

On Social Imaginary

Charles Taylor

The number one problem of modern social science has from the beginning been modernity itself. I mean that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization); of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution).

In our day, the problem needs to be posed again from a new angle: is there a single phenomenon here, or do we need to speak rather of "multiple modernities", the plural reflecting the fact that other non-Western cultures have modernized in their own way, and cannot properly be understood if we try to grasp them in a general theory which was originally designed with the Western case in mind?

This essay is intended to explore the hypothesis that we can throw some light on both the original and the contemporary issues about modernity if we can come to a clearer definition of the self-understandings which have been constitutive of it. Western modernity on this view is inseparable from a certain kind of social imaginary; and the differences between today's multiple modernities need to be understood in terms of the divergent social imaginaries involved.

This approach is not the same as one which might focus on the "ideas", as against the "institutions" of modernity. The social imaginary is not a set of "ideas"; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society. This crucial point will be expanded below, in chapter 3.

My aim here is a modest one. I would like to sketch an account of the forms of social imaginary which have underpinned the rise of Western modernity. This is an essay in Western history, which leaves the variety of today's alternative modernities untouched. But I hope that some closer definition of the Western specificity may help us see more clearly what is in common between the different paths of contemporary modernization. In writing this, I have obviously drawn heavily on the pioneering work of Benedict Anderson in his Imagined Communities¹, as well as on work by Jurgen Habermas and Michael Warner, and on that of Pierre Rosanvallon and others, which I shall acknowledge as the argument unfolds.

My basic hypothesis is that central to Western modernity is a new conception of the moral order of society. This was at first just an "idea" in the minds of some influential thinkers, but it later came to shape the social imaginary of large strata, and then eventually whole societies. It has now become so self-evident to us, that we have trouble seeing it as one possible conception among others. The mutation of this view of moral order into our social imaginary is the coming to be of certain social forms which are those essentially characterizing Western modernity: the market economy, the public sphere, the self-governing people, among others.

I will start with the new vision of moral order. This was most clearly stated in the new theories of Natural Law which emerged in the 17th Century, largely as a response to the domestic and international disorder wrought by the wars of religion. Grotius and Locke are the most important theorists of reference for our purposes here.

Grotius derives the normative order underlying political society from the nature of its constitutive members. Human beings are rational, sociable agents who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit.

Starting from the seventeenth century, this idea has come more and more to dominate our political thinking, and the way we imagine our society. It starts off in Grotius' version as a theory of what political society is, that is, what it is in aid of, and how it comes to be. But any theory of this kind also offers inescapably an idea of moral order. It tells us something about how we ought to live together in society.

The picture of society is that of individuals who come together to form a political entity, against a certain pre-existing moral background, and with certain ends in view. The moral background is one of natural rights; these people already have certain moral obligations towards each other. The ends sought are certain common benefits, of which security is the most important.

The underlying idea of moral order stresses the rights and obligations which we have as individuals in regard to each other, even prior to or outside of the political bond. Political obligations are seen as an extension or application of these more fundamental moral ties. Political authority itself is legitimate only because it was consented to by individuals (the original contract), and this contract creates binding obligations in virtue of the pre-existing principle that promises ought to be kept.

In the light of what has later been made of this Contract theory, even later in the same century by Locke, it is astonishing to us how tame the moral-political conclusions are which Grotius draws from it. The grounding of political legitimacy in consent is not put forward in order to question the credentials of existing governments. The aim of the exercise is rather to undercut the reasons for rebellion being all too irresponsibly urged by confessional zealots; the assumption being that existing legitimate regimes were ultimately founded on some consent of this kind. Grotius also seeks to give a firm foundation, beyond confessional cavil, to the basic rules of war and peace. In the context of the early seventeenth Century, with its continuing bitterly fought wars of religion, this emphasis was entirely understandable.

It is Locke who first uses this theory as a justification of "revolution", and as a ground for limited government. Rights can now be seriously pleaded against power. Consent is not just an original agreement to set up government, but a continuing right to agree to taxation.

In the next three centuries, from Locke to our day, although the contract language may fall away, and be used only by a minority of theorists, the underlying idea of society as existing for the (mutual) benefit of individuals, and the defense of their rights, takes on more and more importance. That is, it both comes to be the dominant view, pushing older theories of society, or newer rivals to the margins of political life and discourse; and it also generates more and more far-reaching claims on political life. The requirement of original consent, via the half-way house of Locke's consent to taxation, becomes the full-fledged doctrine of popular sovereignty under which we now live. The theory of natural rights ends up spawning a dense web of limits to legislative and executive action, via the entrenched charters which have become an important feature of contemporary government. The presumption of equality, implicit in the starting point of the State of Nature, where people stand outside of all relations of superiority and inferiority,² has been applied in more and more contexts, ending with the multiple equal treatment or non-discrimination provisions, which are an integral part of most entrenched charters.

In other words, during these last four centuries, the idea of moral order implicit in this view of society has undergone a double expansion: in extension, on one hand, (more people live by it, it has become dominant), and in intensity, on the other, (the demands it makes are heavier and more ramified). The idea has gone, as it were, through a series of "redactions", each richer and more demanding than the previous one, up to the present day.

This double expansion can be traced in a number of ways. The modern discourse of natural law started off in a rather specialized niche. It provided philosophers and legal theorists a language in which to talk about the legitimacy of governments, and the rules of war and peace, the nascent doctrines of modern international law. But then it begins to infiltrate and transform the discourse in other niches. One such case, which plays a crucial role in the story I'm telling, is the way that the new idea of moral order begins to inflect and reformulate the descriptions of God's providence, and the order he has established between humans and in the cosmos. I'll return to this below.

Even more important to our lives today is the manner in which this idea of order has become more and more central to our notions of society and polity, remaking them in the process. And in the course of this expansion, it has moved from being a theory, animating the discourse of a few experts, and become integral to our social imaginary, that is, the way in which our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain. I want to describe this process in more detail later.

Migrating from one niche to many, and from theory to social imaginary, the expansion is also visible along a third axis, as defined by the kind of demands this moral order makes on us.

Sometimes a conception of moral order may not carry with it a real expectation of its integral fulfillment. This does not mean no expectation at all, for otherwise it wouldn't be an idea of moral order, in the sense I'm using the term here. It will be seen as something

to strive for, and it will be realized by some, but the general sense may be that only a minority will really succeed in following it, at least under present conditions.

Thus the Gospel generates the idea of a community of saints, inspired by love for God, for each other, and for humankind, whose members were devoid of rivalry, mutual resentment, love of gain, ambition to rule, and the like. The general expectation in the Middle Ages was that only a minority of saints really aspired to this, and that they had to live in a world which heavily deviated from this ideal. But in the fullness of time, this would be the order of those gathered around God in the final dispensation. We can speak of a moral order here, and not just a gratuitous ideal, because it is thought to be in the process of full realization, but the time for this is not yet.

A distant analogy in another context would be some modern definitions of Utopia, which refer us to a way of things which may be realized in some eventually possible conditions; but which meanwhile serves as a standard to steer by.

Rather different from this are the orders which demand a more or less full realization here and now. But this can be understood in two rather different ways. In one, the order is held to be realized; it underlies the normal way of things. Mediaeval conceptions of political order were often of this kind. In the understanding of the "King's Two Bodies", his individual biological existence realizes and instantiates an undying royal "body". In the absence of highly exceptional and scandalously disordered circumstances, on the occasion of some terrible usurpation, for instance, the order is fully realized. It offers us not so much a prescription, as a key to understanding reality, rather as the Chain of Being does in relation to the cosmos which surrounds us. It provides us the hermeneutic clue to understanding the real.

But a moral order can stand in another relation to reality, as one not yet realized, but demanding to be integrally carried out. It provides an imperative prescription.

Summing up these distinctions, we can say that an idea of moral or political order can either be ultimate, like the community of saints, or for the here-and-now; and if the latter, it can either be hermeneutic or prescriptive.

Now the modern idea of order, in contradistinction to the Mediaeval Christian ideal, was seen from the beginning as for the here-and-now. But it definitely migrates along a path, running from the more hermeneutic to the more prescriptive. As used in its original niche by thinkers like Grotius and Pufendorf, it offered an interpretation of what must underlie established governments; grounded on a supposed founding contract, these enjoyed unquestioned legitimacy. Natural Law theory at its origin was a hermeneutic of legitimation.

But already with Locke, the political theory can justify revolution, indeed, make this morally imperative in certain circumstances; while at the same time, other general features of the human moral predicament provide a hermeneutic of legitimacy in relation to, for instance, property. Later on down the line, this notion of order will be

woven into "redactions" demanding even more "revolutionary" changes, including in relations of property, as reflected in influential theories, such as those of Rousseau and Marx, for instance.

Thus while moving from one niche to many, and migrating from theory into social imaginary, the modern idea of order also travels on a third axis, and the discourses it generates are strung out along the path from the hermeneutic to the prescriptive. In the process it comes to be intricately with a wide range of ethical concepts, but the resulting amalgams have in common that they make essential use of this understanding of political and moral order which descends from modern Natural Law theory.

This three-axis expansion is certainly remarkable. It cries out for explanation. It is unfortunately not part of my rather narrowly focused intentions to offer a causal explanation of the rise of the modern social imaginary. I will be happy if I can clarify somewhat the forms it has taken. But this will by its very nature help to focus more sharply the issues of causal explanation, on which I will offer some random thoughts somewhat later. For the moment, however, I want to explore further the peculiar features of this modern order.

A crucial point which ought to be evident from the foregoing is that the notion of moral order I am using here goes beyond some proposed schedule of norms which ought to govern our mutual relations and/ or political life. What an understanding of moral order adds to an awareness and acceptance of norms is an identification of features of the world, or divine action, or human life which make certain norms both right and (up to the point indicated) realizable. In other words the image of order not only carries a definition of what is right, but of the context in which it makes sense to strive for, and hope to realize the right (at least partially).

Now it is clear that the images of moral order which descend through a series of transformations from that inscribed in the Natural Law theories of Grotius and Locke are rather different from those embedded in the social imaginary of the pre-modern age.

Two important types of pre-modern moral order are worth singling out here, because we can see them being gradually taken over, displaced or marginalized by the Grotian-Lockean strand during the transition to political modernity. One is based on the idea of the Law of a people, which has governed this people since time out of mind, and which in a sense defines it as a people. This idea seems to have been widespread among the Indo-European tribes who at various stages erupted into Europe. It was very powerful in seventeenth Century England, under the guise of the Ancient Constitution, and became one of the key justifying ideas of the rebellion against the King.

This case should be enough to show that these notions are not always conservative in import; but we should also include in this category the sense of normative order which seems to have been carried on through generations in peasant communities, and out of which they developed a picture of the "moral economy", from which they could criticize the burdens laid on them by landlords, or the exactions levied on them by state and

church.³ Here again, the recurring idea seems to have been that an original acceptable distribution of burdens had been displaced by usurpation, and ought to be rolled back.

The other type is organized around a notion of a hierarchy in society which expresses and corresponds to a hierarchy in the cosmos. These were often theorized in language drawn from the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of Form, but the underlying notion also emerges strongly in theories of correspondence: e.g., the king is in his kingdom, as the lion among animals, the eagle among birds, etc. It is out of this outlook that the idea emerges that disorders in the human realm will resonate in nature, because the very order of things is threatened. The night on which Duncan was murdered was disturbed by "lamenting heard" the air; strange screams of death", and it remained dark even though day should have started. On the previous Tuesday a falcon had been killed by a mousing owl; and Duncan's horses turned wild in the night, "Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would / Make war with mankind".⁴

In both these cases, and particularly in the second, we have an order which tends to impose itself by the course of things; violations are met with backlash which transcends the merely human realm. This seems to be a very common feature in pre-modern ideas of moral order. Anaximander likens any deviation from the course of nature to injustice, and says that things which resist it must eventually "pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of time."⁵ Hesiod speaks of the order of things in similar terms, when he says that if ever the sun should deviate from its appointed course, the Furies would seize it and drag it back.⁶ And of course, the Platonic forms are active in shaping the things and events in the world of change.

In these cases, it is very clear that a moral order is more than just a set of norms; that it also contains what we might call an "ontic" component, identifying features of the world which make the norms realizable. Now the modern order which descends from Grotius and Locke is not self-realizing in the sense invoked by Hesiod or Plato, or the cosmic reactions to Duncan's murder. It is therefore tempting to think that our modern notions of moral order lack altogether an ontic component. But this would be a mistake, as I hope to show later. There is an important difference, but it lies in the fact that this component is now a feature about us humans, rather than one touching God or the cosmos, and not in the supposed absence altogether of an ontic dimension.

Now what is peculiar to our modern understanding of order stands out most clearly if we focus on how the idealizations of Natural Law theory differ from those which were dominant before. Pre-modern social imaginaries, especially those of the second type mentioned above, were structured by various modes of hierarchical complementarity. Society was seen as made up of different orders. These needed and complemented each other. But this didn't mean that their relations were truly mutual, because they didn't exist on the same level. They formed rather a hierarchy in which some had greater dignity and value than the others. An example is the often repeated mediaeval idealization of the society of three orders, oratores, bellatores, and laboratores: those who pray, those who fight, and those who work. It was clear that each needed the others, but there was no

doubt that we have here a descending scale of dignity; some functions were in their essence higher than others.

Now it is crucial to this kind of ideal that the distribution of functions is itself a key part of the normative order. It is not just that each order ought to perform its characteristic function for the others, granted they have entered these relations of exchange, while we keep the possibility open that things might be arranged rather differently, e.g., in a world where everyone does some praying, some fighting and some working. No, the hierarchical differentiation itself is seen as the proper order of things. It was part of the nature, or form of society. In the Platonic and neo-Platonic traditions, as I have just mentioned, this form was already at work in the world, and any attempt to deviate from it turned reality against itself. Society would be denatured in the attempt. Hence the tremendous power of the organic metaphor in these earlier theories. The organism seems the paradigm locus of forms at work, striving to heal its wounds and cure its maladies. And at the same time, the arrangement of functions which it exhibits is not simply contingent; it is "normal" and right. That the feet are below the head is how it should be.

The modern idealization of order departs radically from this. It is not just that there is no place for a Platonic-type form at work; but connected to this, whatever distribution of functions a society might develop is deemed contingent; it will be justified or not instrumentally; it cannot itself define the good. The basic normative principle is, indeed, that the members of society serve each other's needs, help each other, in short, behave like the rational and sociable creatures that they are. In this way, they complement each other. But the particular functional differentiation which they need to take on to do this most effectively is endowed with no essential worth. It is adventitious, and potentially changeable. In some cases, it may be merely temporary, as with the principle of the ancient polis, that we may be rulers and ruled in turn. In other cases, it requires lifetime specialization, but there is no inherent value in this, and all callings are equal in the sight of God. In one way or the other, the modern order gives no ontological status to hierarchy, or any particular structure of differentiation.

In other words, the basic point of the new normative order was the mutual respect and mutual service of the individuals who make up society. The actual structures were meant to serve these ends, and were judged instrumentally in this light. The difference might be obscured by the fact that the older orders also ensured a kind of mutual service; the clergy prays for the laity, and the laity defend/work for the clergy. But the crucial point is just this division into types in their hierarchical ordering; whereas on the new understanding we start with individuals and their debt of mutual service, and the divisions fall out as they can most effectively discharge this debt.

Thus Plato, in Book II of the Republic, starts out by reasoning from the non-self-sufficiency of the individual to the need for an order of mutual service. But quite rapidly it becomes clear that it is the structure of this order which is the basic point. And the last doubt is removed when we see that this order is meant to stand in analogy and interaction with the normative order in the soul. By contrast, in the modern ideal, the whole point is the mutual respect and service, however achieved.

I have mentioned two differences which distinguish this ideal from the earlier, Platonic-modeled orders of hierarchical complementarity: the Form is no longer at work in reality, and the distribution of functions is not itself normative. A third difference goes along with this. For the Platonic-derived theories, the mutual service which the classes render to each other when they stand in the right relation includes bringing them to the condition of their highest virtue; indeed, this is the service which the whole order, as it were, renders to all its members. But in the modern ideal, the mutual respect and service is directed towards serving our ordinary goals, life, liberty, sustenance of self and family. The organization of society, I said above, is judged not on its inherent form, but instrumentally. But now we can add that what this organization is instrumental to concerns the very basic conditions of existence as free agents, rather than the excellence of virtue - although we may judge that we need a high degree of virtue to play our proper part in this.

Our primary service to each other was thus (to use the language of a later age) the provision of collective security, to render our lives and property safe under law. But we also serve each other in practicing economic exchange. These two main ends, security and prosperity, are now the principal goals of organized society, which itself can come to be seen as something in the nature of a profitable exchange between its constituent members. The ideal social order is one in which our purposes mesh, and each in furthering himself helps the others.

This ideal order was not thought to be a mere human invention. Rather it was designed by God, an order in which everything coheres according to God's purposes. Later in the eighteenth Century, the same model is projected on the cosmos, in a vision of the universe as a set of perfectly interlocking parts, in which the purposes of each kind of creature mesh with those of all the others.

This order sets the goal for our constructive activity, insofar as it lies within our power to upset it, or realize it. Of course, when we look at the whole, we see how much the order is already realized; but when we cast our eye on human affairs, we see how much we have deviated from it and upset it; it becomes the norm to which we should strive to return.

This order was thought to be evident in the nature of things. Of course, if we consult revelation, we will also find the demand formulated there that we abide by it. But reason alone can tell us God's purposes. Living things, including ourselves, strive to preserve themselves. This is God's doing.

God having made Man, and planted in him, as in all other Animals, a strong desire of Self-preservation, and furnished the World with things fit for Food and Rayment and other Necessaries of Life, Subservient to his design, that Man should live and abide for some time upon the Face of the Earth, and not that so curious and wonderful a piece of Workmanship by its own Negligence, or want of Necessities, should perish again: God ... spoke to him, (that is) directed him by his Senses and Reason, ... to the use of those things which were serviceable for his Subsistence, and given him as the means of

his Preservation. ... For the desire, strong desire of Preserving his Life and Being having been planted in him, as a Principle of Action by God himself, Reason, which was the voice of God in him, could not but teach him and assure him, that pursuing that natural Inclination he had to preserve his Being, he followed the Will of his Maker.⁷

Being endowed with reason, we see that not only our lives but that of all humans are to be preserved. And in addition, God made us sociable beings. So that "every one as he is bound to preserve himself, and not quit his Station willfully; so by the like reason when his Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind."⁸

Similarly Locke reasons that God gave us our powers of reason and discipline so that we could most effectively go about the business of preserving ourselves. It follows that we ought to be "Industrious and Rational".⁹ The ethic of discipline and improvement is itself a requirement of the natural order that God had designed. The imposition of order by human will is itself called for by his scheme.

We can see in Locke's formulation how much he sees mutual service in terms of profitable exchange. "Economic" (that is, ordered, peaceful, productive) activity has become the model for human behavior, and the key for harmonious co-existence. In contrast to the theories of hierarchical complementarity, we meet in a zone of concord and mutual service, not to the extent that we transcend our ordinary goals and purposes, but on the contrary, in the process of carrying them out according to God's design.

Now this idealization was at the outset profoundly out of synch with the way things in fact ran, thus with the effective social imaginary on just about every level of society. Hierarchical complementarity was the principle on which people's lives effectively operated, all the way from the kingdom, to the city, to the diocese, to the parish, to the clan and the family. We still have some lively sense of this disparity in the case of the family, because it is really only in our time that the older images of hierarchical complementarity between men and women are being comprehensively challenged. But this is a late stage on a "long march", a process in which the modern idealization, advancing along the three axes I mentioned above, has connected up with and transformed our social imaginary on virtually every level, with revolutionary consequences.

The very revolutionary nature of the consequences ensured that those who first took up this theory would fail to see its application in a host of areas which seem obvious to us today. The powerful hold of hierarchically complementary forms of life, in the family, between master and servant in the household, between lord and peasant on the domain, between educated elite and the masses, made it seem "evident" that the new principle of order ought to be applied within certain bounds. This was often not even perceived as a restriction. What seems to us flagrant inconsistency, when eighteenth Century Whigs defended their oligarchic power in the name of the "people", for instance, was for the Whig leaders themselves just common sense.

In fact, they were drawing on an older understanding of "people", one stemming from a pre-modern notion of order, of the first type I mentioned above, where a people is constituted as such by a Law which always already exists, "since time out of mind". This law can confer leadership on some elements, who thus quite naturally speak for the "people". Even revolutions (or what we consider such) in early modern Europe were carried out under this understanding - as for instance, the monarchomachs in the French Wars of Religion, who accorded the right to rebel not to the unorganized masses, but to the "subordinate magistrates". This was also the basis of Parliament's rebellion against Charles I.

And this long march is perhaps only ending today. Or perhaps we too are victims of a mental restriction, for which our posterity will accuse us of inconsistency or hypocrisy. In any case, some very important tracts of this journey happened very recently. I have mentioned contemporary gender relations in this regard. But we should also remember that it wasn't very long ago when whole segments of our supposedly modern society remained outside of this modern social imaginary. Eugen Weber has shown¹⁰ how many communities of French peasants were transformed only late in the last century, and inducted into France as a nation of 40 million individual citizens. He makes plain how much their previous mode of life depended on complementary modes of action which were far from equal; especially, but not only between the sexes: there was also the fate of younger siblings, who renounced their share of the inheritance, in order to keep the family property together and viable. In a world of indigence and insecurity, of perpetually threatening dearth, the rules of family and community seemed the only guarantee of survival. Modern modes of individualism seemed a luxury, a dangerous indulgence.

This is easy to forget, because once we are well installed in the modern social imaginary, it seems the only possible one, the only one which makes sense. After all, are we not all individuals? Do we not associate in society for our mutual benefit? How else to measure social life?

This makes it very easy for us to entertain a quite distorted view of the process; and this in two respects. First, we tend to read the march of this new principle of order, and its displacing of traditional modes of complementarity, as the rise of "individualism" at the expense of "community". Whereas the new understanding of the individual has as its inevitable flip side a new understanding of sociality, the society of mutual benefit, whose functional differentiations are ultimately contingent, and whose members are fundamentally equal. This is what I have been insisting on in these pages, just because it generally gets lost from view. The individual seems primary, because we read the displacement of older forms of complementarity as the erosion of community as such. We seem to be left with a standing problem of how to induce or force the individual into some kind of social order, make him conform and obey the rules.

This recurrent experience of breakdown is real enough. But it shouldn't mask from us the fact that modernity is also the rise of new principles of sociality. Breakdown occurs, as we can see with the case of the French Revolution, because people are often expelled from their old forms, through war, revolution, or rapid economic change, before they can

find their feet in the new structures, that is, connect some transformed practices to the new principles to form a viable social imaginary. But this doesn't show that modern individualism is by its very essence a solvent of community. Nor that the modern political predicament is that defined by Hobbes: how do we rescue atomic individuals from the prisoners' dilemma? The real, recurring problem has been better defined by Tocqueville, or in our day Francois Furet.

The second distortion is the familiar one. The modern principle seems to us so self-evident: are we not by nature and essence individuals? That we are tempted by a "subtraction" account of the rise of modernity. We just needed to liberate ourselves from the old horizons, and then the mutual service conception of order was the obvious alternative left. It needed no inventive insight, or constructive effort. Individualism and mutual benefit are the evident residual ideas which remain after you have sloughed off the older religions and metaphysics.

But the reverse is the case. Humans have lived for most of their history in modes of complementarity, mixed with a greater or lesser degree of hierarchy. There have been islands of equality, like that of the citizens of the polis, but they are set in a sea of hierarchy, once you replace them in the bigger picture. Not to speak of how alien these societies were to modern individualism. What is rather surprising is that it was possible to win through to modern individualism; not just on the level of theory, but also transforming and penetrating the social imaginary. Now that this imaginary has become linked with societies of unprecedented power in human history, it seems impossible and mad to try to resist. But we mustn't fall into the anachronism of thinking that this was always the case.

The best antidote to this error is to bring to mind again some of the phases of the long and often conflictual march by which this theory has ended up achieving such a hold on our imagination.

I will be doing some of this as my argument proceeds. But at this stage, I want to pull together the preceding discussion and outline the main features of this modern understanding of moral order.

This can be sketched in three points, to which I will then add a fourth:

- 1) The original idealization of this order of mutual benefit comes in a theory of rights and of legitimate rule. It starts with individuals, and conceives society as established for their sake. Political society is seen as an instrument for something pre-political.

This individualism signifies a rejection of the previously dominant notion of hierarchy, according to which a human being can only be a proper moral agent embedded in a larger social whole, whose very nature is to exhibit a hierarchical complementarity. In its original form, the Grotian-Lockean theory stands against all those views, of which Aristotle's is the most prominent, which deny that one can be a fully competent human subject outside of society.

As this idea of order advances, and generates new "redactions", it becomes connected again with a philosophical anthropology which once again defines humans as social beings, incapable of functioning morally on their own. Rousseau, Hegel, Marx provide earlier examples, and they are followed by a host of thinkers in our day. But I see these still as redactions of the modern idea, because what they posit as a well-ordered society incorporates relations of mutual service between equal individuals as a crucial element. This is the goal, even for those who think that the "bourgeois individual" is a fiction and that the goal can only be achieved in a communist society. Even connected to ethical concepts antithetical to those of the Natural Law theorists, and indeed, closer to the Aristotle they rejected, the kernel of the modern idea remains an *idée-force* in our world.

2) As an instrument, political society enables these individuals to serve each other for mutual benefit; both in providing security, and in fostering exchange and prosperity. Any differentiations within it are to be justified by this telos; no hierarchical or other form is intrinsically good.

The significance of this, as we saw above, is that the mutual service centres on the needs of ordinary life, rather than aiming to secure for them the highest virtue. It aims to secure their conditions of existence as free agents. Now here, too, later redactions involve a revision. With Rousseau, for instance, freedom itself becomes the basis for a new definition of virtue, and an order of true mutual benefit becomes inseparable from one which secures the virtue of self-dependence. But Rousseau and those who followed him still put the central emphasis on securing freedom, equality and the needs of ordinary life.

3) The theory starts with individuals, which political society must serve. More important, this service is defined in terms of the defense of individuals' rights. And freedom is central to these rights. The importance of freedom is attested in the requirement that political society be founded on the consent of those bound by it.

If we reflect on the context in which this theory was operative, we can see that the crucial emphasis on freedom was overdetermined. The order of mutual benefit is an ideal to be constructed. It serves as a guide for those who want to establish a stable peace, and then remake society to bring it closer to its norms. The proponents of the theory already see themselves as agents who through disengaged, disciplined action can reform their own lives, as well as the larger social order. They are buffered, disciplined selves. Free agency is central to their self-understanding. The emphasis on rights, and the primacy of freedom among them, doesn't just stem from the principle that society should exist for the sake of its members; it also reflects the holders' sense of their own agency, and of the situation which that agency normatively demands in the world, viz., freedom.

Thus the ethic at work here should be defined just as much in terms of this condition of agency, as in terms of the demands of the ideal order. We should best think of it as an ethic of freedom and mutual benefit. Both terms in this expression are essential. And that is why consent plays such an important role in the political theories which derive from this ethic.

Summing up, we can say that the order of mutual benefit holds (1) between individuals (or at least moral agents who are independent of larger hierarchical orders); the benefits (2) crucially include life and the means to life, however securing these relates to the practice of virtue; it is meant (3) to secure freedom, and easily finds expression in terms of rights. To these we can add a fourth point: (4) these rights, this freedom, this mutual benefit is to be secured to all participants equally. Exactly what is meant by equality will vary, but that it must be affirmed in some form follows from the rejection of hierarchical order. These are the crucial features, the constants that recur in the modern idea of moral order, through its varying "redactions".

2

I mentioned above that this new notion of order brought about a change in the understanding of the cosmos as the work of God's Providence. We have here in fact one of the earliest examples of the new model of order moving beyond its original niche and reshaping the image of God's providential rule.

The notion that God governs the world according to a benign plan was ancient, even pre-Christian, with roots in Judaism, as well as Stoicism. What is new is the way of conceiving his benevolent scheme. We can see this in the arguments from the design of the world to the existence of a good Creator God. These too were very old. But formerly, they insisted on the magnificent design of the whole framework in which our world was set, the stars, the planets, etc; and then on the admirable micro-design of creatures, including ourselves, with our organs fitted for their functions, as well as on the general way in which life was sustained by the processes of nature.

These certainly continue, but what is added in the 18th Century is an appreciation of the way in which human life is designed so as to produce mutual benefit. Emphasis is sometimes laid on mutual benevolence. But very often the happy design is identified in the existence of what one might call "invisible hand" factors. I mean by this actions and attitudes which we are "programmed" for, which have systematically beneficent results for the general happiness, even though these are not part of what is intended in the action or affirmed in the attitude. Adam Smith in his Wealth of Nations has provided us with the most famous of these mechanisms, whereby our search for our own individual prosperity redounds to the general welfare. But there are other examples; for instance, one drawn from his Theory of Moral Sentiments, where Smith argues that Nature has made us admire greatly rank and fortune, because social order is much more secure if it rests on the respect for visible distinctions, rather than on the less striking qualities of virtue and wisdom.¹¹

The order here is that of a good engineering design, in which efficient causation plays the crucial role. In this it differs from earlier notions of order, where the harmony comes from the consonance between the Ideas or Forms manifested in the different levels of being or ranks in society. The crucial thing in the new conception is that our purposes mesh, however divergent they may be in the conscious awareness of each of us. They

involve us in an exchange of advantages. We admire and support the rich and well-born, and in return we enjoy the kind of stable order without which prosperity would be impossible. God's design is one of interlocking causes, not of harmonized meanings.

Otherwise put, humans are engaged in an exchange of services. The fundamental model seems to be what we have come to call an economy.

This new understanding of Providence is already evident in Locke's formulation of Natural Law theory in the Second Treatise. We can already see here how much importance the economic dimension is taking on in the new notion of order. There are two facets to this. The two main goals of organized society were security and economic prosperity. But because the whole theory emphasized a kind of profitable exchange, one could begin to see political society itself through a quasi-economic metaphor.

Thus no less a personage than Louis XIV, in the advice he offers to his dauphin subscribes to something like an exchange view: "all these different conditions that compose the world are united to each other only by an exchange of reciprocal obligations. The deference and respect that we receive from our subjects are not a free gift from them but payment for the justice and protection they they expect to receive from us".¹²

This, incidentally, offers some insight into (what turned out to be) an important transition stage on the "long march" of the order of mutual benefit into our social imaginary. This was a rival model of order based on command and hierarchy. What Louis and others of his time were offering could be seen as a kind of compromise between the new and the old. The basic justifying reasoning of the different functions, here ruler and subject, is new, viz., the necessary and fruitful exchange of services. But what is justified is still a hierarchical society, and above all, the most radical hierarchical relation, that of absolute monarch to subject. The justification is more and more in terms of functional necessity, but the master images still reflect something of inherent superiority, an ontological hierarchy. The king, by being above everyone else, can hold society together, and sustain everything. He is like the Sun, to use Louis' favourite image.¹³

We might call this the "baroque"¹⁴ solution, except that its most spectacular example at Versailles, saw itself in "classical" terms. It is this compromise which reigns for a while over most of Europe, sustaining regimes with much of the pomp, ritual and imagery of hierarchical complementarity, but on the basis of a justification drawn more and more from the modern order. Bossuet's defense of Louis' absolute rule falls in the same register.

But secondly, the economy could become more than a metaphor. It came to be seen more and more as the dominant end of society. Contemporary with Louis' memoir of advice, Montchretien offers a theory of the state which sees it primarily as the orchestrating power which can make an economy flourish. (It is he, incidentally, who seems to have coined the term 'political economy'.) Merchants act for love of gain, but good policy by the ruler (a still visible hand) can draw this towards the common good.¹⁵

This second shift reflects feature (2) of the modern order in my sketch above: the mutual benefit we are meant to confer on each other gives a crucial place to the securing life and the means to life. This is not an isolated change within theories of Providence; it goes along with a major trend of the age.

This trend is often understood in terms of the standard "materialist" explanations, for instance, the old Marxist account that business classes, merchants, later manufacturers, were becoming more numerous, and gaining greater power. Even on its own level, this account needs to be supplemented with a reference to the changing demands of state power. It more and more dawned on governing elites that increased production, and favourable exchange, was a key condition of political and military power. The experience of Holland and England demonstrated that. And, of course, once some nations began to "develop" economically, their rivals were forced to follow suit, or to be relegated to dependent status. This, as much if not more than growing numbers and wealth, was responsible for the enhanced position of commercial classes.

These "materialist" accounts are important, but following Weber, I don't believe that they take us to the origins of this change. In other words, I think that more production came about first, and then its military/political advantages began to be plain for all to see, and hence it became an object of policy.

What started us on this path, I believe, was certain political and even spiritual changes. Here I think Weber is right, even if not all the detail of his theory can be salvaged.

The original importance of people working steadily in a profession came from the fact that they thereby placed themselves in "settled courses". If ordered life became a demand, not just for military or spiritual/intellectual elite, but for the mass of ordinary people, then they had to become ordered and serious about what they were doing, and of necessity had to be doing, in life, viz., working in some productive occupation. A really ordered society requires that one take these economic occupations seriously, and prescribe a discipline for them. This was the "political" ground.

But in Reformed Christianity and to a growing extent among Catholics as well, there was a spiritual reason, which was the one Weber picked up on. To put it in the Reformed variant, if we are going to reject the Catholic idea that there are some higher vocations, to the celibate or monastic life, following "counsels of perfection", if one claims that all Christians must be 100% Christian, that one can be so in any vocation, then one must claim that ordinary life, the life that the vast majority cannot help leading, the life of production and the family, work and sex, is as hallowed as any other. Indeed, more so than monastic celibacy, because this is based on the vain and prideful claim to have found a higher way.

This is the basis for that sanctification of ordinary life, which I want to claim, has had a tremendous formative effect on our civilization, spilling beyond the original religious variant into myriad secular forms. It has two facets: it promotes ordinary life, as a site for the highest forms of Christian life; and it also has an anti-elitist thrust: it takes down those

allegedly higher modes of existence, whether in the Church (monastic vocations), or in the world (ancient-derived ethics which place contemplation higher than productive existence). The mighty are cast down from their seats, and the humble and meek are exalted.

Both these facets have been formative of modern civilization. The first is part of the background to the central place given to the economic in our lives, as also for the tremendous importance we put on family life, or "relationships". The second underlies the fundamental importance of equality in our social and political lives.

All these factors, material and spiritual, help explain the gradual promotion of the economic to its central place, a promotion already clearly visible in the 18th Century. And at that time, another factor enters; or perhaps it is simply an extension of the "political" one above. The notion becomes more and more accredited that commerce and economic activity is the path to peace and orderly existence. "Le doux commerce" is contrasted to the wild destructiveness of the aristocratic search for military glory. The more a society turns to commerce, the more "polished" and civilized it becomes, the more it excels in the arts of peace. The impetus to money-making is seen as a "calm passion". When it takes hold in a society, it can help to control and inhibit the violent passions. Or put in other language, money-making serves our "interest", and interest can check and control passion.¹⁶ Kant even believed that as nations become republics, and hence more under the control of their ordinary tax-payers, actuated by economic interests, recourse to war will become rarer and rarer.

The new economically-centered notion of natural order underlies the doctrines of harmony of interest. It even came to be projected onto the universe, for it is this which is reflected in the 18th Century vision of cosmic order, not as a hierarchy of forms-at-work, but as a chain of beings whose purposes mesh with each other. Things cohere, because they serve each other in their survival and flourishing. They form an ideal economy.

See dying vegetables life sustain,

See life dissolving vegetate again:

All forms that perish other forms supply,

(By turns we catch the vital breath, and die)

Like bubbles on the sea of Matter born,

They rise, they break, and to that sea return.

Nothing is foreign: Parts relate to whole;

One all-extending, all preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least;
Made Beast in aid of Man, and Man of Beast;
All served, all serving: nothing stands alone;
The chain holds on, and where it ends, unknown.

.....

God in nature of each being founds
Its proper bliss, and sets its proper bounds;
But as he framed a Whole, the Whole to bless,
On mutual Wants built mutual Happiness:
So from the first, eternal ORDER ran,
And creature linked to creature, man to man.

From all this, Pope triumphantly concludes "that true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same." [17](#)

And so perhaps the first big shift wrought by this new idea of order, both in theory and in social imaginary, consists in our coming to see our society as an "economy", an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange and consumption, which form a system with its own laws and its own dynamic. Instead of being merely the management, by those in authority, of the resources we collectively need, in household or state, the "economic" now defines a way in which we are linked together, a sphere of coexistence which could in principle suffice to itself, if only disorder and conflict didn't threaten. Conceiving of the economy as a system is an achievement of eighteenth Century theory, with the Physiocrats and Adam Smith; but coming to see the most important purpose and agenda of society as economic collaboration and exchange is a drift in our social imaginary which begins in that period and continues to this day. From that point on, organized society is no longer equivalent to the polity; other dimensions of social existence are seen as having their own forms and integrity. The very shift in this period of the meaning of the term 'civil society' reflects this.

I have just invoked the move from theory to social imaginary in connection with this new consciousness of society as "economy". But the 18th Century sees other, perhaps even more fateful such moves. I want to describe two other such, which have helped shape our world. But before doing this, I will have to clarify my key term.

I have several times used the term 'social imaginary' in the preceding pages. Perhaps the time has come to make a little clearer what is involved.

What I'm trying to get at with this term is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking rather of the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.

I want to speak of "social imaginary" here, rather than social theory, because there are important differences between the two. There are, in fact, several differences. I speak of "imaginary" (i) because I'm talking about the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc. But it is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

Now it very often happens that what start off as theories held by a few people may come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first of elites perhaps, and then of the whole society. This is what has happened, *grosso modo*, to the theories of Grotius and Locke, although the transformations have been many along the way, and the ultimate forms are rather varied.

Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of each other; the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices which make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. This understanding is both factual and "normative"; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what mis-steps would invalidate the practice. Take our practice of choosing governments through general elections. Part of the background understanding which makes sense of our act of voting for each one of us is our awareness of the whole action, involving all citizens, choosing each individually, but from among the same alternatives, and the compounding of these micro-choices into one binding, collective decision. Essential to our understanding what is involved in this kind of macro-decision is our ability to identify what would constitute a foul: certain kinds of influence, buying votes, threats, and the like. This kind of macro-decision has, in other words, to meet certain norms, if it

is to be what it is meant to be. If a minority could force all others to conform to their orders, it would cease to be a democratic decision, for instance.

Now implicit in this understanding of the norms is the ability to recognize ideal cases, e.g., an election in which each citizen exercised to the maximum his/her judgment autonomously, in which everyone was heard, etc. And beyond the ideal stands some notion of a moral or metaphysical order, in the context of which the norms and ideals make sense.

What I'm calling the social imaginary extends beyond the immediate background understanding which makes sense of our particular practices. This is not an arbitrary extension of the concept, because just as the practice without the understanding wouldn't make sense for us, and thus wouldn't be possible, so this understanding supposes, if it is to make sense, a wider grasp of our whole predicament, how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups, etc.

This wider grasp has no clear limits. That's the very nature of what contemporary philosophers have described as the "background".¹⁸ It is in fact that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have. It can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines, because of its very unlimited and indefinite nature. That is another reason for speaking here of an "imaginary", and not a theory.

The relation between practices and the background understanding behind them is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice which largely carries the understanding. At any given time, we can speak of the "repertory" of collective actions at the disposal of a given group of society. These are the common actions which they know how to undertake, all the way from the general election, involving the whole society, to knowing how to strike up a polite but uninvolved conversation with a casual group in the reception hall. The discriminations we have to make to carry these off, knowing whom to speak to and when and how, carry an implicit "map" of social space, of what kinds of people we can associate with in what ways in what circumstances. Perhaps I don't initiate the conversation at all, if the group is all socially superior to me, or outrank me in the bureaucracy, or consist entirely of women.

This implicit grasp of social space is unlike a theoretical description of this space, distinguishing different kinds of people, and the norms connected to them. The understanding implicit in practice stands to social theory the way that my ability to get around a familiar environment stands to a (literal) map of this area. I am very well able to orient myself without ever having adopted the standpoint of overview which the map offers me. And similarly, for most of human history, and for most of social life, we function through the grasp we have on the common repertory, without benefit of theoretical overview. Humans operated with a social imaginary, well before they ever got into the business of theorizing about themselves.¹⁹

Another example might help to make more palpable the width and depth of this implicit understanding. Let's say we organize a demonstration. This means that this act is already in our repertory. We know how to assemble, pick up banners, and march. We know that this is meant to be within certain bounds, spatially (don't invade certain spaces), in the way it impinges on others (this side of a threshold of aggressivity - no violence). We understand the ritual.

The background understanding which makes this act possible for us is complex, but part of what makes sense of it is some picture of ourselves as speaking to others, to which we are related in a certain way - say, compatriots, or the human race. There is a speech act here, addresser and addressees, and some understanding of how they can stand in this relation to each other. There are public spaces; we are already in some kind of conversation with each other. Like all speech acts, it is addressed to a previously spoken word, in the prospect of a to-be-spoken word. ²⁰

The mode of address says something about the footing we stand on with our addressees. The action is forceful; it is meant to impress, perhaps even to threaten certain consequences if our message is not heard. But it is also meant to persuade; it remains this side of violence. It figures the addressee as one who can be, must be reasoned with.

The immediate sense of what we're doing, getting the message to the government and our fellow citizens that the cuts must stop, say, makes sense in a wider context, in which we see ourselves as standing in a continuing relation with others, in which it is appropriate to address them in this manner, and not say, by humble supplication, or by threats of armed insurrection. We can gesture quickly at all this by saying that this kind of demonstration has its normal place in a stable, ordered, democratic society.

This does not mean that there are not cases where we might do this - Manila 1985, Tiananmen 1989 - where armed insurrection would be perfectly justified. But precisely, the point of this act in those circumstances is to invite tyranny to open up to a democratic transition.

We can see here how the understanding of what we're doing right now (without which we couldn't be doing **this** action) makes the sense it does, because of our grasp on the wider predicament: how we continually stand, or have stood to others and to power. This in turn opens out wider perspectives on where we stand in space and time: our relation to other nations and peoples, e.g., to external models of democratic life we are trying to imitate, or of tyranny we are trying to distance ourselves from; and also of where we stand in our history, in the narrative of our becoming, whereby we recognize this capacity to demonstrate peacefully as an achievement of democracy, hard-won by our ancestors, or something we aspire to become capable of through this common action.

This sense of standing internationally and in history can be invoked in the iconography of the demonstration itself, as in Tiananmen 1989, with its references to the French Revolution, and its "citation" of the American case through the Statue of Liberty.

The background which makes sense of any given act is thus wide and deep. It doesn't include everything in our world, but the relevant sense-giving features can't be circumscribed; and because of this we can say that sense-giving draws on our whole world, that is, our sense of our whole predicament in time and space, among others and in history.

Now an important part of this wider background is what I called above a sense of moral order. I mean by this more than just a grasp on the norms underlying our social practice, which are part of the immediate understanding which makes this practice possible. There also must be a sense, as I stated above, of what makes these norms realizable. This too, is an essential part of the context of action. People don't demonstrate for the impossible, for the utopic²¹ - or if they do, then this becomes ipso facto a rather different action. Part of what we're saying as we march on Tiananmen is that a (somewhat more) democratic society is possible for us, that we could bring it off, in spite of the skepticism of our gerontocratic rulers.

Just what this confidence is based on, for instance, that we as other human beings can sustain a democratic order together, that this is within our human possibilities, this will include the images of moral order through which we understand human life and history. It ought to be clear from the above that our images of moral order, although they make sense of some of our actions, are by no means necessarily tilted towards the status quo. They may also underlie revolutionary practice, as at Manila and Beijing, just as they may underwrite the established order.

Now what I want to do, in the following pages, is sketch the change-over, the process in which the modern theory of moral order gradually infiltrates and transforms our social imaginary. In this process, what is originally just an idealization grows into a complex imaginary through being taken up and associated with social practices, in part traditional ones, but often transformed by the contact. This is crucial to what I called above the extension of the understanding of moral order. It couldn't have become the dominant view in our culture without this penetration/transformation of our imaginary.

We see transitions of this kind happening, for instance, in the great founding revolutions of our contemporary world, the American and the French. The transition was much smoother and less catastrophic in one case, because the idealization of popular sovereignty connected up relatively unproblematically with an existing practice of popular election of assemblies; whereas in the other case, the inability to "translate" the same principle into a stable and agreed set of practices was an immense source of conflict and uncertainty for more than a century. But in both these great events, there was some awareness of the historical primacy of theory, which is central to the modern idea of a "revolution", whereby we set out to remake our political life according to agreed principles. This "constructivism" has become a central feature of modern political culture.

What exactly is involved, when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? Well for the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this

outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. And hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world, and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention.

But this process isn't just one-sided; a theory making over a social imaginary. The theory in coming to make sense of the action is "glossed", as it were, given a particular shape as the context of these practices. Rather like Kant's notion of an abstract category becoming "schematized" when it is applied to reality in space and time,²² the theory is schematized in the dense sphere of common practice.

Nor need the process end here. The new practice, with the implicit understanding it generates, can be the basis for modifications of theory, which in turn can inflect practice, and so on.

What I'm calling the "long march" is a process whereby new practices, or modifications of old ones, either developed through improvisation among certain groups and strata of the population (e.g., the public sphere among educated elites in the eighteenth Century, trade unions among workers in the nineteenth); or else were launched by elites in such a way as to recruit a larger and larger base (e.g., the Jacobin organization of the "sections" in Paris). Or alternatively, a set of practices in the course of their slow development and ramification gradually changed their meaning for people, and hence helped to constitute a new social imaginary (the "economy"). The result in all these cases was a profound transformation of the social imaginary in Western societies, and thus of the world in which we live.

4

There are three such important transitions which must figure in our account: the rise of, respectively 1) the "economy", 2) the public sphere, and 3) the practices and outlooks of democratic self-rule. Each of these represents a penetration/transformation of the social imaginary by the Grotian-Lockean theory of moral order. I have already mentioned (1) above. I turn now to the other two.

2) The economic was perhaps the first dimension of "civil society" to achieve an identity independent from the polity. But it was followed shortly afterwards by the public sphere.

I want to describe the public sphere as a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these. I say "**a** common space", because although the media are multiple, as well as the exchanges which take place in them, these are deemed to be in principle intercommunicating. The discussion we're having on television now takes account of what was said in the newspaper this morning, which in turn reports on the radio debate yesterday, and so on. That's why we usually speak of the public sphere, in the singular.

The public sphere is a central feature of modern society. So much so, that even where it is in fact suppressed or manipulated it has to be faked. Modern despotic societies have generally felt compelled to go through the motions. Editorials appear in the party newspapers, purporting to express the opinions of the writers, offered for the consideration of their fellow citizens; mass demonstrations are organized, purporting to give vent to the felt indignation of large numbers of people. All this takes place as though a genuine process were in train of forming a common mind through exchange, even though the result is carefully controlled from the beginning.

In this discussion, I want to draw in particular on two very interesting books, one published almost thirty years ago but recently translated into English, Jurgen Habermas' The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,²³ which deals with the development of public opinion in eighteenth Century Western Europe; the other a very recent publication by Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic,²⁴ which describes the analogous phenomenon in the British-American colonies.

A central theme of Habermas' book is the emergence in Western Europe in the 18th Century of a new concept of public opinion. Dispersed publications and small group or local exchanges come to be construed as one big debate, from which the "public opinion" of a whole society emerges. In other words, it is understood that widely separated people sharing the same view have been linked in a kind of space of discussion, wherein they have been able to exchange ideas together with others and reach this common end-point.

What is this common space? It's a rather strange thing, when one comes to think of it. The people involved here have by hypothesis never met. But they are seen as linked in a common space of discussion through media - in the 18th century, print media. Books, pamphlets, newspapers circulated among the educated public, vehiculing theses, analyses, arguments, counter-arguments, referring to and refuting each other. These were widely read, and often discussed in face-to-face gatherings, in drawing rooms, coffee houses, salons, and/or in more (authoritatively) "public" places, like Parliament. The sensed general view which resulted from all this, if any, counted as "public opinion" in this new sense.

This space is a "public sphere", in the sense I'm using it here. Now in the previous paragraph, I talked of a conclusion "counting as" public opinion. This reflects the fact that a public sphere can only exist if it is imagined as such. Unless all the dispersed discussions are seen by their participants as linked in one great exchange, there can be no sense of their upshot as "public opinion". This doesn't mean that imagination is all-powerful here. There are objective conditions; internal: for instance, that the fragmentary local discussions inter-refer; external: there had to be printed materials, circulating from a plurality of independent sources, for there to be the bases of what could be seen as a common discussion. As is often said, the modern public sphere relied on "print capitalism" to get going. But as Warner shows, printing itself, and even print capitalism, didn't provide a sufficient condition. They had to be taken up in the right cultural context, where the essential common understandings could arise.²⁵ The public sphere was a

mutation of the social imaginary, one crucial to the development of modern society. It was an important step on the long march.

We are now in a slightly better position to understand what kind of thing a public sphere is, and why it was new in the eighteenth century. It's a kind of common space, I have been saying, in which people who never meet understand themselves to be engaged in discussion, and capable of reaching a common mind. Let me introduce some new terminology. We can speak of "common space" when people come together in a common act of focus for whatever purpose, be it ritual, the enjoyment of a play, conversation, the celebration of a major event, or whatever. Their focus is common, as against merely convergent, because it is part of what is commonly understood that they are attending to the common object, or purpose, together, as against each person just happening, on his or her own, to be concerned with the same thing. In this sense, the "opinion of mankind" offers a merely convergent unity, while public opinion is supposedly generated out of a series of common actions.

Now an intuitively understandable kind of common space is set up when people are assembled for some purpose, be it on an intimate level for conversation, or on a larger, more "public" scale for a deliberative assembly, or a ritual, or a celebration, or the enjoyment of a football match or an opera, and the like. Common space arising from assembly in some locale, I want to call "topical common space".

But the public sphere, as we have been defining it, is something different. It transcends such topical spaces. We might say that it knits together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of non-assembly. The same public discussion is deemed to pass through our debate today, and someone else's earnest conversation tomorrow, and the newspaper interview Thursday, and so on. I want to call this larger kind of non-local common space "meta-topical". The public sphere which emerges in the 18th Century is a meta-topical common space.

What we have been discovering about such spaces is that they are partly constituted by common understandings; that is, they are not reducible to, but cannot exist without such understandings. New, unprecedented kinds of spaces require new and unprecedented understandings. Such is the case for the public sphere.

What is new is not meta-topicality. The Church, the state were already existing meta-topical spaces. But getting clear about the novelty brings us to the essential features of the public sphere as a step in the long march.

I see it as a step in this march, because this mutation in the social imaginary was inspired by the modern idea of order. Two features of it stand out in this regard. One is the one mentioned above; its independent identity from the political. The other is its force as a benchmark of legitimacy. Why these are important will be clear if we recur to the original idealization, say, with Grotius or Locke.

First, as I made clear in the pencil sketch above (point 1), in the Grotius-Locke idealization, political society is seen as an instrument for something pre-political; there is a place to stand, mentally outside of the polity, as it were, from which to judge its performance. This is what is reflected in the new ways of imagining social life independent of the political, viz., the economy and the public sphere.

Secondly, freedom is central to the rights society exists to defend (point 3). Responding both to this, and to the underlying notion of agency, the theory puts great importance on the requirement that political society be founded on the consent of those bound by it.

Now contract theories of legitimate government had existed before. But what was new with the theories of this century is that they put the requirement of consent at a more fundamental level. It was not just that a people, conceived already as existing, had to give consent to those who would claim to rule it. Now the original contract brings us out of the state of nature, and founds even the existence of a collectivity which has some claim on its member individuals.

This original demand for once-for-all historical consent, as a condition of legitimacy, can easily develop into a requirement of current consent. Government must win the consent of the governed; not just originally, but as an ongoing condition of legitimacy. This is what begins to surface in the legitimation function of public opinion.

I will bring out these features of the public sphere, in reverse order. This can perhaps best be done by articulating what is new about it on two levels: what the public sphere **does**; and what it **is**.

First, what it does; or rather, what is done in it. The public sphere is the locus of a discussion potentially engaging everyone (although in the 18th Century the claim was only to involve the educated or "enlightened" minority) in which the society can come to a common mind about important matters. This common mind is a reflective view, emerging from critical debate, and not just a summation of whatever views happen to be held in the population.²⁶ As a consequence it has a normative status: government ought to listen to it. There were two reasons for this, of which one tended to gain ground and ultimately swallow up the other. The first is, that this opinion is likely to be enlightened, and hence government would be well-advised to follow it. This statement by Louis Sebastien Mercier, quoted by Habermas,²⁷ give clear expression to this idea:

Les bons livres dependent des lumieres dans toutes les classes du peuple; ils ornent la verite. Ce sont eux qui deja gouvernent l'Europe; ils eclairent le gouvernement sur ses devoirs, sur sa faute, sur son veritable interet, sur l'opinion publique qu'il doit ecouter et suivre: ces bons livres sont des maitres patients qui attendent le reveil des administrateurs des etats et le calme de leurs passions.

Kant famously had a similar view.

The second reason emerges with the view that the people is sovereign. Government is then not only wise to follow opinion; it is morally bound to do so. Governments ought to legislate and rule in the midst of a reasoning public. Parliament, or the court, in taking its decisions ought to be concentrating together and enacting what has already been emerging out of enlightened debate among the people. From this arises what Warner, following Habermas, calls the "principle of supervision", which insists that the proceedings of governing bodies be public, open to the scrutiny of the discerning public.²⁸ By going public, legislative deliberation informs public opinion and allows it to be maximally rational, while at the same time exposing itself to its pressure, and thus acknowledging that legislation should ultimately bow to the clear mandates of this opinion.²⁹

The public sphere is, then, a locus in which rational views are elaborated which should guide government. This comes to be seen as an essential feature of a free society. As Burke put it, "in a free country, every man thinks he has a concern in all public matters".³⁰ There is, of course, something very new about this in the 18th Century, compared to the immediate past of Europe. But one might ask, is this new in history? Isn't this a feature of all free societies?

No; there is a subtle but important difference. Let's compare the modern society with a public sphere with an ancient republic or polis. In this latter, we can imagine that debate on public affairs may be carried on in a host of settings: among friends at a symposium, between those who meet in the agora, and then of course in the ekklesia where the thing is finally decided. The debate swirls around and ultimately reaches its conclusion in the competent decision-making body. Now the difference is that the discussions outside this body prepare for the action ultimately taken by the same people within it. The "unofficial" discussions are not separated off, given a status of their own, and seen to constitute a kind of meta-topical space.

But that is what happens with the modern public sphere. It is a space of discussion which is self-consciously seen as being outside power. It is supposed to be listened to by power, but it is not itself an exercise of power. Its in this sense extra-political status is crucial. As we shall see below, it links the public sphere with other facets of modern society which also are seen as essentially extra-political. The extra-political status is not just defined negatively, as a lack of power. It is also seen positively: just because public opinion is not an exercise of power, it can be ideally disengaged from partisan spirit and rational.

In other words, with the modern public sphere comes the idea that political power must be supervised and checked by something outside. What was new, of course, was not that there was an outside check, but rather the nature of this instance. It is not defined as the will of God, or the Law of Nature (although it could be thought to articulate these), but as a kind of discourse, emanating from reason and not from power or traditional authority. As Habermas puts it, power was to be tamed by reason. The notion was that "veritas non auctoritas facit legem".³¹

In this way, the public sphere was different from everything preceding it. An "unofficial" discussion, which nevertheless can come to a verdict of great importance, it is defined outside the sphere of power. It borrows some of the images from ancient assemblies, as we saw above from the American case, to project the whole public as one space of discussion. But as Warner shows, it innovates in relation to this model. Those who intervene are, as it were, like speakers before an assembly. But unlike their models in real ancient assemblies, they strive for a certain impersonality, a certain impartiality, an eschewing of party spirit. They strive to negate their own particularity, and thus to rise above "any private or partial view". This is what Warner calls "the principle of negativity". And we can see it not only as suiting with the print, as against spoken, medium, but also as giving expression to this crucial feature of the new public sphere as extra-political, as a discourse of reason **on** and **to** power, rather than **by** power.³²

As Warner points out, the rise of the public sphere involves a breach in the old ideal of a social order undivided by conflict and difference. On the contrary, it means that debate breaks out, and continues, involving in principle everybody, and this is perfectly legitimate. The old unity will be gone for ever. But a new unity is to be substituted. For the ever-continuing controversy is not meant to be an exercise in power, a quasi-civil war carried on by dialectical means. Its potentially divisive and destructive consequences are offset by the fact that it is a debate outside of power, a rational debate, striving without *parti pris* to define the common good. "The language of resistance to controversy articulates a norm for controversy. It silently transforms the ideal of a social order free from conflictual debate into an ideal of debate free from social conflict."³³

So what the public sphere does, is enable the society to come to a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power. Now let's try to see what, in order to do this, it has to **be**.

We can perhaps best do this by trying to define what is new and unprecedented in it. And I want to get to this in two steps, as it were. First, there is the aspect of its novelty which has already been touched on. When we compare the public sphere with one of the important sources of its constitutive images, viz., the ancient republic, what springs to our notice is its extra-political locus. The "Republic of Letters" was a common term which the members of the international society of savants in interchange gave themselves towards the end of the seventeenth Century. This was a precursor phenomenon to the public sphere; indeed, it contributed to shaping it. Here was a "republic" constituted outside of the political.

Both the analogy and the difference gave its force and point to this image: it was a republic as a unified association, grouping all enlightened participants, across political boundaries; but it was also a republic in being free from subjection; its "citizens" owed no allegiance but to it, as long as they went about the business of Letters.

Something of this is inherited by the eighteenth century public sphere. Within it, the members of society come together and pursue a common end; they form and understand

themselves to form an association, which is nevertheless not constituted by its political structure. This was not true of the ancient polis or republic. Athens was a society, a *koinon*, only as constituted politically. And the same was true of Rome. The ancient society was given its identity by its laws. On the banners of the legions, "SPQR" stood for "Senatus populusque romanus", but the "populus" here was the ensemble of Roman citizens, that is, those defined as such by the laws. The people didn't have an identity, didn't constitute a unity prior to and outside of these laws. This reflected, as we saw above, a common pre-modern understanding of the moral\metaphysical order underlying social practice.

By contrast, in projecting a public sphere, our eighteenth century forbears were placing themselves in an association, this common space of discussion, which owed nothing to political structures, but was seen as existing independently of them.

This extra-political status is one aspect of the newness: that all the members of a political society (or at least, all the competent and "enlightened" members) should be seen as also forming a society outside the state. Indeed, this society was wider than any one state; it extended for some purposes to all of civilized Europe. This is an extremely important aspect, and corresponds to a crucial feature of our contemporary civilization, which emerges at this time, and which is visible in more than the public sphere. I want to take this up in a minute, but first we have to take the second step.

For it is obvious that an extra-political, international society is by itself not new. It is preceded by the Stoic cosmopolis, and more immediately, by the Christian Church. Europeans were used to living in a dual society, one organized by two mutually irreducible principles. So the second facet of the newness of the public sphere has to be defined as its radical secularity.

Here I am recurring to a very particular use of this term, in which it stands close to its original meaning as an expression for a certain kind of time. It is obviously intimately related to the one common meaning of 'secularity', which focusses on the removal of God, or religion or the spiritual from public space. What I am talking about here is not exactly that, but something which has contributed to it; viz., a shift in our understanding of what society is grounded on. In spite of all the risks of confusion, there is a reason to use the term 'secular' here because it marks in its very etymology what is at stake here, which has something to do with the way human society inhabits time. But this way of describing the difference can only be brought in later, after some preliminary exploration.

The notion of secularity I'm using here is radical, because it stands not only in contrast with a divine foundation for society, but with any idea of society as constituted in something which transcends contemporary common action. For instance, some hierarchical societies conceive themselves as bodying forth some part of the Chain of Being. Behind the empirical fillers of the slots of kingship, aristocracy, and so on, lie the Ideas, or the persisting metaphysical Realities that these people are momentarily embodying. The King has two bodies, only one being the particular, perishable one, which is now being fed and clothed, and will later be buried.³⁴ Within this outlook, what

constitutes a society as such is the metaphysical order it embodies.³⁵ People act within a framework which is there prior to and independent of their action.

But secularity contrasts not only with divinely-established churches, or Great Chains. It is also different from an understanding of our society as constituted by a law which has been ours since time out of mind. Because this too, places our action within a framework, one which binds us together and makes us a society, and which transcends our common action.

In contradistinction to all this, the public sphere is an association which is constituted by nothing outside of the common action we carry out in it: coming to a common mind, where possible, through the exchange of ideas. Its existence as an association is just our acting together in this way. This common action is not made possible by a framework which needs to be established in some action-transcendent dimension: either by an act of God, or in a Great Chain, or by a law which comes down to us since time out of mind. This is what makes it radically secular. And this, I want to claim, gets us to the heart of what is new and unprecedented in it.

This is baldly stated. Obviously, this notion of secularity still needs to be made clearer. Perhaps the contrast is obvious enough with Mystical Bodies and Great Chains. But I am claiming a difference from traditional tribal society as well, the kind of thing the German peoples had who founded our modern North Atlantic polities, or in another form what constituted the ancient republics and poleis. And this might be challenged.

These societies were defined by a law. But is that all that different from the public sphere? After all, whenever we want to act in this sphere, we meet a number of structures already in place: there are certain newspapers, television networks, publishing houses, and the rest. We act within the channels that these provide. Is this not rather analogous to any member of a tribe, who also has to act within established structures, of chieftainships, councils, annual meetings, and the rest? Of course, the institutions of the public sphere change; newspapers go broke, television networks merge, and the like. But no tribe remains absolutely fixed in its forms; these too evolve over time. If one wanted to claim that this pre-existing structure is valid for ongoing action, but not for the founding acts which set up the public sphere, the answer might be that these are impossible to identify in the stream of time, any more than they are for the tribe. And if we want to insist that there must be such a moment, then we should remark that many tribes as well hand down legends of a founding act, when a Lycurgus, for instance, laid down their laws. Surely he acted outside of existing structures.

Talking of actions within structures brings out the similarities. But there is an important difference which resides in the respective common understandings. It is true that in a functioning public sphere, action at any time is carried out within structures laid down earlier. There is a *de facto* arrangement of things. But this arrangement doesn't enjoy any privilege over the action carried out within it. The structures were set up during previous acts of communication in common space, on all fours with those we are carrying out now. Our present action may modify these structures, and that is perfectly legitimate,

because these are seen as nothing more than precipitates and facilitators of such communicative action.

But the traditional law of a tribe usually enjoys a different status. We may, of course, alter it over time, following the prescription it itself provides. But it is not seen just as a precipitate and facilitator of action. The abolition of the law would mean the abolition of the subject of common action, because the law defines the tribe as an entity. Whereas a public sphere could start up again, even where all media had been abolished, simply by founding new ones, a tribe can only resume its life on the understanding that the law, although perhaps interrupted in its efficacy by foreign conquest, is still in force.

That's what I mean when I say that what constitutes the society, what makes the common agency possible, transcends the common actions carried out within it. It is not just that the structures we need for today's common action arose as a consequence of yesterday's, which however was no different in nature from today's. Rather the traditional law is a precondition of any common action, at whatever time, because this common agency couldn't exist without it. It is in this sense transcendent. By contrast, in a purely secular association (in my sense), common agency arises simply in and as a precipitate of common action.

The crucial distinction underlying the concept of secularity I'm trying to define here can thus be related to this issue: what constitutes the association? or otherwise put, what makes this group of people as they continue over time a common agent? Where this is something which transcends the realm of those common actions this agency engages in, the association is non-secular. Where the constituting factor is nothing other than such common action - whether the founding acts have already occurred in the past, or are now coming about is immaterial - we have secularity.

Now the claim I want to make is that this kind of secularity is modern; that it comes about very recently in the history of mankind. Of course, there have been all sorts of momentary and topical common agents which have arisen just from common action. A crowd gathers, people shout protests, and then the governor's house is stoned, or the chateau is burned down. But prior to the modern day, enduring, metatopical common agency was inconceivable on a purely secular basis. People could only see themselves as constituted into such by something action-transcendent, be it a foundation by God, or a Chain of Being which society bodied forth, or some traditional law which defined our people. The eighteenth century public sphere thus represents an instance of a new kind: a metatopical common space and common agency without an action-transcendent constitution, an agency grounded purely in its own common actions.

But how about the founding moments which traditional societies often "remembered"? What about Lycurgus' action in giving Sparta its laws? Surely these show us examples of the constituting factor (here law) issuing from common action: Lycurgus proposes, the Spartans accept. But it is in the nature of such founding moments that they are not put on the same plane as contemporary common action. The foundation acts are displaced onto a higher plane, into a heroic time, an *illud tempus* which is not seen as qualitatively on a

level with what we do today. The founding action is not just like our action, not just an earlier similar act whose precipitate structures ours. It is not just earlier, but in another kind of time, an exemplary time.³⁶

And this is why I am tempted to use the term `secular', in spite of all the misunderstandings which may arise. Because it's clear that I don't only mean: `not tied to religion'.³⁷ The exclusion is much broader. For the original sense of `secular' was `of the age', that is, pertaining to profane time. It was close to the sense of `temporal' in the opposition temporal/spiritual, as we saw earlier.

Now in earlier ages, the understanding was that this profane time existed in relation to (surrounded by, penetrated by: it is hard to find the right words here) higher times. Pre-modern understandings of time seem to have been always multi-dimensional. Time was transcended and held in place by eternity; whether that of Greek philosophy, or that of the Biblical God. In either case, eternity was not just endless profane time, but an ascent into the unchanging, or a kind of gathering of time into a unity; hence the expression "hoi ai@nes t@n ai@n@n", or "saecula saeculorum".

The Platonic or Christian relating of time and eternity were not the only games in town, even in Christendom. There was also the much more widespread sense of a foundation time, a "time of origins" as Eliade used to call it,³⁸ which was complexly related to the present moment in ordinary time, in that it frequently could be ritually approached and its force partly re-appropriated at certain privileged moments. That's why it could not simply be unambiguously placed in the past (in ordinary time). The Christian liturgical year draws on this kind of time-consciousness, widely shared by other religious outlooks, in re-enacting the "founding" events of Christ's life.

Now it seems to have been the universal norm to see the important meta-topical spaces and agencies as constituted in some mode of higher time. States, churches, were seen to exist almost necessarily in more than one time-dimension, as though it were inconceivable that they have their being purely in the profane or ordinary time. A state which bodied forth the Great Chain was connected to the eternal realm of the Ideas; a people defined by its law communicated with the founding time where this was laid down; and so on.

Modern "secularization" can be seen from one angle as the rejection of higher times, and the positing of time as purely profane. Events now exist only in this one dimension, in which they stand at greater and lesser temporal distance, and in relations of causality with other events of the same kind. The modern notion of simultaneity comes to be, in which events utterly unrelated in cause or meaning are held together simply by their co-occurrence at the same point in this single profane time-line. Modern literature, as well as news media, seconded by social science, has accustomed us to think of society in terms of vertical time-slices, holding together myriad happenings, related and unrelated. I think Anderson is right that this is a typically modern mode of social imagination, which our mediaeval forbears would have found difficult to understand, for where events in profane time are very differently related to higher time, it seems unnatural just to group them side

by side in the modern relation of simultaneity. This carries a presumption of homogeneity which was essentially negated by the dominant time-consciousness.³⁹ I will recur to this below.

Now the move to what I am calling "secularity" is obviously related to this radically purged time-consciousness. It comes when associations are placed firmly and wholly in homogeneous, profane time, whether or not the higher time is negated altogether, or other associations are still admitted to exist in it. Such I want to argue is the case with the public sphere, and therein lies its new and (close to) unprecedented nature.

I can now perhaps draw this discussion together, and try to state what the public sphere **was**. It was a new meta-topical space, in which members of society could exchange ideas and come to a common mind. As such it constituted a meta-topical agency, but one which was understood to exist independent of the political constitution of society and completely in profane time.

An extra-political, secular, meta-topical space, this is what the public sphere was and is. And the importance of understanding this lies partly in the fact that it was not the only such, that it was part of a development which transformed our whole understanding of time and society, so that we have trouble recalling what it was like before.

5

There are, of course, two other such extra-political, secular spaces which have played a crucial role in the development of society. they are: first, society considered as extra-politically organized in a (market) economy, which I mentioned above; and second, society as a "people", that is as a meta-topical agency which is thought to pre-exist and found the politically organized society. We have to see these three as linked in their development, and also as interwoven with other kinds of social spaces which were also emerging at this time.

Habermas notes that the new public sphere brought together people who had already carved out a "private" space as economic agents and owners of property, as well as an "intimate" sphere which was the locus of their family life. The agents constituting this new public sphere were thus both "bourgeois" and "homme".⁴⁰

I think there is a very important link here. The importance of these new kinds of "private" space, that is, the heightened sense of their significance in human life, and the growing consensus in favour of entrenching their independence in face of state and church, bestowed in fact exceptional importance on an extra-political and secular domain of life. It is hard not to believe that this in some way facilitated the rise of the public sphere.

I would like to place these forms of privacy in a further historical context, which I already invoked above, in connection with the rise of the "economy". This is what I have called the "affirmation of ordinary life".⁴¹ By this I mean the broad movement in

European culture, which seems to have been carried first by the Protestant Reformation, which steadily enhances the significance of production and family life. Whereas the dominant ethics which descend from the ancient world tended to treat these as infra-structural to the "good life", defined in terms of supposedly "higher" activities, like contemplation or citizen participation, and whereas mediaeval Catholicism leaned to a view which made the life of dedicated celibacy the highest form of Christian practice, the Reformers stressed that we follow God first of all in our callings and in our families. The ordinary is sanctified, or put in other terms, the claims to special sanctity of certain types of life (the monastic), or special places (churches), or special acts (the Mass), were rejected as part of false and impious belief that humans could in some way control the action of grace.

But to say that all claims to special sanctity were rejected is to say that the nodal points where profane time especially connected with divine time were repudiated. We live our ordinary lives, work in our callings, sustain our families, in profane time. In the new perspective, this is what God demands of us, and not any attempts on our part to connect with eternity. That connection is purely God's affair. Thus the issue whether we live good or bad lives was henceforth situated firmly in ordinary life and within profane time.

Transposed out of a theological and into a purely human dimension, this gave rise to the constellation of modern beliefs and sensibility which makes the central questions of the good life turn on how we live our ordinary lives, and turns its back on supposedly "higher" or more heroic modes of life. It underlies the "bourgeois" ethic of peaceful rational productivity in its polemic against the aristocratic ethic of honour and heroism. It can even appropriate its own forms of heroism, as in the Promethean picture of humans as producers, transforming the face of the earth, which we find with Marx. Or it can issue in the more recent ethic of self-fulfillment in relationships, which is very much part of our contemporary world.

This is the background against which we can understand the two developments Habermas picks out. First, the saliency given to the "private" economic agent reflects the significance of the life of production in the ethic of ordinary life. This agent is private, over against the "public" realm of state and other authority. The "private" world of production now has a new dignity and importance. The enhancing of the private in effect gives the charter to a certain kind of individualism. The agent of production acts on his own, operates in a sphere of exchange with others which doesn't need to be constituted by authority. As these acts of production and exchange come to be seen as forming an ideally self-regulating system, the notion emerges of a new kind of extra-political and secular sphere, an "economy" in the modern sense. Where the word originally applied to the management of a household, and therefore to a domain which could never be seen as self-regulating, in the 18th Century the notion arises of an economic system, with the Physiocrats and Adam Smith, and that is the way we understand it today.

The (market) economy comes to constitute a sphere, that is, a way in which people are linked together to form an interconnecting society, not only objectively but in their self-understanding. This sphere is extra-political and secularly constituted. But it is in an

important sense not public. The time has come perhaps to distinguish some of the senses of this overworked term.

There seem to be two main semantic axes along which this term is used. The first connects `public' to what affects the whole community ("public affairs"), or the management of these affairs ("public authority"). The second makes publicity a matter of access ("this park is open to the public"), or appearance ("the news has been made public"). The new "private" sphere of economic agents contrasts with `public' in the first sense. But these agents also came to constitute what we have been calling a public sphere in the second sense, because this sphere is precisely a meta-topical common space, a space in which people come together and contact each other. It is a space, we might say, of mutual appearance, and in that sense a "public" space.

But the economic sphere proper is not public even in that second sense. The whole set of economic transactions are linked in a series of causal relations, which can be traced, and by which we can understand how they influence each other, but this is neither a matter of common decision (by "public authority"), nor do these linked transactions lie in some public domain of common appearance. And yet I want to speak of a "sphere" because the agents in an economy are seen as being linked in a single society, in which their actions reciprocally affect each other in some systematic way.

The economy is the first mode of society of the new sort which I defined above, a society constituted purely extra-politically and in profane time. It forms part of the background to the rise of the public sphere. It seems very plausible that the explanation of each is interlinked with that of the other.

The second background Habermas picks out is the intimate sphere. Here we see a development of the second main constituent of ordinary life, the world of the family and its affections. As the 18th Century develops, this becomes the locus of another demand for "privacy", this time defined in relation to the second kind of "publicness", that concerned with access. Family life retreats more and more into an intimate sphere, shielded from the outside world, and even from the other members of a large household. Houses are more and more constructed to allow for the "privacy" of family members, in relation to servants as well as outsiders.

The enhanced value placed on family life, in the context of another long-term development, towards greater concentration on subjectivity and inwardness, has as one of its fruits the 18th Century cherishing of sentiment. Another shift occurs, as it were, in the centre of gravity of the good life, within the broad development which affirms ordinary life, and a new importance comes to repose on our experiencing fine, noble, or exalted sentiments. This new ethic both defines and propagates itself through literature. Perhaps its central vehicle was the epistolary novel. Rousseau's Julie was a paradigm case.

This literature helped define a new understanding of an intimate sphere of close relations, the home at its finest of noble sentiments, and exalted experience. This understanding of experience was further enriched by a new conception of art in the category of the

"aesthetic". This is another fruit of subjectification, of course, because art understood in this category is being defined in terms of our reaction to it. It is in this century that music becomes more and more detached from public and liturgical function, and comes to join the other arts as objects of aesthetic enjoyment, enriching the intimate sphere.

This intimate realm was also part of the background against which the public sphere emerged. And not only because it constituted part of the domain of the (extra-political and secular) "private", but also because the intimate domain had to be defined through public interchange, both of literary works and of criticism. This is only superficially a paradox, as we shall see below. A new definition of human identity, however "private", can only become generally accepted through being defined and affirmed in public space. And this critical exchange itself came to constitute a public sphere. We might say, it came to constitute an axis of the public sphere, along with, even slightly ahead of the principal axis which concerned us above: exchange around matters of public (in sense one) policy. People who never met came to a mutually recognized common mind about the moving power of Rousseau's Julie, even as they came to do in the early Revolutionary period about the insights of his Contrat Social.

We should also mention here a third way in which the Reformation helped to create the conditions for meta-topical common agency in secular time. I am thinking here particularly of the more radical, Calvinist wing. From the very beginning this usually demanded a much more thoroughgoing reorganization of Church life than the more moderate Lutheran variant. Later, particularly in the English-speaking countries, this also spilled over into political restructuring, and the founding of new political units, designed on new principles, as in New England. At this point this strand of the Reformation also began to fissure, and to generate new "free" churches, based more and more on voluntary associations, a process which intensifies in the eighteenth Century with Methodism and the Great Awakening.

In this recurrent activity of founding and refounding, we are witnessing more and more the creation of common agencies in secular time. We still have a crucial reference to God, as the one who calls us to this refounding, but the reference to higher time is less and less prominent. It remained, if at all, only in an eschatological perspective, to the extent that the new reforms were thought to be ushering in the end of profane time, and the gathering of all times in God. As this perspective dims, the founding activity is confined more and more exclusively in profane time.

The life of these new churches or sects also helped to set the scene for modern forms of common agency in another respect. They usually demanded a strong commitment from their members, drawing them to associate with others beyond the bounds of family, lineage, neighbourhood or traditional fealty. They created societies in which these more partial ties mattered less than belonging to a religious community for which membership was individual, and fundamentally the same for all. Something like this, of course, was always part of the theory of the Christian Church, but the modern sect lived this more intensely, and accustomed its members to see themselves as belonging individually and directly to the whole. The ground was thus prepared for modern "horizontal", or direct

access societies, in which our membership is unmediated by any partial group, as also for a mode of sociability in which new associations are constantly being created.⁴²

It is against this whole, economic, ecclesial and intimate-sentimental background that we have to understand the rise of the public sphere in Europe. And this means that we should understand it as part of a family of extra-political and secular constitutions of "society". On one side, it relates to the economy, even farther removed from the political realm in that it is not a domain of publicity in any sense. On the other side, it helped to nourish the new images of popular sovereignty, which gave rise to new and sometimes frightening forms of political action in this century.

6

3) This latter is the third in the great connected chain of mutations in the social imaginary which have helped constitute modern society. This too starts off as a theory, and then gradually infiltrates and transmutes social imaginaries. We can see how older ideas of legitimacy are colonized, as it were, with the new understandings of order, and then transformed; in certain cases, without a clear break.

The United States is a case in point. The reigning notions of legitimacy in Britain and America, the ones which fired the English Civil War, for instance, as well as the beginnings of the Colonies' rebellion, were basically backward-looking. They turned around the idea of an "ancient constitution", an order based on law holding "since time out of mind", in which Parliament had its rightful place beside the King. This was typical of one of the most widespread pre-modern understandings of order, which referred back to a "time of origins" (Eliade's phrase), which was not in ordinary time.

This older idea emerges from the American Revolution transformed into a full-fledged foundation in popular sovereignty, whereby the US constitution is put in the mouth of "We, the people". This was preceded by an appeal to the idealized order of Natural Law, in the invocation of "truths held self-evident" in the Declaration of Independence. The transition was the easier, because what was understood as the traditional law gave an important place to elected assemblies and their consent to taxation. All that was needed was to shift the balance in these so as to make elections the only source of legitimate power.

But what has to take place for this change to come off is a transformed social imaginary, in which the idea of foundation is taken out of the mythical early time, and seen as something that people can do today. In other words, it becomes something that can be brought about by collective action in contemporary, purely secular time. This happened sometime in the eighteenth century, but really more towards its end than its beginning. @lites propounded **theories** of founding action beforehand, but these hadn't adequately sunk into the general social imaginary for them to be acted on. So that 1688, radical departure as it may seem to us in retrospect, was presented as an act of continuity, of return to a pre-existent legality. (We are fooled by a change in semantics. The "Glorious

Revolution" had the original sense of a return to the original position; not the modern sense of a innovative turn-over. Of course, it helped by its Wirkungsgeschichte to alter the sense.)

This fit between theory and social imaginary is crucial to the outcome. Popular Sovereignty could be invoked in the American case, because it had a generally agreed institutional meaning. All colonists agreed that the way to found a new constitution was through some kind of assembly, perhaps slightly larger than the normal one, such as in Massachusetts in 1779. The force of the old representative institutions helped to "interpret" in practical terms the new concept.

Quite different was the case in the French Revolution, with fateful effects. The impossibility remarked by all historians of "bringing the Revolution to an end"⁴³ came partly from this, that any particular expression of popular sovereignty could be challenged by some other, with substantial support. Part of the terrifying instability of the first years of the Revolution stemmed from this negative fact, that the shift from the legitimacy of dynastic rule to that of the nation had no agreed meaning in a broadly based social imaginary.

This is not to be understood as the global "explanation" of this instability, but as telling us something about the way in which the different factors we cite to explain it worked together to produce the result we know. Of course, the fact that substantial parts of the King's entourage, the army and the nobility did not accept the new principles created a tremendous obstacle to stabilization. And even those who were for the new legitimacy were divided among themselves. But what made these latter divisions so deadly was the absence of any agreed understanding on the institutional meaning of the sovereignty of the nation.

Burke's advice to the revolutionaries was to stick to their traditional constitution, and amend it piecemeal. But this was already beyond their powers. It was not just that the representative institutions of this constitution, the Estates General, had been in abeyance for 175 years. They were also profoundly out of synch with the aspiration to equal citizenship which had developed among the educated classes, the bourgeoisie and a good part of the aristocracy, which found expression in a number of ways; negatively through the attack on aristocratic privilege, and positively in the enthusiasm for Republican Rome and its ideals.⁴⁴ That is why virtually the first demand of the Third Estate in 1789 was to abolish the separate chambers, and bring all the delegates together in a single National Assembly.

Even more gravely, outside of these educated elites, there was very little sense of what a representative constitution might mean. True, masses of people responded to the calling of the Estates General, with their cahiers de doléance, but this whole procedure supposed the continuance of royal sovereignty; it wasn't at all suited to serve as a channel for the popular will.

What the moderates hoped for was something along the lines of Burke's prescription: an evolution of the traditional constitution to fashion the kind of representative institutions which would precisely be understood by all as the expression of the nation's will, through the votes of the citizens. This is what the House of Commons had become in the 18th Century, even though the "people" here was a small elite, deemed to speak for the whole through various kinds of virtual representation.

This created a sense of the forms of self-rule which was part of the social imaginary of the broader society. That's why the demands for broader popular participation took the form in England of proposals to extend the franchise. The people wanted in to the established representative structure, as most notably in the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 1840s. The American case discussed above was a stage ahead on this same evolution; their representative assemblies were generally elected on the basis of manhood suffrage.

These forms of self-rule through elected assembly were part of the generally available repertory in the Anglo-Saxon societies. Not only were they absent in that of the popular classes in France, but these had developed their own forms of popular protest which were structured by a quite different logic. French peasants and city dwellers had their own way of making their needs known when things got intolerable, the peasant or urban uprising. In towns, say, when the price of wheat soared, and local merchants were suspected of hoarding grain to make a killing, riots could break out, targetting the municipal authorities and/or the offending merchants. These offenders were often killed, in a partly ritualized violence which our modern sensibility finds gruesome (e.g., the victims decapitated, their heads carried around on pikes and displayed).

Then the royal government would react, send in some soldiers, restore order, and make some exemplary punishments (more killing, and with its own ritual elements, which accompanied public executions under the ancien regime).⁴⁵ But they would also be sure to take measures to lower the price of grain, imposing ceilings and importing stocks from elsewhere.

From one point of view, one can see the whole bloody process as an exchange between the base and the summit where power resides, the enacting of a cahier de doléance in unmistakable terms. But the background understanding which enframes the whole exchange is that power remains at the summit; the very opposite of the understanding defining popular sovereignty. Popular classes that function in this way have to transform their repertory before they can act as a sovereign "people".

A good part of what was involved in "bringing the Revolution to an end" was this transformation of the popular repertory, the development of a new social imaginary which would confer on regular ordered elections the meaning of expressions of popular will. In the meantime, as always, there was a struggle to reinterpret old practices in a new way.

Take the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. This was in many ways an old-style popular insurrection. It had a particular, limited goal: getting hold of the arms which were

supposedly stored in the Bastille in order to defend Paris against the threat of the Swiss mercenaries; and it ended in a very traditional ritual of violence: the execution of the governor, whose head was displayed on a pike. But just as the revolt of the colonies in the name of their traditional, established rights was later reinterpreted as the innovative act of a sovereign people; so here the taking of the Bastille was seen as an assertion of popular power. The building's importance was no longer the particular, contingent fact that it contained arms (actually it didn't really, but that was what was believed), but its essential, symbolic nature as a prison in which people were arbitrarily confined by royal fiat.

This creative misremembering has played a big part in the transformation of the social imaginary. It was ritually referred to in the Fete de la Federation exactly a year later, through which Lafayette hoped to stabilize the revolution in the more moderate form of a constitutional monarchy. And it has of course become THE symbolic date of the turn-over to popular rule, the annual national feast of the French Republic.

But in the nature of things this kind of transformation couldn't be effected right away, in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. Moreover, any chance of doing this was undermined by the fact that the leading elites couldn't agree on the representative forms which they wanted to have accepted as the normal channels of the popular will.

For the great battle between the different revolutionary factions turned on this issue: what was the correct institutional expression for the sovereignty of the nation. This defined the terms of the struggle between them. Each had its formula to offer as the proper way of realizing this principle: whether through a republic or a constitutional monarchy, through indirect representation, or some more immediate relation of people and deputy, through the representation of different interests or the undivided expression of a general will. The undecidable issue between these different institutions and procedures had in the end to be determined at the boundary of all of them, through coups de force. Thus the members of the Convention elected by the "people" were eventually purged in 1793 under threat of the activists from the Paris sections, and that in the name of the "people". The immediate consequences are too horrible and too well-known to need repetition.

The terms of this struggle, its peculiarly intense ideological nature, the immense importance placed on theoretical justifications and models of right government, during those days when the urgent practical dangers of foreign invasion and internal counter-revolutionary insurrection seemed to demand their place at the top of the agenda; these are to be understood in this context. The discourse wasn't simply a cover for the hard reality of group interest and military defense, a diagnosis which becomes truer later in under the Directory. Rather all this talk was for real; its goal being to establish that one's own group was carrying out the only legitimate realization of the sovereignty of the people. And this meant that however dotty the content of the discourse, it was generally meant in deadly earnest; even when we're dealing with the Jacobins, where the criteria of genuine representation of the people turned crucially on the virtue of the leaders, standing foursquare for the whole against the self-interested, divisive "factions". It is especially in the case of the Jacobins that the expression "deadly earnest" becomes appropriate.

As Furet has argued, the murderous craziness of the revolutionary crisis cannot be considered a kind of rhetorical froth thrown up by the real battles for national survival, or between groups. We have to allow for its centrality.⁴⁶

The problem of "ending the Revolution" continued to haunt French society into the Restoration and well into the 19th Century.⁴⁷ The return to some stability in the aftermath of the Revolution could only come through some generally accepted forms of representative government. And this meant solving the double problem which the whole Revolutionary period had left unresolved: coming to an agreement among political elites on representative institutions, which could at the same time become part of the popular social imaginary.

Once again, during the Restoration, the opposition of the royalist ultras made things exceedingly difficult. And the growing social divisions which came with the growth of the working class made it all the more difficult to bridge the gap between elite constitutionalism and popular repertory. On the contrary, the Revolution remained alive for a number of radicals not just as the gateway to a proper institutional order, but as itself the paradigm moment of popular sovereignty. Something like a revolutionary scenario, what Robert Tombs calls "the Revolutionary passion play",⁴⁸ haunted the radical imagination and remained in the popular memory, waiting to be re-enacted in order to realize finally the promise of 1789. In these circumstances, the spectre of renewed revolution could never be finally laid to rest, however often the claim was made to have "ended the Revolution".

But as Guizot, the Doctrinaires, Thiers, and later Gambetta saw, the only solution would be the evolution of forms which would come to be generally recognized as the obviously appropriate realization of the new principle of legitimacy. Guizot and the Doctrinaires understood that required the growth of a new, widely shared social imaginary,⁴⁹ but their own elite representative institutions, with their narrow franchise, could never crystallize this around themselves, as gradually became clear after 1830.⁵⁰

Over time, republican France found such forms, but only after they had gone over to manhood suffrage. Gambetta saw that the only way the people could develop a new social imaginary around ordered representative institutions was by participating in their election.⁵¹

The forms which "took" in France turned out to be interestingly different from the Anglo-American mode. Pierre Rosanvallon has traced the peculiar path by which universal suffrage was achieved in France, and he brings to light the different shape of the social imaginary in this republican tradition.⁵²

7

So this third of the great mutations, after the economy and the public sphere, involves "inventing the people"⁵³ as a new collective agency. We can recognize in the forms

which have emerged from these mutations the lineaments of our understanding of moral order in contemporary liberal democracies. The way we imagine our social life is articulated in these forms. The "society" in which we live is not just the politically-structured order; we also belong to "civil society". We are linked in an economy, can seek access to a public sphere, and move in a world of independent associations.

Moreover, action in the political sphere has to take account of the integrity of the other forms, and the goals people seek in them. It is true that the idea of politics as purely instrumental to, say, economic prosperity is hotly contested in our world (and rightly so, I believe). In fact, the emergence of popular sovereignty has given politics a new importance, which partly expressed itself in the retrieval of forms and ideals from the ancient republics and poleis, in which political activity stood at the apex of the citizen's life. But even so, the integrity of the other spheres cannot be gainsaid. The drive to override them, to control all other aspects of life in the name of some radiant future, has become familiar to us as the totalitarian temptation, visible early on at the height of the Jacobin terror, and latterly in Soviet Communism and its offshoots. Not only do these attempts run counter to certain fundamental features of our understanding of moral order - most notably the demand for individual freedom and moral autonomy - but they themselves have generally been undertaken in the hope (vain, as it turns out) that this hyper-control would issue in a world of non-constraint. For Marxism, the ultimate end was the withering away of the state. No more eloquent testimony is possible to the profound anchoring of the pre-political in our modern understanding as limit and goal of politics.

(In the case of the other great totalitarian temptation of our century, Fascism, we have indeed, a frontal assault on our understanding of moral order. This is one facet of the reaction against this order, which I want to describe below. It is important to see that this order has been and will continue to be contested. But it is hard to imagine its being replaced. We were lucky in that Fascism was eliminated by military defeat in the first half of the Century. But even if it hadn't suffered this fate, I doubt that fascist regimes could have indefinitely resisted the demands for greater freedom which are so anchored in our culture.)

This sense of the modern age as one which gives a crucial place to the non-political was articulated early on by Benjamin Constant in his famous lecture on ancient and modern liberty.⁵⁴ The error of Jacobinism (and of Rousseau), according to Constant was to think that the only freedom which matters to us is that of political participation, which the ancients prized. But we have become people for whom economic prosperity and the satisfactions of private life also have a crucial importance. We cannot just apply the ancient models to our political life.

In order to give a fuller picture of our contemporary notions of moral order, we should add to the three forms of social existence we have already identified in our modern imaginary - economy, public sphere, and a polity ruled by the people - a fourth, which has been articulated in bills and charters of rights. Here is a crucial feature of the original Grotian-Lockean theory which has become embedded in our understanding of normative

order. It has come to structure our social imaginary in somewhat the same way and by the same process as Popular Sovereignty has. That is, earlier practices were given a new sense, and thus came to be structured differently.

So just as the practices of getting consent from elected assemblies was transformed during the American revolution into a new definition of political legitimacy; so at the same time, and through the same political changes, the practices embodying the primacy of law begin to change their sense. Instead of enshrining merely the rights of Englishmen, they began to be seen as reflections of the Natural Right, of which the great seventeenth Century theorists had spoken. These were invoked in the Declaration of Independence. The primacy of rights is given a further push by the first ten amendments to the constitution.

This whole development reaches its culmination in our time, in the period after the Second World War, in which the notion of rights which are prior to and untouchable by political structures becomes widespread - although they are now called "human" as against "natural" rights; and in which this consciousness is given expression in the entrenchment of charters of rights, by which ordinary legislation can be set aside when it violates these fundamental norms.

These declarations of rights are in a sense the clearest expression of our modern idea of a moral order underlying the political, which the political has to respect.

8

I have been describing our modern social imaginary in terms of the underlying idea of moral order, one which has captured in our characteristic social practices and forms the salient features of seventeenth Century Natural Law theory, while transforming this in the process. But it is clear that the change in the underlying notion of order has brought a number of other changes with it.

I have already mentioned the absence of an action-transcendent grounding, the fact that modern social forms exist exclusively in secular time. The modern social imaginary no longer sees the greater trans-local entities as grounded in something other, something higher, than common action in secular time. This was not true of the pre-modern state, as I argued above. The hierarchical order of the kingdom was seen as based in the Great Chain of Being. The tribal unit was seen as constituted as such by its law, which went back "since time out of mind", or perhaps to some founding moment which had the status of a "time of origins" in Eliade's sense. The importance in pre-modern revolutions, up to and including the English civil war, of the backward look, of establishing an original law, comes from this sense that the political entity is in this sense action-transcendent. It cannot simply create itself by its own action. On the contrary, it can act as an entity because it is already constituted as such; and that is why such legitimacy attaches to returning to the original constitution.

Seventeenth century social contract theory, which sees a people as coming together out of a state of nature, obviously belongs to another order of thought. But, if my argument above is right, it wasn't until the late eighteenth century that this new way of conceiving things entered the social imaginary. The American Revolution is in a sense the watershed. It was undertaken in a backward-looking spirit, in the sense that the colonists were fighting for their established rights as Englishmen. Moreover they were fighting under their established colonial legislatures, associated in a Congress. But out of the whole process emerges the crucial fiction of "we, the people", into whose mouth the declaration of the new constitution is placed.

Here the idea is invoked that a people, or as it was also called at the time, a "nation", can exist prior to and independently of its political constitution. So that this people can give itself its own constitution by its own free action in secular time. Of course the epoch-making action comes rapidly to be invested with images drawn from older notions of higher time. The "Novus Ordo seclorum", just like the new French revolutionary calendar, draws heavily on Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic. The constitution-founding comes to be invested with something of the force of a "time of origins", a higher time, filled with agents of a superior kind, which we should ceaselessly try to re-approach. But nevertheless, a new way of conceiving things is abroad. Nations, people, can have a personality, can act together outside of any prior political ordering. One of the key premisses of modern nationalism is in place, because without this the demand for self-determination of nations would make no sense. This just is the right for peoples to make their own constitution, unfettered by their historical political organization.

In order to see how this new idea of collective agency, the "nation" or "people", articulates into a new understanding of time, I want to recur to Benedict Anderson's very insightful discussion.⁵⁵ Anderson stresses how the new sense of belonging to a nation was prepared by a new way of grasping society under the category of simultaneity:⁵⁶ society as the whole consisting of the simultaneous happening of all the myriad events which mark the lives of its members at that moment. These events are the fillers of this segment of a kind of homogeneous time. This very clear, unambiguous concept of simultaneity belongs to an understanding of time as exclusively secular. As long as secular time is interwoven with various kinds of higher time, there is no guarantee that all events can be placed in unambiguous relations of simultaneity and succession. The high feast is in one way contemporaneous with my life and that of my fellow pilgrims, but in another way it is close to eternity, or the time of origins, or the events it prefigures.

A purely secular time-understanding allows us to imagine society "horizontally", unrelated to any "high points", where the ordinary sequence of events touches higher time, and therefore without recognizing any privileged persons or agencies - such as kings or priests - who stand and mediate at such alleged points. This radical horizontality is precisely what is implied in the direct access society, where each member is "immediate to the whole". Anderson is undoubtedly right to argue that this new understanding couldn't have arisen without social developments, like that of print capitalism, but he doesn't want to imply by this that the transformations of the social imaginary are sufficiently explained by these developments. Modern society required

also transformations in the way we figure ourselves as societies. Crucial among these has been this ability to grasp society from a decentred view which is no-one's. That is, the search for a truer and more authoritative perspective than my own doesn't lead me to centre society on a king or sacred assembly, or whatever, but allows for this lateral, horizontal view, which an unsituated observer might have - society as it might be laid out in a tableau without privileged nodal points. There is a close inner link between modern societies, their self-understandings, and modern synoptic modes of representation in "the Age of the World Picture":⁵⁷ society as simultaneous happenings, social interchange as impersonal "system", the social terrain as what is mapped, historical culture as what shows up in museums, etc.

There was thus a certain "verticality" of society, which depended on a grounding in higher time, and which has disappeared in modern society. But this was also, seen from another angle, a society of mediated access. In an ancien regime kingdom, like France, the subjects are only held together within an order which coheres through its apex, in the person of the King, through whom this order connects to higher time and the order of things. We are members of this order through our relation to the king.

The principle of a modern horizontal society is radically different. Each of us is equidistant from the centre, we are immediate to the whole. This describes what we could call a "direct-access" society.

The last centuries have seen a shift from hierarchical, mediated-access societies to horizontal, direct-access societies. In the earlier form, hierarchy and what I am calling mediacy of access went together. A society of ranks - "society of orders", to use Tocqueville's phrase - like seventeenth century France, for instance, was hierarchical in an obvious sense. But this also meant that one belonged to this society via belonging to some component of it. As a peasant one was linked to a lord who in turn held from the king. One was a member of a municipal corporation which had a standing in the kingdom, or exercised some function in a Parlement with its recognized status, and so on. By contrast, the modern notion of citizenship is direct. In whatever many ways I am related to the rest of society through intermediary organizations, I think of my citizenship as separate from all these. My fundamental way of belonging to the state is not dependent on, or mediated by any of these other belongings. I stand, alongside all my fellow citizens, in direct relationship to the state which is the object of our common allegiance.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily change the way things get done. I know someone whose brother-in-law is a judge, or an MP, and so I phone her up when I'm in a jam. We might say that what has changed is the normative picture. But underlying this, without which the new norm couldn't exist for us, is a change in the way people imagine belonging. There were certainly people in seventeenth century France, and before, for whom the very idea of direct access would have been foreign, impossible to clearly grasp. The educated had the model of the ancient republic. But for many others, the only way they could understand belonging to a larger whole, like a kingdom, or a universal church, was through the imbrication of more immediate, understandable units of belonging, parish, lord, into the greater entity. Modernity has involved, among other things, a

revolution in our social imaginary, the relegation of these forms of mediacy to the margins, and the diffusion of images of direct access.

This has come through the rise of the social forms which I have been describing: the public sphere, in which people conceive themselves as participating directly in a nation-wide (sometimes even international) discussion; market economies, in which all economic agents are seen as entering into contractual relations with others on an equal footing; and, of course, the modern citizenship state. But we can think of other ways as well in which immediacy of access takes hold of our imaginations. We see ourselves as in spaces of fashion, for instance, taking up and handing on styles. We see ourselves as part of the world-wide audience of media stars. And while these spaces are in their own sense hierarchical - they centre on quasi-legendary figures - they offer all participants an access unmediated by any of their other allegiances or belongings. Something of the same kind, along with a more substantial mode of participation, is available in the various movements, social, political, religious, which are a crucial feature of modern life, and which link people translocally and internationally into a single collective agency.⁵⁸

These modes of imagined direct access are linked to, indeed are just different facets of modern equality and individualism. Directness of access abolishes the heterogeneity of hierarchical belonging. It makes us uniform, and that is one way of becoming equal. (Whether it is the only way is the fateful issue at stake in much of today's struggles over multi-culturalism.) At the same time, the relegation of various mediations reduces their importance in our lives; the individual stands more and more free of them, and hence has a growing self-consciousness as an individual. Modern individualism, as a moral idea, doesn't mean ceasing to belong at all - that's the individualism of anomie and break-down - but imagining oneself as belonging to ever wider and more impersonal entities: the state, the movement, the community of humankind. This is the change that has been described from another angle as the shift from "network" or "relational" identities to "categorical" ones.⁵⁹

We can see right away that in important sense, modern direct-access societies are more homogeneous than pre-modern ones. But this doesn't mean that there tends to be less de facto differentiation in culture and life style between different strata than there was a few centuries ago, although this is undoubtedly true. It is also the case that the social imaginaries of different classes have come much closer together. It was feature of hierarchical, mediated societies, that the people in a local community, a village or parish, for instance, might have only the most hazy idea of the rest of their society. They would have some image of central authority, some mixture of good king and evil ministers, but very little notion of how to fill in the rest of the picture. In particular, their sense was rather vague of what other people and regions made up the kingdom. There was in fact a wide gap between the theory and social imaginary of political elites, and that of the less educated classes, or those in rural areas. This state of affairs lasted until comparatively recently in many countries. It has been well documented for France during most of the nineteenth Century, in spite of the confident remarks of Republican leaders about the nation "one and indivisible".⁶⁰ This split consciousness is quite incompatible with the existence of a direct-access society. The necessary transformation was ultimately

wrought by the Third Republic, and the modern France theorized by the Revolution became real and all-embracing for the first time. This (in more than one sense) revolutionary change in the social imaginary is what Weber captures in his title: Peasants into Frenchmen.⁶¹

9

Imagining ourselves in this horizontal, secular world involves our belonging to new kinds of collective agency, those grounded just in common action in secular time. But it also involves, at the other end of the spectrum, being able to grasp society as objectified, as a set of processes, detached from any agential perspective.

As long as society is seen as by its very nature only cohering as subject to the king, or as ruled by its ancient Law, because in each case this is what links our society to its grounding in higher time, it is hard to imagine it in any other terms, or from any other angle. To see it just as a system, a set of connected processes, operating in partial independence from its political or legal or ecclesial ordering, requires this shift into pure secular time. It requires a perspective on society as a whole independent from the normative ordering which defines its coherence as a political entity. And this was well-nigh impossible as long as a normative ordering embedded in higher time was seen as essentially defining the polity.

The first such independent take on society was the first form introduced above, that which grasped it as an "economy", that is, no longer just as a particular domain of the management by the ruler of his kingdom, construed as an extended "household", but as a connected system of transactions obeying its own laws. These laws apply to human actions as they concatenate, behind the backs of the agents; they constitute an "invisible hand". We are at the antipodes of collective agency.

So the new horizontal world in secular time allows for two opposite ways of imagining society. On one side, we become capable of imagining new free, horizontal modes of collective agency, and hence of entering into and creating such agencies, because they are now in our repertoire. On the other, we become capable of objectifying society as a system of norm-independent processes, in some ways analogous to those in nature. On one hand, society is a field of common agency, on the other a terrain to be mapped, synoptically represented, analyzed, perhaps preparatory to being acted on from the outside by enlightened administrators.

We have become accustomed to experiencing these two perspectives as in tension; we often fear that the first will be repressed or elided by the second, as our world comes more and more under bureaucratic management, which itself may turn out to be dominated by its own impersonal laws. But these two standpoints cannot be dissociated. They are co-aeval, they belong together to the same range of imaginings which drive from the modern moral order.

Central to this is the idea that the political is limited by the extra-political, by different domains of life which have their own integrity and purpose. These include but aren't exhausted by the economic. It is thus built in to the modern social imaginary that it allow us to conceive of society in extra-political forms; not just through the science which came to be called "political economy", but also through the various facets of what we have come to call "sociology". The very meaning of 'society' in its modern sense points us to this entity which can be grasped and studied in various ways, of which the political is only one, and not necessarily the most fundamental.

Our modern imaginary thus not only includes categories which enable common action, but also categories of process and classification which happen or have their effects behind the backs of the agents. We each can be placed in census categories in relation to ethnicity, or language, or income level, or entitlements in the welfare system, whether or not we are aware of where we fit, or what consequences flow from this. And yet categories of both kinds, the active and the objective, can be essential to the social imaginary in the sense I've been using it here, that is, the ensemble of imaginings that enable our practices by making sense of them.

It is clear how the active do this: only if we understand ourselves as a collective agency can we have this kind of action in our repertory. But the objective categories enable in another way. Grasping my society as an economy is precisely not grasping it as a collective action, but only because I understand the system in this way will I engage in market transactions the way I do. The system provides the environment which my action needs to have the desired result, and I may want to assure myself from time to time that it is still working as intended, e.g., not heading into depression, or hyper-inflation.

Active and objective categories play complementary roles in our lives. It is close to inconceivable that we could dispense with the second. As to the symmetrical hypothesis: that we should only have objective imaginings of society, while our sense of agency should be entirely as individuals, this corresponds to one of the Utopias (or dystopias) of the 18th Century, that of Enlightened despotism. The only agency allowed to affect the whole is the ruler, guided as he or she is by the best scientific understanding.

Only for fleeting moments did the political development of any society approximate to this, under the "enlightened" direction of Frederick II, Joseph II, Catherine the Great, Pombal. It seems more than a mere accident that our history took a different direction. In a sense, it did so most strikingly through the development of the public sphere.

We can see here the complementarity at work. In a sense, the discussions in the public sphere depended on and consisted in the development of enlightened, objective understanding of society, economically, politically, juridically. Public opinion was seen in one perspective as ideally rational, the product of calm and reasoned discussion. But the public sphere from another angle was also inevitably seen as a common action. The discussion had an upshot, it chrySTALLIZED into "public opinion", a common mind or collective judgment. And what is more fateful, this opinion became gradually but irresistibly a principle of legitimation.

Nothing is more striking than the emergence of this new force in the last 20 years of an ancien regime in France. Before 1770, Enlightened opinion was seen as a potential nuisance or danger by the royal government. An attempt was made to control the circulation of ideas through censorship. As this came to be more and more obviously ineffective, some attempts were made to steer the public discussion through "inspired" interventions by friendly writers. By the time we get to the eve of the Revolution, public opinion comes to be seen as an irresistible force, forcing the King, for instance, to recall Necker, the finance minister whom he had earlier sacked.

Many things underlie this development, including the mounting uncontrolled debt of the government which put it at the mercy of its creditors. But an essential condition of the turn-over was the growth of the common understanding itself which underlay the very existence of such a thing as "public opinion". A change in social imaginary had brought a new political force onto the scene.

In a common contemporary image, public opinion was portrayed as a tribunal, a sort of supreme court which authority had to listen to. This was the tribunal which Malesherbes praised as "independent of all powers and respected by all powers ... that tribunal of the public ... the sovereign judge of all the judges of the earth".⁶² And as Jacques Necker himself put it after the event in his history of the Revolution: "... an authority has arisen that did not exist two hundred years ago, and which must necessarily be taken into account, the authority of public opinion".⁶³

The modern social imaginary is thus both active and contemplative. It expands the repertory of collective action, and also that of objective analysis. But it also exists in a range of intermediate forms as well. In speaking above about the typically modern, "horizontal" forms of social imaginary, in which people grasp themselves and great numbers of others as existing and acting simultaneously. I mentioned: the economy, the public sphere, and the sovereign people, but also the space of fashion. This is an example of a fourth structure of simultaneity. It is unlike the public sphere and the sovereign people, because these are sites of common action. In this respect, it is like the economy, where a host of individual actions concatenate behind our backs. But it is different from this as well, because our actions relate in the space of fashion in a particular way. I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. The space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language together of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing, but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have. If my hat can express my particular kind of cocky, yet understated self-display, then this is because of how the common language of style has evolved between us up to this point. My gesture can change it, and then your responding stylistic move will take its meaning from the new contour the language takes on.

The general structure I want to draw from this example of the space of fashion is that of a horizontal, simultaneous mutual presence, which is not that of a common action, but rather of mutual display. It matters to each one of us as we act that the others are there, as witness of what we are doing, and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our action.

Spaces of this kind become more and more important in modern urban society, where large numbers of people rub shoulders, unknown to each other, without dealings with each other, and yet affecting each other, forming the inescapable context of each other's lives. As against the everyday rush to work in the Metro, where the others can sink to the status of obstacles in my way, city life has developed other ways of being-with, for instance, as we each take our Sunday walk in the park; or as we mingle at the summer street-festival, or in the stadium before the play-off game. Here each individual or small group acts on their own, but aware that their display says something to the others, will be responded to by them, will help build a common mood or tone which will colour everyone's actions.

Here a host of urban monads hover on the boundary between solipsism and communication. My loud remarks and gestures are overtly addressed only to my immediate companions; my family group is sedately walking, engaged in our own Sunday outing; but all the time we are aware of this common space that we are building, in which the messages that cross take their meaning. This strange zone between loneliness and communication fascinated many of the early observers of this phenomenon as it arose in the 19th Century. We can think of some of the paintings of Manet, or of Baudelaire's avid interest in the urban scene, in the roles of fl@neur and dandy, uniting observation and display.

Of course, these 19th Century urban spaces were topical, that is all the participants were in the same place, in sight of each other. But 20th Century communications has produced meta-topical variants, when for instance, we lob a stone at the soldiers before the cameras of CNN, knowing that this act will resonate around the world. The meaning of our participation in the event is shaped by the whole vast dispersed audience we share it with.

Just because these spaces hover between solitude and togetherness, they may sometimes flip over into common action; and indeed, the moment when they do so may be hard to pin-point. As we rise as one to cheer the crucial third-period goal, we have undoubtedly become a common agent; and we may try to prolong this when we leave the stadium by marching and chanting, or even wreaking various forms of mayhem together. The cheering crowd at a rock festival is similarly fused. There is a heightened excitement at these moments of fusion, reminiscent of Carnival, or of some of the great collective rituals of earlier days. So that some have seen these moments as among the new forms of religion in our world.⁶⁴ And Durkheim gave an important place to these times of collective effervescence as founding moments of society and the sacred.⁶⁵ In any case, these moments seem to respond to some important felt need of today's "lonely crowd".

Some moments of this kind are, indeed, the closest analogues to the Carnival of previous centuries, as has frequently been noted. They can be powerful and moving, because they witness the birth of a new collective agent out of its formerly dispersed potential. They can be heady, exciting. But unlike Carnival, they are not enframed by any deeply entrenched if implicit common understanding of structure and counter-structure. They are often immensely rivetting, but frequently also "wild", up for grabs, capable of being taken over by a host of different moral vectors, either utopian revolutionary, or

xenophobic, or wildly destructive; or they can crystallize on some deeply felt, commonly cherished good, like ringing the key chains in Wenceslas Square; or as in the case of the funeral of Princess Diana, celebrating in an out-of-ordinary life the ordinary, fragile pursuit of love and happiness.

Remembering the history of the 20th Century, replete with the Nurnberg rallies and other such horrors, one has as much cause for fear as hope in these "wild" kairotic moments. But the potentiality for them, and their immense appeal, is perhaps implicit in the experience of modern secular time.

I have dwelt at length on these ambiguous spaces of mutual display, but they obviously don't exhaust the range of possibilities between common action and objectification. There are also moments where a common space is filled with a powerful shared emotion, rather than an action, as with the millions of spectators watching the funeral of Diana. These vast meta-topical spectator spaces have become more and more important in our world.

Moreover, these different ways of being together don't just exist side by side. We have already seen how mutual display, for instance, can sometimes flip over, at least momentarily, into common action. On a somewhat more enduring basis, what starts of as a mere census category may be mobilized into common agency, making common demands, as with the unemployed, or welfare recipients. Or previously existing agencies can lapse into mere passive categories. The modern imaginary contains a whole gamut of forms, in complex interaction and potential mutual transition.

10

The move to a horizontal, direct-access world, interwoven with an embedding in secular time, had to bring with it a different sense of our situation in time and space. In particular it brings different understandings of history and modes of narration.

In particular, the new collective subject, a people or nation that can found its own state, that has no need for a previous action-transcendent foundation, needs new ways of telling its story. In some ways, these resemble the old ones; and I noted above how the stories of state founding may draw on the old images of larger-than-life figures in a time of origins that we cannot recapture: think of some of the treatment of Washington and other Founders in American story-telling about their origins. But for all the analogies, there is a clear difference. We are dealing with a story in purely secular time. The sense that the present, post-founding order is right has to be expressed in terms which consort with this understanding of time. We can no longer describe it as the emergence of a self-realizing order lodged in higher time. The category which is at home in secular time is rather that of growth, maturation, drawn from the organic realm. A potential within nature matures. So history can be understood, for instance, as the slow growth of a human capacity, reason, fighting against error and superstition. The founding comes when people arrive at a certain stage of rational understanding.

This new history has its nodal points, but they are organized around the stages of a maturing potential, that for reason, or for rational control, for instance. On one story, our growth entails coming to see the right moral order, the interlocking relations of mutual benefit that we are meant to realize ("We hold these truths to be self-evident ..."), on one hand; and achieving adequate self-control to put it into practice, on the other. When we are sufficiently advanced on both of these paths, we are at a nodal point, where a new and better society can be founded. Our founding heroes, for all their exceptional qualities, emerge out of a story of growth in secular time.

This can fit into the story (or myth) of progress, one of the most important modes of narration in modernity. But it can also fit into another such widely invoked matrix, that of Revolution. This is the nodal point of maturation in which people become capable of making a decisive break with age-old forms and structures which impede or distort the moral order. Suddenly, it becomes possible to carry out the demands of this order as never before. There is a heady sense that everything is possible. Which is why the idea of Revolution can easily turn into a powerful myth, that of a past nodal point whose infinite possibilities have been frustrated, betrayed, by treachery or pusillanimity. The Revolution becomes something which is yet to be completed. This was a sustaining myth of the radical French Left during the nineteenth Century and into this one.⁶⁶

But one of the most powerful narrative modes centres around the "nation". There is something paradoxical about the people that can preside over its own political birth. What makes it that just these people belong together for purposes of self-rule? Sometimes in fact, it is the accidents of history. A "nation" is born, because the people who were hitherto ruled by a single authority decide to take this rule into their own hands (or certain elites decide that they have to be led to this end). This was the case in France in 1789, and less happily, with the early 20th Century attempts to establish an Ottoman nationality. Or else a people establishes itself out of the political choice for self-rule, as with the American Revolution. The revolutionaries separated themselves off from other Englishmen, even the Tories in their midst, by this decisive political option.

But much of what we call nationalism is based on the idea that there is some basis for the unit chosen, other than historical contingency or political choice. The people who is being led to statehood is thought to belong together - in virtue of a common language, common culture, common religion, history of common action. The point has been tirelessly made that much of this common past is frequently pure invention.⁶⁷ This is true, but it has certainly often been politically effective invention, which has been interiorized and become part of the social imaginary of the people concerned.

And here again, the underlying category is that of growth of potential. In spite of our dispersion, multiplicity of dialects, lack of consciousness, we were an sich Ukrainians, Serbs, Slovaks, or whatever. We had important things in common which made it natural and right for us to function together as a single sovereign people. Only we needed to be awoken. Then perhaps, we needed to struggle in order to realize this destiny. The idea of a maturation, a growth in consciousness, an an sich which ultimately becomes fur sich, is central here.

These three modes of narrativity: progress, revolution, nation, can obviously be combined. And they can in turn be interwoven with an apocalyptic and messianic modes which are drawn from religious understandings of Heilsgeschichte: for instance the idea that the maturing order must confront violent opposition, the more violent the closer it is to ultimate victory. Revolution will be attended by a titanic struggle, a secularized Armageddon. The devastating effects of this in twentieth Century history have been all too evident.

And beyond this placing of our present in a national political history is our sense of our people's place in the whole epochal development or struggle for moral order, freedom, the right. This can be a very important part of our national self-understanding. Think of the place of a kind of universalist chauvinism in French national consciousness at the time of the French Revolution: France as the nation destined to bring freedom and the rights of man to Europe. Military glory and a universal mission are fused. This is heady stuff, as Napoleon knew. The USSR and Communist China have tried to assume this mantle at different points in our Century.

11

Enough has perhaps been said to show how much our outlook is dominated by modes of social imaginary which emerge from what I have called the long march, and has been shaped in one way or other by the modern ideal of order as mutual benefit. Not only the troubling aspects, like some forms of nationalism, but if we just look at the other, virtually unchallenged benchmarks of legitimacy in our contemporary world: liberty, equality, human rights, democracy; we can see how strong a hold this modern order exercises on our social imaginary. It constitutes a horizon we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond. After a certain date, it is remarkable that even reactionaries can no longer invoke the older groundings in higher time. They too have to speak of the functional necessities of order, as with de Maistre's executioner. They may still think in theological terms, as do both de Maistre and Carl Schmitt (but significantly, not Maurras). But this is theology in a quite different register. They have to speak as theorists of a profane world.⁶⁸

What relation then does the modern social imaginary bear to modern secular society?

Well, plainly, as my use of the term `secular' in the above discussion implies, the long march must have contributed to a displacement of religion from the public sphere. It has helped to remove God from public space. Or so it might seem. But this is not quite true. It has certainly removed one mode in which God was formerly present, as part of a story of action-transcendent grounding of society in higher time. "The divinity that doth hedge a king", and the powerful range of analogies/assimilations between king and God, king and Christ, which Kantorowicz describes⁶⁹, these are drastically undermined and finally dispelled by the imaginaries which have emerged from the order of mutual benefit. But this doesn't mean that God must be altogether absent from public space. The American people who came to invoke itself as "we" also defined (defines) itself as "one people

under God". The order of mutual benefit was originally seen as God-created, and its fulfillment as God-destined.

In order to understand our present predicament, we have to see what this alternative form of God-presence amounts to, and how it has been set aside in many contemporary societies.

I will try to describe here what it amounts to. Now what the long march has plainly done is work alongside and together with the forces which have carried us away from the enchanted cosmos shaped by higher times. There is, of course, a close connection between disenchantment and the confining of all action to profane time. The same factors which eventually dispel and empty the world of spirits and forces - worshipful living of ordinary life, mechanistic science, the disciplined reconstruction of social life - also confine us more and more to secular time. They empty and marginalize higher times, they repress the kairoitic, multi-level time of Carnival, occlude the need for, even the possibility of anti-structure; and hence render notions of action-transcendent grounding less and less comprehensible. They plant us firmly in a secular time which is more and more mapped out and measured as a comprehensive environment without a chink which might give access to the former connections of higher time.

And so these latter disappear, albeit through a number of transition stages, of which the great modes of Baroque public space are striking examples, as was also the "classicism" of the Sun King.

Plainly, then, this social imaginary is the end of a certain kind of presence of religion or the divine in public space. It is the end of the era where political authority, as well as other meta-topical common agencies, are inconceivable without reference to God or higher time, where these are so woven into the structures of authority, that the latter cannot be understood separately from the divine, the higher or the numinous. This is the step that Marcel Gauchet has described as "the end of religion". But this alarming expression is given a more exact sense: it is the end of society as structured by its dependence on God or the beyond.⁷⁰ It is not the end of personal religion, as Gauchet insists.⁷¹ And it is not even necessarily the end of religion in public life, as the American case shows. However it is undoubtedly a decisive stage in the development of our modern predicament, in which belief and unbelief can coexist as alternatives.

More precisely, the difference amounts to this. In the earlier phase, God or some kind of higher reality is an ontic necessity; that is, people cannot conceive a meta-topical agency having authority which is not grounded somehow in higher time - be it through the action of God, or the Great Chain, or some founding in illo tempore. What emerges from the change is an understanding of social and political life entirely in secular time. Foundings are now seen to be common actions in profane time, ontically on the same footing with all other such actions, even though they may be given a specially authoritative status in our national narrative or our legal system.

This freeing of politics from its ontic dependence on religion is sometimes what people mean by the secularity of public space. And there is no harm in this; indeed, it is probably a good idea to give it this sense. This is the picture of "le social fonde sur lui-m^{me}", of which Baczko speaks.⁷²

But we musn't lose from sight that this opens a new space for religion in public life. Regimes founded on common action in profane time are in a certain sense based on a common will. This doesn't mean that they are necessarily democratic; the common will may be that of a minority, it being taken for granted that they can speak for the rest, or that the others are not capable of self-rule. The common will is even the grounding of fascist regimes, it being understood that the real will of the people is expressed through the Leader. In a sense it is almost a tautology that, where we lose any ontic dependence on the higher, and the polity emanates from some founding common action, the shared will that this action realizes is given a foundational role.

And of course, this reference to a common will is inescapable in democracies, which claim to be based on popular sovereignty. Here there is some common understanding of what the state is about, which provides the framework within which the ongoing deliberation can take place, the reference points of public discussion, without which the periodic decisions cannot be recognized as expressions of the popular will. Because it is only if we have had a debate about a commonly identified issue, and one in which each of us has some kind of chance at a hearing, that we will be able to recognize the outcome as a common decision.

More, if I am to accept as aauthoritative a decision which goes against me, I have to see myself as part of the people whose decision this is. I have to feel a bond with those who make up this people, such that I can say: wrong as this decision is in its content, I have to go along with it as an expression of the will, or interest, of this people to whom I belong.

What can bond a people in this sense? Some strong common purpose or value. This is what I want to call their "political identity", Let me try to explain this further.

To take the case of democratic societies as our example, it is clear that this identity must involve freedom, and that must include the freedom of the dissenting minority. But can a decision which goes against me serve my freedom? Here we meet a long-standing skepticism, which is particularly strong among those who hold to an atomist political philosophy, and who are suspicious of all appeals to a common good beyond individual choice. They see these appeals as just so much humbug to get contrary voters to accept voluntary servitude.

But we don't need to decide this ultimate philosophical issue here. We are dealing with an question not of philosophy, but of the social imaginary. We need to ask: what is the feature of our "imagined communities" by which people very often do readily accept that they are free under a democratic regime, even where their will is over-ridden on important issues?

The answer they accept runs something like this: You, like the rest of us, are free just in virtue of the fact that we are ruling ourselves in common, and not being ruled by some agency which need take no account of us. Your freedom consists in your having a guaranteed voice in the sovereign, that you can be heard, and have some part in making the decision. You enjoy this freedom in virtue of a law which enfranchises all of us, and so we enjoy this together. Your freedom is realized and defended by this law, and this whether or not you win or lose in any particular decision. This law defines a community, of those whose freedom it realizes/defends together. It defines a collective agency, a people, whose acting together by the law preserves their freedom.

Such is the answer, valid or not, that people have come to accept in democratic societies. We can see right away that it involves their accepting a kind of belonging much stronger than that of any chance group which might come together. It is an ongoing collective agency, one the membership in which realizes something very important, a kind of freedom. Insofar as this good is crucial to their identity, they thus identify strongly with this agency, and hence also feel a bond with their co-participants in this agency. It is only an appeal to this kind of membership which can answer the challenge of an individual or group who contemplates rebelling against an adverse decision in the name of their freedom.

The crucial point here is that, whoever is ultimately right philosophically, it is only insofar as people accept some such answer that the legitimacy principle of popular sovereignty can work to secure their consent. The principle only is effective via this appeal to a strong collective agency. If the identification with this is rejected, the rule of this government seems illegitimate in the eyes of the rejecters, as we see in countless cases with disaffected national minorities. Rule by the people, all right; but we can't accept rule by this lot, because we aren't part of their people. This is the inner link between democracy and strong common agency. It follows the logic of the legitimacy principle which underlies democratic regimes. They fail to generate this identity at their peril.

This last example points to an important modulation of the appeal to popular sovereignty. In the version I just gave above the appeal was to what we might call "republican freedom". It is the one inspired by ancient republics, and which was invoked in the American and French Revolutions. But very soon after, the same appeal began to take on a nationalist form. The attempts to spread the principles of the French Revolution through the force of French arms created a reaction in Germany, Italy and elsewhere, the sense of not being part of, represented by that sovereign people in the name of which the Revolution was being made and defended. It came to be accepted in many circles that a sovereign people, in order to have the unity needed for collective agency, had already to have an antecedent unity, of culture, history or (more often in Europe) language. And so behind the political nation, there had to stand a pre-existing cultural (sometimes ethnic) nation.

Nationalism, in this sense, was born out of democracy, as a (benign or malign) growth. In early nineteenth century Europe, as peoples struggled for emancipation from multi-

national despotic empires, joined in the Holy Alliance, there seemed to be no opposition between the two. For a Mazzini, they were perfectly converging goals.⁷³ Only later on do certain forms of nationalism throw off the allegiance to human rights and democracy, in the name of self-assertion.

But even before this stage, nationalism gives another modulation to popular sovereignty. The answer to the objector above: something essential to your identity is bound up in our common laws, now refers not just to republican freedom, but also to something of the order of cultural identity. What is defended and realized in the national state is not just your freedom as a human being, but this state also guarantees the expression of a common cultural identity.

We can speak therefore of a "republican" variant and a "national" variant of the appeal to popular sovereignty, though in practice the two often run together, and often lie undistinguished in the rhetoric and imaginary of democratic societies.

(And in fact, even the original "republican" pre-nationalist revolutions, the American and the French, have seen a kind of nationalism develop in the societies which issued from them. The point of these revolutions was the universal good of freedom, whatever the mental exclusions which the revolutionaries in fact accepted, even cherished. But their patriotic allegiance was to the **particular historical project** of realizing freedom, in America, in France. The very universalism became the basis of a fierce national pride, in the "last, best hope for mankind", in the republic which was bearer of "the rights of man". That's why freedom, at least in the French case, could become a project of conquest, with the fateful results in reactive nationalism elsewhere that I mentioned above.)

And so we have a new kind of collective agency, with which its members identify as the realization/bulwark of their freedom, and/or the locus of their national/cultural expression. Of course, in pre-modern societies, too, people often "identified" with the regime, with sacred kings, or hierarchical orders. They were often willing subjects. But in the democratic age we identify as free agents. That is why the notion of popular will plays a crucial role in the legitimating idea.⁷⁴

This means that the modern democratic state has generally accepted common purposes, or reference points, the features whereby it can lay claim to being the bulwark of freedom and locus of expression of its citizens. Whether or not these claims are actually founded, the state must be so imagined by its citizens if it is to be legitimate.

So a question can arise for the modern state for which there is no analogue in most pre-modern forms: what/whom is this state for? whose freedom? whose expression? The question seems to make no sense applied to, say, the Austrian or Turkish Empires - unless one answered the "whom for?" question by referring to the Habsburg or Ottoman dynasties; and this would hardly give you their legitimating ideas.

This is the sense in which a modern state has what I want to call a political identity, defined as the generally accepted answer to the "what/whom for?" question. This is

distinct from the identities of its members, that is the reference points, many and varied, which for each of these defines what is important in their lives. There better be some overlap, of course, if these members are to feel strongly identified with the state; but the identities of individuals and constituent groups will generally be richer and more complex, as well as being often quite different from each other.⁷⁵

We can now see the space for religion in the modern state. For God can figure strongly in the political identity. It can be that we see ourselves as fulfilling God's will in setting up a polity which maximally follows his precepts, as many Americans have done, in the Revolutionary period and after. Or else, our national identity can refer to God, if we see ourselves as defined partly by our unique piety and faithfulness. This has often arisen among peoples who are surrounded or worse, dominated by (what they see as) heretics and non-believers; e.g., the Afrikaners, Poles, Irish, French Canadians of yore. As they struggle to gain or preserve independence, a certain kind of fidelity to God, a certain confessional belonging becomes constitutive of their political identity. We have seen how this can later degenerate, so that the piety drains away and only the chauvinism remains, as in Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, but this identity presence can also nourish a living faith.⁷⁶

This is the new space for God in the "secular" world. Just as in personal life, the dissolution of the enchanted world can be compensated by devotion, a strong sense of the involvement of God in my life; so in the public world, the disappearance of an ontic dependence on something higher can be replaced by a strong presence of God in our political identity. In both individual and social life, the sacred is no longer encountered as an object among other objects, in a special place, time or person. But God's will can still be very present to us in the design of things, in cosmos, state and personal life. God can seem the inescapable source for our power to impart order to our lives, both individually and socially.

It was this shift from the enchanted to the identity form of presence which set the stage for the secularity of the contemporary world, in which God or religion are not precisely absent from public space, but are central to the personal identities of individuals or groups, and hence always possible defining constituents of political identities. The wise decision may be taken to distinguish our political identity from any particular confessional allegiance, but this principle of "separation" has constantly to be interpreted afresh in its application, wherever religion is important in the lives of substantial bodies of citizens - which means virtually everywhere.⁷⁷ And the possibility is ever present of a re-invasion of the political identity by the confessional, as with the rise of the BJP in India.

Modernity is secular, not in the frequent, rather loose sense of the word, where it designates the absence of religion, but rather in the fact that religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.

NOTES

1. London: Verso 1991.
2. John Locke, quote on SofN where no subordination,
3. The term "moral economy" is borrowed from E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Classes,
4. Macbeth, 2.3.56; 2.4.17-8 (Sources 298).
5. Quoted in Louis Dupre, Passage to Modernity, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 19.
6. Hesiod,
7. Two Treatises of Civil Government, I.86.
8. Op. cit., II.6; see also II.135; and Some Thoughts concerning Education, para 116.
9. Op. cit, II.26.
10. See Peasants into Frenchmen, London: Chatto & Windus 1979, ch 28.
11. Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the 18th Century, vol 2, p. 72.
12. Memoires, p. 63, cited in Nanerl Keohane, Philosophy and the State in France, p. 248.
13. Keohane, op. cit, p. 249-51.
14. Of course, a large and complex thesis lies behind this flip reference. The basic idea is that Baroque culture is a kind of synthesis of the modern understanding of agency as inward and poi'otic, constructing orders in the world, and the older understanding of the world as cosmos, shaped by Form. With hindsight, we tend to see the synthesis as instable, as doomed to be superseded, as it was in fact.

But whatever the truth of this, we can see in Baroque culture a kind of constitutive tension, between an order which is already there, and is hierarchical, and agents who continue and complete it through their constructive activity, and hence tend to understand themselves as acting out of themselves, and thus in this respect as situated outside of hierarchy and thus equal. Hence hybrid formulations such as those of Louis above.

I have learnt much from the very interesting decription of Baroque art in Louis Dupre's Passage to Modernity, Yale University Press 1993, pp. 237-48. Dupre speaks of the Baroque as the "last comprehensive synthesis" between human agency and the world in which it takes place, where the meanings generated by this agency can find some relation to those we discover in the world. But it is a synthesis filled with tension and conflict.

Baroque churches focus this tension not so much on the cosmos as static order, but on God whose power and goodness is expressed in the cosmos. But this descending power is taken up and carried forward by human agency, creating "the modern tension between a divine and a human order conceived as separate centres of power." (p. 226).

Baroque culture, Dupre argues is united by "a comprehensive spiritual vision. ... At the centre of it stands the person, confident in the ability to give form and structure to a nascent world. But - and here lies its religious significance - that centre remains vertically linked to a transcendent source from which, via a

descending scale of mediating bodies, the human creator draws his power. This dual centre - human and divine - distinguishes the Baroque world picture from the vertical one of the Middle Ages, in which reality descends from a single transcendent point, as well as from the unproblematically horizontal one of later modernity, prefigured in some features of the Renaissance. The tension between the two centres conveys to the Baroque a complex, restless, and dynamic quality." (237)

15. Keohane, op. cit, pp. 164-7.

16. Albert Hirschmann, The Passions and the Interests, Princeton, 1977. I am greatly indebted to the discussion in this extremely interesting book.

17. Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, III, 9-26, 109-14; IV, 396.

18. See the discussions in Hubert Dreyfus, Being in the World, and John Searle, drawing on the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Polanyi,

19. The way in which the social imaginary extends well beyond what has been (or even can be) theorized is illustrated in Francis Fukuyama's interesting discussion of the economics of social trust. Some economies find it difficult to build large-scale non-state enterprises, because a climate of trust which extends wider than the family is absent or weak. The social imaginary in these societies mark discriminations - between kin and non-kin - for purposes of economic association, which have gone largely unremarked in the theories of the economy that we all share, including the people in those societies. And governments can be induced to adopt policies, legal changes, incentives, etc., on the assumption that forming enterprises of any scale is there in the repertory, and just needs encouragement. But the sense of a sharp boundary of mutual reliability around the family may severely restrict the repertory, however much it might be theoretically demonstrated to people that they would be better off changing their way of doing business. The implicit "map" of social space has deep fissures, which are profoundly anchored in culture and imaginary, beyond the reach of correction by better theory. Francis Fukuyama, Trust, New York; Free Press, 1995.

20. Mikhail Bakhtin,

21. This doesn't mean that Utopias don't deal in their own kind of possibility. They may describe far-off lands or remote future societies which can't be imitated today, which we may never be able to imitate. But the underlying idea is that these things are really possible in the sense that they lie in the bent of human nature. This is what the narrator of More's book thinks: the Utopians are living according to nature (Baczko 75). This is also what Plato thought, who provided one of the models for More's book, and for a host of other "Utopian" writings.

22. Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason,

23. Translated Thomas Burger, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989; German original: Strukturwandel der @ffentlichkeit, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1962.

24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

25. Letters, chapter 1.

26. This indicates how far the late 18th Century notion of public opinion is from what is the object of poll research today. The phenomenon that "public opinion research" aims to measure is, in terms of my above distinction, a convergent unity, and doesn't need to emerge from discussion. It is analogous to the opinion of mankind. The ideal underlying the 18th Century version emerges in this passage from Burke, quoted by Habermas (Structural Transformation, pp. 117-8): "In a free country, every man thinks he has a concern in all public matters; that he has a right to form and deliver an opinion on them. They sift, examine and

discuss them. They are curious, eager, attentive and jealous; and by making such matters the daily subjects of their thoughts and discoveries, vast numbers contract a very tolerable knowledge of them, and some a very considerable one. ... Whereas in other countries none but men whose office calls them to it having much care or thought about public affairs, and not daring to try the force of their opinions with one another, ability of this sort is extremely rare in any station of life. In free countries, there is often found more real public wisdom and sagacity in shops and manufactories than in cabinets of princes in countries where none dares to have an opinion until he comes to them."

27. Structural Transformation, p. 119.

28. Letters, p. 41.

29. See Fox's speech, quoted in Structural Transformation, pp. 65-6: "It is certainly right and prudent to consult the public opinion. ... If the public opinion did not happen to square with mine; if, after pointing out to them the danger, they did not see it in the same light with me, or if they conceived that another remedy was preferable to mine, I should consider it as my due to my king, due to my Country, due to my honour to retire, that they might pursue the plan which they thought better, by a fit instrument, that is by a man who thought with them. ... but one thing is most clear, that I ought to give the public the means of forming an opinion."

30. Cited in Structural Transformation, p. 117.

31. Structural Transformation, p. 82.

32. See Letters, pp. 40-2. Warner also points to the relationship with the impersonal agency of modern capitalism (pp. 62-3), as well as the closeness of fit between the impersonal stance and the battle against imperial corruption which was so central a theme in the colonies (pp. 65-6), in the framing of this highly over-determined mode.

33. Letters, p. 46.

34. See E. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

35. For an extra-European example of this kind of thing, see Clifford Geertz's Negara, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, where the pre-Conquest Balinese state is described.

36. I have discussed these different modes of higher time in DRB, pages

37. As a matter of fact, excluding the religious dimension is not even a necessary condition of my concept of secular here, let alone a sufficient one. A secular association is one grounded purely on common action, and this excludes any divine grounding **for this association**, but nothing prevents the people so associated from continuing a religious form of life; indeed, this form may even require that, e.g., political associations be purely secular. There are for instance **religious** motives for espousing a separation of church and state.

38. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, New York: Harper 1959, pp. 80 and ff.

39. Anderson borrows a term from Benjamin to describe modern profane time. he sees it as a "homogeneous, empty time". 'Homogeneity' captures the aspect I am describing here, that all events now fall into the same kind of time; but the "emptiness" of time takes us into another issue: the way in which both space and time come to be seen as "containers" which things and events contingently fill, rather than as constituted by what fills them. This latter step is part of the metaphysical imagination of modern physics, as we can see with Newton. But it is the step to homogeneity which is crucial for secularization, as I am conceiving it.

The step to emptiness is part of the objectification of time which has been so important a part of the outlook of the modern subject of instrumental reason. Time has been in a sense "spatialized". Heidegger has mounted a strong attack on this whole conception in his understanding of temporality; see especially, Sein und Zeit, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1926, Division 2. But distinguishing secularity from the objectification of time allows us to situate Heidegger on the modern side of the divide. Heideggerian temporality is also a mode of secular time.

40. Structural Transformation, Chapter II, sections 6 and 7.

41. See Sources of the Self, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, chapter 13.

42. Francis Fukuyama, whose discussion of this point I found very helpful, also holds that the new sociability which arises from this strand of the Reformation helped to create the conditions for a very successful mode of capitalist development. See Trust, New York: The Free Press 1995.

43. Francois Furet, La Revolution Fran@aaise, Paris 1988.

44. See Simon Schama, Citizens, New York: Knopf 1989, chapter 4.

45. Just how elaborate and (to us) horrifying these could be one can glean from the description of the execution of Damiens, who made an attempt on the life of Louis XV in 1757, in the rivetting opening pages of Michel Foucault's Surveiller et Punir, Paris: Gallimard 1976.

46. Francois Furet, Penser la Revolution fran@aaise, Paris:

47. Pierre Rosanvallon, Le Moment Guizot, Paris: Gallimard 1985, pp. 16-7, 285 and ff.

48. Robert Tombs, France: 1814-1914, London: Longman 1996, pp. 20-26.

49. Le Moment Guizot, p. 80.

50. Op. cit. chapter IX.

51. "Je parle pour ceux qui, parmi les conservateurs, ont quelque souci de la stabilite, quelque souci de la legalite, quelque souci de la moderation pratiquee avec perseverance dans la vie publique. Je leur dis, "e ceux-le: comment ne voyez-vous pas qu'avec le suffrage universel, si on le laisse librement fonctionner. si on respecte, quand il s'est prononce, son independance et l'autorite de ses decisions, comment ne voyez-vous pas, dis-je, que vous avez le un moyen de terminer pacifiquement tous les conflits, de denouer toutes les crises, et que, si le suffrage universel fonctionne dans la plenitude de la souverainete, il n'y a pas de revolution possible, parce qu'il n'y a plus de revolution "e tenter, plus de coup d'etat "e redouter quand la France a parle". Gambetta's speech of October 9 1877, quoted in Rosanvalloon, Le Moment Guizot, pp. 364-5.

52. Pierre Rosanvalon, Le Sacre du Citoyen, Paris: Gallimard 1992.

53. E.S Morgan, Inventing the People,

54. Benjamin Constant: "De la liberte des anciens, comparee "e celle des modernes",

55. Imagined Communities, London: Verso 1991.

56. Anderson, op. cit., p. 37.

57. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes", in Holzwege, Frankfurt: Niemeyer
58. cf. Anderson, op. cit.
59. Calhoun, op. cit., pp 234-5. I want to reiterate how much the discussion in this section owes to Calhoun's recent work.
60. This has been admirably traced by Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, London: Chatto 1977.
61. London: Chatto 1979.
62. Quoted in Keith Baker, Inventing the French Revolution, Cambridge 1990, p. 189.
63. Quoted in Stephen Holmes, Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism, New Haven: Yale University Press 1985, p. 243.
64. See Danielle Hervieu-Leger, La Religion pour Memoire, Paris: Cerf 1993, chapter 3, esp. pp. 82ff.
65. Emile Durkheim, Les Formes elementaires de la Vie religieuse,
66. Bronislaw Baczko, Les Imaginaires Sociaux, Paris: Payot 1985, pp. 117-8. I have drawn a great deal on the interesting discussions in this book.
67. See Ernest Gellner, Nations and nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm, Nationalism,
68. The pathos involved in the attempt to recover the unrecoverable was well illustrated by Charles X's attempt to restore the whole original liturgy in his coronation at Reims in 1825. See the description in Francois Furet, Revolutionary France, pp. 300-3.
69. E. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies,
70. "La fin du role de structuration de l'espace social que le principe de dependance a rempli dans l'ensemble des societes jusqu'e la notre", Le Desenchantement du Monde, Paris: Gallimard 1985, p. 233. I have learnt a great deal from this fascinating and profound work.
71. Op. cit. pp. 292 ff.
72. Op. cit., p.
73. And in fact, the drive to democracy took a predominately "national" form. Logically, it is perfectly possible that the democratic challenge to a multi-national authoritarian regime, e.g., Austria, Turkey, should take the form of a multi-national citizenship in a pan-imperial "people". But in fact, attempts at this usually fail, and the peoples take their own road into freedom. So the Czechs declined being part of a democratized Empire in the Paulskirche in 1848; and the Young Turk attempt at an Ottoman citizenship foundered, and made way for a fierce Turkish nationalism.
74. Rousseau, who laid bare very early the logic of this idea, saw that a democratic sovereign couldn't just be an "aggregation", as with our lecture audience above; it has to be an "association", that is, a strong collective agency, a "corps moral et collectif" with "son unite, son **moi** commun, sa vie et sa volonte". This last term is the key one, because what gives this body its personality is a "volonte generale". Contrat Social, Book I, chapter 6.

75. I have discussed this relation in "Les Sources de l'identite moderne", in Mikhael Elbaz, Andree Fortin, and Guy Laforest, eds., Les Frontieres de l'Identite: Modernite et postmodernisme au Quebec, Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Universite Laval, 1996, pp. 347-64

76. See my "Faith and Identity"

77. See Jose Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World, University of Chicago Press 1994.