Towards a Democratic Liberatory Ethics: A restatement[1]

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In this article, I will try, first, to critically assess the approaches to liberatory ethics particularly those developed in early modernity, which aimed at deriving an "objectively" grounded liberatory ethics, second, to explore the reasons why today's liberatory ethics should avoid both the Scylla of "objective" ethics as well as the Charybdis of irrationalist ethics or unbounded moral relativism and, finally, to show that a democratic liberatory ethics, which could only be derived through a process of democratic rationalism, should necessarily express those moral values which are intrinsically compatible to the democratic institutions themselves.

Introduction: What is liberatory ethics?

A good starting point in discussing liberatory ethics is to attempt to define it. We may define liberatory ethics as those approaches to ethics[2] proposed by radical theorists of the "antisystemic" Left,[3] which aim to assess —from a radical viewpoint explicitly challenging the present form of socio-economic organisation based on the market economy and representative "democracy"— the ethics of various societies in the past and present and suggest the normative ethics of a future liberatory society. As such, liberatory ethics is a branch of moral philosophy, an alternative ethics to "orthodox" moral philosophy, i.e. those approaches to ethics proposed by theorists who, explicitly or implicitly, take for granted the socio-economic system and the set of values justifying it.

But, before we begin our investigation on the various approaches to liberatory ethics it may be useful to see the main divisions within this field. As it is well known, the central issue around which all of Western ethics has revolved since classical Greek times is the one arising out of the debate between ethical relativism and ethical objectivism. The former was adopted by the Sophists, who based their philosophy on the principle that goodness and justice are relative to the customs of each society, if not merely a disguise for the interests of the stronger. On the other hand, the main proponent of the latter was, Plato, who adopted a stand, according to which it was possible to know an objective form or idea of goodness.

A similar division exists today, not just among "orthodox" moral philosophers, but also among supporters of liberatory ethics. Thus, the main division in liberatory ethics is the one between what we may call "objective liberatory ethics" and the various forms of liberatory ethical relativism. The former is that type of "objectively" grounded liberatory ethics, which proposes a set of ethical values on the basis of an assumed social evolution that is supposedly the outcome of a historical process (Marxist ethics) or, alternatively, of a process of natural

evolution (Kropotkin, Bookchin et al). The latter is the type of liberatory ethics that has been developed in the aftermath of the serious crisis of "objective" ethics that was marked by the rise of postmodernism.[4]

It should be made clear however that I do not classify under liberatory ethics the ethics proposed by communitarians like Etzioni[5], as well as postmodern ethics, Habermas' "communicative ethics," Rawls' theory of justice, and environmental ethics. The reason for this exclusion is that none of these approaches might be characterised, on the basis of the definition given above, as liberatory ethics, since all of them take for granted the present socio-economic system. On the other hand, the approach to ethics that is implied by the approach developed here, does meet the criteria set by the above definition of liberatory ethics, as it explicitly challenges the present socio-economic framework. Furthermore, this approach may be seen as an alternative to the "objective" type of liberatory ethics that was developed in the past, or today (e. g. Bookchin[6]), whilst at the same time it does not fall to the usual traps of the present era: the unbounded moral relativism of postmodern ethics and the various forms of irrationalist ethics —either the latter is based on traditional religions or on the various forms of rampant spiritualism.

In the next section, I will assess the "objective" approaches to liberatory ethics, with particular reference to the Marxist and the libertarian approaches. Then, I will examine the present crisis of "objective" ethics with particular reference to the criticisms raised against it by postmodernists and Castoriadis. Finally, in the last part, I will attempt to outline a democratic ethics based on the Inclusive Democracy project (ID).

1. "Objective" approaches to liberatory ethics

"Objective" liberatory ethics emerged in the nineteenth century as an alternative to the orthodox Enlightenment ethics, which had become the dominant ethics in the West after the decline of the religion-based ethics of the precapitalist era. The common characteristic of the approaches that we may classify under this heading is that they are all based on the hypothesis of some kind of social evolution that is either determined by the historical process (Marxists) or the process of natural evolution (Kropotkin, Bookchin et al). Although they all agree that the content of ethics, i.e. ethical judgments, change through definite causes in historical development, they also insist that the only sound basis for analysing the evolution of ethics can be found in scientific analyses of nature, man, and his social relations. As both Marxists and anarchists maintain, it is only in the historical or natural process respectively, that the unity of ethical judgments and "objective/scientific" analyses can be found.

The Marxist approach to liberatory ethics: one-dimensional ethical relativism

Marx, Engels, and Lenin wrote little that could constitute a theory of liberatory ethics, particularly as regards its normative aspects, i.e. the ethics of a future society. Marxists in general concentrated on what we may call "positive ethics," i.e. the ethics of present/past societies and its evolution, rather than on the ethics of a future society. It was this fact that created the impression that Marxism has no ethics —an impression that was reinforced by some of Lenin's statements. Thus, just a few years after the 1917 revolution, Lenin stressed that:[7]

> We repudiate all morality derived from non-human and non-class concepts (…) We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat (…) We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all labouring people around the proletariat, which is creating a new, communist society. Communist morality is the morality which serves this struggle, which unites the toilers against all exploitation, against all small property.

As is clear from the above statement, Lenin was in fact adopting what some describe as "pragmatic expediency,"[8] i.e. a cynical view of morality according to which the end justifies the means, at least as far as the period before the establishment of a communist society is concerned. With regards to the ethics of the communist society, the Marxist hints about the form that a future liberatory society will take (after the transitional stage of a socialist society) , pointed towards a society which differed little, as regards its main elements, from the kind of society described by utopian socialists, anarcho-communists and others. In a nutshell, the communist society was described by the motto "From each according to capacity, to each according to need." This implied a post-scarcity society of abundance in which all goods would be distributed on the basis of need rather than of endeavour. The ethics of such a society were indirectly described by the concept of "communist man," which was shared by all these visions. This concept embraces qualities like willingness to work without economic compulsion, ability to place the public welfare ahead of limited individual interests, respect for the producers and the products of labour, solidarity, the endeavour to develop one's talents and capacities to their fullest not for personal satisfaction or prestige but as a means of advancing the material and cultural well-being of society as a whole etc

It is therefore important to consider the Marxist contribution to positive ethics since this could provide, even indirectly, useful clues about their views on liberatory ethics in general. Particularly so when one takes into account that the Marxist attempt to convert the liberatory project into a "scientific" one, i.e. to move from utopian socialism to "scientific" socialism, was in fact a (false) attempt to hide their moral choices about future society under a respectable "scientific" cover —particularly needed in the first phase of modernity (nineteenth century) when scientism was dominant.[9]

Marxists correctly stressed the historical nature of ethics and rejected any idea of eternal ethics, or immutable moral laws, emphasising instead that the content of ethics crucially depends on time, i.e. on the concrete form of society at a particular moment in history which, in turn, is determined by the prevalent mode of production. Hence, a feudal ethics, corresponding to the feudal mode of production, preceded the bourgeois ethics of capitalism, which however gave rise to proletarian ethics, vividly described by Engels.[10] As the same author points out, capitalist ethics, like that of all other ruling classes, necessarily identifies its class interest with universal good whereas, in fact, all ethical notions and systems have a specific historical origin and are relative to particular forms of society.

However, the ethical relativism adopted by Marxists extended only to the time dimension and always in relation to the economic concept of the mode of production, so that they could accommodate their "scientific" view of History with their analysis of ethics and its evolution. Communist ethics, for Marxists, is the highest pos-sible ethics at the present period of

historical development because it represents the needs and interests of that particular class, which in a capitalist society —as Historical Materialism maintains— can alone raise society to a higher level, through the elimination of capitalist exploitation and the release of the forces of production from the fetters capitalist relations impose upon them.

The inevitable result of the one-dimensional ethical relativism adopted by Marxists was a one-dimensional analysis of ethics, which did not take into account the crucial significance of non-economic factors in the determination of culture and —indirectly— of ethics. This was particularly significant with respect to historical analyses of pre-capitalist societies in which the economic element was not the dominant element in their organisation and therefore political, or even pure ideological factors like religion played a much more important role than economic factors in conditioning social organisation, culture and ethics. The limited nature of Marxist ethical relativism becomes evident, for instance, when one attempts a comparison of cultural differences in today's societies. Thus, Engels's stand that "in similar or approximately similar stages of economic develop-ment moral theories must of necessity be more or less in agree-ment"[11] could hardly explain for example the tremendous variations in ethical rules concerning e.g. the relations between sexes in countries at similar economic development but with very different cultures and ethical structures (for example, Saudi Arabia and Brazil).

One important element of Marxist ethics, which is common in all types of "objective" ethics, including the anarchist ethics of Kropotkin and Bookchin, is the idea of ethical Progress i.e. of an evolution towards moral "improvement" (in terms of mutuality, solidarity and self-government) that supposedly corresponds to some kind of social or natural evolution. Thus, Engels refers to the evolution of the idea of equality over time and mentions the recognition of equal rights to all citizens in ancient Greece (excluding foreigners, women and slaves), which led to the present formal equality of political rights for all in bourgeois society and, at the same time, to the proletarian demand for an inclusive equality that would extend to the social and economic sphere, i.e. to equality that would imply the very abolition of classes.[12] For Marxists, therefore, as Engels put it clearly, "the idea of equality, both in its bourgeois and in its proletarian form, is itself a historical product, the creation of which required definite historical conditions which in turn themselves presuppose a long historical development. It is therefore anything but an eternal truth".[13]

Similarly, as regards the future liberatory society, Marxists have no doubt about the role of historical evolution. Thus, Engels writes that "only conscious organisation of social production (…) can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world as regards the social aspect, in the same way that production in general has done this for men in their aspect as species. Historical evolution makes such an organisation daily more indispensable, but also with every day more possible. From it will date a new epoch of history".[14] Freedom is "necessarily a product of historical develop-ment" and "each step forward in civilization was a step towards freedom,"[15] (for which Marxists, like socialists and most anarchists, and unlike liberals and individualistic libertarians, adopted a positive conception[16]).

However, for Marxists, freedom is crucially constrained by some material preconditions —a hypothesis which, as I have tried to show elsewhere,[17] practically negates the realm of freedom. Thus, as Marx stressed referring to the mythical communist stage:[18]

> In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus, in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production (…) (until then) freedom can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature.

Still, as we shall see next, it is not only Marxists who see freedom constrained by material preconditions. Libertarians, although adopting a conception of equality which is different from the conceptions adopted by liberals and Marxists, end up with the same material preconditions for freedom as Marxists do. Not surprisingly, they end up with a similar approach as regards the grounding of liberatory ethics.

The libertarian approach to liberatory ethics

When we compare the libertarian notion of equality with respect to the liberal and the Marxist notions, we notice first that although some libertarians like Berkman,[19] not unlike liberals, talk about "true equality" in terms of equal opportunity, still, their world view is very different from that of liberals as they do not ignore the institutional constraints which make such equality formal and particularly the market system and private ownership and control of economic resources. This has important implications with respect to the notions of "justice" and "rights" used by anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin, which had little to do with the corresponding liberal notions[20].

Thus, for anarchists, "justice" meant perfect equality and absence of any domination, while "rights" meant equal rights, in the sense of perfect equality, which included not just liberal equality before the law (Bakunin was particularly clear in distinguishing between justice and legal justice) but also economic equality, as well as the lack of hierarchical structures. For modern anarchists like Karl Hess "rights are power, the power of someone or some group over someone else (…) rights are derived from institutions of power."[21] This concurs with the view adopted by the ID project that I developed elsewhere[22] according to which human rights are mostly rights against the state in the sense that it is only in forms of social organisation where political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of elites that many "rights" are invested with any meaning, whereas in a non-statist type of democracy, which by definition involves the equal sharing of power, these rights become meaningless. This implies in turn that, in principle, the issue of human rights should not arise at all in the case of a non-statist democracy like that of ID, although there still remains the problem of how certain fundamental individual freedoms are safeguarded against majority decisions.[23]

Furthermore, the libertarian vision of equality significantly differed from the Marxist notion of economic equality. As Bookchin pointed out, libertarians have always stressed the element of choice (i.e. individual freedom) in their definitions of equality, something that "was to create a radically new point of departure from the increasingly teleological visions of religious and later "scientific" socialisms".[24] For the same author, "the anarchist and libertarian utopist emphasis on individual freedom meant the emancipation of history itself from an ahistorical preordination and stressed the importance of ethics in influencing choice".[25] Likewise, the ID project defines freedom in terms of individual and social autonomy,[26] something that not

only makes the element of choice an integral part of the conception of freedom but, even more crucially, does not make the realm of freedom dependent on some material preconditions which put it off till the mythical stage of post-scarcity!

Still, Bookchin, following the anarchist tradition (Bakunin, Kropotkin et al.) , linked his conception of freedom to the same material preconditions mentioned by Marxists: the post-scarcity society. The inevitable outcome is that the difference between the Marxist and the libertarian approaches is reduced to the issue whether post-scarcity freedom is the inevitable outcome of *social* evolution and the historical process (Marxists) or, instead, of a process of *natural* evolution. Thus, Kropotkin, who like Marx was a strong believer in science and progress, attempted to base his liberatory ethics not on the study of the historical process and the "laws" of motion of society and economy like Marx but on the study of nature. His strong belief in scientific and moral progress and on a naturalistic ethics is evident in extracts like the following ones:[27]

> a new, realistic moral science is the need of the day (…) that such a science is possible lies beyond any reasonable doubt. If the study of Nature has yielded the elements of philosophy which embraces the life of Cosmos, the evolution of human beings, the laws of physical activity, and the development of society, it must also be able to give us the rational origin and the sources of the moral feelings. And it must be able to show us where lie the forces that are able to elevate the moral feelings to an always greater height and purity

Kropotkin was of course right to contrast science as "the source of all true knowledge"[28] (although one should better replace "science" with knowledge based on reason in this quote) as against "intuition," "spiritualism" and the other forms of irrationalism that are rampant among today's self-declared anarchists —many of whom, embracing Zen, Taoism and other varieties of Eastern spiritualism, attempt to base liberatory ethics on "some mysterious moral intuition inherent in the human psyche".[29] He was wrong however when he tried to deduce a "progressive evolution" based on what he considered as an indisputable "fact" —that mutual aid is the predominant fact of nature[30]— and then, on the basis of this "fact," to conclude that:[31]

> it is already possible to conceive the history of mankind as the evolution of the ethical factor, as the evolution of an inherent tendency of man to organise his life on the basis of mutual aid, first within the tribe, then in the village community and in the republics of the free cities —these forms of social organisation becoming in turn the bases of further progress, periods of regression notwithstanding (…) we certainly find in the development of Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire, a continual widening of the conception of mutual support and mutual protection, from the clan to the tribe, the nation, and finally the international union of nations.

It is therefore clear that for libertarians like Kropotkin mutual aid is so generally inherent in social animals that it constitutes "a law of Nature"[32] and that consequently there is a "universal law of organic evolution" involving the consecutive steps of an ascending series (mutual aid-justice-morality) that leads men to a continual ethical progress.[33] Such an

evolutionary ethical progress was seen by Kropotkin as a pre-requisite to the development of an anarcho-communist society, in place of the dominant capitalist ethics that was grounded on individualism, self-interest and profit. In this problematique, the reason why the tendency for justice (i.e. equality) has not prevailed so far is that the progress towards equality is retarded (or at times even regressed) by the opposing tendency for domination, for power over others, which has led to the creation of hierarchical societies that reinforce this tendency.[34] Whether, therefore, Kropotkin's "objectively" grounded ethics was based on positivism, or, as Brian Morris argues, on an "evolutionary holism,"[35] there is no doubt that Kropotkin did try to create an "objective" liberatory ethics based on Progress and natural evolution —an attempt that was developed to its logical conclusion, almost a century later, by Murray Bookchin.

Bookchin (who is undoubtedly the most significant anarchist writer of the second half of the twentieth century) writing at a time when the ecological crisis created by the dynamics of the market/growth economy was at full blast, not only developed a full ecological ethics but also provided a more sophisticated version of an "objectively" grounded ethics, founded on what he called "dialectical naturalism". Unlike some deep ecologists,[36] Bookchin does not adopt a teleological view of natural evolution; instead his approach is explicitly non-teleological. As he has repeatedly stressed :

> Let me emphasize that social ecology, while viewing nature as a ground for an ethics of freedom and individuation, does not see an inexorable "lawfulness" at work that derives the human from the nonhuman or society from nature, Social ecology is not only a philosophy of process, it is also a philosophy of potentiality… This notion, in any case, is a message of freedom, not of necessity; it speaks to an immanent striving for realization, not to a predetermined certainty of completion. [37]

However, his dialectical naturalism explicitly assumes that the actualisation of unfolding potentialities for freedom —within the process of *natural* evolution— involves a "directionality" towards a democratic ecological society and a moral economy:[38]

> minimally we must assume that there is some kind of directionality towards ever-greater differentiation or wholeness insofar as potentiality is realised in its full actuality.

Still, as I attempted to show elsewhere,[39] the attempt to establish a directionality toward an ecological society depends on two crucial hypotheses. First, that there is a directionality in natural change, which yields a clearly discernible evolutionary development toward more complex forms of life, greater subjectivity and self-awareness, growing mutuality —a hypothesis that is supported by modern developments in biophysics, in terms of the self-organisation theory, which introduce into biology a type of "law of increasing complexity" that is consistent with dialectical naturalism[40]. Second, that there is a graded evolutionary continuum between our first nature and our second (social and cultural) nature, so that "every social evolution is virtually an extension of natural evolution into a distinctly human realm"[41]. Although, Bookchin stresses that social evolution is profoundly different from organic evolution, still, social change in his scheme is characterised by a process of Progress,

defined as "the self-directive activity of History and Civilisation towards increasing rationality, freedom"[42]. Thus, "second nature," namely, the evolution of society, "develops both in continuity with first nature and as its antithesis, until the two are sublated into «free nature,» or «Nature» rendered self-conscious, in a rational and ecological society."[43] However, the hypothesis about a rational process of social evolution is not only undesirable, since it creates unintentional links with heteronomy and it may easily lead to inadvertent affinities with intrinsically anti-democratic eco-philosophies, but untenable as well.[44]

To my mind, the dialectical idea of unfolding objective potentialities, i.e., of real latent possibilities which may (or may not) be actualised, is not applicable at all in the case of social change. To talk about any particular being that, in developing itself, actualises what at first was only a latent possibility and that this way attains its own truth, we have to assume that there is a specific possibility in the first place and not a choice of different possibilities. Therefore, whereas it is true that an acorn has the potentiality to become an oak tree and a human embryo to become a fully mature and creative adult, we cannot extend the analogy to human society and assume that the potentiality of society to become free "is equivalent"[45] to these natural potentialities. The obvious difference between the potentialities of acorns and human embryos to become oak trees and adults respectively, and those of society to become free, is that the former represent single possibilities whereas the latter is just one possibility out of two broad possibilities: for autonomy or heteronomy.

Therefore, if we take into account that "the very history of the Greco-Western world can be viewed as the history of the struggle between autonomy and heteronomy,"[46] it is obvious that the heteronomous forms of society which have dominated History cannot just be considered as "fortuitous events," similar to those that may not allow an acorn to become an oak tree. So, to assume that the possibility for autonomy (i.e. a liberatory society) is an unfolding and therefore rational *potentiality* (in the dialectical sense of the word) and conversely to assume away the possibility for heteronomy as just a *capacity* for irrationality[47], may easily be seen as a deliberate objectivization of one possibility at the expense of the other, in order to conceal our choice for the autonomy tradition under the cover of dialectical "objectivity".

Bookchin is, of course, right in insisting that in developing a democratic ethics we should adopt a non-hierarchical interpretation of nature.[48] However, it should not be forgotten that this is just one possible form of interpretation of Nature that we consciously **have chosen** because it is compatible with our choice for autonomy in the first place. This is obviously very different from assuming that a non-hierarchical interpretation of Nature is an "objective" one and that, as a consequence, a democratic society will be the product of a cumulative development, a rational process of realisation of the potentiality for freedom. To my mind, social ecology's attempt to develop an "objective" ethics not only undermines its democratic credentials but it also gives an easy target to statists and irrationalists of various sorts, as it is indicated by the fact that most attacks against social ecology focus on its philosophy [49] — apart of course from the case of some ex-Bookchinites who, revealing the undemocratic nature of their views, also attack its political basis![50]

Still, given the crucial role that the ideology of Progress in general and ethical progress in particular plays in both the Marxist and the libertarian approaches, it would be worthwhile to

assess it in more detail.

The myth of Progress

History does not justify the idea of Progress towards a free society, in the sense of a form of social organisation which secures the highest degree of individual and social autonomy at the political, the economic and the social levels —what we call an Inclusive Democracy. Even more so, as we shall see below, History does not justify the hypothesis of an ethical progress. Therefore, unless we underplay the significance of the imaginary element in human History and we deny the fact that History is a creation,[51] (as Marxists do), we have to conclude that it is impossible to establish any sort of social evolution towards a particular form of society. In other words, even if one accepts the hypothesis that self-consciousness and self-reflection, in very broad terms, are part of a dialectical unfolding in Nature and do not just represent a rupture with the past, this does not imply that there is a similar dialectical unfolding toward a free society, i.e., an Inclusive Democracy. Such a view is incompatible with historical evidence, which clearly shows that the historical attempts for a free society have always been the result of a rupture with the instituted heteronomy (which has been dominant in the past) rather than a sort of processual "product".

Thus, the fact that societies, almost always and everywhere, have lived in a state of **instituted heteronomy** (namely a state of non-questioning of existing laws, traditions and beliefs that guarantee the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of elites), with no trace of an "evolution" towards democratic forms of organisation securing individual and social autonomy, clearly vitiates any hypothesis of a progress towards a free society. In fact, if there is any continuity in history, it is a continuity in heteronomy interrupted by usually sudden and temporary leaps into "autonomous" forms of organisation. Thus, an autonomous form of political organisation (direct democracy) has always been the rare exception and even rarer have been the cases of autonomous forms of economic and social organisation (economic democracy and "democracy in the social realm"). It is only therefore with respect to social change in a broad sense, which includes the accumulation of scientific and technological knowledge, as well as improvements with respect to gender relations, human rights, etc., that we may perhaps speak of some sort of progress. But, these changes in no way justify the hypothesis of a directionality towards a free society.

As far as scientific and technological change is concerned, few would argue today, particularly after the experience of the last century, that there is some sort of correlation between progress in these fields and the degree of autonomy achieved in society at the political and economic levels. Furthermore, several writers have noted the increasing vulnerability of the human species because of the world-wide reliance on the same technology and the fact that increasing technological complexity is accompanied by an increasing lack of flexibility and adaptive capacity.[52] Also, as regards the alleged improvements in gender, race, ethnic relations, human rights in general, they hardly justify the hypothesis of progress towards a free society, in the sense of an autonomous society. The improvements in social relations and structures have not been matched by a corresponding progress in political and economic relations and structures towards political and economic democracy. Although the widening and deepening of women's rights, minorities' rights, etc., may have improved the social position of the members of the respective communities, from the democratic viewpoint, this

process has simply led to the expansion of the ruling political and economic elites to include representatives of these communities. Furthermore, these improvements do not imply any significant changes with respect to democracy in the workplace, the education place etc. Even as regards the human rights record, one may raise serious doubts about the progress achieved. Torture, for instance, after tapering off with the Enlightenment in Europe in the seventeenth century to the extent that it had almost disappeared, came back with a vengeance in the last century, to the extent that the twentieth century has been called by some "the torturer's century,"[53] and, according to the evidence so far on the twenty first century (Guantanamo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Egypt etc) it seems that the new century will surpass even this record!

At the cultural level, as Polanyi[54] has persuasively shown, the establishment of the market economy implied sweeping aside traditional cultures and values. This process was accelerated in the twentieth century with the spreading of the market economy and its offspring the growth economy all over the world and the inevitable elimination of all cultures not based on the system of the market economy. Furthermore, economic globalisation has led to a parallel cultural globalisation,[55] which not only rules out any progress towards more complexity, but, in effect, is making culture simpler, with cities becoming more and more alike, people all over the world listening to the same music, watching the same soap operas on TV, buying (or aspiring to buy) the same brands of consumer goods, etc.

Similarly, as regards ethical Progress, i.e., the evolution towards moral "improvement" (in terms of mutuality, solidarity, etc.), it is indicative that even social democrats like Habermas and Bobio, who have an obvious vested political interest in the idea of Progress and social evolution, also admit that it is not possible to assert the existence of ethical Progress, despite the acknowledged rapid technological progress of the last hundred years or so. Thus, Habermas, countering the pessimism of the Frankfurt School about Progress, argues that the error in the Marxist and other optimistic theories of social evolution lies in the presumption that Progress on the system's level (which attends to the material reproduction of society) would automatically entail an improvement on the level of moral-practical conscience.[56] So, one may argue that the unmistakable trend, at least in the past two to three centuries, has been for growing selfishness and growing competition, rather than for enhanced mutuality and solidarity. Likewise, it is at least doubtful whether there has been an ethical progress in terms of environmental values.[57]

Furthermore, one may argue that the fact that some enlightened parts of the world population have moved from religious ethics and the premodern myths about God to the "objective" ethics of early modernity, and that today there is a similar movement away from "objective" ethics to various forms of ethical relativism, does not imply some kind of ethical progress. In fact, even today, at the threshold of a new millennium, the vast majority of the world population (including the clear majority in many Western countries —and predominantly in the USA where most of the population still believes in God, miracles etc!) have not even made the first step in this supposedly ascending path, i.e. the move from religious morality to some form of morality based on "objective" ethics. Far from it, in the past quarter of a century, for reasons that I examined elsewhere[58] a rapid rise in every form of irrationalism (which includes not simply the move back to religion but also to other forms of irrationalism, spiritualism etc.) became obvious.

Therefore, the issue that arises is whether changes in the historical forms of social organisation reveal some kind of progress towards a free society, which would represent the graded actualisation of unfolding human potentialities for freedom (as Dialectical Naturalism maintains), or whether, instead, they do not reveal any form of "directionality" or progress, since the form society takes each time merely represents social creations, which are conditioned (but not fully determined) by time and space constraints, as well as by institutional and cultural factors. The former view sees History as a process of Progress, the unfolding of reason, and assumes that there is an evolution going on towards autonomous, or democratic, forms of political, economic and social organisation —a view which, to my mind, is not supported by History. The latter view sees the autonomous society as a rupture, a break in the historical continuity that the heteronomous society has historically established.

Of course, "autonomy/heteronomy" is not an ironclad distinction. Autonomous and heteronomous forms of social organisation historically interact with each other, and elements of both may coexist within the boundaries of the same society. Still, despite the development *within* each tradition and the possible interaction, no development *between* them may be established. For instance, one may support the case that although constitutional monarchy did express a more sophisticated form of heteronomy than absolute monarchy and, by the same token, parliamentary "democracy" does represent the most sophisticated form of oligarchy in History, still, the differences between the political regimes involved refer to the size and the composition of the ruling elites, not to the fundamental distinction itself between ruling elites and the rest of the population —a distinction that excludes the vast majority of the population from any effective political decision taking. Similarly, within the alternative autonomy-democratic tradition, the Parisian Sections of the early 1790s[59], where women had an equal share in the distribution of political power, did express a more complete form of democracy compared to the Athenian assemblies. Also, the Spanish collectives in the civil war [60], which contained a significant element of economic democracy, did express a more complete form of autonomy than both the Athenian and the Parisian assemblies.

Thus, although it is true that the break with the heteronomy tradition takes place in a specific time and place and that therefore History, tradition, and culture certainly condition the form that society takes, still, institutional and historical factors never determine when and where this break will take place, or even the specific form the autonomous organisation of society will take. An autonomous form of social organisation has always been a **creation** expressing a break with past development. The rare historical cases of relatively free forms of social organisation came about as a result of the fact that at certain historical moments, for reasons that only partly refer to the concrete historical circumstances, the social paradigm expressing the autonomy project had become hegemonic and led to a rupture of the dominant social paradigm[61] of heteronomy. That such ruptures do not fit in any unfolding dialectical pattern of History, and cannot even be considered as "reactions" to heteronomous forms of organisation, becomes obvious by the fact that repeatedly in History similar, if not identical, institutional and historical circumstances led to very different forms of social organisation. As a rule, they led to heteronomous forms of social organisation and only very exceptionally to attempts for autonomy.

The classical Athenian democracy is a characteristic example. There is no doubt that the movement from tribal blood ties to civic ties represents a form of development. The question

is whether this development is a development within the heteronomous tradition or, alternatively, one between the two traditions. I would argue that although elements of autonomous organisation may be found in tribal societies (e.g., tribal assemblies), still, the movement from tribes to cities represents a development predominantly **within** the heteronomous form of social organisation and only in one exceptional case (Athenian democracy) towards a new form of autonomous organisation. This fact, in turn, illustrates the significance of the creative element in History, rather than of any kind of an evolutionary pattern in political organisation. As Castoriadis puts it:

> Democracy and philosophy are not the outcome of natural or spontaneous tendencies of society and history. They are themselves creations and they entail a radical break with the previously instituted state of affairs. Both are aspects of the project of autonomy (…) the Greeks (discovered) in the sixth and fifth centuries that institutions and representations belong to nomos and not to physis, that they are human creations and not "God-given" or "nature-given."[62]

A view of History based on an evolutionary pattern could not explain why a similar movement from tribes to cities in many parts of the world, even in classical Greece itself, has led, on the one hand, to the classical Athenian democracy and, on the other, to a variety of oligarchic, if not despotic, forms of political organisation. Of course, few would deny that specific "objective' factors (geography, climate etc) may have played a significant, but never a deterministic, role on each historical occasion. What is disputable is whether there has been a long-term pattern of social evolution that led to classical Athenian democracy, an experiment that was not repeated elsewhere at the time and which re-emerged hundreds of years later.

Parliamentary "democracy" is another example. As I have tried to show elsewhere,[63] representative "democracy," which emerged in the West —an invention of the US Constitution's Founding Fathers— is not a form of political democracy in the classical meaning of the world. Furthermore, parliamentary democracy can in no way be seen as a stage in the development of democracy. This is obvious not only from the fact that direct democracy historically preceded parliamentary "democracy" but also because, as the experience of the past two centuries or so has shown, parliamentary democracy, if it evolves into something, it evolves into a further concentration of political power in the hands of professional politicians' elites, at national or supranational levels. Social development, in terms of political organisation, is not "cumulative", i.e. one leading from various forms of "democracy" (constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, etc.) —which reflect quantitative differences— towards direct democracy that is clearly a qualitative change.

By the same token, the market economy is neither a relative (even a poor one) to economic democracy, nor does it constitute a kind of stage in the development of economic democracy. Instead, as I tried to show elsewhere,[64] today's market economy represents a definite step backwards in comparison to the socially controlled economies of the medieval free cities. Furthermore, if the market economy evolves into something it evolves towards further concentration of economic power and there is no prospect whatsoever that a market economy will ever lead, through cumulative quantitative changes, to the qualitative change of economic democracy.

Finally, the various attempts for "democracy in the social realm', particularly workplace democracy (workers' councils, Soviets), and for democracy in educational institutions have always been associated with historical "moments" of insurrection and as soon as "order" has been restored, either by the institutionalisation of a "revolutionary" new regime of heteronomy (e.g., Soviet Union) or the continuation of the old one, the democratic forms have been replaced by forms of pseudo-democracy at the workplace, the University, etc.

So, it is not possible to derive any sort of evolutionary process towards a free society, what we call an Inclusive Democracy. The historical attempts to establish autonomous forms of political, social and economic democracy, although, of course, did not appear *ab novo*, still, they cannot be fitted in any grand evolutionary process. This is clearly indicated by the fact that such attempts took place in specific times and places and as a break with past development, rather than in several societies at the same stage of development and as a continuation of it. Therefore, although the ideals of freedom may have expanded over time, the last 30 years or so notwithstanding, this expansion has not been matched by a corresponding evolution towards an autonomous society, in the sense of greater participation of citizens in decision taking. In fact, the undermining of communities, which was intensified by the emergence of the market economy 200 years ago and has been accelerated by the development of the present internationalised market economy, as well as the growing privacy and self-interest of individuals encouraged by the consumer society, are clear indications of a trend towards more heteronomous forms of society rather than the other way round. Likewise, if we accept the view that I tried to develop on globalisation[65], i.e. that the present internationalised market economy marks the latest phase of modernity, as well as a new, higher, stage in the marketisation process, then all the signs are that we have entered a new period where the "two-thirds' (if not the "40 percent"[66]) societies of the North will be based on sophisticated forms of heteronomy, whereas the miserable societies of the South will rely on various forms of brutal authoritarianism, disguised under the formal parliamentary democracy format. The permanent "war" of the transnational elite against terrorism,[67] aims exactly at suppressing any anti-systemic movement towards a liberatory society and few doubt that the elites will be effective in achieving this aim, with the decisive help of a mainly reformist Left.

One may therefore raise serious objections with respect to both the Marxist and libertarian approaches for their adoption of the idea of dialectical Progress in History, and, implicitly or explicitly, in ethics . Thus, it should not be forgotten that the adoption of the idea of Progress implies also the endorsement of such conclusions as the Marxist one about the "progressive" role of colonialism[68], or the corresponding anarchist one that the state is a "socially necessary evil".[69] However, if we adopt the view that there is no unilinear or dialectical process of Progress and a corresponding evolutionary process towards forms of social organisation grounded on autonomy and we assume, instead, that the historical attempts for freedom and democracy represent a break with the past, then, forms of social organisation like colonialism and the state can be seen as just "social evils", with nothing "necessary" about them, either as regards their emergence in the past, or the form that social change has taken since, or will take in the future.

But if the hypothesis of progress in social change and of a rational historical process is untenable, then the question arises whether it is still possible to develop an "objective" ethics

which assesses forms of social organisation as "good" or "bad" on the basis of the degree according to which they represent the actualisation of the latent potentialities for freedom. The obvious answer, which is implied by the above analysis, is that any attempt to develop an "objective" ethics on the assumption of a process of social evolution (based on an "objective"; reading of History or natural evolution) is little more than an effort to mask a conscious choice among the autonomy and the heteronomy tradition, the democratic and the non-democratic society.

Still, the fact that a democratic society represents a conscious choice does not mean that this is just an arbitrary choice. This is clearly implied by the very fact that the autonomy project turns up in history again and again, particularly in periods of crisis of the heteronomous society. Furthermore, the fact that heteronomous society has been the dominant form of social organisation in the past is not indicative of its intrinsic superiority over an autonomous society. Heteronomous societies have always been created and maintained through violence (military, economic) and/or indirect forms of control (religion, ideology, mass media) by privileged elites, which aimed at the institutionalisation of inequality in the distribution of power.

Finally, the grounding of a free society on a conscious choice rather than on some "objective" social or natural "laws" does not deprive us of an ethical criterion to assess the various forms of social organisation and generally of social behaviour. In fact, the degree to which a form of social organisation secures an equal distribution of political, economic and social power is a powerful criterion to assess it. But this is a criterion chosen by us and not implied by some sort of evolutionary process. In other words, it is a criterion which is consistent with the view that I will develop in the last section, that the project for a democratic society and its ethics can neither be grounded on scientism and objectivism nor on Utopianism and irrationalism.

The crisis of "objective" ethics

As I attempted to show elsewhere[70], scientism and objectivism in general entered a serious crisis in the present phase of neoliberal modernity (or as postmodernists call it the era of postmodernity). This had inevitable consequences on ethics since the ethics of the early phases of modernity, both the orthodox and the liberatory ones, was based on objectivism in general and scientism in particular. Postmodernists were among the first who attempted to theorise the crisis of "objective" ethics, both orthodox and liberatory. At the same time, Marxist and libertarian writers, under the influence of the postmodern critique, began developing various hybrids of "poststructural Marxism" and "post structural anarchism" respectively, which not only adopted the postmodern critique of scientism and objectivism but also embraced the postmodern rejection of "universalism," consequently abandoning any idea of a liberatory project aiming to replace the market economy and representative "democracy" with a new liberatory society. Similarly, the ecological movement, under the same postmodernist influences and also some irrational spiritual ones, developed a kind of "environmental ethics" that was deeply influenced by irrational spiritualistic tendencies. Thus, most of environmental ethics has been characterised by irrational pantheistic, or similar spiritual, approaches to Nature.[71]

However, as I hinted above, postmodernists were not the only ones to criticise "objective"

(orthodox and liberatory) ethics. The other major source of criticism comes from within the autonomous-democratic tradition. I will examine next these major critiques.

2. The postmodern critique of "objective" ethics

Although there are various currents within the postmodernist camp, (which I have considered in detail elsewhere[72]), I will attempt here to summarise the main elements of what has come to be associated with the notion of the postmodern approach to morality —a morality that has often been celebrated as the "demise of the ethical," the substitution of aesthetics for ethics and the consequent "ultimate emanci-pation".

The main contradiction of modern society is seen by many postmodernists to be the one between individual autonomy, (which they see as the free will, which was recognised by the Enlightenment to rational individuals, and had been denied by religious morality[73]) and social heteronomy, i.e. the heteronomy of what they call "rational management,"[74] by which they mean the "injection" into human conduct, through legislation etc, of a set of rules so conceived that the individuals, while exercising their free will and making their choices, would be likely to choose what is right and proper (according of course to the elites' criteria) over what is wrong and evil.[75] However, as Zygmunt Bauman stresses, the defining feature of modernity, as seen by postmodernists, was not the contradiction itself but the fact that this *aporia* (i.e. a contradiction that cannot be overcome , one that results in a conflict that cannot be resolved) was played down by modernists as "a conflict not-yet-resolved-but-in-principle-resolvable; as a temporary nuisance, a residual imperfection on the road to perfection, a relic of unreason on the way to the rule of reason".[76]

Thus, to resolve this contradiction, both orthodox and antisystemic moral philosophers of the early phases of modernity searched for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory. However, whereas orthodox ethics found their way into legislation, with Western legislators attempting to impose universal moral codes, liberatory ethics suggested alternative forms of social organisation within which the conflict was supposed to be overcome. It is therefore clear that the modern solution was based on the assumption that it is possible to create a *non-ambivalent, non-contradictory ethical code,* so that universal reason could replace universal religious belief in guiding individual and collective morality. On the other hand, postmodernists are not interested at all in eliminating the contradiction between individual autonomy and social heteronomy. For them, every kind of liberatory project is rejectable because it is by necessity universalist. Instead, postmodernists focus their attention in criticising the modernist project, casting doubt on its main premises.

Thus, first, they reject any idea of moral certainty based on some sort of "objective" ethics. In their view, humans are morally ambivalent, as there is neither a good human nature nor a bad one. Therefore, no logically coherent ethical code can "fit" the essentially ambivalent condition of morality:[77]

> we know now what we did not know then, when we embarked on this journey of exploration: that a non-aporetic, non-ambivalent morality, an ethics that is universal and objectively founded, is a practical impossibility; perhaps also an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms (…) What follows is that moral conduct cannot

be guaranteed; not by better designed contexts for human action, nor by better formed motives of human action. We need to learn how to live without such guarantees and with the awareness that guarantees will never be offered — that a perfect society, as well as a perfect human being, is not a viable prospect, while attempts to prove the contrary result in more cruelty than humanity, and certainly less morality.

Next, postmodernists assume that morality is much more autonomous from society than modernists would concede. Bauman, for instance, asserts that "before society, its law-makers and its philosophers come down to spelling out its ethical principles, there are beings who have been moral without the constraint (or is it luxury?) of codified goodness".[78]

However, even if one assumes a relative autonomy of morality (and culture in general) with respect to the form of social organisation, the question still remains whether the morality of socialized human beings (I do not mean the morality which is based exclusively on kinship and reciprocity that has also been observed in the animal world) can be reasonably assumed as not being heavily conditioned by society, its values, culture and dominant social paradigm. If therefore we assume a strong association between individual morality and social morality, given that most people are socialised individuals, the "Robinson Crusoe" type of argument adopted by postmodernists is invalid. This does not mean of course that *all* members of society adapt their moral behaviour to society's moral codes but it certainly means that *most* of its members do conform to such codes —unless of course a serious social crisis, which also involves a morality crisis, is in progress.

Postmodernists then proceed to criticise even the very foundation of the modernist project: rationalism itself. Bauman[79] for instance celebrates the fact that :

> the mistrust of human spontaneity, of drives, impulses and inclinations resistant to prediction and rational justification, has been all but replaced by the mistrust of unemotional, calculating reason. Dignity has been returned to emotions; legitimacy to the "inexplicable," nay irrational, sympathies and loyalties which cannot "explain themselves" in terms of their usefulness and purpose (…) We learn again to respect ambiguity, to feel regard for human emotions, to appreciate actions without purpose and calculable rewards. We accept that not all actions, and particularly not all among the most important of actions, need to justify and explain themselves to be worthy of our esteem (…) what we are learning, and learning the hard way, is that it is the personal morality that makes ethical negotiation and consensus possible, not the other way round

It seems therefore clear that postmodernists, by not making a clear distinction between the private and the public realms on the matter, not only contradict the autonomous nature of the pluralism they preach, but also confuse rationality in the private realm with rationality in the public realm. Thus, if society legitimises the "inexplicable nay *irrational*" and at the same time does not rule out any collective decision-taking based on such premises, it is in fact legitimising heteronomy, given that the irrational "explanations" of the inexplicable have always been based on some form of externally given "truth". In other words, a society in which collective decision-taking and consensus is based on personal morality, which, in turn, may well be founded on irrational premises (i.e. the premises that are usually prescribed by

religious or spiritualist "truths" and moral codes), may well be an heteronomous society and therefore the pluralism characterising such a society is also of a heteronomous nature. No wonder that the first sperms of democratic societies, like the Athenian democracy, were clearly distinguishing between the public and the private realms and while they ostracised irrationalism from the public realm, where all deliberations had to be carried out in terms of rational argument, they even celebrated acts that had only "passions" and spontaneous inclinations for their cause in the private realm.

Thus, although one may agree that non-rational, or even irrational, behaviour could not (and, in a sense, perhaps should not) be ostracised from the private realm, It is clear that in an autonomous democratic society democratic rationalism is the only way to derive the moral code that should guide social morality. But, it is obvious that this is not the stance adopted by those postmodernists who declare that:

> reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: that un-founded, non-rational, un-arguable, no-excuses-given and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may. Reason is about making correct decisions, while moral responsibility precedes all thinking about decisions as it does not, and cannot care about any logic which would allow the approval of an action as correct.[80]

Yet, as I mentioned above, it is the postmodernist rejection of universalism in general and moral universalism in particular, which characterises their problematique and makes it particularly objectionable from a liberatory viewpoint. For them, morality is *not universalisable*. Still, this does not imply some sort of simplistic moral relativism, in the sense that morality is merely relative to time and place. In fact, what is rejected is the substitution of heteronomous, enforced-from-outside, ethical rules for the autonomous responsibility of the moral self, i.e. the replacement of local *distortions* in the name of one all-human ethics.[81] Postmodernists, not only see modern societies as making the false assumption that they can be the ultimate authors and the sole trustworthy guardians of morality, but also accuse them for practising "moral parochialism" under the mask of promoting universal ethics, which is nothing else than a power-assisted ethical code. In fact, for postmodernists, it is the supposedly universal moral codes that are plagued with a parochial relativism —something that could lead to the overcoming of variety through the extension of the scope and the reach of a given institutional power, political or cultural, i.e. to a yet more thorough substitution of ethics for morality, heteronomy for autonomy.

The ideology of Progress, as postmodernists rightly point out, was the ideology that modern states used in order to justify this "moral parochialism," or some would call cultural imperialism. Thus, any significant variations of the moral codes in the rest of the world versus the "advanced" countries were attributed to backwardness and it was thought that it was simply a matter of time before the moral values of the latter (who also happened to be the victors that have always been writing History) were universalised. Otherness (all man-made otherness, including the ethical one) was *temporalized* in a way characteristic of the idea of progress.[82] In fact, the postmodernist rejection of the modernist ideology of progress in general and moral progress in particular is one of the salient features of postmodern analysis with which few would disagree today. Bauman, for instance, refers to two devastating

examples from recent History to dismiss the myth of progress. In America, he observes, the shame of Vietnam boosted high-tech warfare, much more than it did moral self-scrutiny, so that with electronic surveillance and smart missiles, people can now be killed before they have a chance to respond. Similarly, in Palestine, "the memories of the Holocaust firm the hand of the Israeli occupiers of the Arab lands: mass deportations, roundings-up, hostage-taking and concentration camps are well-remembered as cost-effective".[83] The inescapable conclusion he derives is that:[84]

> No victory over inhumanity seems to have made the world safer for humanity. Moral triumphs, apparently, do not accumulate; in spite of the narratives of progress, movement is not linear —yesterday's gains are not reinvested, nor are the bonuses once awarded irreversible. Ever anew, with each shift in the balance of power, the spectre of inhumanity returns from its exile. Moral shocks, however devastating they might have seemed at the time, gradually lose their grip until they are forgotten. All their long history notwithstanding, moral choices seem always to start from square one. No wonder there are powerful reasons to doubt the reality of moral progress, and in particular the moral progress of the kind which modernity claims to promote.

However, postmodernists do not simply criticise the ideology of progress but proceed to criticise the universalist projects of modernity and the very idea of the citizen and the *polis.* Thus, modernity is accused for attempting to "substitute the *citizen* (the person with only such attributes as have been assigned by the laws of the single and uncontested authority acting on behalf of the unified and sovereign state) for the motley collection of parishioners, kinsmen and other locals".[85] At the same time, it is argued that "the postulate of universality… opposes the very Aristotelian principle of the polity as the ultimate fount and the guardian of humanity".[86]

Still, what is not made clear is that it is only the statist form of democracy, i.e. representative "democracy" together with the system of the market economy, which are indeed creating a clear divide between democracy and society, economy and society, community and society, citizens and individuals. Thus, a liberatory project like the ID project —which is based on the postulate that social autonomy is inseparable from individual autonomy— is nothing else than a demand for the reintegration of democracy and society, of economy and society, of community and society, of citizens and individuals. But such a reintegration is impossible outside a universalist liberatory project. Particularly so if one takes into account the fact that representative "democracy" and the market economy represent the materialisation of universalist projects, which today also have become universalised. It is clear that it is only through an alternative universalist project that the present institutions, which generate the above divides, could be abolished rather than through the particularised projects proposed by postmodernists. This is because such an endeavour requires the development of a universalist antisystemic consciousness, which could never be created by the political alliances between the fractionalised social movements that postmodernists support (feminists, Greens, identity movements etc). Needless to add that the argument that "any *polis* separates, sets apart, «particularizes» its members from members of other communities, as much as it unites them and makes alike inside its own boundaries,"[87] is obviously invalid within the problematic of a *confederal* ID.[88]

Yet, the question remains: is there a universal morality? Or is it just an illusion since there are several conceptions of universal morality and therefore which one of them prevails at any moment of time is relative to the strength of the powers that claim and hold the right to articulate it, as postmodernists argue[89]? Few would doubt, of course, that there are more than one moralities and surely the recognition of ethical relativism, as I attempted to show above, is not a postmodernist invention. In other words, there is little controversy nowadays on the fact that each society, defined in specific time and place, has its own moral code, which is not simply determined by the mode of production that is dominant in its social formation. The content of the moral code is crucially conditioned by the interdependence between the society's socio-economic institutions in relation to its culture and the dominant social paradigm. However, to the extent that a particular type of society is universalised (for instance, feudal European Christian society, or consumerist-individualistic USA) the dominant moral code of this type of society is inevitably universalised as well.

In this problematique, the postmodern claim that present society is not characterised by a universal morality is false. This is because the universalisation of representative "democracy" and the market economy has inevitably been followed by a corresponding universalisation of the culture and the dominant social paradigm which are compatible with these institutions. In fact, the process of "globalisation," which has characterised neoliberal modernity, has been instrumental in this universalisation process. In this context, the moral pluralism that postmodernists celebrate —taking for granted the present socio-economic system— is in fact a pseudo-pluralism, given that all societies which have adopted a market economy and representative "democracy" show fundamental similarities as regards their core values: individualism, consumer culture, heteronomous morality as such (irrespective on whether it is based on religion or some other kind of spiritualism etc). In other words, cultural differences between societies express much more differences in peripheral values and mainly the differences in heteronomous morality, (i.e. the external moral codes imposed by religious and irrational beliefs in general, which particularly flourish in the present neoliberal era of modernity) rather than differences in core values.[90]

Therefore, an autonomous liberatory society should be expected to create its own moral code, with hard core values which will inevitably be consistent with its fundamental institutions (as I will try to show in the last section) and peripheral values that may vary from society to society. In case such a society is universalised then a new universal morality will be created, which will neither be power-assisted nor would involve an "imposed heteronomy by the power holders," as it used to be the case in all heteronomous societies in the past. To my mind, it is only a world-wide genuinely democratic society, based on universal core values expressing the uncompromising demand for individual and social autonomy and a variety of peripheral values celebrating difference, which could promise peaceful and liberatory coexistence. Of course, neither reason nor any institutional framework could *guarantee* individual and social autonomy and the morality which is compatible with it. Nobody could doubt however that in such a society the postmodernist claim, according to which in modern society "in order to act morally the person must first be disowned of autonomy,"[91] will be thrown to the dustbin of History.

3. The Castoriadian critique of the separation of ethics from

politics

Castoriadis has been accused by, among others, Agnes Heller[92] as not interested in ethics. In fact, however, his critique of "objective" ethics, both orthodox and liberatory, is much more fundamental than the postmodernist critique, notwithstanding the fact that most of the postmodernist criticisms I mentioned above (critique of the ideology of progress, critique of objectivism and of certainties in the analysis of social phenomena or moral behaviour etc) had been explored by Castoriadis before the rise of postmodernism as a significant movement. For Castoriadis, the problem is not simply the rise of "objective" ethics which he considers as just an aspect of what he calls the "unitary ontology" that has always plagued political philosophy. For him, the problem is heteronomy:[93]

> The operative postulate that there is a total and "rational" (and therefore "meaningful") order in the world, along with the necessary implication that there is an order of human affairs linked to the order of the world —what one could call unitary ontology— has plagued political philosophy from Plato through modern liberalism and Marxism. The postulate conceals the fundamental fact that human history is creation —without which there would be no genuine question of judging and choosing, either "objectively" or "subjectively." By the same token, it conceals or eliminates the question of responsibility. Unitary ontology, in whatever disguise, is essentially linked to heteronomy.

The crucial issue for Castoriadis is the separation between ethics and politics, between the inner man and the public man, which lies at the basis of Western civilisation.[94] Of course, what he rejects is not the separation between the private and the public spheres (in fact he proposes the maximum degree of autonomy of the private from the public) but the opposition between them that heteronomous societies create. As he rightly stresses, "in the «true» Greek world (i.e., until the end of the fifth century B.C.), no opposition existed in principle between the «private» and «public» spheres (though they were clearly distinguished), nor did any opposition exist between ethics and politics".[95] Thus, if we follow Castoriadis in distinguishing between the three main realms as regards the relations of individuals among themselves and their institutions —i.e. the private sphere *(oikos),* the public/private sphere *(agora)* and the public/public sphere, which in the case of a democratic society takes the form of a demotic assembly (*ekklesia)*— then, it was in ancient Greek society that the independence of the private sphere is posited, a free public/private is created, and the public/public sphere becomes *truly* public —the main characteristic of democracy. On the other hand, in today's "liberal oligarchies," as Castoriadis points out, the public/public sphere is in fact, in its greatest part, private. It certainly is not so legally speaking, but on the factual level "the essential features of public affairs are still the private affair of various groups and clans that share effective power, decisions are made behind closed doors, the little that is brought onto the public stage is masked, prefabricated, and belated to the point of irrelevancy".[96] All this, when the first condition for the existence of an autonomous society is that the public/public sphere become effectively public, an ekklesia, and not an object of private appropriation by particular groups.

The split between ethics and politics, the private and public begins, according to Castoriadis, with Plato, although, even then, only on the factual level but not also on the theoretical level

where Plato still tried to reconcile the political principle and the ethical principle. It was with the Cynics, the Epicureans, and especially the Stoics —early Christianity in particular lies in a direct line of descent from Stoicism— that the with-drawal into the private sphere became dominant. It was through the spreading of Christianity all over the West and beyond in the first millennium that the Judeo-Christian codification of a "moral law," —i.e. an extreme form of heteronomous ethics in which the moral codes are given to us exogenously, from outside, without us being able to raise any questions about it[97], became hegemonic. In this context, today's dominance of the "private" along with its individualistic ideology, as well as the recent "return of ethics" (postmodern ethics playing a crucial role in this process), simply reflect the deep crisis of politics and the crisis of values in general .

The solution to this problem in the Castoriadian problematic is obvious. We must overcome the separation between politics and ethics, i.e. we must overcome the ethics of heteronomy. But, individual autonomy, as he stresses,[98]

> arises only under heavily instituted conditions. We therefore need institu-tions that favour autonomy, institutions that grant to each person an effective autonomy qua member of the collectivity and that allow that person to develop her individual autonomy. That can occur only through the instauration of a regime that is genuinely (and not just verbally) democratic. In such a regime, I effectively participate in the instauration of the laws under which I live.

Therefore, to overcome the ethics of heteronomy, we must first overcome the politics of heteronomy, i.e. we need an ethics of autonomy, which can only become articulated along with a politics of autonomy. In other words, an ethics of autonomy is impossible without the introduction of such "instituted conditions" that favour autonomy to replace the present "liberal oligarchies". In this problematique, one could easily understand the Castoriadian conclusion that "politics stands over and above ethics".[99]

Still, the meaning of "instituted conditions" has changed significantly between the early and the late work of Castoriadis. I considered elsewhere[100] the break between the early and late work of Castoriadis when he moved from an analysis aiming at the deepening of the content of socialism (through workers' self-management) and the parallel critique of what he considered the "traditional" or non-revolutionary elements in Marxist thought (historical "laws" in societal development and so on)[101] into an analysis which was transcending not just Marxism but, in a sense, the socialist project itself,[102] with the aim to interpret philosophy and democracy on the basis of the central concept of individual and social autonomy. This break was not, inevitably, confined to the political content of Castoradis' project but was also extended to its philosophical grounding, with his adoption of a modified Freudianism (and a corresponding pseudo-"objective" rationalism —as it was shown recently). Thus, the late Castoriadis adopted the groundless (and, as I tried to show elsewhere[103] incompatible with the project of autonomy) concept of the "psyche" —delighting, in the process, even the ears of enlightened churchmen who now declare themselves his admirers!— as well as the axiomatic grounding of the autonomy project on supposedly "objective" truths on the relation between radical imaginary, social imaginary and institutions. This move, which involved shifting the emphasis of his theoretical work away from revolutionary political theory to abstract theorizing, was inevitably accompanied by the academisation of "late"

Castoriadis and his abandonment of all political work in the last twenty five years of his life or so.

To my mind, this significant shift in the Castoriadian problematique, which involved a move from his notion of socialist workers' self-management to that of an autonomous democratic society, had important implications as to the meaning of "instituted conditions" I mentioned above, which were never worked out by late Castoriadis. Thus, he never attempted to articulate a strategy leading to the overcoming of political and ethical heteronomy, or even to outline a genuine democracy consistent with his autonomy project —particularly needed today when the collapse of socialist statism raised the crucial issue of the feasibility of any alternative form (to the market economy and representative "democracy") of social organisation[104]. Instead, although he adopted a new conception for a future society, he did not disown his earlier formulations for a socialist model of workers' management,[105] despite the obvious contradictions created by the significant differences between the citizens' democratic self-management implied by his autonomy project and the workers' (self) management implied by his earlier socialist project.

Thus, as I attempted to show elsewhere,[106] people in a democracy should take the major decisions to run it not just as producers (which is the idea behind workers' management) but as citizens, which is a much broader category than that of a producer. In fact, Castoriadis himself seemed to be concerned by this when he stressed that in services it may not always be possible to create workers' councils based on working unity and a shared life but instead it may be necessary to rely on associations or co-ops based on occupation[107]. But, if we take into account that in today's societies (unlike the fifties when Castoriadis was formulating his proposal) the vast majority of the active population is employed in services the argument for workers' management becomes almost irrelevant. Furthermore, irrespective of what Castoriadis thought, It is clear that it is the citizens participating in the *demotic*/confederal assemblies who can better express the *general interest* and take decisions on the economic, but also political, ecological and broader social problems. On the other hand, the worker councils of particular enterprises (even if we extend the definition of worker to include ex-workers, future workers, disabled workers, farmers etc, as some people tautologically do) are necessarily expressing particular interests. Especially so, if the collectivised enterprises on which these councils are based are engaged in competition among themselves to achieve their targets —a competition which may easily lead them to an effort "to cut corners" as regards social or ecological requirements[108].

In fact, one may argue that the reluctance of the late Castoriadis to consider the political implications of his autonomy project is not unrelated to the content of his late work about the institution of society in general and heteronomous society in particular. Thus, Castoriadis identifies the institution of society with the institution of a magma of social imaginary significations ("the institution of society is the institution of social imaginary significations"[109]) which significations, as he stresses, "in all known societies have been in the main and in their essence "religious".[110] Furthermore, he makes clear that by "religious" significations he does not mean only those based on an irrational religious belief system but also those "quasi- or pseudo-religious" social imaginary significations persisting in today's capitalist societies, according to which "the origin of the world and the origin of society, the operation of the one and of the other are *tied together* in and through "rationality," the "laws of nature," and "the

laws of history'[111] But then, when he attempts to give an answer to the crucial question "why does society institute itself as heteronomous society?" his reply does not involve, at least explicitly, any role for ruling classes or elites and he simply talks about an undifferentiated (as regards classes) "society":

> We cannot "explain" the heteronomy of society, or why religion has been, until now, a central component of the institution of society. Nevertheless, we have elucidated certain aspects of this capital fact; namely, that, at its centre and in its essence, every heteronomous institution of society has been religious. In other words: *the enigma of heteronomous society and the enigma of religion are in very large part, one and the same enigma.* No need to add, after saying this, that the idea that religion might belong to "ideology," to "superstructure, or that it would be an "inverted reflection" of the "real world" is beneath ridicule. The "real world" is defined and organized each time by means of a magma of social imaginary significations, that is, significations relating to questions for which no "real" or "rational" response ever could be furnished.

It is therefore clear, that the religious or quasi-religious imaginary social significations in the Castoriadian scheme owe their existence and reproduction exclusively to the radical imaginary as instituting, what Castoriadis calls the "i*nstituting* imaginary," and its interaction with what I called above the dominant social paradigm, or what he describes as the specified social imaginary in each instituted society. As Castoriadis puts it:

> Society, as *always already instituted*, is self-creation and capacity for self-alteration. It is the work of the radical imaginary as instituting, which brings itself into being as instituted society and as a given, and each time specified, social imaginary (…) society is the work of the *instituting* imaginary.[112] The individuals are made by the *instituted* society, at the same time as they make and remake it.

However, the crucial role of the ruling elites in conditioning the content of the dominant social paradigm is never made explicit. If one adds to this that the abandonment by late Castoriadis of the Marxist class analysis —along with the role he assigned in his earlier work to the proletariat— has not led him to develop a new theory of class divisions consistent with his autonomy project,[113] then, one could understand his reluctance to draw the political implications of his autonomy project. No wonder that several libertarians, ex-social ecologists and others interpret his theory of social imaginary significations as assuming that society will change just by a cultural revolution that will involve a change in the radical imaginary. However, as I attempted to show elsewhere[114], society could never change just by changing our values at the individual level. The change in values has a social significance, as far as radical social transformation is concerned, only if it is the outcome of a collective struggle, as part of a comprehensive political programme that explicitly questions the institutional framework and the dominant social paradigm[115]. Therefore, social transformation towards an Inclusive Democracy would never come about by "example and education" alone, or even by a cultural revolution alone. The required change in values and culture can only be the outcome of a process of continuous interaction between changes in institutions and changes in values, as part of a programmatic political movement within the framework of a political project expressing a universalist goal for systemic change and the strategy to achieve such a goal.

In the same context, it is not difficult to understand also Castoriadis' reluctance even to attempt to consider the sort of ethical values that he thinks are consistent with an autonomous society, as when, seemingly raising his hands, he declares that, "we will always still have to make our lives under the tragic conditions that characterize those lives, for we do not always know where good and evil lie, either on the individual level or on the collective level".[116] Not surprisingly, his "agnostic" approach on the matter raised Bookchin's strong criticism that "in the absence of rational objective standards of behaviour, imagination may be as demonic as it may be liberatory when such standards exist; hence the need for *informed* spontaneity —and an *informed* imagination".[117] To my mind, the problem with the Castoriadian stand is that it can easily lead to a postmodern type of moral relativism, i.e. to a "moral arbitrariness," as Bookchin calls it, covered by democratic procedures. Although therefore, as I stressed above, we should reject any "objective" ethics, it is at the same time equally imperative to explore the sort of moral values that are consistent with the institutional framework of a genuinely democratic society and propose some *guidelines* for the development of a democratic ethics.

4. Towards a democratic ethics

It is therefore clear on the basis of the above analysis that we cannot prescribe the moral code for a genuine democratic society, which is obviously a matter for the citizens' assemblies of the future to decide. Still, we can (in fact we *should)* show the ethics that, in our view (which, of course, is just one view) is compatible and the ethics that it is not compatible with the institutions of a democratic society —the object of this section.

Incompatible ethics

First, it should be obvious from the analysis above that religious ethics, or any ethics based on any kind of irrational belief system, is utterly incompatible with a democratic society, since it is incompatible with the democratic principle of organisation itself. A morality based on irrationalism of various types is a negation of intellectual autonomy. This is because the foundation of individual and collective autonomy can only be democratic rationalism and therefore any morality not drawn through democratic rationalism is heteronomous. Thus, if we define an irrational belief system as a system whose core beliefs are not derived by rational methods (i.e. reason and an appeal to "facts") but by intuition, instinct, feeling, mystical experience, revelation, etc then it is obvious that all religious beliefs, which have always been characterised by the existence of a set of irrational core truths (God, immortal soul, karma and so on), are ruled out as the basis of a democratic ethics. This is because the core truths that characterize all religious systems have always been a closed system. In fact, religious ethics is a basic characteristic of heteronomy. The same applies to all other belief systems that are based on the teachings of various gurus and are therefore incompatible with autonomy defined, from the Greek word autos+nomos, as giving oneself one's laws. Furthermore, one may add, the ethics derived by irrational methods and particularly religious ethics are rejectable not only because of the way in which they have been derived but also because, contrary to the common belief, a religious framework, far from providing us with a set of moral principles, it systematically corrupts morals. Thus, as R.A. Sharpe reminds us, "some virtues cease to be virtues when given a religious context[118] (…) to avoid crime because you fear ultimate punishment is not the same as avoiding crime because it is wrong".

Second, similarly incompatible to democratic ethics is any idealist conception of perennial and universal values, as it is now obvious that values differ in space and time among various communities and societies. In other words, it is universalised institutions that could create universal moral values and not the opposite, as idealists argue. Likewise, any materialist conception of universal values ("objective" ethics), which are supposedly derived from some sort of (social or natural) evolutionary process, are also incompatible to democratic ethics, for the reasons I considered above. Therefore, the concept of holism has to be repudiated in defining a new democratic ethics, either this holism takes the form of a mystical holism like biocentrism[120] —which turns the clock of history back to premodern mystical conceptions of nature— or of an eco-centric holism like Kropotkin's "evolutionary holism" or Bookchin's dialectical naturalism. Similar considerations apply to any attempt to derive an ethics from chaos theory and the sciences dealing with the laws of self-organisation and complexity, as I attempted to show elsewhere.[121] If, as Castoriadis aptly reminds us, it is impossible to deduce a politics from philosophy,[122] it is obviously ludicrous even to attempt to deduce a politics, or an ethics for that matter, from science!

 Third, the fact that the project for a democratic society is not objectively grounded does not mean that "anything goes" and that it is therefore impossible to derive a definable body of principles to assess social and political changes, or a set of ethical values to assess human behaviour on the basis of the fundamental criterion of compatibility with the institutions of the democratic society. Therefore, the postmodern adoption of a complete relativism with respect to ethical values should be rejected for the same reasons that the complete relativism with respect to the choice of traditions should also be rejected. Here we should make the important distinction between *political* and *democratic relativism* on the one hand and *philosophical relativism* on the other. It is obvious that d*emocratic relativism*[123] (i.e., that all traditions, theories, ideas, etc., are debated and decided upon by all citizens), is an essential element of democracy. The same applies to political relativism (i.e., that all traditions have equal rights). Still, a strong case can be made against *philosophical relativism,* according to which all traditions have equal truth value, in the sense of all being accepted as equally true or false.

Compatible ethics

As the above list of incompatible to a democratic society ethics shows, there is no "objective" or society-independent way of deriving the moral rules guiding human behaviour. This brings us directly to the importance of social organisation with respect to interpreting the basis of morality and, also, the process of making specific moral values hegemonic. I will not discuss here the former, which will lead us to some sort of theory about how the interaction of natural instincts and tendencies on the one hand and social organisation on the other that — through the socialisation process— conditions ethics, as well as the way we see it . I will attempt however to discuss briefly the role that the institutional framework of each society plays in conditioning the process of making specific values hegemonic at the expense of other values that are marginalized or discarded.

First, we should notice that the distinction we discussed above between heteronomous and

autonomous societies is crucial. Thus, premodern heteronomous societies invented various religious myths, and, similarly, modern heteronomous societies elaborated several reason-based universalist principles, in order to justify certain values and discard other values. At the same time, the institutional framework of each society had always made certain (through the socialisation process) that only those particular values that were compatible with the main institutions would constitute the core of the dominant social paradigm. Not accidentally, the same institutions —which in a heteronomous society are controlled by the privileged social groups, classes or castes— secure also the unequal distribution of power among society's members.

I would therefore argue that although it is true that, as Castoriadis stressed, every society is self-instituting, I would fundamentally disagree (for the reasons I explained elsewhere[124]) to the process of self-institution described by him. According to this view, as I mentioned above, institutions are reduced to the radical imaginary —a view which is false both epistemologically and ontologically (although there is no impenetrable barrier separating epistemology from ontology).

It is epistemologically faulty, because this stand attempts to interpret the social dynamics through an essentially closed theoretical system, psychoanalytical theory, something that I consider incompatible with the project of autonomy, as well as the ID project. Thus, the Castoriadian use of social imaginary significations, instead of the broader concept of "dominant social paradigm"[125] that I adopted, does not allow him to make clear the role of the elites in the socialisation process, (through the conditioning role they play in the formation of the dominant social paradigm) —a fact which frequently leads the late Castoriadis (in contrast to the early Castoriadis of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) to talk about a class undifferentiated "society" and "its" imaginary— something that led him to unacceptable for an antisystemic analyst political conclusions on USSR, (as the only superpower capable of an aggressive policy), or on the criminal war against Iraq launched by the transnational elite (as a kind of clash of imaginaries!) ,etc. On the other hand, the ID project interprets the same social dynamics on the basis of the role of the "dominant social paradigm" in the socialisation process —something that brings back the crucial class divisions into the analysis of social dynamics.

Furthermore, the attempt to reduce institutions to the radical and social imaginary is ontologically faulty, because the Castoriadian thesis, which reduces the institutions to the imaginary of a class-undifferentiated society, in effect, exists only in the ideology of today's elites! In other words, in an heteronomous society characterised by the unequal distribution of power, only those values which are compatible with the institutional framework, i.e. those that they do not challenge in any way the unequal distribution of power, would become core values of the dominant social paradigm. The socialisation process of such societies, which is decisively conditioned by the elites controlling the main institutions, plays a crucial role in this context. Vice versa, in an autonomous society characterised by the equal distribution of power among its members, only those values that are compatible with its institutional framework, (i.e. those that will not challenge in any way the equal distribution of power) would become core values of its dominant social paradigm. Again, the socialisation process in such a society, particularly a democratic *Paideia,* would play a crucial role in this process.

As I mentioned above, the grounding of a free society on a conscious choice does not deprive

us of ethical standards to assess the various forms of social organization and individual behaviour. Thus, the degree to which a form of social organization secures an equal distribution of political, economic and social power is a powerful criterion to assess such social organisation. Similarly, in a future democratic society, the degree to which a modality of individual acting is compatible with the democratic form of social organization can be rationally assessed on the basis of a set of moral values, derived through a process of democratic rationalism, which express this compatibility. No need therefore to fall into the trap of a postmodern type of moral relativism, as supporters of "objective" ethics argue would be the inevitable outcome of abandoning their own "absolute" standards. Similarly, although it is true that moral and ethical systems have functioned as control mechanisms, created and enforced by the ruling elites for the more convenient management of the population, the way out is not, as Georges Sorel suggests "to detach morality from the tyranny of reason and to anchor it once more in compassion and empathy"[126]. Moral and ethical systems can cease to function as control mechanisms not when they are made detached from "the tyranny of reason" but when they emerge as part of democratic rationalism, i.e. when people are left alone to decide their moral codes instead of leaving their elites to do it for them.

So, the issue here is: what are those values that express the compatibility of human behaviour to the democratic institutions? I can only outline here what might be the content of democratic ethics in the sense of the moral values expressing this compatibility and it is up to supporters of democratic politics and, at the end, up to the citizens' assemblies of a democratic society to enrich this discourse. Assuming therefore that a democratic society will be based on a confederal Inclusive Democracy[127] which is founded on two fundamental principles of organisation, i.e.

    a) the principle of autonomy and

    b) the principle of community

one may derive a set of moral values that express this compatibility. At the outset, however, we have to define autonomy and community.

Autonomy is not meant here in the usual Kantian sense (adopted by postmodernists and others), as an end in itself, consisting in acting according to a law discovered in an immutable Reason and given once and for all. Instead, we use the etymological meaning given above, according to which individual autonomy means the creation of our laws (i.e. the institutions and our values), provided however that we are fully aware of the fact that *we ourselves* are the only source of our laws and that therefore we do not simply parrot as "our own laws" certain supposedly God-given commandments conveyed to us through Moses, Christ, Mohamet and the like or similarly certain "laws of History" or "laws of Nature" which supposedly determine social evolution. Similarly, we may define social autonomy, as society not only positing its own laws but also recognising itself as the source of its norms.

As regards the meaning of community, I defined elsewhere[128] the concept of community (or *demos*), as the basis of a confederal Inclusive Democracy, in terms of three fundamental elements:

- the *ecumenicity* element, defined by David Clark[129] as a sense of solidarity that enables people to feel themselves part of and not hostile towards wider society —which could well mean a confederation of demoi, or an international democratic community of confederal inclusive democracies;

- the *autonomy* element, defined by the same author as a sense of significance that enables people to feel they have a role to play in the social scene, a role that is determined by rules that members of the community choose themselves and feel free to modify; and

- the *democracy* element which I will define as a sense of equal sharing of power

Historical evidence supports the view that past communities were characterised by several of the above elements, which define corresponding values that could provide a guide for the moral values that should, in our view, be the dominant values in a democratic society. Thus, as Michael Taylor[130] has shown (drawing on the experience of stateless primitive societies, peasant communities and "intentional" utopian communities), a community requires rough economic equality, as well as relations between its members that involve reciprocity (mutual aid, co-operation, sharing) and that are *direct* (i.e., not mediated by representatives, leaders, etc.) and many-sided.[131]

On the basis of the above fundamental principles of organisation of a confederal Inclusive Democracy and the meaning we gave to autonomy and community, a whole series of moral values could be derived which may provide us with an outline of the moral values that are compatible to a democratic society.

Thus, out of the fundamental principle of autonomy one may derive a set of moral values involving equality and democracy, respect for the personality of every citizen (irrespective of gender, race, ethnic identity etc) and of course respect for human life itself which, as Castoriadis puts it, "ought to be posited as an absolute because the injunction of autonomy is categorical, and there is no autonomy without life".[132] Also, out of the same fundamental principle of autonomy, we may derive values involving the protection of the quality of life of each individual citizen —something that would imply a relationship of harmony with nature and the need to re-integrate society with nature.

Similarly, out of the fundamental principle of community we may derive a set of values involving not only equality but also solidarity and mutual aid, altruism/self-sacrifice (beyond concern for kin and reciprocity), caring and sharing. As Michael Taylor has shown, one of the core characteristics of a community is reciprocity, which covers "a range of arrangements and relations and exchanges, including mutual aid, some forms of cooperation and some forms of sharing".[133]

However, as the above discussion hopefully makes clear, it is out of the combination of the two principles mentioned —which form the organisational basis of a confederal Inclusive Democracy— that we may derive the moral principles mentioned, which have always been part of liberatory ethics. If on the other hand we rely exclusively on the autonomy principle, as the autonomy project does, then the traditional liberatory values of solidarity, mutual aid,

altruism, caring and sharing would be difficult, if not impossible, to be derived from this principle alone. Vice versa, if we rely exclusively on the community principle, as many libertarians do, then we may easily end up with "the Bordigist and primitivist arguments for a tight, unified community, for the end of opposing social groups, for the unification of humanity, and in their scepticism about democracy".[134] It is therefore only this synthesis of autonomy and community which, to my mind, could avoid both the Scylla of "objectifying" ethics and/or negating politics and ethical concerns in favour of the coercive harmony of the organic community and the Charybdis of unbounded moral relativism.—

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[1] An earlier version of this article was published in *Democracy & Nature,* Vol. 8, No. 3 (November 2002). Here is published a significantly updated version of it.

[2] Although ethics and morality are often used interchangeably the term ethics is used here to refer not to morality itself but to the field of study that has morality as its subject matter, i.e. in a similar sense as moral philosophy.

[3] By "antisystemic" Left I mean this part of the Left which explicitly challenges the legitimacy of the present socio-economic system and aims at the replacement of the existing political and economic institutions (representative "democracy' and the system of the market economy respectively), as well as the corresponding values that are compatible with them, with new liberatory institutions and values. This is in contrast to the "reformist" Left which simply aims at reforming the existing institutions ("deepening democracy," better regulating the market economy etc) and the corresponding values.

[4] See T. Fotopoulos. "The Myth of postmodernity," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 27-76. http://www.democracynature.org/vol7/takis_postmodernism.htm

[5] As I attempted to show in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 227-30 communitarianism is, in effect, a middle-class movement against the social *symptoms* of the capitalist neo-liberal globalisation (pp. 227-230). No wonder that the socio-economic framework is ruled out of the communitarian problematique and Etzioni, the guru of Communitarianism, gave an unequivocal answer when asked about socio-economic rights and the communitarian economic agenda. "The short answer is," he says, "there is none." see Amitai Etzioni, "Common Values," *New Statesman & Society* (12 May 1995).

[6] See M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Black Rose, 1995) and critique in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., pp. 328-40.

[7] V. Lenin, "Address at Congress of Russian Young Communist League" (1920), *The Young Generation,* pp. 36-41. quoted in *Reader in Marxist Philosophy*, ed by H. Selsam & H. Martel (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 272-73.

[8] See Chamsy Ojeili, "Post-modernism, the Return to Ethics, and the Crisis of Socialist Values," *Democracy & Nature,* vol. 8, no. 3, (November 2002)

[9] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The Myth of Postmodernity," op. cit., pp. 27-76.

[10] See F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), part I.

[11] Ibid., p. 114.

[12] Ibid., pp. 124-29.

[13] Ibid., p. 129.

[14] F. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* (1882) (quoted in *Reader in Marxist Philosophy,* op. cit., p. 212).

[15] Engels, *Anti-Duhring,* op. cit., p. 137.

[16] Thus, Engels defined freedom as "the control over ourselves and over external nature" (ibid); also, according to Kolakowski, for Marxists, "freedom is the degree of power that an individual or a community is able to exercise over the conditions of their own life." Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism,* Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 387.

[17] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, op. cit., pp. 196-99.

[18] K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III (1894)/1966 (Moscow: Progress Publishers/London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966), p. 820.

[19] A. Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism*, (London: Freedom Press, 1964), p. 29

[20] see e.g. G.P. Maximoff, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: Free Press, 1953), pp 155-56; see, also, see, also, Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989) pp. 95-100 for a clear differentiation between justice and freedom

[21] Karl Hess, "Rights and Reality" in *Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology*, John Clark, ed. (London: Greenprint, 1990), pp. 130-33.

[22] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., pp. 231-33

[23] ibid., for a discussion of possible safeguards in an Inclusive Democracy

[24] M. Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989) p. 119

[25] ibid. p. 120

[26] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., pp. 177-180

[27] P. Kropotkin*, Ethics,* (Dorchester: Prism Press, 1924), p. 5

[28] ibid. p. 11

[29] See Brian Morris, "Kropotkin's ethical naturalism," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (November 2002).

[30] P. Kropotkin*, Ethics,* p. 14

[31] ibid. p. 17

[32] ibid. p. 286

[33] ibid. pp. 30-31

[34] ibid. pp. 263-64

[35] See B. Morris, "Kropotkin's Metaphysics of Nature," *Anarchist Studies*, vol 9 no 2, Oct. 2001, pp. 165-180.

[36] See, for instance, Albert Bergesen "Deep Ecology and Moral Community" in *Rethinking Materialism,* Robert Wuthnow ed. (New York: Erdmanns, 1995).

[37] From "Rethinking Ethics, Nature and Society" (1985). Quoted in *The Murray Bookchin Reader,* ed. by Janet Biehl, (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 202

[38] M. Bookchin, "A Philosophical Naturalism," *Society & Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1992), p. 74.

[39] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., pp. 328-340.

[40] *See,* e.g., Stuart A. Kaufmann, *The Origins of Order: Self organisation and Selection in Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[41] Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 25.

[42] M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, (Montreal: Black Rose, 1995) p. xii.

[43] Ibid, p. xi.

[44] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., pp. 329-330.

[45] "What is potential in an acorn that yields an oak tree or in a human embryo that yields a mature, creative adult is equivalent to what is potential in nature that yields society and what is potential in society that yields freedom, selfhood, and consciousness", Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*

(Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1987), p .13.

[46] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 88.

[47] M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, op. cit., pp. 157-70.

[48] M. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991) p. 274.

[49] See, for instance, the criticisms raised against dialectical naturalism by eco-socialists like David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 165; and Andrew Light, "Rereading Bookchin and Marcuse as Environmental Materialists," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism,* No. 3 (March 1993), and, "Which Side Are You On? A Rejoinder to Murray Bookchin," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism,* No. 14 (June 1993). See, also, the criticisms raised by deep ecologists like Robyn Eckersley, "Divining Evolution: The Ecological Ethics of Murray Bookchin," *Environmental Ethics,* Vol. 11, No 2 (Summer 1989).

[50] See T. Fotopoulos, "John Clark and Democracy" (refused by the editors of *Social Anarchism*) http://www.democracynature.org/dn/branarchism/fotopoulosonclark.htm; see also, the exchange with John Clark in *Democracy & Nature,* Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov 1999), pp. 523-561.

[51] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 34.

[52] *See* ,for instance, John M. Gowdy, "Progress and Environmental Sustainability," *Environmental Ethics,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring 1994).

[53] Amnesty International, *A Glimpse of Hell,* (London: Amnesty International UK, 1996)

[54] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press,1957), chs. 14-15.

[55] See T. Fotopoulos, "Globalisation, the reformist Left and the anti-globalisation movement," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (July 2001), pp. 233-280.

[56] Costas Kavoulakos, "The Relationship of Realism and Utopianism in the Theories of Democracy of Jurgen Habermas and Cornelius Castoriadis," *Society and Nature*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1994), p. 74. *See* also, N. Bobio, "Science, Power and Freedom," *Eleftherotypia* (18 Sept. 1995).

[57] *See* J. Gowdy, "Progress and Environmental Sustainability," op. cit.

[58] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The rise of new irrationalism and its incompatibility with Inclusive Democracy," *Democracy & Nature,* Vol. 4, No. 2/3 (1998), pp. 1-49.

[59] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, (London: Cassell, 1995) pp, 111-16. See, also, his *The Third Revolution* (London: Cassell, 1998), Vol. 2.

[60] *See* Sam Dolgoff, ed., *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974).

[61] The dominant social paradigm is defined as the system of beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values, which are dominant (or tend to become dominant) in a particular society at a particular moment of its history, as most consistent with the existing political, economic and social institutions

[62] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* op. cit., pp. 36-38.

[63] Takis Fotopoulos, *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy* (*The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy,* 2005), ch. 1. http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/ss/ch1.htm

[64] Ibid., chs 1-2.

[65] See T. Fotopoulos, "Globalisation, the reformist Left and the anti-globalisation movement," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (July 2001), pp. 233-280.

[66] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., p. 38.

[67] See T. Fotopoulos,' The Global "War" of the Transnational Elite', *Democracy & Nature,* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 201-240.

[68] See*,* e.g., Shlomo Avineri, ed., *Karl Marx on Colonialism & Modernization* (New York: Anchor Books,

1969), p. 13; and Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 18.

[69] See G.P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*) p. 145. See, also, M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, p. xvi.

[70] See T. Fotopoulos, "The Myth of postmodernity," op. cit.

[71] As Jonathan Porritt, a supporter of such spiritualism and Prince Charles' adviser (as well as an ex-president of Friends of the Earth!), put it: "From its inception in the early 1970s, the modern environment movement has always had an influential spiritual dimension to it, which has been deeply suspect in the eyes of most scientists" (*The Guardian*, May 20, 2000). This is also confirmed by the explicitly spiritualist dimension of the "ecovillage movement" (see my exchange with Ted Trainer, *Democracy & Nature*, vol 8 no 1 (March 2002) pp. 143-158

[72] See T. Fotopoulos, "The Myth of postmodernity," op. cit.

[73] "Free will, if it existed at all, could mean only —as St Augustine insisted and the Church repeatedly hammered home— freedom to choose wrong over right —that is, to *breach* God's commandments: to depart from the way of the world as God ordained it; and anything that visibly deflected from custom was seen as such a breach. Being in the right, on the other hand, was not a matter of choice: it meant, on the contrary, avoiding choice —following the customary way of life". Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 4.

[74] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics,* op. cit., p. 7

[75] Ibid., p. 6.

[76] Ibid., p. 8.

[77] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[78] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics,* op. cit.*,* p. 61.

[79] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[80] Ibid., p. 247.

[81] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[82] Ibid., p. 38.

[83] Ibid., pp. 227-228.

[84] Ibid., pp. 228-29.

[85] Ibid., p. 39.

[86] Ibid., p. 40.

[87] Ibid.

[88] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit.*,* ch. 6 : "A Confederal Inclusive Democracy".

[89] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics,* op. cit., p. 42.

[90] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The Rise of New irrationalism and its Incompatibility with Inclusive Democracy," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 4, Nos. 2/3 (1998), pp. 1-49.

[91] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics,* op. cit, p. 248.

[92] See *The Castoriadis Reader,* ed. by David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 398.

[93] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

[94] C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, ed. by David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 121.

[95] Ibid. p. 117.

[96] *The Castoriadis Reader,* op. cit., pp. 406-407.

[97] As Castoriadis aptly put it: "One must neither commit nor desire adultery because God has forbidden it. Why has God forbidden adultery? The question itself is forbidden," C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, p. 120.

[98] Ibid., p. 122.

[99] Ibid., p. 111.

[100] See T. Fotopoulos, "Castoriadis and the democratic tradition," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (10), pp. 157-63 (see also *Encyclopedia Britannica* on line) and my exchange with David Ames Curtis in *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 163-188.

[101] See C. Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings*, Vols 1-3 (University of Minnesota Press).

[102] Although Castoriadis himself in a 1979 essay was giving the impression that his abandonment of the term "socialist society" in favour of "autonomous society" was just a change in terminology (see Vol. 3 of his P*olitical and Social Writings*, p. 317), I believe that his late work, in which he integrated classical Greek philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis into the project of autonomy, made it clear that something much more than a change in terminology was involved.

[103] See T. Fotopoulos, "Recent Theoretical Developments on the Inclusive Democracy Project", in Global Capitalism and the Demise of the Left: Renewing Radicalism through Inclusive Democracy **,** ed. by Steven Best, (International Journal of Inclusive Democracy, 2009)

[104] And yet, he was (rightly) emphatic on the need to outline the form of a future society: "Just as we must avoid the fetishism of «statutes» we should also condemn any sort of «anarchist» or «spontaneist» fetishism that, in the belief that the working class consciousness ultimately will determine everything, takes little or no interest in the forms such consciousness should take if it wants to be effective in changing society…the definition of socialist society that we are attempting therefore requires of us some description of how we visualize its institutions and of the way they will function," in *Political and Social Writings*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1988), Vol. 2, pp. 90-154. He also made a similar statement in his major work: "Praxis cannot do away with the need to clarify the future it wants to bring about." C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 110.

[105] C. Castoriadis, "On the content of socialism II" (1957) in *Political and Social Writings.*

[106] See my exchange with David Ames Curtis in *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 163-188.

[107] C. Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader,* op. cit., pp. 88-9.

[108] The above contradictions are internal contradictions between early and late Castoriadian work. Apart from them however there is the even more crucial problem I considered in my exchange with Curtis that the real market cum money economy suggested by Castoriadis leads to serious problems and inequalities (despite his assumption about equal wages) because it cannot avoid the problems that any real market creates, irrespective of whether it is capitalist or not. As I attempted to show in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, the real issue is how we can achieve a synthesis of democratic planning and freedom of choice, *without resorting to a real market*, (as Castoriadis does), which would inevitably lead to all the problems linked with a market allocation of resources

[109] C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, op. cit., p. 313.

[110] Ibid., p. 324.

[111] Ibid., pp.317-318.

[112] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

[113] See for an attempt to develop an analysis of class divisions today from the Inclusive Democracy project's viewpoint T. Fotopoulos, "Class Divisions Today-the Inclusive Democracy Approach*," Democracy*

& Nature, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2000), pp. 211-251.

[114] See T. Fotopoulos, "The limitations of Life-style strategies: The Ecovillage «Movement» is NOT the way towards a new democratic society," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2000), pp. 287-308.

[115] See T. Fotopoulos, "Transitional Strategies and the Inclusive Democracy Project," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 17-62.

[116] C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, op. cit., p. 122.

[117] M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology, op. cit.,* p. 178.

[118] R. A. Sharpe*, The Moral Case Against Religious Belief* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1997), p. 97.

[119] Ibid., p. 100

[120] According to biocentrism, humans, as part of nature, should "obey" the "laws of nature" and conform with the world, which is conceived as an "organism" or as a "cosmic unity".

[121] See T. Fotopoulos, "Systems theory and complexity: a potential tool for radical analysis or the emerging social paradigm for the internationalised market economy?," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (November 2000), pp. 421-446.

[122] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, op. cit., p. 125.

[123] P. Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 59.

[124] See Takis Fotopoulos, "Recent Theoretical Developments on the ID project," op. cit.

[125] The dominant social paradigm is defined as the system of beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values, which are dominant in a particular society at a particular moment of its history, as consistent with the existing institutional framework; see T. Fotopoulos, "Mass media, Culture and Democracy," *Democracy & Nature,* Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999).

http://www.democracynature.org/vol5/fotopoulos_media.htm

[126] See Thomas Martin, "Violent Myths' The Post-Western Irrationalism of Georges Sorel," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 4, Nos. 2/3 (Issue 11/12) double issue (1998), pp. 50-69.

[127] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy,* op. cit., ch. 6.

[128] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, op. cit., pp. 225-227.

[129] David Clark, "The Concept of Community Education" in *Community Education*, Garth Allen et al., eds. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), pp. 58-

[130] Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 26-32.

[131] Michael Taylor also shows conclusively why the liberal arguments of the "anarcho-capitalist school" (R. Nozick and others), which claim that no equality would survive for long without state interference, are logically and historically invalid and that, in fact, community is a necessary condition for the maintenance of an approximate equality; ibid., pp. 95-104.

[132] *The Castoriadis Reader,* op. cit*.,* p. 400.

[133] Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty,* pp. 28-29.

[134] See Chamsy Ojeili, "Post-modernism, the Return to Ethics, and the Crisis of Socialist Values," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (November 2002).