their contingent conditions to their own fate, there are some people who choose themselves as evil. If this cannot be understood, then we certainly will not have any guarantee against the recurrence of persons who incarnate evil. And if new Hitlers and Stalins might occur, who, similarly to Richard III, will choose themselves as evil, then there will be only one possibility left to evade Auschwitz and the Gulag: we have to create circumstances under which only evil will follow evil, but it is not in the interest of the lukewarm who will be spat out by God-since this lukewarm majority is said to be following only its own interests. But if I try to explain to them what is decent and what is not, nothing will happen.

So what we cannot understand is why some people are decent while others are not-and this incomprehensibility is independent of our anthropological point of view. Because no matter how we think about human nature-is it bad? neutral? or maybe good?-it will not explain the difference. If our nature is bad, why are there any good people (how they are possible, as Ágnes asks)? If it were neutral, then we should become good under good circumstances and bad under bad circumstances (under "the threat of misery and unhappiness"), which often seems not to be true. If it is good-if our nature is good-why are there bad people, why are there evil ones among us? (It is relatively easy to reply to this last question-let us consider the answer of the Enlightenment. This answer, however, seems to be hopelessly naive in the light of Auschwitz and the Gulag.) But all of these cannot be understood: we understand only that morality rests on a foundation that *does not reveal itself* to us. Does Being withdraw itself from us?

* * *

So the ethics of personality is not another side of a theory of morals, but *another kind* of ethics. It is the ethics of those who would like to find the source of morality in the choice of themselves, rather than in a relatively successful individual conforming to conventions confirmed by God or tradition. In an age of modernity proper conduct is possible much rather on the grounds of the former, because God has been killed by us and traditions do not exist anymore.

> The traditional ethics of personality [...] begins with the experience of contingency. Influenced by the once proud dream of the deification of man, it gambles on the single individual as the sole and complete carrier of ethics. Ethics of personality is, in this sense, an ethics without norms, rules, ideas, without anything that is, or remains, merely 'external' to the person. There are as many ethics of personality, as many authors [...]. But three types of approach can still be distinguished. The first assumes the universal viability of an ethics of personality. If only all external constraints put on the single individual were removed, every human person would be fully moral on his or

> her own way, and each and every individual would become many sided, universally developed personality. The classicistic ideal is based on this optimistic version of an ethics of personality. The second type (of an ethics of personality) does not doubt that external constraints must remain in place for the common man, but puts it money on the exceptional specimen of the human species: the exceptional person will be perfect in his or her own way and also absolutely free. No one else is worthy of theoretical interest. The third type encompasses philosophers who do not share even the limited illusions concerning an ethical elite, and also those who disapprove of such an approach. (EP, 3.)

Heller's ethics of personality, considering that she cured herself of the optimism of classicism-in her book on the ordinary life she had formulated the Goethean thesis that every human being has the opportunity to form itself to an autonomous personality-must belong to the second or the third type. She cannot accept, however, the third one, which could be illustrated by the standpoint of Jacques Derrida. She cannot accept it because it leaves the ordinary people out of ethical consideration. Ágnes insists on the importance of the philosophy of morals that serves the purpose of the Wittgensteinian ladder-or rather she prefers the metaphor of the "crutch"-in the life of those who are not depositaries of the ethics of personality. Because even if they have chosen themselves as decent persons (which they already were), consequently they know that there is good and evil, and that a decent man gives preference in every situation to the urge of morality instead of other ones, in the lack of such a crutch they will often fail to decide what is the appropriate reaction in a particular situation. So they are opposites of the protagonist of the novel by *Péter Nádas, Emlékiratok könyve (Book of Memoirs),* who is maybe not quite decent, but who actually does not fail to choose himself. "I realized that I can be foolish, clumsy, sneaking, hideous, cruel, flattering, intriguer or anything that is aesthetically, intellectually or ethically inferior, if I compensate my aesthetical, intellectual or ethical inferiority, my inclination to

spiritual crime with the firm conviction that my senses are uncheatable and incorruptible, that I can feel first and know after that, because I am not a coward like those who want to know first and after that they allow themselves to feel according to the actual rules, so I am able to distinguish unappealingly good from evil and right from wrong, because my moral sense is not the constraint of knowledge that is floating independently of feelings." Does it mean that moral philosophy is for those who are under the constraint of knowledge that is floating independently of feelings?

* * *

Heller draws the conclusion from the ultimate failure of the "Anti-Parsifal", that is, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* that even Nietzsche was embarrassed by the exclusive inner command, "Be yourself!" or "Choose yourself!". That even Nietzsche was compelled to supply the formal inner command, "Be yourself!" with the requirement of certain material values. And when he did that, he lost his game against Parsifal, although the values supported by him were not the traditional Jewish-Christian values of European culture. It is beside the point whether Heller is right concerning the relation of Nietzsche and Parsifal. What we have to see is that autonomy as an exclusive value can be promoted only one way that is consistent and free from compromise: if we point to the one who incarnates it, without any further commentary. If we tell the story of her life. It is because if we keep repeating the command, "Be yourself!" or "Choose yourself!", then we will restrict the autonomy of others in an inadmissible way.

But that is not the only point. The exclusive command of Nietzschean ethics of personality is "Be yourself!", but it also means "Choose yourself!": choose yourself along with your values, sins and "aesthetical, intellectual or ethical" inferiorities, so along with all that would seem inferior from the point of view of the actual, "valid" hierarchy of values; and if you undertake them as your own, then all of these will not count as moral faults because you make yourself independent of the authority of any actual hierarchy of values. Your values are nobler merely because you accept responsibility for them and say, "What I am is good." Undertake that yourself, and do not shift the

responsibility to someone else for what you think and what you choose-for your own values. If you want to know before you start to feel-to feel according to the actual rules-and if you are not able to distinguish unappealingly good from bad and right from wrong, then you are a slave, a man of *resentment.* So I think that even if Nietzsche bows to Parsifal, he does it only because the source of Parsifal's Christian sentiments can be found in his personality, rather than in conforming to the prescribed morality.

And Ágnes also thinks that.

* * *

Now I shall try to reformulate my misgivings towards Heller's theory of morals. I agree that the ethics of personality does not have real alternatives today; the morality that was based on the presence of God and the unquestioned validity of tradition has become hopelessly empty. If we accept, however, that “morality must be saved after the death of God”, its only way will be the ethics of personality. I also agree with Ágnes that the majority of people cannot be depositary of the ethics of personality. And it is true not only to the mob that indulges its *resentment,* but also to the real majority the members of which are perfectly sure that there is good and bad, and also what would count as such in the light of the traditional morality; and they are likely to choose good in every situation, *if its price is not too high.* They are the ones for whom tradition is still alive. But they do not want to pay too much for the choice of good: “Why should I be good, against my interests, while evil succeeds?” As I have mentioned before, Ágnes also condemns the classicistic approach of ethics of personality as illusory: “If we removed every constraint that presses human beings, then all of them would become a versatile, universal personality in their own way.” But why do we have to refuse the third, or-if my interpretation is correct-Nietzschean approach? Because of Auschwitz and the Gulag? Is it not an illusion to think that we can stop the spread of nihilism with some moral preaching? Is not “I wash my hands” the cowardly standpoint, if we try to say anything to “them”, to the “one-dimensionals”, to those who are out of morality? Suppose that it is not. But in this case we also have to suppose that “the excep-

tional specimens of the human race" want to make Auschwitz and the Gulag impossible by their conduct, by their being in the world, because for them these are the scandal of mankind-and they are not the ones who just *want them to come true!* Since the men of the ethics of personality can realize themselves as evil, too. Do they have the right to accept after all, in a manner that combines aristocratism with disdainful democratism, that the conduct of the so-called intellectual elite represented by them cannot serve as a model to others? If we do not have the power to keep a tight rein on the mob-because there is no Gulag and Auschwitz without a mob that the evil ones rely on, without a mob that is other-directed-then...

> Man muss geübt sein, auf Bergen zu leben - das erbärmliche Zeitgeschwätz von Politik und Völker-Selbstsucht *unter* sich zu sehen. Man muss gleichgültig geworden sein, man muss nie fragen, ob die Wahrheit nützt, ob sie Einem Verhängniss wird …(Nietzsche, Antichrist)

* * *

I also become embarrassed by such a consistent imitation of Nietzsche. Even the most autonomous person, as long as he or she is a mortal human being rather than an immortal God, owes a debt of responsibility to someone. The only question is, to whom? To himself? to herself? That cannot be the source of responsibility in the world; I can owe a debt of responsibility to myself only if it is founded on my responsibility towards others. The *solus ipse* cannot be a responsible being. Then to whom? To God? To other people? But where is that God? Who are those people?

> "[A] crime can only be a crime if it is viewed as such. So *who* defines actions as crimes, if the people who commit them do not view them as such because they have no yardsticks for distinguishing good from evil? Who provides this yardstick? What kind of yardstick is it? If God is the provider of such yardsticks, then in our age they cannot exist because God is now forsaken. Well, is the yardstick that of our predecessors,

> as Balzac believed? Or is it the yardstick of those contemporaries who do not participate in collective crimes? Or is it the yardstick of our successors? Or of each and every matter just mentioned?" (GE, 79.)

asks Heller in *General Ethics,* and she replies in *An Ethics of Personality,* "There is no morality, absolutely none, without the passionate acknowledgment that there is something (or someone) that is, or that stands above, every single man" (EP, 91.). Is it sure? Do I have to acknowledge passionately that there is something (or someone) that stands above *all single man?* Even above those individuals who lack morality? If I have a sense of responsibility, if I am able to distinguish unappealingly good from evil and right from wrong, then I will have to acknowledge that... What? That there is something above me? Or that there is something inside me? And that there is another thing inside me that might be able to resist the former one? "The starry heaven above me, and the moral law within me." And Nietzsche is not constrained to lay his arms before Kant, since we cannot be so naive anymore, and we cannot believe - because *there was* an Auschwitz and *there was* a Gulag - that this something (or someone) stands *above* all single men, even the man of the mob and the evil. But I do acknowledge that this can be present, or, what is more, it *is* present in those individuals who are simply other-directed.

Regarding this, there is no need for the passionate tone common in most ethical theories. There is no need to believe in "leaps" and existential choices, and there is no need to think that the man of the ethics of personality must be an exceptional specimen.

Those who are aware of that moral law have inside them a... I do not know what exactly they do have inside. At the end of her lectures on Nietzsche, Heller speaks about *Mitleid,* which she translates as "sympathy" or "empathy", and she emphasizes that it is not "pity". But I think this is too general, it reminds me after all of the Nietzschean *tartufferie;* I do not believe that this "something" inside me (strange though it may appear, but I do not have the right to speak about anybody but myself, since I have denied that there is something

above all of us-I can only infer to the similarity of others) makes me able to sympathize with all of the sufferer-I feel only pity for them. Shall we call it “love”? Yes, I know that even Eichmann loved his family. Why not call it simply “goodness”? Because not every decent man is possessed of goodness. Sympathy, empathy, love, goodness, decency-it is one of them. But it is not evident that there should be something common in those who are not evil and do not belong to the mob, whether they are autonomous or other-directed.

Maybe Sophie Meller thinks like this, too. She also has certain doubts concerning the overstrained thinking of Kant, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, which is-why should I deny it?-the main source of the excitement and beauty of modern philosophy. So it is not accidental that Granny stresses she is not a philosopher. And that she says, “Before one loses oneself entirely one always has the chance to regain oneself. And I think that one can lose oneself entirely only in the moment of one's death.” (EP, 267.)

English translation György Pápay and Andrew Clifford Rouse

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Photo by István Vajai

Agnes Heller

Born 1929 in Budapest. A survivor of the Holocaust, she lost most of her family who perished in various concentration camps. Student of Georg Lukacs since 1947, later his Ph.D, student and assistant professor in his department. First editor of the postwar Hungarian Philosophical Journal (1955-56). Dismissed from academic position together with G. Lukacs for political reasons after the Hungarian Revolution. Several years spent in grammar school teaching and banned from all publications. In 1968, protested against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which renewed political and police harassment. In 1973, on special decision of party authorities, all academic positions lost again. "Politically unemployed" translator between 1973-1977. In 1977, emigrated to Australia. Since the great change of 1989, she now spends half of the year in her native Hungary where she has been elected to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. She was awarded the Szechenyi National Prize in Hungary and the Hannah Arendt Prize in Bremen, both in 1995, and she received honorary degrees from La Trobe University in Melbourne 1996 and the University of Buenos Aires in 1997. In 2006 she was recipient of the danish Sonning price.

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