Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein
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LIBERALISM AND PHILOSOPHY

II. THUGS AND THEORISTS
A Reply to Bernstein

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RICHARD BERNSTEIN CONCENTRATES ON a forthcoming paper of mine about Rawls ("The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy"), but most of his criticisms apply equally well to various papers urging what I called (rather unhappily) a "post-modernist bourgeois liberalism." In these papers I tried to separate what is sometimes called "post-modernism" from political radicalism. I tried to disengage polemics against "the metaphysics of presence" from polemics against "bourgeois ideology," and criticisms of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism from criticisms of liberal, reformist political thought. Quite a few people whose politics are more radical than mine, but also quite a few fellow social democrats (whom I had expected largely to agree with me) have been annoyed by these papers. They have found them, as Bernstein does, frivolous in tone, pointlessly extreme and paradoxical in formulation, and likely to give aid and comfort to the wrong people (and, in particular, to neoconservatives).

The fact that these critics include some of my oldest friends (e.g., Bernstein and Fisk), as well as a lot of other people whose views I respect, has made me realize that there must be a better way of

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presenting the position that I want to urge. Still, there are some issues that are not just a matter of tone and presentation, but are genuine disagreements—mostly about the utility of philosophical theory for social democratic politics. So I should like to use Bernstein’s paper to make a fresh start, and to try to do a better job of isolating the latter issues. I shall not try to cover all of Bernstein’s points, and in particular I shall avoid those that are specific to “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy.” But I shall try to make clear the line I would take in replying to the suspicions Bernstein and others have voiced.

I hope that it will not seem too pompous to begin with something like a political credo. My excuse for doing so is that it seems the best way to answer Bernstein’s question about who I mean by “we.”4 (It also has the advantage of enabling me to distance myself from the neoconservatives, with whom I have been astonished, and alarmed, to find myself lumped.5) The audience I am addressing when I use the term “we” in the way Bernstein describes is made up of the people whom I think of as social democrats—that is, people whose view of the contemporary political situation has considerable overlap with the following eight theses:

(1) Given the failures of central governmental planning, we can no longer make “nationalization of the means of production” a central element in our definition of “socialism.” Instead, we have to use some such definition of “socialism” as Habermas’s: “overcoming the . . . rise to dominance of cognitive-instrumental [interests].”6 (Alternatively, perhaps: “overcoming the greed and selfishness which are still built into the motivational patterns impressed on our children, and into the institutions within which they will have to live.”) We have to find a definition that commits us to both greater equality and a change in moral climate, without committing us to any particular economic setup. Nobody so far has invented an economic setup that satisfactorily balances decency and efficiency, but at the moment the most hopeful alternative seems to be governmentally controlled capitalism plus welfare-statism (Holland, Sweden, Ireland). There is nothing sacred about either the free market or about central planning; the proper balance between the two is a matter of experimental tinkering.

(2) The world is currently divided into a rich, relatively free, reasonably democratic, notably selfish and greedy, and very shortsighted First World; a Second World run by ruthless and cynical oligarchies; a starving, desperate Third World.

(3) Within the First World, the social democratic scenario of steady
reform along increasingly egalitarian lines (lines that would lead to the eventual realization of Rawls’s two principles of justice) has been stalled for decades, largely because the political right within the First World (made up of the people who have no interest in increasing equality) has diverted public attention, money, and energy to combating Soviet imperialism.

(4) Soviet imperialism is indeed a threat. Granted, for example, that SDI is just a gimmick to make Reagan’s rich friends richer at the cost of the poor, there is still a need for military defenses against the Soviets. There is still considerable reason to think that a NATO-free Western Europe would, sooner or later, come under the same kind of Moscow-dominated governments as now rule Eastern Europe, with the same loss of democratic freedoms. Again, granted that a lot of American intervention in the Third World has been for the sake of protecting investments (or supporting oligarchs who hired the right Washington lobbyists), it remains quite likely that Third World governments manned by graduates of Patrice Lumumba University will end up as the same kind of ruthless oligarchies that we find in contemporary Rumania and Vietnam—with the same forcible suppression of reform from below.

(5) Not only is Soviet imperialism a threat, but time seems to be on the Soviet side. Since the days when Lyndon Johnson gradually gave up on the Alliance for Progress, there has been no serious attempt by the First World to support the kind of social democratic revolutions in the Third World that might provide alternatives to takeovers by the ex-students of Lumumba U. In the absence of such an attempt, it seems likely that the next century will see a steady extension of Moscow’s empire throughout the Southern Hemisphere—a gradual absorption of the Third World by the Second. Where else, after all, can revolutionary movements in the Third World turn?

(6) So we social democrats have to maneuver on (at least) two fronts—against enemies at home in the interest of, for example, the people in the urban ghettos and rural slums of the First and Third Worlds, and against Soviet imperialism in the interest of the human race. The struggle against the latter threat has as little to do with “the struggle between socialism vs. capitalism” as the present institutions of the Second World have to do with socialism (in Habermas’s sense of the term.)

(7) So no single set of slogans is going to help. There is no way to consolidate our enemies in any interesting “theoretical” way.
shadowy millionaires manipulating Reagan (people who are happy to see democratic politics turned into sham battles between telegenic puppets), the nomenklatura in Moscow, the Broederbond in South Africa, and the ayatollahs in Iran are so many gangs of thugs concerned to hold on to the power and wealth they have managed to grab. They use the other gangs for mutual reinforcement in the way in which, in 1984, the governments of Eurasia, Oceania, and Eastasia use each other. Unfortunately, however, much of what each gang says about its rivals is all too true.

(8) Still, this does not mean that "there is no significant difference" between the First and Second Worlds. We have hope, and they (unless Gorbachev astonishes us all) do not. We have freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, and universities in which teachers continually urge students to combat (in Bernstein's words) "the forces and tendencies at work (e.g., class conflict, social division, patriarchy, racism) which are compatible with liberal political practices but nevertheless foster real inequality and limit effective political freedom." Such fragile, flawed, institutions, the creation of the last 300 years, are humanity's most precious achievements. It is impossible to imagine, in their absence, anything like approximation to, or continuing conformity with, Rawls's two principles of justice. It is quite possible that all such institutions may vanish by the year 2100 (as an isolated First World gradually collapses). There will then (given the powers that modern technology makes available to thugs) be nothing to prevent the future being, as Orwell said, "a boot stamping down on a human face, forever." Nothing is more important than the preservation of these liberal institutions.

I could add some further points to this credo, but perhaps these eight are enough to convey the line I would want to take on lots of other subjects, and to pin down my use of "we." My hunch is that something like this credo is common ground not only for Bernstein and me, but also for Rawls, Habermas, Berlin, Robert Bellah, Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Sidney Hook, John Dunn, Charles Taylor, and lots of other people who might not mind describing themselves as "social democrats" (though each might dissent from one or another clause in the above theses).
We—we liberals, in the sense contextually defined by this credo—differ from radicals like Althusser, E. P. Thompson, Christopher Norris, Milton Fisk, Fred Jameson, and so on in at least two respects. The radicals find Marxist terminology more useful than we do, and they do not discuss Soviet imperialism much. Some radicals think reference to the latter merely paranoid, or a sign of "complicity." Others grudgingly grant that there is a real danger, but then change the subject back to the (very real) cynicism and hypocrisy of the rulers of Natopolis, or to the threat of nuclear war. Typically, radicals assume that either an internal dynamic, or a reaction to the eventual breakdown of capitalism will eventually (by some deep historical necessity) bring a free press, free universities, and so on to the Second World. They think it simplenminded to view, for example, Brezhnev and his circle as having been mere thugs, and would prefer to see them as embodying a stage in a dialectical process. They think Orwellian scenarios far too pessimistic, and suspect them to be merely apologias for the status quo within the First World. They want to keep attention, and social theory, focused on the evils internal to the First World—and, in particular, on the ways in which liberal institutions often function as tools of the local oligarchs. Whereas liberals think of these evils as eventually reformable, radicals are concerned to show that they are somehow "integral" to liberal society. Whereas liberals think of the First World democracies as promising experimental bricolages, radicals think of them as concealing (probably irreparable) "structural" defects, defects that theorizing can detect and illuminate.

On a closer view, this distinction between liberals and radicals looks like a break on a continuous spectrum—with, say, Althusser at the left end and Daniel Bell at the right, and the rest of us dotted along in between. I put Bell at the far end because he is identified with the claim that terms like "socialism," "capitalism," "imperialism," "fascism," "totalitarianism" and so on do not have much to do with the post-World War II political situation, and more generally with the view that large theoretical constructs on a Marxist scale are no longer of much use for understanding what is going on in the world. On a view like Bell's, what was useful in Marxism has been absorbed into the social democratic, Deweyan tradition, and the residue can safely be neglected. By contrast, Althusser is emblematic of the claim that there is a "science" that can analyze the "real meaning" of contemporary sociopolitical phenomena—and of the corollary claim that we theorists (and, in particular, we philosophers) have an important role to play in achieving socialism.
Notice that there is a rough correlation between the latter claim and a lack of belief in the Soviet threat to democracy, and between doubts about this claim (and consequent attempts to "end ideology") and concern about that threat. One reason for this correlation is that we at Bell's end of the spectrum are impressed by the sheer contingency of history—and in particular by the fact that a mad tyrant (and his thuggish heirs) just happened to be the upshot of the Bolshevik Revolution. When one thinks of the fate of democracy and of socialism as largely a matter of who shoots whom first, or whose agents co-opt which revolution first, one's sense of the importance of the theorist in politics diminishes. One reason that Orwell is so unpopular among radicals is that if he were right in his account of the British Conservatives and the Stalinists as just two different gangs of thugs (two examples of "the High" using "the Middle" against "the Low"), then philosophy would be less relevant to politics than radical (and, for that matter, neoconservative) intellectuals would like it to be.

My basic disagreement with Bernstein, as far as I can see, is about the utility of theory (and, in particular, of those parts of theory usually labeled "philosophy") in thinking about the present political situation, as opposed to its utility in imagining a liberal utopia. I am near the Bell end of the spectrum, in the sense that I cannot find much use for philosophy in formulating means to the ends that we social democrats share, nor in describing either our enemies or the present danger. Its main use lies, I suspect, in thinking through our utopian visions. Bernstein and Habermas are somewhere in the middle of this spectrum (though still well within the range I intended to cover with the term "we"). They are both concerned to develop large-scale analyses of the "political meaning" of contemporary phenomena. In particular, as philosophers, they are concerned to relate philosophical doctrines and vocabularies (e.g., what Habermas calls "the philosophical discourse of modernism") to politics.

The chief form that this concern takes is the desire to practice Ideologiekritik, and to provide a philosophical account of the nature and goal of this practice. The ideology that is to be criticized is always the "bourgeois ideology" of "late capitalism." To my mind, this genre—unmasking bourgeois ideology—has long been overworked, and has by now turned into self-parody. Belief in the utility of this genre has persuaded a whole generation of idealistic young leftists in the First World that they are contributing to the cause of human freedom by, for example, exposing the imperialistic presuppositions of Marvel Comics,
or campaigning against the prevalence of “binary oppositions.” This belief has helped produce the idiot jargon that Frederick Crews has recently satirized as “Leftspeak”—a dreadful, pompous, useless, mish-mash of Marx, Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan. It has resulted in articles that offer unmaskings of the presuppositions of earlier unmaskings of still earlier unmaskings. It has created the contemporary equivalent of the self-involved Trotskyite discussion groups of the 1930s.14

Those groups were made up of people of goodwill. So are the contemporary discussion groups whose members pride themselves on acuity in Ideologiekritik. But neither the 1930s Trotskyites nor contemporary American radical intellectuals had, or have, much interest in questions about what political options are currently available “within the system,” nor with questions about what might replace the system if it were overthrown. Contemporary Ideologiekritiker on the American left have practically nothing to say about the sorts of decisions that still have to be made by the governments of the First World countries—and, ultimately, by the electorates of those countries. In particular, the question of how to fight on two fronts, how to respond simultaneously to the need for greater equality and the need to resist Soviet imperialism, does not get discussed on the left.15 Soviet imperialism is often taken to be, like Donald Duck and the Justice League of America, just one more illusion staged by our capitalist masters to conceal the reality of our condition.

The habit of endless, ever more sophisticated criticism of the “ideology” of the surviving democracies, combined with lack of attention to scenarios for their reform, seems to me grounds for suggesting that the First World left has gotten overtheoretical, over-philosophical.16 To take the American case: ever since the American left decided that its traditional attempt to penetrate and influence the Democratic Party was a “sellout” (a decision taken in reaction to, e.g., Arthur Schlesinger’s involvement in the Bay of Pigs, Humphrey’s inability to break with Johnson, and so on), that left has taken less and less interest in what the rest of the country is worrying about. It has taken more and more interest in Adorno, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, and Althusser. Philosophy is “in” on the left in a way in which it was “out” during the period 1920-1960—the period in which American social democrats nodded briefly and respectfully in Dewey’s direction and then got down to the details of reform and reeducation.17

* * *
Well, what sort of use can we social democrats make of philosophy? Here is where the crunch comes between Bernstein and me. In the first place, Bernstein resembles Habermas in thinking that there is still something to be milked out of Marxism. I doubt this. People who are, like me, closer to Bell’s end of the spectrum tend to think of Marxism in the same way we do of Straussianism—as an amiable, but fruitless, exercise in nostalgia. We see no more point in trying to rework a political vocabulary developed in the middle of the nineteenth century than in trying to rework one developed in the middle of the fourth century B.C.\(^\text{18}\) We think that Dewey and Weber\(^\text{19}\) absorbed everything useful Marx had to teach, just as they absorbed everything useful Plato and Aristotle had to teach, and got rid of the residue.\(^\text{20}\)

Many people leftward of me think that Derrida and Foucault have given us some new weapons to use in unmasking the rottenness of the system. I doubt this also. I agree that Foucault, in his capacity of social historian, did a lot of useful work on particular institutions (e.g., prisons and asylums). But the general neo-Nietzschean philosophical line he developed, and partially shared with Derrida, seems to me to have no particular relevance to Ideologiekritik, social reform, or current political dilemmas. Neither Derrida nor Foucault taught or practiced a method (e.g., “deconstruction,” or “genealogy”) that helps us to do better what old-time Marxists wanted to do—expose the “underlying meaning” of what our fellow intellectuals are up to.

But this is not to deny that Derrida and Foucault are important, useful philosophers. On my view, they are useful, among other things, for helping us envisage a social democratic utopia—a future for the human race in which Enlightenment liberalism is carried through to its limit, eradicating in the process the last traces of Enlightenment rationalism. Neither philosopher can be blended with Marx,\(^\text{21}\) but both (as I have tried to show in the articles to which Bernstein refers) can be blended with Dewey and Rawls. I have invoked the (by now familiar) resemblances between the James-Dewey criticism of the Plato-Kant philosophical tradition and the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida criticism of “the metaphysics of presence” to argue that Derrida and Foucault can be viewed as continuing the good work done by Mill and Dewey: following through on Enlightenment secularization by, roughly, pragmatizing and demetaphysicizing culture.

My attempts have sometimes (especially in “The Contingency of Community”) taken the form of what Bernstein calls “a celebration of a new tolerant jouissance of multiple language games and vocabularies.”
That description is accurate if taken to describe the ideal toward which I hope the culture of the democracies may evolve. But, of course, such a celebration has no relevance to the question of what is to be done here and now: what concrete measures will further human solidarity, combat Soviet imperialism, or both. It is as irrelevant to current political decisions or programs as I believe most Ideologiekritik to be. Habermas sums up my attempt as a “clouding over of the sober insights of pragmatism with the Nietzschean pathos of a linguistically turned Lebensphilosophie.”22 If one substitutes “illumination” for “clouding over,” this description catches exactly what I have been trying to do.

Both Bernstein and Habermas see the current infatuation with “post-modernism” as a danger for the left.23 So do I, but for different reasons. They think that Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault take us down the wrong philosophical road. Habermas thinks that these philosophers are largely wrong—a reductio ad absurdum of what he calls “the philosophy of subjectivity.” I think they are, broadly speaking, right—but that they cannot be used for the purposes for which the left would like to use them. I see them as useful for, roughly, private rather than public purposes—for giving us intellectuals a more coherent self-image, and a more coherent cultural utopia, rather than for giving us new political weapons or freeing us from old political illusions. Their greatest utility lies in helping us decide “what to do with our aloneness.”24

Habermas and Bernstein are inclined to think that if a philosopher is any good at all, he is good for political purposes—that if his work has any significance at all, it has political significance, relevance to contemporary political controversies, current social needs. That is why Bernstein sees my “celebration” as “little more than an ideological apologia for an old-fashioned version of cold war liberalism dressed up in fashionable ‘post-modern’ discourse.”25 It is why Habermas thinks it important to emphasize the connections between Heidegger’s Nazism and his neo-Nietzscheanism, and to interpret Derrida and Foucault as Jungkonservative.

In contrast, I think that we should see philosophy as, roughly, a branch of literature.26 Some philosophers (Mill, Dewey, Rawls, Habermas) write books that are relevant to current political practice, as do some novelists (e.g., Hugo, Zola, Dickens, Solzhenitsyn, Orwell). Other philosophers (e.g., Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Wittgenstein) do not, as other novelists (e.g., Virginia Woolf, Proust, Nabokov) do not.27 Philosophers whose writings are not relevant to current politics (but, at most, to political utopias) are not automatically “irresponsible,” nor are
they automatically to be assigned to the political right.

After all, part of the point of the efforts of us social democratic intellectuals is to help create a society in which there is room for subjectivity and self-involvement, room for the kind of private spiritual development that politically irrelevant philosophers and novelists help us to achieve. We social democrats ought to be able to cooperate in political projects while differing in our philosophical tastes, as in the rest of our literary tastes. In particular, people like Berlin and Taylor, who disagree about whether negative liberty is liberty enough, or Habermas and Derrida, who disagree about whether there is something universally human to serve as a foundation for ethics, can collaborate perfectly well on such projects.

One advantage we social democrats have always had over the radicals is that we have traditionally worried less about ideological purity, and have relied on what Rawls calls “overlapping consensus.” We all are working for a utopia in which equal access to a free press, a free judiciary, and free universities will permit questions about, for example, negative liberty-versus-civic republicanism or privatism-versus-community or ethnocentrism-versus-universality (the issues that Bernstein rightly says I gloss over with my use of “we”) to get peacefully and gradually worked out through new, ever-richer, syntheses of theory and practice. Differences in philosophical taste between us social democrats can easily be deferred until we have come a good deal closer to that utopia. The differences on empirical issues (e.g., Is Soviet imperialism a threat? Does the system still work, or has democratic politics in the First World become merely a series of media farces?) cannot. My main objection to the people closer to Althusser’s end of the spectrum is that they seem to think these issues can be treated as “ideological” ones.

I shall end by citing one concrete instance of the danger of trying to find “the inner political meaning” of philosophical doctrines. Habermas has said (in an interview) that he knows himself to be on the right track in his ethical universalism because that is the doctrine that brings the loudest squeals from the German political right. When I first read this remark, my first reaction was that Habermas must have been misquoted, or that the sentence must have gotten scrambled. I had taken for granted, on the basis of my (admittedly limited) experience with the American political right, that what made the right squeal was any doubt
about ethical universalism, any suggestion of historicism, of the idea that there were no "universal and objective values" to be found in "human nature." Certainly most of the flak I have gotten from neoconservatives has been centered on my skepticism about that idea. Such flak had helped convince me that I was on the right track.

I take the moral to be that the German and the American political right were educated differently, and hence are offended by different philosophical doctrines. I would draw the further moral that we should not try too hard to label philosophical views "rightist" or "leftist," nor waste too much time asking what "ideology" they represent. Political labels often have only very local utility. Contemporary German apologists for Nazism (whom Habermas has done yeoman work in confuting) often use a historicist philosophical rhetoric that talks a lot about tradition, phronesis, and the spiritual situation of the age. By contrast, apologists for Reagan usually tell us that we need to recapture our sense of universal and objective moral values, and add that this means getting back behind both pragmatism and the secularism of the Enlightenment to either "natural law" or to a religious ethics.

These two local branches of the right are both defending the cynical hypocrisy of some of our current rulers—but their respective tactics are skillfully adapted to the local environment. We social democrats who are also theorists need to keep our tactics equally flexible. But this means keeping the distinction between empirical predictions and philosophical interpretations reasonably clear. It means avoiding Leftspeak, ceasing to worry so much about "complicity," and being willing to join in (rather than aufheben) the exoteric political arguments being conducted by our untheoretical fellow citizens. It also means treating thugs as thugs and theorists as theorists, rather than worrying about which theorists to pair off with which thugs.

NOTES


4. I agree with Bernstein that I need to spell out the reference of “we” more fully. I think that this is best done by reference to a view of current political dangers and options—for one’s sense of such dangers and options determines what sort of social theory one is able to take seriously. However, I cannot figure out what Foucault meant when he said (in the passage Bernstein quotes) that “the 'we' must not be previous to the question.” With Wittgenstein and Dewey, I should have thought that you can only elaborate a question within some language-game currently under way—which means within some community, some group whose members share a good many relevant beliefs (about, e.g., what is wrong, and what would be better). Foucault seems to be envisaging some sort of simultaneous creatio ex nihilo of vocabulary and community. I cannot envisage this. As far as I can see, you can only describe or propose radical social change if you keep a background fixed—if you take some shared descriptions, assumptions, and hopes for granted. Otherwise, as Kant pointed out, it won’t count as change, but only as sheer, ineffable difference. Attempts at such ineffability can produce private ecstasy (witness Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) but they have no social utility. A lot of Foucault’s admirers seem to think that he (or he taken together with Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, and so on) showed us how to combine ecstasy and utility. I cannot envisage this either.

5. Fortunately, I have gotten as much flak from the right as from the left about these articles. Had I not, I would have begun to fear that I had turned into a neoconservative in my sleep, like Gregor Samsa.

6. Peter Dews, ed., Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews (London: Verso, 1986), p. 91: “What constitutes the idea of socialism, for me, is the possibility of overcoming the onesidedness of the capitalist process of rationalization (to use Weber’s terminology). Onesidedness, that is, in the sense of the rise to dominance of cognitive-instrumental aspects, which results in everything else being driven into the realm of apparent irrationality.”
There is one question I wish Marxists would discuss more than they do: Why can we not yet point with pride to a noncapitalist democracy? As Habermas rightly says, “The whole wretchedness of so-called actually existing socialism can basically be traced back to a reckless disdain for the principles of the constitutional state” (Dews, Habermas, p. 186). I see no deep link between capitalism and democracy, nor between central economic planning and tyranny, but I wish I had some answer to question of why this disregard is so ubiquitous and persistent in the countries that call themselves “socialist.” Is the only answer that you cannot, in the present situation, be a Marxist government without becoming a client of Moscow, and that Moscow will not let its clients encourage a free press, free universities, and so on? Does this entirely explain the absence of such institutions in, for example, Cuba?

One can argue plausibly that the more local Communist regimes are set up, the less able Moscow will be to control those regimes. This is, however, cold comfort. Consider the prospect of a Period of Warring Marxist States when, ignoring frantic messages from the imperial capital, local autarchs—the Ceacescus and Kim Ii Sungs of the twenty-first century—start slingng nukes at each other.

There is a possibly apocryphal, uncheckable-upon, story (which I owe to Robert Tucker) about an exchange between Dubcek and Brezhnev in 1968. Dubcek is supposed to have assured Brezhnev that his government would not dismantle socialism, whereupon Brezhnev replied, “Don’t talk to me about socialism! What we have, we hold!” It sounds pretty plausible.

They would also, of course, disagree among themselves about particular political tactics. For example: Hook was against America’s pulling out of Vietnam, and most of the other people on this list were, like me, in favor of it. I think that Bernstein would have a hard time specifying what he calls “the politics of Rorty’s new heroes: Sidney Hook, Karl Popper, Michael Oakeshott, Leszek Kolakowski.” (Incidentally, although I have found Popper and Oakeshott useful in various ways, I do not think of them as heroes. I do tend to think of both Hook and Kolakowski as heroes. This is because both men have done a great deal for the cause of social democracy and have endured an extraordinary amount of spiteful and resentful opprobrium in the process.)

I have to admit that the survival of the human race is, pace the above credo, more important than the survival of liberal institutions. Ernst Tugendhat, for one, has argued for unilateral nuclear disarmament on this basis. See his Nachdenken ueber die Atomkriegsgefahr und warum man sie nicht sieht (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1986). I confess that I do not know what I think about Tugendhat’s claim that it is “irrational” for the First World to continue to use nuclear weapons as a threat. We cold war liberals might, indeed, help bring about the end of the human race by resisting unilateral nuclear disarmament. We might help cause a new, permanent, Dark Ages by not resisting unilateral nuclear disarmament. It is a hard choice, and I doubt that there are general criteria of “rationality” that one can apply to choices that hard.

See, for example, Christopher Norris, ed., Inside the Myth: Orwell—Views from the Left (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984).

Nobody bothers to criticize the “ideology” of the communist countries, any more than to analyze the writings of Mikhail Andreevitch Suslov. This, it seems to me, amounts to a tacit acceptance of the Orwellian “thug” view of the nature of politics in those countries. Asking about the ideology of Brezhnev's Russia would, indeed, be like asking about the ideology of a docksie run by the Mafia.
14. I have in mind Irving Howe's famous description (in *A Margin of Hope*) of the cafeteria at City College, a cafeteria that had its analogue at the University of Chicago in the mid-1940s, when Bernstein and I were students there.

15. For example, does anybody know what the foreign policy of American leftist intellectuals is? Does it amount to more than "Don't back any more contras, don't invade any more Grenadas, don't station any more missiles in Europe'? Has the left any positive suggestions about some actions for the American government to take, or some middle-range policy goals? Until it does, it is hard to imagine it functioning as a force in American political life.

16. I would admit that there has been at least one useful spin-off from this leftist philosophy fetishism. This is feminism, which seems to me the one area of *Ideologiekritik* where people are actually having some new ideas, actually unmasking something that hasn't already been unmasked *ad nauseam*. This may be, in part, because the patriarchy-nonpatriarchy distinction swings free of the capitalism-socialism distinction. So feminists have been able to develop some fresh dialectical space.

17. This treatment of Dewey was one Dewey himself welcomed. Dewey thought of himself as freeing us up for practice, not as providing theoretical foundations for practice.

18. It is sometimes suggested that we should take Marxism seriously because it is taken seriously by Third World intellectuals—people who are fighting harder, and suffering more, than we are. The same argument would suggest that we take Christianity seriously (given the role of the church in Poland and parts of Latin America). The reliance on Marxism on the part of the people trying to overthrow Third World oligarchies seems to me potentially as dangerous as their grandparents' reliance on the United Fruit Company or Anaconda Copper. For an attempt to find a political vocabulary for the Third World that is neither "functionalist" nor Marxist, see Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Unger is the one social theorist I have read who gets beyond the standoff between the Deweyan position I share with Bell and the Marxist one that Jameson shares with Fisk. Maybe he will help us all get out of our respective ruts.

19. I take Dewey and Weber as emblematic of the constellation of social democratic thinkers who were active around the turn of the century. For a discussion of the links between these thinkers, and of the intellectual movement of which they were a part, see the fascinating study by James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

20. To my pragmatic mind, part of this disposable residue is the Socratic habit of asking "in virtue of what is a particular instance an example of piety, justice, etc.?" I had thought Dewey taught us to reject such essentialist questions, and to replace them with questions about what concrete alternatives to a putative instance of piety or justice are available in the situation at hand. So I am surprised to find Bernstein, my fellow-Deweyan, telling me that I "cannot avoid" Socrates' questions. I am also surprised to find Bernstein incredulous about my claim that the only argument for a theory of the self that I can offer is that it suits the political purposes of us social democrats. (For the [Freudian-Davidsonian] theory in question, see "The Contingency of Selfhood," *London Review of Books*, 8 May 1986.) Bernstein says that I must also be claiming that the theory is *true*. But we pragmatists think that the true is the good in the way of belief. Social democratic thought is, Bernstein and I agree, better in the way of belief than the radicalism of Jameson or the conservatism of Buckley. But I do not know how to "justify" or "defend" social
democracy to Jameson or Buckley in a large philosophical way (as opposed to going over
the nitty-gritty advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives these people propose).
Nor would I know how to defend my view of the self to these two save by first making
social democrats out of them. This latter fact is part of what I have in mind when I speak of
"the priority of democracy to philosophy." I think Dewey showed us that we pragmatists
can start with our social hopes and work down from there to theories about the standard
philosophical topics, and that we can do this without becoming "irrationalist" or
"relativist." See Unger's use of the slogan "everything is politics"—a use that I think
Dewey would have endorsed.

21. Marx is a perfect example of "the metaphysics of presence" that deconstructors
want to deconstruct—the set of ideas that centers on the distinction between reality and
appearance. Foucault's forthright criticism of Marxism seems to me much more
enlightening than Derrida's bemused and ironic stance toward it.

22. "Man sieht, wie das Nietzscheanlsche Pathos einer ins Linguistische gewendeten
Lebensphilosophie die nieuchternen Einsichten des Pragmatismus vernebelt; in dem Bild,
das Rorty entwirft, hat der erneuernde Prozess der sprachlichen Welterschliessung keinen
Gegenhalt mehr im bewaehrenden Prozess der innerweltlichen Praxis" (Der philoso-
phische Diskurs der Moderne [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984]), p. 242. This book will
shortly appear in English translation from MIT Press.

23. I think Habermas is right that what gets called "post-modernism" is as old as the
young Hegelians, and I now regret ever having used this term. I borrowed the sense that
Lyotard gave it—repu diation of "meta-narratives." But Der Philosophische Diskurs der
Moderne has convinced me that this sense will not help us to draw the desired line between
Hegel and Derrida.

24. The quoted phrase is a paraphrase of Whitehead's definition of "religion." Whereas
Habermas wants a philosophy of intersubjectivity that can take over the social-
glue function of communal religious belief, I would like to privatize religion (as Whitehead
did) and also to privatize the tradition that Habermas calls "the philosophy of
subjectivity." Further, I should like the sentiments of pity and tolerance to take the place of
belief-systems (or of what Habermas calls "the commitment to rationality") in bonding
liberal societies together. I want a meta-ethics that follows up on Hume rather than on
Kant. I have tried to develop this line of thought and, in particular, the distinction between
the private and the public uses of philosophy, in a book called Contingency, Irony, and
Solidarity (forthcoming in 1988 from Cambridge University Press). This book incor-
porates the "Contingency of Community" and "Contingency of Selfhood" essays cited
above.

25. I do not think that old-fashioned cold war liberalism needs any apologies. It will
need them only if new evidence shows that Soviet imperialism never existed, or no longer
exists, or if somebody comes up with a better alternative for dealing with it than the cold
war. My project was not to make this sort of liberalism look better, but to take it for
granted and discuss another subject: What sort of culture might lie at the end of the road
that we liberal intellectuals have been traveling since the Enlightenment? However, the
political credo I sketched above is not a "presupposition" of this "celebration of a new
tolerant jouissance." One might join such a celebration while disbelieving in the Soviet
threat—or, like the neoconservatives, believe in the threat while loathing the jouissance.
Whether soviet imperialism is a threat is a paradigm of a non-"ideological," unphilosophi-
cal, straightforwardly empirical, question. It is a question about what will happen if such
and such other things happen (if Nato collapses, if South America goes Communist, and
The hope that such questions can be answered by improving one's philosophical sophistication (rather than by, say, reading intelligence reports on what the Politburo and the Soviet generals have been saying to one another lately) seems to me like hoping, in the 1930s, that the Nazi threat would dissolve once we got a clearer theoretical understanding of Nazism's "internal dynamic" and "structural problems."

26. This view is often taken as further evidence of my incorrigible and irresponsible frivolity. In reply, I can only ask that my critics reflect on the comparative roles of novelists and literary critics, on the one hand, and of philosophers, on the other, in the history of political liberalism and in the recent high culture of the democracies. One of the few places in which *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* seems to be just plain wrong is in Habermas's dismissive account of literary criticism.

27 I admit that Nietzsche and Heidegger were under the illusion that they had something useful to say about politics. I would also admit that, as Habermas and others have argued, Heidegger's "turn" was influenced by the ignominious failure of his attempt to ingratiate himself with the Nazis and to become a "national" philosopher (by, among other things, betraying his Jewish colleagues). But both Nietzsche and Heidegger seem to be people who knew next to nothing about politics, and who simply assumed (as Habermas and Bernstein assume) that if one is a great philosopher (as they both, correctly, believed themselves to be), one must be relevant to the politics of one's time. Although Nietzsche occasionally had an acute political remark to make, Heidegger seems to me to have had all the political sophistication of your average Schwarzwald redneck.

28. Habermas's ethical universalism is nicely summarized in the following passage: "According to my conception, the philosopher ought to explain the moral point of view, and—as far as possible—justify the claim to universality of this explanation, showing why it does not merely reflect the moral intuitions of the average, male, middle-class member of a modern Western society" (Dews, Habermas, p. 169). This is just the sort of project that Nietzsche, Dewey, Derrida, and Heidegger (and I) think pointlessly "metaphysical." From Dewey's point of view, the moral intuitions of the average middle-class member of a modern Western society are contingent, fragile, precious creations, not the expression of something universally human. They are to be justified not by being grounded upon the nature of "rationality" or of "universally human emancipatory interest," but simply by invidious comparisons with human beings of other times and places. To Carol Gilligan's point that Kantian-Kohlbergian ethics is specifically masculine (which Habermas has in mind in the passage I have quotes), we Deweyans will reply that it may well be that the average female middle-class member of a modern Western society has different, and perhaps better, moral intuitions than her average male counterpart—but that this is not because she is closer to a gender-neutral and history-neutral human nature than he. In the utopian postmetaphysical culture I envisage, nobody would see the point of asking whether or not "there is a universal core of moral intuition in all times and all societies" (Dews, Habermas, p. 206). What difference would it make to us whether there were or not?

29. The empirical-theoretical distinction is, as Deweyan holists like Bernstein and I have often urged, relative and fluctuating. But at any given moment it is, usually, not very hard to draw. Sometimes, when a conceptual revolution is in process, it does become hard. Those who hope for more from *Ideologiekritik* than I do seem to think that they can bring about (or have already brought about) such a revolution. They believe that as a result of that revolution the questions I persist in posing, and in regarding as empirical, will be shown to be bad questions, because formulated in a bad language. After the revolution they will be replaced by other, better questions about the consequence of given actions (as
Newton's vocabulary replaced Aristotle's in our questions about, and predictions of, the motions of bodies. I see no evidence that such a revolution is at hand. But, of course, I would not be the first pragmatic reformer to be astonished by the fall of an intellectual Bastille.

30. Dews, Habermas, p. 207

31. Habermas, almost alone among the eminent philosophers of the present day, manages to work as Dewey did, on two tracks. He produces both a stream of philosophical treatises and a stream of comment on current events. I doubt that any philosophy professor since Dewey has done more concrete day-to-day work in the political arena, or done more for the goals of us social democrats. Habermas's connection with the German SPD is exactly the sort of eminently useful connection that leftist academics influenced by Dewey used to have with the Democratic party in the United States.

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