

Two liberalisms

How the modernist conception of the philosophical subject comes to undermine universalist political structures

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1. Introduction

1.1 A Demeter on The Shores of Epistemology

The issue of political modernity has garnered considerable attention in the past century, both in terms of academic writing and cultural output. These debates have to a large degree centered around discussions conducted within the preview of political philosophy and epistemology. Often it has been the case that the theoretical underpinnings of one or the other of these subdisciplines have had a significant impact on the issues presented by the other, so that these two fields of philosophical inquiry have come to find themselves inextricably linked and intertwined (Hicks 2004: 92).

While it seems that a recurrent tendency for writers of text books on political philosophy is to express the need to distinguish between *modernity* as the designated birth of a new naturalistic scientific method and *political modernity* as the starting point of a new abstract way of thinking about politics, founded on rationalist principles and ultimately paving the way for new forms of political organization, it would be a mistake to draw too sharp a line between the two concepts. Such distinctions may prove themselves analytically useful but can also serve to obfuscate the very vital points of theoretical overlap between the two concepts (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 87-89).

What then lies at the heart of these discussions on modernity? To answer this question, we must first understand the concept of modernity and how it relates to political modernity.

As with many other periods in history, it is difficult to pinpoint any precise moment in time that might have served as the starting point for what we call modernity. More generally, the word refers to those emergent new trends in both philosophy and politics that accumulated in axiomatically new ways of thinking about knowledge and that cut across several centuries, starting in the mid-15th century and stretching all the way through the 16th and 17th century. These new ideas were logically contingent on monumental events that had taken place before – most notably the Renaissance, starting in the 14th century which also paved way for the Protestant Reformation.

A way of overcoming this ambiguity in time and space is to point to concrete ideas and the progenitors of these ideas who have become associated with the concept of modernity. After all, words like “modernity” are often labels that are applied to trends in history after the fact.

Thinkers participating in such movements at any given time in history seldom consciously think of themselves as participating in any larger philosophical project.

A central theme in modernist thinking regarding epistemology is the emergent rationalist conceptualization of the philosophical *subject* as self-sufficient (Hicks 2004: 20; Mitchell 2019: 2). This implies that man became regarded as capable of gaining sufficient insight into the world around him by resorting to nothing more than his universal capacity to *reason*. From a *foundationalist* point of view, *tradition* hereby came to be regarded as mere misguided speculation on the nature of reality, built on nothing but “sand and mud”. As the quote implies, this line of thinking is most notably associated with the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) and his work *Discourse on the Method* (1637). This self-sufficient notion of the subject was in some respects not new. Rationalistic philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, no doubt played a major role in elevating the status of reason in western philosophy. Yet, there is a novel element to modernist thinking which is heavily implied by the title of Descartes’ work – this novel element has to do with the *method* being employed. In Plato’s dialogues *Phaedo* and *Meno*, Socrates develops a theory of how the subject is able to perceive, conceptualize and understand the world around him – including moral categories such as justice. According to Socrates’ doctrine of *reminiscence*, the subject has once encountered the *forms* in an *ideal world* that constitutes a reality beyond that of the shadow world that makes up man’s material existence (*Menon* 70a-72d).

This line of thought implies that there is a direct resemblance between the content of the subject’s mind and the notion of *truth in itself*. Therefore, man is compelled to take the content of his mind seriously, both regarding its conceptual frameworks and its sensory input.

However, a radical change can be said to have taken place in the rationalism that will be deployed by Descartes in the 17th century. Descartes was hugely influenced by the emergent natural scientific method of his time, the foundations of which had been laid out nearly a century before by his contemporary Francis Bacon (1561-1626) (Nordin 1995: 273-280). This view implies that the philosophical subject, through employing the right means, can acquire objective, universal knowledge of the world around him without having to resort to any tradition of thought that has come before. In other words, the universal human capacity for reason can serve to make prior religious dogma obsolete.

Descartes took these theoretical outlines to heart and proposed that to attain knowledge of this kind one would have to make oneself devoid of all prior learnings. In the case of Descartes, this would entail an outright rejection of all things having to do with the scholasticism and Aristotelian teleology that had permeated the early university institutions founded by monasteries since the 12th and 13th century (Descartes 2017: 30-32). This does not mean, however, that Descartes would break with every type of knowledge or practice that he had encountered during his education. In addition to drawing on the radically new views of naturalistic science, Descartes was still hugely influenced by both mathematics and geometry, which ever since the time of the ancient Greeks have remained vital tools for the construction of logical models of how knowledge is derived. The crowning achievement of such efforts was for a long time the *foundationalist* view of epistemology. A defining feature of foundationalist thought is that all complex logical propositions can ultimately be derived from one singular and irrefutable axiomatic proposition (Johansson, Ekenberg, Masterton, Remes 2014: 237-245). For Descartes, this irrefutable proposition is encapsulated in the now famous phrase *cogito ergo sum* (Nordin 1995: 290). Descartes subsequently rids himself of all prior knowledge, starting with the axioms which scholasticism was based on, a move which, in line with foundationalist thinking, causes all other propositions built on said axioms to come tumbling down.

Whereas the rationalism that was conceived by Socrates and developed upon further by Plato carries with it an impetuosity to believe that our sensory input and our conceptualizations of the world bear some resemblance to the ideal forms, Descartes' *methodological doubt* ends up discrediting the validity of practically all prior theoretical knowledge as well as sensory input. For this reason, Descartes dismisses tradition all together and starts his search for a secure foundation for knowledge with nothing more to light the way than his reason and a new method of inquiry (Mitchell 2019: 44-45).

This is the process by which the autonomous nature of reason and its capacity to acquire objective knowledge about the world ends up constituting one of the fundamental building blocks of modernist epistemology, which is soon to give way to modern political ideas of how society ought to be organized, founded on some of the same abstract rationalist principles as the cartesian approach to knowledge. The pivotal question remains, in what sense is this a proper way of proceeding in questions regarding morality and political organization? Surely one can hardly dispute that this scientific method has been highly

successful in achieving remarkable things in the way of technological advancement, revolutionary discoveries within biology and medicine that have benefitted the lives and health of people worldwide. However, to what extent can *moral knowledge* be said to have prospered under this view of epistemology (Mitchell 2019: 1)?

My previous point concerning the “proper way of proceeding” must, therefore, be viewed in a conservative light, both in terms of descriptive assessments concerning a coherent way of viewing the nature of moral knowledge and in terms of prescriptive assessments, of how we as a society should approach questions of morality based on our descriptive findings.

It is crucial for us to recognize that the traditional body of knowledge that ends up becoming sidelined by modern universal reason, includes more than just propositions about the state of nature – it encompasses metaphysical propositions, the very stuff that hitherto had given moral concepts their meaning and had tied them to a culturally coherent and a, more or less, homogenous way of being – both culturally, politically, and epistemologically. Naturally one could argue that tradition can become a burden, an impediment on the advancement of knowledge. But what does it mean to speak of moral knowledge as having advanced? When it comes to technical and scientific matters, one can easily point to some objective metric according to which science “progresses”. One could argue for the *objectivity* of such a metric, by pointing to developments in the field of technology or to how medicine has become more adept at curing certain illnesses – but in what sense is it appropriate to speak of the changing moral landscape in terms of betterment or progress? After all, a moral proposition does not appear to be falsifiable according to the same logic as an empirical hypothesis about the nature of physical reality. Yet, it appears as though it were just this type of thinking that has ideologically permeated the self-perception of the West for the better part of four hundred years, culminating in the now famous article by political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1952-) who, at the end of the cold war, proclaimed “the end of history”. The eponymous article was later redrafted into a book. The main thrust of both the article and the book, is that the world has entered a post-ideological era, in which our liberal, constitutional democracy reigns supreme.

One can easily understand where Fukuyama is coming from when considering the historical moment in time in which his article was written. There may indeed have been a lot of things for Western leaders to be optimistic about in the direct aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin wall. It is easy to soak up some of the atmosphere of that era

just by reading Fukuyama's work. Nevertheless, one cannot help but being struck by the author's utter lack of philosophical appreciation for the underlying processes that had brought liberal constitutionalism about and how these very same processes would continue to throttle on, even after the constitutional framework was made manifest. Indeed, many authors have commented on this same issue and its implications in the past. One of the most prolific voices that at the present time stands out as highly prophetic, is that of the French writer and political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1856) who, during the course of his visit to North America in 1831 became highly impressed by the extent to which civic engagement had flourished in the American democratic polity (Dalton 2009: 53). Tocqueville would write about his experiences in his now famous work *Democracy in America*, which would be published in two separate volumes – the first volume came out in 1835 and the second one in 1840. At one point in his work, Tocqueville implicitly commented on the matter of what gives a liberal constitution its value. This is a question that lies at the heart of the discussion we are about to embark on.

Tocqueville points out that abstract political ideas such as the dignity of the individual and the liberal contract theories that espouse it, are not in fact functions of some transcendental reason, which can be found to be true just by employing said reason. Tocqueville realized, as did Edmund Burke and several other thinkers since him, that these truths that are taken “to be self-evident” are not in fact self-evident at all but may as far as the philosophical subject is concerned, come across as such due to them being logically contingent on the conceptual frameworks that have preceded them. The philosophical and political truths, that we have agreed on as a society, are not abstract notions that have the power to reinforce themselves in the mind of every rational person – on the contrary, we accept these ideas to be true on an emotional level, since they are recognizable conceptual structures, that build upon earlier concepts that we also have an attachment to. Tocqueville points out that what, therefore, binds American society together is not the notion of liberalism as such, but a shared protestant life world which its heirs sought to save under the religious wars in Europe. It is this same metaphysical structure that once birthed liberal concepts and gave them value and meaning in the eyes of the populous. The survival of the liberal and constitutional order was, therefore, seen by Tocqueville as contingent on the survival of this old metaphysical world. Once this old world dissipates liberalism will show its true face (Mitchell 2019: 49-51).

Naturally, one might wonder what the term *liberalism* in this instance refers to.

If institutional structures are to be conceived of according to the reasoning I have outlined above, it makes little sense to argue that the liberal constitution in and of itself is going to facilitate something antithetical to its original ends: the preservation of the right to one's tradition. But what if tradition itself were to become undermined from within, including the very tradition that paved way for liberal thinking in the first place? What then is to come of this constitution and in the long run society? These are questions that will be addressed in detail below. Let us now turn our attention back to the question posed earlier: if constitutionalism is not in and of itself at fault here, but merely a symptom of an underlying epistemological problem, how are Tocqueville's concerns about liberalism to be interpreted?

This culprit called "liberalism", as I see it, seems to be the idea of *the liberal subject* itself. The liberal subject, is in essence synonymous with the cartesian subject; regarded by thinkers as possessing an autonomous and supposedly culturally destitute form of reason, which by the mere tools of deduction is expected to proceed into the future and not only pave the way for naturalistic propositional truth but moral truth as well.

We might in a sense speak of the existence of two liberalisms in the world. On the one hand this word appears to refer to a constitutional arrangement, designed to accommodate moral and religious incommensurability under one legislative and governmental framework. On the other hand, the word also seems to denote a cultural and philosophical phenomenon – one that encapsulates the self-image of modern man in post-industrial Western societies. The former is in essence the handwork of the latter. This phenomenon, which is quite distinct from *constitutional liberalism*, has variously been referred to as *cultural liberalism*, *social liberalism* or *individualism*. It denotes political subjectivities of various kinds that regard individual choice as constituting one of the highest moral goods in the world – a tendency that in the West is made quite evident by the fact that political actors are self-identifying under the label "liberal".

The liberal subject has arguably become a prominent cultural figure in many western societies. It can be seen reflected in the cultural image of the self-made man, a role that was played to the hilt by many early American film stars, such stars as John Wayne and Gary Cooper. The stoic characters they played were in many ways men of honor who were deeply concerned with protecting the survival of their community, particularly from outside interference. There is however an argument to be made for how there always seemed to be a dual nature inherent to some of these characters. The primary motivation to act upon

perceived injustices carried out by some outside party always seemed to boil down to a bottom-line, which primarily involved the preservation of a particular principle more than anything else. The mentality of “the American way” seemed to have become synonymous with a kind of idolatry of individualism rather than any tradition or way of life.

But what could possibly be wrong with this type of culture? After all, Western liberal democracies pride themselves on being the champions of freedom. Freedom to be whoever one desires, to lead the kind of life one wants to, and the right for everyone to believe whatever one wants to, without the fear of persecution. The fact that a whole new range of possibilities is made available to the individual by dint of a set of legal rights, should not however be confused with the moral imperative, that the prioritization of individual freedom at every expense should be hailed as some form of unquestionable cultural maxim.

In some ways it can be argued that the existence of “two liberalisms” constitutes a misreading of what was originally intended by liberal philosophers – and a dangerous one at that. Whereas the internalization of “liberal values” in society can be regarded as a precondition for the continued legitimacy of constitutional liberalism (meaning that a large number of citizens accept the *legal* rules of the game), this divergent view of liberalism might actually in a strange and counter intuitive way have become instrumental in undermining its own creation. A general carelessness for past tradition, inherent to this type of liberal subjectivity, is what warrants our concern. The survival of tradition is not merely an academic question that relates to the survival of philosophical truths. The ambiguous prospects of the survival of tradition, has severe implications for the survival of our Western societies. Common cultural narratives, traditions, myths, and morality are essentially what bind a society together. Should these structures become unglued in an increasingly atomized world, the subject will inevitably – as some have argued – come to feel aimless and lost.

This issue of the subject feeling morally lost became the topic of much discussion within existentialist circles in philosophy, where the responsibility of the subject to create his or her own life on his or her own terms, became one of the central maxims as philosophy moved into the post-Nietzschean world of the 20th century (Nordin 1995: 522-523). This burdensome – and some would argue impossible – task, of forging one’s own meaning in life, is in a way the reason why society does not remain individualistic or atomized for very long. Man is at heart a social creature and seeks out the meaningful, and ready-made contextual output of moral authorities.

The constitutional edifice is, therefore, not the only formal structure or system that universal reason has come to produce during its somewhat lengthy history. Reason has arguably been quite busy during the past 500 years and has come to generate moral systems of varying kinds, such as Kantian duty-based ethics and utilitarianism; all of which purport to be universal in nature. This trend towards a kind of pluralism can be seen reflected in politics as well. The terms of political participation have changed radically since the latter part of the 20th century, becoming ever more individualistic. Older political ties between class and economic policy, which were once heavily reflected in the party systems of Western countries, have to some degree diminished in importance, especially in the eyes of young democratic citizens (Dalton 2009: 1-6). Likewise, the terms of religious participation and affiliation seem to be undergoing a process of radical change, whereby individuals no longer feel attached to their parents' religion but have become inclined to seek out religious and moral truths that speak to their present needs.

This talk of society becoming more individualistic is, therefore, somewhat of a misnomer. One could reasonably argue that society has become more individualistic in the sense that the individual has become more inclined to pledge political allegiances on his or her own terms rather than through some feeling of obligation or duty to the past, but this does not imply that society has become politically atomized. When we are talking about political affiliations and political action these are always collective efforts, taken on behalf of some shared interest or goal. If political affiliations could be said to have been class based in the past, current affiliations are based around a phenomenon that in the political science literature has come to be known as *new social movements*. These movements, composed mainly of young, cosmopolitan millennials and members of Gen-Z, tend to concern themselves with global injustices as well as issues relating to politicized personal identity, what has colloquially been termed identity politics.

Though the term *political polarization* tends to raise concerns in whatever context it gets brought up, the pursuit and ontological reality of an increasingly more *pluralistic political landscape* is not always viewed as a problem (despite the fact that the two concepts are related). On the contrary, a diversity of viewpoints is often put forward as a moral good in its own right. Of course, it need not be the case that a diversity of opinion constitutes a problem in and of itself. It may be argued, that uniformity breeds dogmatism, stagnation and an inhospitable environment for the development of new ideas. This is undeniably true. Under

fruitful circumstances differing viewpoints can agree to disagree or even come to a consensus. This is arguably the case when it comes to negotiating the rules and regulations surrounding the coexistence of multireligious or multiethnic communities. We should keep in mind, however, that in such circumstances we are talking about coherent traditions agreeing on the terms of their coexistence. What happens when a tradition starts to erode from within and the heirs of that tradition can no longer communicate in a coherent manner? What if we, as a society, can no longer agree on who we are and what we stand for? This could constitute not only a full-fledged existential crisis but a political one as well.

Some would argue that this has already come to pass.

Almost a decade before Fukuyama published his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), a Scottish moral philosopher by the name of Alasdair Macintyre (1929-) published a curious work on metaethics entitled *After virtue* (1981). Macintyre's book is in a sense a mirror image of Fukuyama's work. Macintyre's contention in this book is that our moral language is in a state of disarray. Much of this is due to the philosophical developments described previously, whereby moral concepts have become disentangled from their proper context. Ironically, this has come about as a direct result of philosophers having tried to attain moral certainty. However, if indeed the aim of western moral philosophy, founded on rationalist principles, has been to produce universal knowledge in matters of morality, one cannot in a certain sense help but feel underwhelmed by the fruits of its labor. Furthermore, modern-day debates concerning some of the most contentious moral issues imaginable, display all the characteristics of *incommensurability* that Macintyre was mapping out over 40 years ago (Macintyre 1981: 1-26).

The circumstances surrounding this disarray are what lie at the heart of the debate concerning political modernity. It is a debate, which at its core, revolves around such issues as the lack of coherency in moral language and the societal consequences of such disunity. All the issues listed above are concerns, that in an unavoidable way tie in with our previous discussion on the errors of modern-day epistemology.

It can be argued, that in the eyes of some philosophers and laymen alike, the sheer multitude of the moral systems that exist, seem to have, in and of themselves, come to undermine the very notion of a *truth in itself*. Whereas this abundance of axiomatically divergent – but still purportedly universalistic – truth claims can be considered troublesome, some areas of

philosophy can be said to have made a precipitous turn away from being *universalistic* and towards becoming *particularistic*, knowingly opposing the idea of a unified society.

Particularism in general, refers to the epistemological standpoint that moral truths are culturally mediated and, therefore, local rather than *a-historic* (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 351).

There is however a difference between the particularism being espoused by this particular strand of philosophy, which sets it apart from some areas of conservative thought.

Conservative particularists, can in some sense be said to have remained mindful of the epistemological issues discussed above, since the early days of the French revolution. These differences will be discussed in more detail below.

So how does one navigate the political and epistemological terrain of this current state of disarray? Who are the key political players and what do they want?

To put it plainly, there exist three main strands of political thought that have tackled the issue of modernity. Proponents for these three traditions of thought implicitly draw on philosophical discussions concerning such issues as knowledge and metaphysics, that have taken place side by side with the political debates of their time. Some of the discussions taken up by the metaphysical strand of philosophy, can be said to have taken on a political bent from the get-go.

The three traditions of concern are *political liberalism*, *communitarianism* and finally a flurry of normative and descriptive theories drawing on sociological *conflict theory*, *Hegelian philosophy*, *critical theory* and *post-structuralist theory* (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 241-243; Best, Kellner 1991: 20-25; Held 1980: 13-26; Giddens, Sutton 1989: 42-43). Taken together, the latter two of these theoretical strands concern themselves broadly with a critique of the liberal order. This is a critique, that is not solely based on a *normative* disapproval of the social or economic structures as they exist in the present moment – this critique also operates on a descriptive level and draws on deeper disagreements about the very axioms that appear to have brought these structures about. To varying degrees, all three traditions align themselves with political ideologies on both the Left and the Right. Apart from the obvious connection between liberal contract theory and its institutional and economic counterparts, some vital points of interest also include the connection between contemporary communitarian thought and conservatism and Right-wing reactionary thought, as well as between conflict theory and the various strands of Marxism, feminism and postcolonialism.

The one thing, that the latter two theoretical strands of thought share in common, is the fact that they all to wearying degrees draw attention to what they see as indicative of a contradictory nature within liberalism. This critique comes in many forms. For those theorists with a more particularistic bent to their views on epistemology and metaphysics, the thought of the universal liberal subject, as it has been outlined by numerous contract theorists since the 17th century – most notably by John Rawls (1921-2002) in recent times – comes across as nothing short of a good example of bad philosophy (Freedman 1996: 247-249). These thinkers argue that the philosophical subject is always situated in a particular historical epoch, a *lifeworld* that exist a-priori to his thoughts, values and actions – therefore the very tools, that is to say the *reason* by which one goes about conceptualizing the world around them, are part of a tradition, or what some thinkers might more appropriately have termed *practice* (Nordin 1995: 503; Mitchell 2019: 107-111; Oakeshott 1947: 5-42). The notion of the cartesian subject being able to gain not only scientific but also *moral knowledge*, by means of a rationale, that operates separate from any form of tradition that comes before, is a central tenant of liberal thought. According to the divergent philosophical traditions however, this line of thinking is nothing but a mirage and a prime example of liberal thinkers simply lacking in self-awareness. The one exception to this rule of course being classical Marxism, which also regards itself as universalistic. Therefore, whereas constitutional liberalism is primarily concerned with *the formal political and legal structures*, that regulate the interplay between different moralities, communitarianism and particularistic theories influenced by conflict theory are more focused on *epistemological and metaethical perspectives on society*. The latter two perspectives are both particularistic in nature and both contain a sort of conservative impulse to *preserve a form of collective tradition*. However, despite these outward similarities, there are also some crucial differences between the two. While some thinkers in the communitarian tradition are mainly oriented towards the preservation macro level culture, and have a certain reverence for the past, proponents of varying strands of conflict theory tend to be much more skeptical about the wholesale acceptance of this type of tradition. Said theorists are arguably not very concerned with macro level politics but can be considered an emancipatory project for identarian groups, oriented towards liberating local cultures from a particularistic and oppressive macrolevel polity (Ambjörnsson 2016: 47).

Why does any of this matter? As I have alluded to before, questions on the nature of morality and political organization are not simply conversations that only have theoretical implications for the scholarship taking place within the confines of the university as an institution.

Questions about morality are perhaps more than any other field of study intimately tied up with the lives of real living people, their interests, their needs and their values. The survival of institutions is also predicated on the ability of these institutions to justify their own existence. Thus, theoretical shortcomings open doors for real life changes. *How* we counter and remedy these shortcomings, within or outside of our political institutions, therefore, matters because theoretical propositions, no matter how vague and “academic” they may seem, can impact the lives of real living people. The question of *how* the problems brought up in this chapter are redressed can make a real difference for the outcome. The question is what outcome are we talking about? As implicitly denoted above, there are two levels of analysis here that need to be addressed when it comes to questions of moral disagreement. At one level of analysis, we are dealing with *cultural disagreements* and political forces pulling citizens of the same polities in different directions. Then there is the level of formal political and legal institutions. If the legitimacy and survival of these institutions is dependent on culture, then there is an inherent danger in that these disparate particularistic convictions, operating in the same cultural space, can ultimately serve to disrupt the legitimacy of institutions that were built on universalistic premises. Debates on differing demographic values, needs and interests inevitably become tied up with different concepts of *representation*. If moral frameworks are indeed historical rather than universal, then the question that appears to follow goes something like this: *if it is the case that society functions, then for whose benefit does it function?*

This brings us to a more recent, but in no way unrelated aspect of this current state of pluralistic affairs. For almost a decade, starting around 2015, there has been an increasing amount newspaper articles written on the topic of so-called *identity politics* (Internet1). In a nutshell identity politics constitutes a collective effort to bring previously sidelined voices in society to the forefront of political discourse. Identity politics concerns itself with issues of personal identity and collectively shared experiences of oppression, so-called *lived experiences*. Many of the theoretical premises involved in this brand of politics, draw on ideas that have grown out of various fields within the social sciences. Philosophically, such ideas are rooted in developments that took place within French philosophy in the 1960’s, particularly within the post-structuralist tradition. Towards the end of the last decade, after the election of President Donald Trump and later in the fall of 2020, after the death of George Floyd, the visibility and in some cases the volatility of these movements became imprinted on

the minds of democratic citizens worldwide as parts of protests in Minneapolis turned into riots, causing around \$550 000 000 in property damage.

There are several criticisms that can be directed towards these movements. One could for instance go about falsifying some of the empirical claims put forth by their representatives. However, narrative frameworks can seldom be refuted as such, much for the same reasons we have outlined above, but every narrative still rests on a set of empirical claims that seem to reaffirm the plausibility of said narrative. Therefore, each claim can be treated as a falsifiable hypothesis. This will not be the route taken in this dissertation, however. Devoting too much attention to any one movement would also inevitably be a fruitless endeavor, as this would by and large entail too much emphasis being placed on the symptom rather than the underlying problem. Instead, I will be focusing on the philosophical developments that have brought about the conceptual frameworks employed by these movements. I purpose that this current fragmentary predicament in society can be understood as resulting from a continuous process of philosophers trying to find moral truth outside the boundaries of tradition. It is a process that has failed to produce any self-evidently true moral propositions and which already in the early stages of its development, resulted in a multiplicity of moral systems, all claiming the mantle of universality, before finally reaching its zenith in what has now variously been described as *the postmodern condition* by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), the *malice of modernity* by Charles Taylor (1931-) and *incommensurability* by Alasdair Macintyre (1929-) (Hicks 2004: 25; Best, Kellner 1991: 163-167; Macintyre 1981:43; Taylor 1991: 1; Lyotard 1979: 29-33). Views on the implications of this condition differ to some degree from one author to another. Not all philosophers perceive our current predicament as a problem – on the contrary, some see it as an avenue to realizing a world not yet conceived of outside academia; the realization of *new ways of being*, the birth of *new subjectivities* and rebranding of philosophy and the human mind as a radically creative act.

When it comes to diagnosing the epistemological origins of the current state of moral disarray, there appears to be more agreement among philosophers. When taking a closer look at public debates on these issues, however, it seems less obvious to me that priority is given to the philosophical origins of this crisis. This is arguably the case when it comes to liberal criticisms of the identity politics phenomenon. Such criticism would include the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker's (1954-) latest work *Enlightenment Now* (2018) and the much-discussed book *Cynical Theories* (2020) by mathematician James A. Lindsay (1979-) and

historian Helen Pluckrose (1974-). What these works have in common is the promotion of constitutional liberal ideas and individualism over collectivism and tribalism. While I wholly agree with the preservation of a constitutional liberal framework, we also need to seriously consider the implications of the nature of moral knowledge and moral truth when addressing the issues of identity politics. If one is inclined to agree with the metaethical description of morality provided by me thus far, they are probably also inclined to agree – perhaps begrudgingly – that the entirety of the liberal project may in some sense have been a mistake. However, this line of reasoning also suggests that constitutionalism, as it stands need not be dispensed with in order to redress the problem I have described. In fact, if liberalism as a form of constitutional arrangement is to remain true to its spirit, it cannot redress cultural problems without contradicting itself. If the true locus of the problem is moral discourse, then the solution must come from within culture itself. This realization also implies that we cannot resort to cultural liberalism or individualism as a way of fixing problems concerning the lack of common morality and a common identity. What’s more, there is the very real possibility that this narrow focus on individualism may in fact, in quite a counterintuitive fashion, have brought these collectivist movements about.

As my reader might be able to discern, this dissertation, therefore, not only has a *descriptive* dimension to it, but a *prescriptive* one as well. Moving forward, the reader should assume that too much societal fragmentation – either through cultural liberalism or through tribal micropolitics – constitutes a disconnect and disregard of the tradition that unites us linguistically. Both an overwrought culturally liberal society and one torn asunder by tribal identity politics, not only lose sight of the epistemological roots of their own thinking, but lose sight of the value of tradition as a utility, thereby losing sight of *what a society is ontologically*: a more or less coherent body of thought. My normative stance on cultural and political change, hereby, draws on the conservative theorization of this concept: it is an invitation to a cultural dialogue with the past, but one that leaves the door open for future change (Scruton 1980: 4-16).

One might of course object to this line of thinking, pointing to the fact that the aim of many new social movements is to rectify structural injustices in Western societies and that merely focusing on the philosophical roots of these movements as a way of discrediting them, is to set aside the plight of material, suffering bodies. This, however, is not the case. As I have previously stated, problems in society can still be acknowledged as being problems without

having to resort to any specific theoretical framework. We also must keep in mind that no political issue is the keystone of any one political movement and not every explanation or description of a problem is equally valid. The issue of violence against women in society can be viewed as a problem by theoreticians operating outside the premises of patriarchy theory for instance. Moreover, I will once again remind the reader that since the preservation of society is key to understanding the conservative world view, the issue of *how* we address said problems in society and deal with them as a society is what sets conservatism apart from other perspectives on societal issues.

The epistemological issues that I will be covering in this dissertation have recently been brought to public attention by two authors (Internet 2). In 2018 political scientist Patrick J. Deneen (1964-) published the book *Why Liberalism Failed* which was closely followed by Mark T. Mitchell's book *The Limits of Liberalism* (2019). Both works cover similar themes, but also show some discrepancies. In the following dissertation I will be focusing on some of the same philosophical topics that are covered by both Deneen and Mitchell, but I will also depart from some of the thoughts outlined by these two authors.

1.2 Prior Empirical Research

In political science, there exists a longstanding area of empirical research which, although it cannot be tied in directly with issues relating to modernity, still exhibits some interesting points of overlap with the sorts of philosophical debates I have been addressing. Here, I am referring to the empirical efforts of political scientists to map out and understand the variables involved in the emergence of a younger generation of seemingly politically disinterested citizens in the 1980's and the 1990's. This topic was indirectly brought to the forefront of political science debates in the early 2000's by the political scientist Robert Putnam (1941-) after the publication of his book *Bowling Alone – The Collapse and Revival of the American Community* (2000). What has been inferred from Putnam's work, is that democracy is experiencing a crisis of sorts (Dalton 2014: 37-38). Communal activities and norms advocating for collective engagement and care for one's community, which had once thrived in America and had amazed the likes of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), seemed to have almost dissipated from American society during the latter half of the 20th century. Putnam adds that this declining social capital among a younger generation of American citizens might

spell trouble for political cohesion, which had previously helped to bridge gaps between identity groups in multicultural and multiethnic Western societies. Since then, troubling trends in American political life have drawn the attention of political scholars and generated considerable debate regarding the question of how this data is to be interpreted. Some of the issues that top the list of concerns raised by scholars, include the implications of declining numbers in party membership as well as lower levels turnout in American elections. Similar trends have been recorded in several other Western democracies.

One erroneous conclusion that seems to have been drawn from such data, however, is that a younger generation of democratic citizens have become apathetic and wholly disinterested in political matters. As much of Russel J. Dalton's research has shown, these conclusions rest on a fairly narrow definition of the word "political participation" (Dalton 2009: 58-79). Empirically, the phenomenon of political participation has since the 1960's come to encompass a wider range of political behaviors than merely voting or taking part in political campaigns of local representatives. Today the word political participation denotes a wide variety of political action: these activities include protesting, signing petitions, contacting representatives via email, social media or telephone as well as donating money to charities. It is naturally important to point out, that in the same way as adopting narrow definitions of one's concepts might do a disservice to one's own research, operating with definitions that are too wide will bring about similar problems. These problems have primarily to do with the issue of *reliability*. If anything and everything can be construed as a form of political action, then the usefulness of this concept in the area of empirical research will no doubt be undermined.

The empirical findings highlighted by Dalton, have been of great value for making the case, that an interest in politics and political participation among young citizens has not in fact declined over the years. Instead, scholars are having to face up to the possibility that forms of political participation have radically changed shape over generations. Political interests have become more individualistic in the sense that loyalties to one's background in terms of class and party affiliation can no longer be taken for granted – instead young citizens prefer to form new ties and affiliations on their own terms via novel channels made available to them by advancements in technology and the creation of the internet. On the other hand, the old economic Left v. Right dichotomies, that can be seen reflected in the political party structure to this date, can be seen as sorely lacking in awareness of these societal changes, which in

turn might account for the low turn-out among younger voters. This new trend is arguably also reflected in the sudden emergence of wild card candidates on the electoral arena. This phenomenon can be exemplified by the unexpected electoral successes of candidates like Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump.

The question then becomes, what accounts for this individualistic turn in political participation and the forming of political bonds? One answer that can be acquired from past research is fundamentally materialistic in nature. In 1977 Ronald Inglehart (1934-2021) first published one of his most noted works, *The Silent Revolution* (1977). In this book Inglehart documents some of the same trends and shifts in political priorities as noted above.

Inglehart's explanation for these phenomena is that in advanced industrial societies an abundance of material wealth has formed an expanding middleclass, which has contributed to the diminishing importance of class based economic politics in the democratic polity.

Theoretically, Inglehart has come to adopt a modified variant of Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) *hierarchy of needs*. What this theory stipulates is that human beings are inclined to see to their most basic material needs before moving on to more individualistic ones. These basic needs include such things as food, water, and shelter. Once these needs have been taken care of, the individual will no longer have to face up to the constant struggle of trying to make ends meet, which means more cognitive energy and focus can be directed towards *self-actualization* (Inglehart 1977: 3-71).

Though Inglehart's theorizing on this issue is compelling, I believe that there's an argument to be made for a more idealistic take on recent developments. My purpose is not to sideline the necessity of taking material variables into consideration, but merely to acknowledge that recent developments in political activism are not some inevitable consequence of material developments. *The conceptual world* we inhabit plays a crucial role in affecting a unique *conceptual outcome*. This philosophical approach will be elaborated on further in the following section.

1.3 Method

The following thesis will be a philosophical undertaking. Some may question the validity of a philosophical approach when it comes to questions of scientific research and scientific method. Often, it has been the case that philosophy has come to be regarded as a form of

protoscience; intuitive, imprecise and highly speculative in nature – all characteristics that do not, as some would have it, sit well with quantitative efforts to map out causal mechanisms in the empirical world. However, this hostility directed towards philosophy is not born of a simple misunderstanding of how philosophical research is conducted. It is about more than that; it is also, one might argue, indicative of a more fundamental misunderstanding of how scientific research itself is being carried out. This view of philosophy, which in some ways, is an artifact of a *positivist* conception of science, persists to this day. It was in an effort to correct and overcome some of these misunderstandings that the analytic philosopher Peter Winch (1926-1997) first wrote his groundbreaking book *The Idea of Social Science* (1958). It may seem inaccurate to some extent to characterize Winch's work as "groundbreaking". After all Winch himself was strictly speaking not contributing any new or profound knowledge to the philosophical or scientific community. It would be more accurate to state that he was shining a light on topics that had already been discussed in philosophy for the better part of a century, since the death of Willhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) (Nordin 1995: 459-461). However, Winch's work has become a recurrent point of reference to anyone engaged in contrasting quantitative and qualitative methods in science – so much so, that the Finnish analytic philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright (1916-2003) wrote a book by the name *Explanation and Understanding* (1971), which touched on some of the same subjects as Winch's work, give or take a few conceptual differences here and there.

Winch's premise in this famous work, is that the human sciences constitute an independent scientific enterprise and that the concept of human action is not reducible to either naturalistic premises or to the establishment of lawlike statistical relationships (Winch 1958: 69-91). This view of the human condition ties in with a distinct methodological approach to scientific inquiry. From this point of view, man is construed as unique in his ability to attribute meaning to life, his predicament, and his surroundings. These constructs will, in the long run, come to constitute meaningful, particularistic creations or what the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in his later work might have called *life worlds*. This is a concept that displays some degree of overlap with the concept of *language games* coined by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) in his second book *Philosophical investigations* (1953). In his later work Wittgenstein comes to abandon his previous *picture theory of meaning* in favor of a radically different understanding of language, one where the meaning of words are determined by how they are being used in a particular context. The aim of the human sciences, in Winch's view, is to *understand the meaning* of the concepts being used by man

to construct a coherent cultural system (von Wright 1957: 201-215). A major hurdle for this need to understand is of course the self-contained nature of all language and the realization that the researcher himself is situated in such a particularistic context. The approach employed by me in writing this thesis, can rightly be regarded as a hermeneutic approach, but in a wider sense of the word, whereby we find ourselves inching closer to the kind of understanding of hermeneutics that was advocated by the German thinker Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) in his work *Truth and Method* (1960). According to Gadamer's understanding of this concept, human conduct itself – not only their textual output – can become the object of hermeneutic inquiry.

This method is part and parcel of all scientific inquiry that concerns itself with *human social life*. Conceptualizing the world around us is, in and of itself, a philosophical activity. We could go even further and argue that *the need to understand* rudely asserts itself in quantitative research efforts as well. Once statistical relationships of any kind become established, the researcher will inevitably attempt to theorize *why* said patterns occur. Questions such as “why do the dependent and the independent variable correlate in some peculiar manner” inevitably necessitate a further qualitative interrogation of the world, regarding the question of what lies behind a given statistical relationships. Any attempt to deny this is, in Winch's view, indicative of scientists not understanding the content of their own methods.

These views put forth by Winch should not, however, be taken as a dismissal of the inherent truth value of quantitative method as such. Which's work illuminates what lies underneath the concepts that have been quantified by the researchers in social science – human beings, who interpret the world around themselves, using their unique conceptual framework as a toolbox and act based on these interpretations. Understanding and explanation should, therefore, be viewed as constituting complementary endeavors in science rather than being seen as rival methods. Any hypothetical contention between said endeavors has more to do with the so-called *nature-nurture* debate regarding the question of how free the human mind is to construct things. As some of the progenitors of the more idealistic conceptions of the Wittgenstein's language games would have it, the creation of one's life world should be seen as a potentially boundless linguistic activity with no causal connections to underlying biology. The critics of this position, on the other hand, implicitly argue that the language games, at least with regard to some of their shared premises, are inevitably anchored in the

language user's biological constitution. However, much of this discussion falls outside the preview of the analysis that we are about to undertake. Suffice to say that as far as the topic of this thesis is concerned, any disagreement we might encounter between quantitative and qualitative measures, have more to do with differing metaphysical understandings of reality rather than scientific conduct.

Furthermore, there are two crucial distinguishing features in this text that need to be highlighted before we move on with our analysis. In his book *Grundbok i idéanalys – Det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer* (2005), the political scientist Ludvig Beckman (1970-) distinguishes between three types of *idea analysis*. These are the following: *beskrivande idéanalys* (roughly translated: descriptive idea analysis), *idékritik* (idea criticism) and *förklarande idéanalys* (explanatory idea analysis). These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Elements from any of the above-mentioned types of idea analysis can be employed simultaneously in the same study. We will take a closer look at the first two types listed above, as these will be the most appropriate tools for our research purposes going forward.

Descriptive idea analysis, as the word implies, is strictly a descriptive qualitative research tool. All scientific research rests on some shared ontological view of what exists in the world, in other words, a description of what the empirical world is made up of. In this case our units of analysis are made up of political ideas in the form of normative frameworks, as well as epistemological worldviews of how knowledge is derived. The aim of such a descriptive undertaking is naturally to clarify that which is unclear, to show how words and discourses being deployed in political debates today correspond to established ways of thinking, which in turn have developed and changed over time. In fact, in this instance Beckman is advocating for the very same methodological approach to our world of ideas as Winch – Beckman's view of understanding is to make the proper connection between *words* and *concepts*. Employing this approach will in my estimate be appropriate for the analysis we are about to undertake (Beckman 2005: 49-55).

One might wonder why the social actors themselves, the people who are, as one might put it *inhabited by these ideas*, aren't treated as our primary units of analysis? This is in some sense a valid question. The issue of materialism, in the form of neuroscience would in my estimation be a crucial building block in creating a holistic view of the moral subject, which in turn would lay the groundwork for a continued discussion on the contents of moral action. For our purposes however, covering the hermeneutic aspects of this larger discussion will do

quite sufficiently. The aim on my part is therefore not reductive in any sense. Nor do the points put forth in this text in any way contradict previous findings by Inglehart. The purpose of this research should merely be seen as adding another layer to these previous findings. Material conditions in the form of an expanding middle class, as pointed out by Inglehart, may indeed play a crucial role in shaping our political landscape, making political interests more individualistic as material wealth per capita increases. However, in my opinion we need to recognize that material wealth in and of itself does not push society in any one direction. Contrary to classical Marxist sentiment, I contend that culture still holds sway when it comes to the specifics of political formation – this point (interestingly enough), also became one of the axioms that the Frankfurt school built their ideas on in the 1930's (Held 1980: 207).

One of the most crucial points to be made in this entire thesis, is that the values and the reason we possess are not abstract notions, that have resulted from either material conditions or a transcendental mind that operates separate from a past tradition of thought. *Current ideas are built on ideas that have come before.* The past speaks through us at the present moment and we, as heirs to a tradition of thought, are predisposed to employ the linguistic and conceptual tools handed down to us from the past. These tools, though subject to change, display continuity. They guide our way into the future like the banks of a riverbed guide the flow of water from one point to another. This has been a common feature of many thinkers no matter what their academic background – this thinking is mirrored in Carl Jung's (1875-1961) depiction of the unconscious which is made up of conceptual archetypes; it can be seen in Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) genealogy of morality as well as in later communitarian and post-structuralist thinking. The positing of empirical relationships without a deeper understanding of how people or cultures attribute meaning and act out this meaning will in my estimation inevitably render such scientific efforts hollow. This point is seldom made for purely analytic reasons. Likewise, the aim of this thesis is not strictly descriptive, but has a normative bent to it. This is the point where idea criticism as formulated by Backman in his book will come in handy (Beckman 2005: 56-80). To care for these ideological and religious structures has been one of the fundamental cornerstones of conservative thought since the publication of Edmund Burke's (1729-1797) book *Refelctions on the revolution in France* (1790) and in the writings of catholic thinkers like Joseph De Maistre (1753-1821).

2. Analysis

2.1 Renaissance Humanism and the Origins of Individualism

Despite the previously outlined shortcomings intrinsic to the notion of cartesian subjectivity, Descartes' ideas would nonetheless go on to have a significant impact on the philosophical and intellectual milieus to come (Nordin 1995: 298; Juti 2019: 134). However, there are arguably other sources of individualist sentiment that have played an equally troublesome role in the forming of the morally self-sufficient modern-day man. In some ways, they may even have played a much more profound role than that of Descartes. Descartes was after all part of a moment in history where a certain sense of individualism could be argued to have constituted one of the fundamental building blocks of that era – The Renaissance.

Starting approximately in 14th century and lasting up until the 16th century, the Renaissance was in many ways at its core an Italian cultural movement, with its birthplace credited to such historic cities in northern Italy as Florence and Milan. What was at least in the early days a movement centered around art would eventually come to encompass almost all areas of cultural life in Italy and beyond, from literature to theology. The Renaissance has often been described as the rediscovery of ancient literature as well as ancient Greco-Roman aesthetics (Tergel 1973: 262). While there is considerable truth to this statement, one should not ignore the fact that ancient thinkers such as Plato and later Aristotle had always exerted a tremendous influence on medieval thinkers such as Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) and Thomas of Aquinas (1226-1274) (Tergel 1973: 215-233). In fact, even before medieval times, Plato's influence on early Christianity had been significant, especially in the controversies surrounding the issue of Gnosticism. When examining this paradigm of a return, one should therefore be careful not to overstate the presence of a novel element in history.

The above description of the Renaissance does have analytic value to some extent, but it is sometimes rather regrettably used by scientists to contrast the Renaissance against the backdrop of the medieval times, hereby depicting the former period as humanity's great awakening from its dark slumber (Nordin 1995: 170). The medieval period was in no sense a period of intellectual decay – quite the opposite. If one were to contrast the two periods in history, a more apt description would be to think of the Renaissance as a turning point in

humanity's approach to the world around it. Whereas the medieval period can broadly be described intellectually as the human mind turning away from profane matters, focusing solely on issues relating to a transcendental reality and the relation between belief and knowledge, worldly beauty and a different kind of knowledge would start garnering a renewed interest and appreciation around the time of the Renaissance.

According to Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), this shift in focus included the preconditions necessary for the cultivation of the individualist mindset. In fact, the concept of the Renaissance is intimately connected with a litany of related concepts – chief among them is of course humanism – the cultural view of man as constituting the pinnacle of the world and that the individual human being constitutes the natural starting point for all serious moral inquiry. Individualism, therefore, in Burckhardt's view is the lovechild of Renaissance humanism. This is made most apparent in the following paragraph from the second part of Burckhardt's famous work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) (Burckhardt 1860: 98):

“In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness - that which was turned within as that which was turned without - lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation - only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such. In the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arab had felt himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race. It will not be difficult to show that this result was due above all to the political circumstances of Italy”.

Turning then to Renaissance philosophers, a recurrent tendency to celebrate individualism is certainly apparent in the thoughts put forth in writings of several prominent thinkers of the time, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). To describe this early form of individualism as embryonic would doubtless prove itself a mistake. Many of the thinkers of the early Renaissance were, in fact, quite radical for their time and would pay for their transgressions by being accused of heresy by the Pope

Innocentius VIII (1432-1492). Most astonishingly, in his famous work *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1488), della Mirandola would echo the kind of *tabula rasa* sentiments that would be paralleled by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) almost five centuries later in his work *Being and Nothingness* (1943) (della Mirandola 1488: 5-8; Nordin 1995: 237-238). In his work, della Mirandola argues that in creating the heaven and the earth, God the Father – “*The Mightest Architect*” – provided every living being with a set nature. When he created man, however, God was left without a corresponding archetype for his nature. He therefore conceived of man as a supreme being that could go on to shepherd and control his creation. For this reason, God created Adam as a being devoid of any set behavioral patterns or nature, one that is free to interpret the world at his will, as an individual, and to craft his own vision of himself.

In one of his famous *Essays*, *On Solitude*, Michel de Montaigne would however argue for the urgent need for Renaissance man to regain control of his own subjectivity (de Montaigne 1580: 290). de Montaigne advocates for societal withdrawal as a way of escaping the trappings of honor and greed – the true motives lurking behind the norms upheld by men of virtue. However, isolating oneself from one’s fellowman socially, is not going far enough in one’s pursuit of the goal of becoming intellectually self-sufficient and independent. de Montaigne realizes that the hypocrisies perpetrated by both political leaders and holy men alike have become so thoroughly inculcated in our minds that a complete purge of society’s voice within ourselves becomes the necessary second step on this road to autonomy (de Montaigne 1580: 288-289).

These thinkers do not, of course, speak in unison for some internally coherent or unified mode of thinking. The differences between della Mirandola and de Montaigne are many, but there are some overarching similarities and signs of overlap between the two thinkers, which are easily recognizable as not only constituting the hallmarks of Renaissance Philosophy, but as being synonymous with some of the highest virtues bestowed upon *modern day* man. Prime examples of such overlap is how the inherent autonomy of the individual intellect is normatively construed as one of the supreme goals of the humanist movement; this goal is predicated the view of philosophical subjectivity that we have discussed earlier in the introduction of this dissertation; likewise, there appears to be an overt disregard, if not an outright hostility, being displayed in these thinkers’ attitude towards the idea of there being any redeeming quality to tradition.

There are even some similarities to Montaigne's thoughts and those of the mid-20th century structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers. Montaigne recognizes, as did Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Louis Althusser (1918-1990), and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), that social structures and traditions end up becoming internalized by the philosophical subject and restrict his or her freedom to become truly autonomous and liberated. Of course, many post-structuralist theorists would argue that the kind of liberal subjectivity advocated for by de Montaigne is neither possible nor desirable, as their concerns have mainly to do with collective liberation from an illusory order of universalism that is, in fact, particularist throughout (Best, Kellner 1991: 51).

Elements of the philosophical debates that were to take center stage on the European continent centuries later were, therefore, very much present in the disparate writings of Renaissance humanists. However, whether the birth of individualism can truly be traced back to Italy in the 14th century is disputable. According to the church historian Alf Tergel (1935-2007), there is widespread consensus among historians that individualism was taking shape much earlier and was already present in France by the 12th century (Tergel 1973: 263). According to historian Norman Davies (1939-), the earliest source material for individualism in Western societies can be traced all the way back to ancient Greece and the writings of Plato (Davies 1996: 483). As I have alluded to earlier, the universalist rationalism as conceived of by Plato and his teacher Socrates inevitably carries with it an impetus towards abstraction and, therefore, by extension also towards a kind of individualism. The presence of individualism in Western intellectual life can, thus, in some ways be said to be as old as its canon.

There is, however, a crucial point to be made here. What we have endeavored to describe so far, are the developing thoughts of an elitist intellectual movement of philosophers composed almost entirely of people from the upper echelons of society. It would, therefore, be highly erroneous of us to claim that the ideas espoused by said thinkers were being disseminated into wider circles and adopted by the common peasant farmer or tradesman. One would, however, be equally misguided in thinking that we can simply dismiss the relevance of philosophy all together. As far as examining mass movements in society is concerned, elitist ideas – especially those explicitly designed for political or religious purposes – do have a way of finding their way into society at large. Up until this moment in time, however, dissenting philosophical or religious voices were hard pressed to find favor with political and religious

rulers by going against the grain of the established order of the Catholic church. Dissenters, even among the elites, would have been well advised to tread carefully and align their arguments with the Christian canon so as not to ruffle the feathers of the clerics. Descartes' allusions to God, as constituting the sole guarantor that his senses were not deceiving him, could in many ways be construed as a way of Descartes wanting to appease the Catholic church of his time (Descartes 2017: 58). However, the political landscape was not then – just as it is not now – unipolar. The relations between the Roman Catholic Church and kings had had its ebbs and flows throughout much of Europe's history, making it possible for ideological dissenters to seek protection from the Church by joining rivaling powerholders. These conditions allowed for philosophical, religious and political splits to take place in a more fundamental way.

Aside from these circumstances, the dawning of new technologies lay just beyond the horizon – innovations that would allow for the dissemination of information more rapidly and democratically, hereby making the intellectual splits in the privileged intelligentsia more visible in the allegiances pledged by common men. However, this realignment would not be achieved through the spread of abstract philosophical ideas as such, but through their manifestation in a vehicle that was much more present in the everyday lives of ordinary people – religion.

2.2 The Protestant Reformation and the Breaking with Catholic Tradition

The source of individualism as a wider, cultural sentiment can, therefore, be found, not within the realm of philosophy, but theology. In the 16th century the Protestant Reformation would become one of the most significant intellectual movements of its time and it would feed back into the culture of the early renaissance which had created it. At the heart of protestant thought is the idea that God's word alone, should take precedence over archaic old institutions, hierarchies and dogmas, that serve only to subvert the meaning of the Gospels, as originally interpreted and lived out by the early Christians in the apostolic age. This message was historically most vividly brought to the forefront of both politics and religion alike when Martin Luther (1483-1546) – according to Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) – on October the 31st 1517 nailed his so called Ninety-five Theses to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, hereby essentially generating the protestant reformation in spirit

(Tergel 1973: 297-299). By saying “in spirit”, I wish to acknowledge the fact that Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) is generally regarded as one of the earlier intellectual progenitors of reformist thought. However, unlike Luther, who was eventually excommunicated from the Catholic Church, Erasmus of Rotterdam – though a reformer in principle – would remain faithful to the Catholic tradition throughout his life and would, therefore, disagree with both the teachings of Martin Luther as well as some of the more radical offshoots of the protestant reformation, such as Calvinism.

Martin Luther railed against what he saw as the growing economic corruption of the Catholic Church in the 16th century. The way he saw it, economic profit seemed to have become the guiding principle behind many of the religious practices and teachings taken up by the church during this period. Chief among such practices was the proliferation of so-called *letters of indulgence*. By the act of purchasing one of these letters from a Bishop, Catholics would be absolved of any sin they may have committed. Luther regarded this practice as a sign that the Catholic church had lost its way by upholding a doctrine, according to which salvation could be achieved through man’s own efforts and actions.

The roots of Luther’s vehement opposition to the underlying ideas of such practices, stretched back decades. In accordance with his father’s wishes, Luther had originally studied law at the University of Erfurt, though after having allegedly had a religious awakening during a violent thunderstorm, during which he was thrown to the ground after nearly being struck by lightning, young Martin Luther would instead opt for a monastic life in 1505. As a monk Luther would devote his time to Bible study and later became professor in exegesis at the University of Wittenberg (Tergel 1973: 292). During his studies, Luther would come across a passage in the bible that would later prove formative for his theology. This passage was Romans 1:17. It would solidify Luther’s firm belief that righteousness, on part of the Christian, could only be achieved through faith and God’s grace. Man is unable to make himself worthy of salvation through his actions. Instead, man’s actions ought to be regarded as a reflection of his belief, in so far as they can truly be regarded as morally good actions. Only through *belief* is man freed from the shackles of selfishness and rendered capable of good deeds. Luther also believed that God speaks to man directly through the written word of the Gospels (Tergel 1973: 293-294).

These were to become central tenants of Luther’s theology, and they stood in direct contrast to the catholic tenants of the time. For our purposes it is also of crucial importance to

acknowledge how Luther's endeavors constitute a radical departure from tradition. Luther was by no means a reformist in the true sense of the word. A reformist endeavor is organic by nature and hereby conservative. It seeks to preserve a continuity with the past whilst also making room for innovation, novel interpretations, corrections, and amendments. In Mark T. Mitchell's eyes, this description is not in line with the type of labor undertaken by Luther in his protestant reformation but is arguably more akin to Erasmus of Rotterdam's ambitions. This holds true on several accounts. Luther's concerns have not merely to do with the economic corruption of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. Luther seeks to break with the entirety of the scholastic tradition, Aristotle as well as the hierarchical structure of the Church (Mitchell 2019: 25-27).

The implications of these actions are many. Firstly, there is the question of hermeneutics. On the issue of salvation, Luther aspires not only to correct for the theological errors of the Catholic church, but to free the individual from the Hierarchical system of the Church, which he argues subverts the meaning of God's word. Luther encourages the individual parishioner to read and therefore interpret the Bible for him- or herself. In accordance with Luther's views on faith and God's grace, this implies that the true meaning of the written word will reveal itself to the reader provided he has faith, since God works through the Gospels.

Though protestant religions may have their own sets of systematized theologies, this line of thinking, none the less, implies that truth and meaning can be inferred by the subject, independent of any set tradition of interpretation (Hägglund 1956: 195-198). This was indeed a radical break with several Catholic tenants – not least the idea that the Pope serves as the highest authority on God's word in his capacity as the successor of St. Peter and that no truth can exist outside the Church's clerical hierarchy. It should of course be noted that the Pope would only later become the highest authority through the Council of Trent in 1545-1563.

Luther's own experiences as a monk may no doubt have weighed heavily upon his teachings on this issue. But Luther was also clearly a product of his time; his emphasis on the epistemological necessity to return to the original textual sources, was also in line with the radical sentiments which had become characteristic of the intellectual aspirations of the renaissance era as a whole (Tergel 1973: 263). It is also hardly a coincidence that the story of a young Luther studying the Bible in a lonely monastery inevitably conjures up images of how Descartes in the following century would describe himself retreating into isolation, in order to discover a truth, which existed separate from both his senses and his prior learnings.

Secondly, Luther's teachings would have several political implications. In Europe, during the Middle Ages, the interpretation of the meaning of God's word was a privilege bestowed upon the educated religious class of monks and clergymen, whereas the illiterate masses would inevitably have to rely on the interpretation of God's word as passed down by the ministers. Masses would also be conducted in Latin, rendering much of the sermons unintelligible to the average churchgoer. However, as literacy rates started going up in Europe after the 16th century and as Luther's German translations of the New and the Old Testament were published in 1522 and 1534 respectively, this would make it possible for ever increasing numbers of people to read the Bible for themselves, hereby in a sense making the individual Christians autonomous in their relation to the Church's hierarchy. No longer would individual Christians have to rely on the Church's interpretation of the holy scripture. In the case of what was to become the protestant movement specifically, turning to the Roman Catholic Church for clarity on matters of faith and hermeneutics was in any case naturally out of the question. The ability to read the Bible for oneself would furthermore become an invaluable resource for mobilizing a mass movement of the German populous at the time, as well as a way for Lutherans of converting their theological views into action and symbolically marking their status as a separate religion from the Roman Catholic Church.

Materially, these ideas were of course fostered by the advent of Gutenberg's printing press in around 1440, which enabled the mass proliferation of reading material to the general public. Books were previously handwritten and translated, often by monks – a burdensome task that prevented any kind of mass production at the time. Libraries were generally confined to monasteries and the institutional setting of the first universities created between 1100 and 1200 in Bologna, Paris and Toledo (Tergel 1973: 222-223). This implies that *the production of knowledge* was essentially monopolized by the Roman Catholic Church and the Mediant orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans. What we are therefore witnessing in the early days of the protestant reformation are the beginnings of a fragmentary social process, one that epistemologically separates the individual subject from the restraints of tradition by postulating that the individual is capable of knowing the meaning of God's word without surrendering him- or herself to a previous tradition of scholarship. A certain sense of individualism, that in some ways was intrinsic to the whole Renaissance era, will now manifest itself in Protestant hermeneutics and by the aid of technological advancements it becomes generated into an unprecedented potential for popular movements, all tearing at the

social fabric of a unified Catholic culture (author's own rough translation of the Swedish word *enhetskultur*) (Tergel 1973: 265).

2.3 Modern-day Individualism and its relation to Protestantism

Let us now consider the following hypothesis: to what extent would it be a fair assessment historically to characterize individualism – that is to say, individualism as it has been conceptualized in the West – as a uniquely protestant and Anglo-Saxon phenomenon? An affirmative answer to this question would arguably serve as one of the fundamental lynchpins to Mitchell's arguments (Mitchell 2019: 25-57).

A key difference between the historical account of the roots of individualism provided here and the one offered by Mitchell, is the fact that the above account is slightly more far-reaching in terms of its philosophical scope. The analysis conducted so far in this dissertation, therefore, paints a somewhat different genealogical picture of the historical presence of individualism across different religious demographics in Western society. This has a few implications moving forward.

The genealogical accounts provided thus far are very much in keeping with Mitchell's line of thought. But whereas Mitchell appears to locate the source of Western individualism in Luther's revolutionary antics, the analysis provided above makes it clear that Luther did not generate his ideas in a vacuum. He was as much a part of the same zeitgeist as any other thinker working during this period in history, soaking up the brave new ideas of the philosophical edifice that was coming together after the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers in the West. Many of these new and radical tendencies are readily on display in Martin Luther's actions and teachings. Luther himself may not have preceded by way of early proto technological thinking as did Descartes, but he nonetheless embraces the Renaissance attitude of radical renewal and social withdrawal on part of the subject.

Each of these parts are intimately connected and stand in the service of what will become a conceptual whole called the modern world.

Luther's theological stances are informed by the kind of understanding of epistemology and hermeneutics that Mitchell and Deneen seek to refute. This stance is in large parts enabled by

the universalism that preceded it, giving way to the undermining of any inherent truth value connected to a given tradition. None of these ideas are unique to Luther's theology. One of the means by which this universal goal is to be achieved is through social isolation. As we have seen, this is a methodological imperative, that is also readily displayed in the works of early Renaissance thinkers like de Montaigne and would only later be mirrored, not only in the works of Descartes, but also in Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) writings, where he lays bare the virtues of an ascetic lifestyle. Naturally Luther does not display the same sort of disregard for society and the idea of a common good as did de Montaigne, but he arguably contributed to turning the individual mind into something sacrosanct.

To summarize: if indeed individualism is to be regarded as being an integral part of the very concept of Renaissance humanism, then it stands to reason that philosophers, born of a wholly Catholic cultural environment are perhaps more responsible for honing the conceptual tools that Martin Luther was to pick up during his lifetime, than what Mitchell is perhaps willing to admit. Therefore, there does not appear to be an exclusive or straightforward line of succession between the ideas involved in the early theology of the Protestant religion and modern-day individualism – a process through which Catholic majority cultures would somehow end up becoming absolute strangers to the sort of renegade individualism we see in Protestant majority countries today.

There is, however, something to be said for the function of religion in society, a topic which will be covered more at length later on in our discussion of the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). Even though Western individualism, in its earliest conceptions, in the form of Renaissance humanism did surface – or resurface if you will – in Catholic cultural environments, it could be argued that by being inscribed in Protestant theology, individualism would end up earning an almost sacred status in Protestant societies, whereas in Catholic countries this sentiment did not penetrate the religious sphere in quite the same way.

What would be the implications of the conclusions reached through this line of reasoning? First, we need to be mindful of the fact that the individualism espoused by Martin Luther is in no way conceptually identical to the modernist conception of the word. It may be argued from a communitarian point of view that Protestant hermeneutics, as conceived of by Luther, is misguided when it comes to the issue of subjectivity, but it still does not constitute a push towards a *do what thou wilt as long as you hurt no one else* type of mentality. It is an

individualism firmly grounded in a Christian cosmology, scripture, language, and conceptual background.

What starts to emerge through the efforts of modern political thinkers during the late Renaissance and the early days of the Enlightenment is a different animal all together. However, the emergence of political liberalism is arguably not unrelated to the fact that the individual has, through the historical and philosophical processes covered here, garnered a sacred status and the concept of individualism has, therefore, become valued as such in protestant majority cultures. Indeed, the sacredness of the individual is explicitly referenced in the emergent doctrine of natural rights espoused by the English philosopher John Locke (Nordin 1995: 329-330). It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the majority of philosophers who have contributed to the project of political liberalism, are of a Protestant background.

Before delving deeper into political modernity, however, we need to come to grips with the political and religious tensions that helped shape the contents of modern political theory. The issue here is not merely the fact that individualism has become abstracted from a particular religious background, but the fact that seemingly insurmountable religious differences would play a crucial role in shaping this theory – a theory that is at its heart a theory about political recognition and autonomy.

2.4 Religious Wars in Europe

If we were to focus exclusively on the religious motivations, that lay the foundation for what has been termed a form of religious warfare between Protestants and Catholics in Europe during the 16th and 17th century, these ambitions could largely be summarized under the common heading of *European counterreformation*. The overall ambition of this project on the part of the Roman Catholic Church was to preserve the religious unity within its European territories. Through the Council of Trent, which lasted approximately seventeen years, between 1545-1563, the Catholic religion would in many ways be shaped into its modern-day form, but it would also during this period transform its doctrine into a form of *confessionalism*; the view taken by both the Catholic church and its supporters was that since the unitary state of the time – which in many cases took the form of absolute monarchy – was contingent on the religious unity of the people, the people's adherence to the Catholic faith

was absolutely crucial. Differing religious views could hereby not be tolerated (Tergel 1973: 362-365).

A complicated power struggle between Catholic kings and Protestant – predominantly Calvinist – subjects, would ensue in western parts of the European continent as well as England. On the continent this conflict would result in The Dutch War of Independence – also known as the Eight Years' War – lasting from 1572-1648, as well the Thirty Years' War between 1618-1648 and finally culminating in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

By noting that violent conflict was one of several manifestations of a religious feud, I wish to draw attention to the fact that not all disagreement taking place would escalate into violent confrontation between the two parties. Neither were the motives of all actors involved, always overtly religious. The ever-present element of *realpolitik* would occasionally rear its ugly head and make strange bedfellows of Catholics and Protestants in an era that was otherwise dominated by significant tension between these two religions (Tergel 1973: 381). None of this negates the fact that religion and the conflict between Protestants and Catholic powerholders remained an inseparable component in these conflicts in one way or another. The fact that the Thirty Years' War, which resulted in the Peace of Westphalia, was arguably fought over more than theology, religious alignments would still matter. Whether these alignments were formed out of convenience or out of sheer conviction, we are still witnessing the standoff between elements of the new world and the old world.

One of the key players involved with these religious conflicts on more than one front was Philip II of Spain (1556-1598) who, according to historian Alf Tergel, saw himself as God's instrument, and a guarantor for Rome's ambition to win back some of its territories in Western Europe (Tergel 1973: 368). Philip II presided over what was at the time Hapsburg Spain – the very model of a Catholic unitary state.

Back in the 16th century, the Hapsburg empire held territories all across Central Europe, controlling land areas which geographically consisted not only of what makes up Italy and Germany, but also encompassed the entirety of modern-day Holland and Belgium. In addition to some parts of France, the Netherlands had become one of the major strongholds of European Calvinists, also referred to as Huguenots, which inhabited the norther parts of the Netherlands – its southern parts were predominantly Catholic. After initially coming down with monetary sanctions in the form of increased taxes directed towards the Huguenots,

Philip II would later initiate a full-blown military onslaught against the Calvinists, utilizing the religious splits between the northern and southern parts of the Country to his advantage. This initiated the so-called French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) as well as the Dutch war of independence. With the support of William the Silent (1533-1584), the Dutch were able to hold their own against Philip II and the Netherlands were proclaimed an independent republic in 1581, with Calvinism becoming the official religion of country (Tergel 1973: 368-370).

Philip II and his armies did not fare much better when it came to curbing the protestant presence in England. In the years running up to the Dutch war of Independence the prospect of a potential Spanish invasion had sent many Dutch Calvinists fleeing to England, where they would soon come to be known as puritans. The name derives from Calvinist Theology which takes a hardline stance on the issue that no religious practice could stray from the written word of the Bible. This included questions regarding the esthetic outlook of the Church interior as well as the exterior. English puritans viewed the early beginnings of the Anglican Church under Elizabeth I (1558-1603) – the only real compromise resulting from the schism between Protestants and Catholics – as a sign of British Christendom kowtowing to a corrupt Catholic tradition. The Episcopalian church of England would hereby come to adopted aspects of Calvinist, Lutheran and Zwinglian theology, while at the same time in large parts retaining aspects of Catholic theology and liturgy (Tergel 1973: 385). The puritans did not approve of the affluent outlook of Catholic churches and masses and used the humble aesthetic of the Apostolic Church as a benchmark for authenticity.

After Queen Elizabeth I had sentenced Maria Stuart, “Mary Queen of Scots” (1542-1587), to death, Philip II sent his Spanish Armada to attack England on orders of the Pope, who had excommunicated the Queen following the death of Maria Stuart. Maria Stuart was executed after it was revealed that she had been involved in a plot against Queen Elizabeth I together with Philip II. After the Spanish fleet was utterly defeated, England became the strongest protestant country in Europe (Tergel 1973: 386).

But the struggle between puritans and the Anglican church would not end there. After the passing of Elizabeth I, James I (1603-1625), the king of Scotland became the king of England. Under the reign of the Catholic “Stuarts”, that is to say James I and his son and successor Charles I (1625-1649), political and religious tensions in England would rise to an all-time high. James I regarded himself as God’s deputy on earth and wanted to undermine the influence of the parliament. Charles I would rule the country for eleven years without a

parliament. The Stuarts backed the Anglican church and wanted to enforce the vision of one country, united under one religion and under one king. These developments would naturally serve to antagonize the puritans further, but when the Stuarts sought to widen the sphere of influence for the Anglican church into Calvinist Scotland, war broke out in 1649, between the king and the puritans. The conflict eventually spilled over from Scotland and onto the English mainland where it turned into civil war. Under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1659), the puritans took up arms against Charles I, and with the backing of the parliament, the absolute monarchy in England would come to an end. Charles I was executed in 1649 and the republic was born (Tergel 1973: 388).

Under Cromwell England would experience a brief period as a military dictatorship with overtly religious overtones. This so-called *Protectorate* lasted from 1653 to 1658. As “Lord Protector”, Cromwell sought to heal the country after years of political and religious turmoil. In practice though, this meant granting religious freedoms to puritans exclusively, whereas Anglicans fled to North America. Cromwell would also end up disbanding the parliament that had given him its support years earlier.

The years between 1653 and 1658 were certainly a period of hardship for both Anglicans and English Catholics alike, but even among the puritans, views on Cromwell’s religious politics were divided. Even before the establishment of The Protectorate, puritans had formed themselves into different factions. The ones that were led by Cromwell were largely in favor of free churches whereas the presbyterian faction favored the establishment of state religion.

Once again, the pendulum would swing back, and one brand of particularistic religious politics would pave way for another. After the death of Cromwell, and the return of the Stuarts who had been living in exile, the old political institutions would reemerge. Under the reign of King James II (1633-1701), who was himself Catholic, a number of crucial political changes favoring Catholics and Anglicans alike would take place. Jacob II would reestablish the Anglican Church as state church. He also reestablished the parliament, which by the 1680’s would come to be dominated by two political parties – the Whigs and the Tories. These were in essence the forerunners for what constitutes today’s two-party system in British politics. By and large the Tories looked favorably on King James II’s politics; they ostensibly favored the establishment of state religion, whereas the Whigs wanted to grant the puritans religious freedoms. As it turned out however, the politics of James II would prove far too radical for either one of them to stomach. Puritans were stripped of their religious

freedoms and were soon required to enter the Anglican church. Those who were not willing to submit to these demands, would become pilgrims and sail for North America (Tergel 1973: 391-392).

Fearing the encroaching Catholicization of England, the Whigs and the Tories would offer up the British crown to the daughter of James II, Mary II (1662-1694), who was herself Anglican and married with the protestant stadtholder of Holland, William III (1650-1702). In 1688 William III reached the British shores and James II would go back into exile in France, leaving of his own accord. In terms of sheer logistics, this rather undramatic event has become known as the Glorious revolution, and it paved the way for the Toleration act of 1688. This signaled the end for a long power struggle between king and parliament and the dawning of the secular state in British history (Tergel 1973: 393).

In France, both the Catholic Church and the monarch would take a somewhat ambiguous position on the protestant question. Officially, confessionalism would reach its zenith in France under the rule of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) and King Louis XIII (1601-1643). By the end of The French Wars of Religion, the Huguenots had been granted religious liberties in France under The Edict of Nantes in 1598. By the 17th century, however, the powers that be had come to regard the Huguenot presence in France as constituting a state within a state – something that not only contradicted the state’s politics of religious unity but something that might also in the long run serve to undermine the longevity of the unitary state. Catholics and Protestants would come to blows once again, and by 1629, after the seaport town of La Rochelle had fallen, the terms for coexistence put forth in The Edict of Nantes would be almost completely revoked. Tergel is clear about pointing out, however, that the 200 or so Protestant “safe heavens” that fell during these Last Religious Wars (1621-1629), enjoyed a significant amount of territorial, political and religious autonomy and that it was this issue of territoriality rather than religious unity that formed the basis for these reemerging religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. The Huguenots were allowed to maintain their religious liberties as French citizens under the Edict of Nîmes in 1629 (Tergel 1973: 370-371).

Despite these harrowing events, Richelieu would later – albeit for tactical reasons – develop a mutually supportive relationship with the Calvinists in France. Fearful of the implications of the expansionist politics of The Hapsburg Empire, Richelieu would during the Thirty Years’ War not only align himself with the Calvinists in France but also with other Protestant

powerholders. Richelieu approached the Swedish king Gustav II Adolph (1611-1632) in an effort to form a partnership against The Hapsburgs. Together, Sweden, France and The Netherlands emerged victorious from the war against the Catholic Hapsburg empire, hereby, paving the way for the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (Tergel 1973: 380).

2.5 Political modernity

It was against the backdrop of these tumultuous historical events that the broad strokes of modern political thought were to be formed. A pivotal question at this point would be, how are we to interoperate the meaning of these events and what is their significance as far as further developments of political modernity are concerned?

At the heart of the religious conflicts that took place in 16th and 17th century Europe lay the issue of *difference* and its various implications for the preservation of a coherent and overtly religious polity. The concept of difference in this instance refers to the phenomenon of *religious pluralism*, which had gradually come to take shape in central Europe, following Luther's break with the Catholic Church. The tremendous impact of Luther's actions can, therefore, hardly be underestimated. Firstly, the implications of the events of 1517 were by no means purely academic. Just as the East-West Schism of 1054 had brought a permanent religious and political divide in Christendom, the survival of a *respublica christiana* in Europe was now at stake and the Catholic church knew this (Haddock 2008: 70). As Ivan Strenski has pointed out, the Lutherans breaking with the Catholic church and the subsequent emergence of reformed churches, had dealt the unified European religious conscience an insurmountable blow, one which it would never recover from. Hence forth, the concept of European religion would encompass more than just the Catholic faith. The Protestant Reformation and the ensuing Catholic Counter Reformation had therefore put in motion a process of mutual *othering*. The concept of religion became objectified and the notion of "religions" in plural, as well as the notion of "christiandoms", would etch themselves permanently on the European mind (Strenski 2006: 13-14).

Once this difference became established a furious power struggle for influence within the corridors of the old political institutions of divinely anointed kings and queens would ensue. What had taken place on the European continent and England was the unfolding of a winner

take all situation, one where the fundamental incongruity between coexistence and established religion would become accentuated.

It was the reality of this political impasse and its violent fallout that would prompt early modernist political thinkers to ponder a solution to the issues at hand. In this case also, these philosophical developments cannot be viewed in isolation from the prior historical and philosophical developments that we have covered. As the mounting religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics would escalate into full blown religious warfare on the European continent, issues of *coexistence, representation and political sovereignty* would be catapulted to the forefront of modernist political thought. What was needed, it seemed, was a justification for a new institutional arrangement, that would be able to accommodate this new reality of *religious differences*. Such institutions could not be explicitly particularistic in any way, shape or form. It stood to reason, that with religious unity gone, political institutions in Europe, that stood in the service of the old Catholic hegemony would have to go. Not only that. The new institutions could not be skewed in the opposite direction either. As noted in the historical example of Oliver Cromwell, particularistic institutions of any kind were doomed to failure in a religiously diverse polity – at least when considering the fact that protestants had the backing of several kings and stadtholders.

But the issue at hand is not merely one concerning functionality. All of the above-mentioned concerns seem to, in one way or another, to tie in with the question of what constitutes *legitimate sovereignty*? That is to say, legitimate in a universal sense. How was the blueprint for this ideal society to be achieved? Through a method of *abstraction and reason*. The one area of modernist political thought, where these two elements were to be dealt with analytically, is one of modernist thoughts crowning political achievements – *the contract theory*. This philosophical innovation has very much become synonymous with the very concept of political modernism itself, as it serves essentially as a blueprint for today's representative government. Evoking the previously mentioned issues of legitimate sovereignty and the issue of representation, contract theory seeks to reconstitute these concepts from a rationalist perspective. Its primary aim is to redress these issues from a viewpoint that abstracts from the existing political order and sidelines the historical circumstances of how these orders have come about and how they can go on existing in their current form. Therefore, the writings of contract theorists are by no means to be taken as neutral studies of political power as it exists. From its inception the universalist tendencies

inherent to contract theoretical thought were always formulated in an effort to *delegitimize* the existing monarchies – what would in France later be termed *l’Ancien Régime* – for not being in keeping with abstract notions of abstract universal ideals (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 87-89).

The architect who chiefly helped initiate this project was the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) (Nordin 1995: 308). Hobbes’ thoughts and reason were in many of their constituent elements anchored in prior humanistic and philosophical thought. The influence of Descartes and geometry weigh heavily on the works on Thomas Hobbes (Nordin 1995: 306). These influences become evident when examining how an a-historical *foundationism* becomes translated into normative political language in Hobbes’ work.

Hobbes’ ideas would be developed further by other thinkers, also regarded by historians of philosophy as being part of the contract theoretical tradition. These include prominent English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) and his French counterpart Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) – both early progenitors of republicanism and the modern nation state, through which the boundaries for the rights of men were founded not on tradition or any given religion, but on abstract notions of freedom, rights and representation (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 127-151).

Problems relating to modernist political thought and how it conceives of subjectivity, have largely to do with this issue of abstraction. Universalist thought inevitably carries with it an impetuosity to abstract something essential beyond the boundaries of mere accident and particularity. Such endeavors are by their very nature a-historical. As some would have it, they are epistemologically incoherent and antithetical to tradition and, therefore, the survival of a unified and coherent culture (Mitchell 2019: 1-24; Deneen 2018: 18). Since every person by dint of their capacity to reason is capable of gaining universal knowledge, tradition does not have anything to offer humanity besides a long record of subjective claims about the nature of things, claims which are dubious at best. At the same time the universalist impulse remains unaware of its own debt to history and tradition.

As previously stated, modernist political thinkers – or liberal thinkers – were almost exclusively products of a protestant background. Given past and present experiences, the pressing need for religious freedoms and recognition of differing religious beliefs within the same polity, would take centerstage in the writings of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John

Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Through their philosophical efforts, the concept of *unalienable universal rights*, as abstracted from the protestant view on salvation, would become the primary tool for achieving this goal.

Universalism, as it has been expressed in the language of political modernity, implies a discontinuity between past and present political institutions. By having abstracted the individual from God, the logical next step in this aim for freedom is achieved through the separation between church and state and the individual from both as well as his fellow human beings.

In their own view, liberal thinkers had once and for all solved the issue of representation. The logic underpinning this bald conclusion is fairly straightforward. According to a *de ontological* and universalist view of ethics, moral principles on governance constitute transcendent forms of knowledge (Collste 2010: 62). Any moral or political subject deviating from the fundamental logic, under which liberal thinkers are presupposing that rational subjects operate, must consequently be deemed as irrational. According to the critics of liberalism there are many problems inherent to this line of thought. These problems have primarily to do with a technified view of morality and the rejection of tradition.

Before we move on to deal with these more fundamental metaphysical problems and how they relate to the present-day problems of a polarized and morally fragmented polity in many Western countries, we need go over the basics of liberal contract theory as conceived of by modernist thinkers such as Hobbes.

2.6 Some Elaborations on the Conceptions of Political Contract Theory

Hobbes' experiences of a Britain torn asunder by religious warfare would help set the tone for his magnum opus *Leviathan* (1651), which was published during Oliver Cromwell's rule as Lord Protector. By then an entire generation of Britons had been shaped by a cultural setting where religious violence – or the threat thereof – had been commonplace for nearly a century. It was a zeitgeist that Hobbes himself knew all too well. According to Swedish historian of ideas Svante Nordin (1946-), Hobbes would tell stories of how he was born prematurely, due to the violent cramps his mother had contracted as a result of her fear of a coming invasion by the Spanish Armada (Nordin 1995: 307).

Unlike his father, a protestant minister who was rumored to be illiterate, Hobbes received an outstanding education, which led him to become steeped in the humanistic thought of his time as well as becoming fluent in four more languages besides English; namely, Latin, Italian, French and Greek. Hobbes would take up an interest in philosophy during his exile in France, which lasted from 1640 to 1651. He had left Britain in the years leading up to Cromwell's revolution. In France, Hobbes would become well acquainted with both mathematics and geometry as well as their philosophical offspring, the cartesian method. His exposure to these ideas would influence his later philosophical work, including his political philosophy (Nordin 1995: 307).

The publication of *Leviathan* would earn Hobbes friends and foes on both sides of the English Channel. After the Stuarts came back into power, following the death of Cromwell, Hobbes petitioned the English government for protection and eventually left the continent where his old friends and acquaintances had turned their backs on him (Nordin 1995: 311).

As stated previously, the question that would come to occupy Hobbes' mind philosophically following these events was the issue of what constitutes legitimate political power? The inclination towards abstraction on Hobbes' part when it comes to this issue, arises from his broader ambition to answer this question through a thought experiment, which essentially diverts attention away from how concrete historical societies and their political institutions have organically come about. What we encounter in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, is instead a general description of political legitimacy, one that seeks to address and resolve disputes present in his own time by deferring to a definition of legitimacy, that each and every citizen can come to an agreement on regardless of their political or religious background.

Hobbes is one of the early contributors to modern political theory on state formation. His thoughts on this subject were almost assuredly as much influenced by European Colonialism as the religious wars. The recent discovery of *the new world* by Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) and the conquistadores, would have a considerable impact on the political and religious conscience of the European intellectual elite. Whereas prior mental maps on the religious and societal outlook of the world had clearly been molded by the monotheisms of the Abrahamic religions as well as African religions, the tribal societies of the indigenous populations of the Americas opened Europe's eyes to the vast differences that existed not only between religious practices but between societies (Strenski 2006: 14-15). This is what Ivan Strenski means by stating that religion became "objectified" during this period of time in Europe's

history. Among the many ideas that were fostered by these events, one construct in particular, has etched itself on the minds of contract theorists. This is the image of “primitive man” or man as he might have existed before entering into civilizations at large. This is an image that reverberates throughout European intellectual output since the Renaissance, and it was no doubt inspired by the stories of modern man’s encounter with the indigenous tribes of the new world. Consequently, different conceptions of this pre-civilized man would start to emerge, most of them purely figments of imagination, dreamt up by European thinkers during this period of time.

In any case, the image of pre-civilized man became the jumping off point for theories concerning *the nature of man*. Although variously being imbued with an almost childlike innocence by philosophers like Rousseau, others would cast this figure in a much darker light. Hobbes conceived of pre-civilized man as a thoroughly savage creature; inherently selfish and prone to violence as a means for securing resources for himself. The social conditions that existed prior to law and order were termed by Hobbes *the state of nature*. Just as Locke and Rousseau would outline their own philosophical concepts regarding the nature of man, they would also conceive of their own outlooks on the state of nature. For Hobbes the state of nature is a horrendous environment, something that every rational individual seeks to avoid at all costs. A world ravaged by a “war of everybody against everybody” (Hobbes 1651:128). At first glance this type of environment may appear to be a psychopath’s dream come true. Indeed, if man is truly to be regarded as selfish and treacherous at heart, surely this type of world, where only the strongest survive, would make for the ideal living conditions for this egotistical creature.

According to Hobbes, this is not the case. He argues that by employing that same cynical outlook on life and by focusing mainly on self-interest, man will inevitably reach the conclusion that life in the state of nature is untenable. In his assessment of the pros and cons that come with living in the state of nature, man essentially employs a *consequentialist* moral framework, whereby no moral judgement can be regarded as morally true or untrue in and of itself (Collste 2010: 43-45). Much like the term suggests, what matters to the consequentialist mindset, are the *consequences* that result from any given judgement. Through such reasoning, man will come to realize that under the state of nature nobody is truly free, that is to say, free in the *negative* sense of the word. In the political science literature *negative freedom* as opposed to *positive freedom* is usually defined as *freedom from* something; this “something”

usually functions as a stand-in for any type of force being directed towards the individual, be that government sanctioned violence or coercion or violence perpetrated by one individual citizens against another (Berlin 2011:191-204). Under the state of nature anything is permitted. Hence, anyone is free to take someone else's life and rob them of their possessions. Under such circumstances even the strongest and most vicious of characters will inevitably be left vulnerable to some extent.

Upon realizing the costs of having to go on living under these conditions, reasonable people will inevitably – according to Hobbes – opt for relinquishing this absolute sense of freedom in exchange for peace. The *monopoly on violence* is hereby transferred from individual citizens into the hands of an abstract political actor. It is through this process that the sovereign state is born – a corporate entity that *represents* the people as a whole and acts on their behalf (Brito Vieira, Runciman 2008: 24-26). Through this exchange of freedoms, the people gain the right to live their lives freely as they please without having to fear their next of kin.

What we mean by saying that the state is “born” is that it is through this process that the state should gain its aura of legitimacy in the minds of political and legal subjects. Hobbes is after all not engaged in an anthropological effort, trying to uncover the *is* of how the state has historically come to be; his mission, as I've stated previously, is normative throughout.

There are a number of important philosophical insights that are implicit to these last few paragraphs. Firstly, we should recognize that Hobbes sees the state and the art of politics as an artificial construct rather than something organic and intrinsic to human beings as political animals. This signals a break with Aristotelian teleology, the vision of politics as constituting the natural state of human affairs and the organic manifestation of a larger proto-biological way of being (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 61-81). This break with Aristotle is not coincidental. Just as Luther and Descartes had been, Hobbes was as decidedly anti-Aristotelian as any of the other philosophical or religious figures we have covered so far (Nordin 1995: 307-308).

We should nonetheless be mindful of the fact that even though Hobbes may not be trying to perform the task of a researcher when outlining his vision of how political societies come about, his views are not purely normative either. When contract theories are labeled as fictitious, what philosophers actually mean is, of course, that no such formal agreement between state and citizen has ever taken place. This does not imply that Hobbes would not

still conceive of states as thoroughly artificial constructs as opposed to natural outgrowths of what it means to be human. Hobbes' conception of human nature differs from that of Aristotle, and this conception informs his constructivist view of societies as they stand. There is therefore a descriptive element to Hobbes' views on politics.

It is through this line of reasoning that the cartesian dimension to Hobbes' philosophy becomes evident (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 94). Hobbes precedes by way of dismantling political life into its constituent elements in an effort to try and find the one indisputable fact about human life, which necessarily paves the way for statehood – enter Hobbes' vision of *natural law*. Just as selfishness and cruelty are intrinsic parts of man's nature, so too is his ability to reason. What Hobbes refers to as a natural law constitutes a formal way of reasoning, that under the state of nature presents itself to every reasonable individual employing their capacity to reason just as clearly as though they were empirical truths (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 98). This reason informs us that in politics chaos and disorder are outcomes to be avoided as they are hazardous to the wellbeing of the individual (Hobbes 1651:130-131). This is Hobbes' first natural law. The second one states that if our unlimited rights are the source of all this chaos, these rights need to be curtailed.

Despite the aforementioned consequentialist bent to the ethics being employed by Hobbes' egotistical subject, there is also quite distinctly a *deontological* quality to Hobbes' epistemology, in regards to the question of what constitutes a reasonable solution to the dilemma that plagues men under the state of nature. This is incidentally the case with great many of the modern political thinkers we will cover later in this dissertation. Deontological normative ethics maintain that moral precepts exist separately from historical particularities as universal truths and are attainable through human reason (Collste 2010: 55-67).

These observations tie in with our second point regarding the would-be goals for a politic that conducts itself in accordance with these natural laws. As we have also previously stated, Hobbes' inquiry into the question of political legitimacy is not strictly an academic affair. By breaking with this old political philosophy, Hobbes is also implicitly breaking with an old political order. This occurs through his description of what makes government legitimate, that is to say, their ability to uphold their end of the social contract and maintain peace (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 101). The extent to which a government is able to perform this task has direct bearing on the question as to when (if ever) it should be regarded as admissible for the political subjects to take up arms in order to oppose the state – the answer is of course that

opposition becomes admissible when the state is no longer able to perform its primary function. Hobbes makes this clear in his discussions on the admissibility of revolution.

Above and beyond that, the very idea of *legitimacy* by itself suggests that some entirely novel element has entered European political discourse at this point in time. Another way of conceiving of legitimacy is to talk about it in terms of *accountability* – the implicit introduction of this concept signals the theoretical advent of a *responsive relationship* between a ruler and his subjects, whereby the deposition of an unjust ruler by his or her subjects becomes possible. Even though Hobbes' political philosophy is a far cry from modern day representative democracy, it is important to note that what we are witnessing in his account of representation are the early beginnings of an alteration of the idea of representation, whereby the political and judicial subjects would slowly but surely come to find themselves placed in the driver's seat of representative politics. The spark that ignited this continuing change in the concept of representation was the issue of *difference*.

Aside from the problem of a government's potential ineptitude and inability to uphold the social contract, we also have to face up to the equally troublesome issue of how an explicitly particularistic government, that enforces a particular religion on its subjects, is by definition unable to live up to its end of the bargain in this ideal political order. It becomes complicit in the persecution of its own subjects. In this case accountability also implies that the duty of this ideal form of government is to recognize the legitimacy of differing religious groupings in society – provided of course that these groups have internalized liberal political norms – and incorporate them into the larger polity.

What this translates to, is that the political message in Hobbes' *Leviathan* stood in direct opposition to absolute monarchy as it had existed up to that point. Though Hobbes' philosophy would lay the groundwork for later iterations of contract theoretical thought, it is nevertheless through the works of the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) that concepts such as *natural rights* and *accountability* would be shaped into something resembling their modern-day form. Like Hobbes, Locke too came from of a protestant background. His father was a puritan who worked as a lawyer and was highly active in the anti-royalist politics of his time, defending the parliament against Charles I of England. Young Locke would come to adopt his father's anti-royalist stances, but his politics were also influenced by his tutelage under Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683), who prior to his oppositionist stance to the absolute monarchy had worked in the court

of Charles II (Nordin 1995: 326-327). Thanks to his father's network of contacts Locke would receive a good education, starting out by tending a prestigious Latin grammar school after which he studied medicine at the University of Oxford. He became the personal physician for Ashley Cooper, but this insight into the natural sciences would also influence his later philosophical development.

A detailed outlook on Locke's moral philosophy can be found in his famous work *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), which was released the same year as an earlier work on epistemology called *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Nordin 1995: 327). I will be delving deeper into Locke's epistemological views in a later chapter, where I will be discussing the topic of empiricism. Therefore, I will not be going into further detail on these matters just yet. Sufficed to say that just as our summary of Locke's epistemological work suggests, he is a deontological theorist through and through. This becomes further evident in how the concepts pioneered by Hobbes, such as the state of nature as well as the concept of natural rights and the legitimacy of the government, would be developed upon further by Locke and even altered to some extent.

According to Locke the state of nature is not in and of itself a world plagued by violence, but it very well might turn out that way in the absence of a state, a police force, and courts that are able to regulate the natural rights of man. In stark contrast to Hobbes, Locke relies heavily on Christian Cosmology. Just as Descartes evoked the image of a Christian God, so too does Locke depend upon the benevolent nature of God as the sole guarantor that our senses do not deceive us, and that there is some level of correspondence between sensory input and reality itself, but also that our intuitions about morality are correct.

Locke does not view moral truths as commands we must subjugate ourselves to, but as objective and independent truths that can be inferred from theology by the use of conceptual analysis – that is to say, laws that can be discovered through the tools of reason. Aside from the mathematical and geometrical influences which are quite evident in Locke's thinking, the protestant individualism of his ancestors, is also heavily reflected in his religious views on what constitutes man as a divine creation (Nordin 1995: 334). God has created men as autonomous individuals with certain duties to him and to each other. He has imbued them with an autonomous capacity for reason. What ought to follow from these premises, provided that one is thinking clearly, is that each human being deserves dignity as an individual

autonomous mind created by God and that no man has the right to infringe on another man's rights to his life and his possessions (Locke 1690b: 40).

This is John Locke's view of the natural law that exists even in the state of nature. One might wonder, why a state or what Locke terms *civil society* is needed at all, if indeed men are not to be thought of as the vicious creatures Hobbes envisaged. Locke's answer to this question is that the same natural law we have just mentioned also gives the individual the right to punish those who have transgressed against them and their property rights. If society is to permit vigilante justice, it is easy to imagine how the state of nature might well turn into the type of nightmare scenario that Hobbes envisaged (Locke 1690b: 47; Nordin 1995: 336-337).

Locke's basic outlines of what is implied by the institutionalization of a *political society* and a *civil society* in place of a state of nature, have been reiterated by liberal thinkers throughout the centuries – from Voltaire (1694-1778) to John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and from Karl Popper (1902-1994) to John Rawls (1921-2002) and Robert Nozick (1938-2002) (Voltaire 1763: 94-100; Mill 1859: 83-102; Nozick 1974: 88-90; Rawls 1971: 127-251). I will not be discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work *The Social Contract* (1762) in this section. Despite the fact that Rousseau's ideas have been hugely relevant for the forming of the French republic, his ideas have also by and large been more relevant to those philosophical and political movements that have, in one way or another, sought to oppose liberalism (Hicks 2004: 40).

2.7 The Trouble with Metaphysics

I have hereby provided my reader with a brief historical overview of the religio-cultural milieu, out of which political liberalism or constitutionalism was born. What is made quite evident by this historical rendition alone, is the fact that the rationality behind liberal truths, specifically regarding the processes by which constitutionalism and political freedom become a priority, does not emerge out of thin air. As Mitchell and Deneen would have it, it is not the product of some transcendental philosophical insight (Mitchell 2019: 46-49). There are very real historical pressures made present in this overview, which no doubt necessitated the pilgrim voyages of the protestant religions for the new continent of North America. It is also this historicity of liberal thought and the unwillingness of liberal thinkers to either satisfactorily address their own shortcomings or to come to terms with this predicament, that

has in my view provoked the countercultural backlash against the liberal order. A more detailed answer to the question of why this is the case will be provided in the chapters to come. We will start off this venture by pinpointing the number one issue that all of these religious and political schisms implicitly have in common. This will hopefully help us realize how these much older debates bear a striking philosophical resemblance to modern day identity politics.

It might then be of some use to consider for a moment what gets left behind in this era of tumultuous political upheaval. This is in a way asking a mouthful, and we will indeed have to redress this question several times over from varying viewpoints in the upcoming chapters. What follows below is therefore, but a brief overview designed to help the reader navigate the landscape of the modern and the pre-modern.

In terms of political institutions, we could argue that what gets left behind is a certain relation between a metaphysical moral order and its union with political absolute monarchy (Kenny 1998: 344). This immanent brake up with old political institutions, implies the discarding of certain notions of the nature of political power, the relationship between religion and politics, morality and religion, as well as the relationship between the sovereign and the subject. As stated, prior, in terms of political theory much of this disagreement comes down to the apparent incommensurability of differing viewpoints on the concept of political representation – or to be more precise *who* ought to be represented. The emergent religious and moral differences in society in the early modern era, coupled with the material military might that sided with these ideas, could therefore be argued to have placed certain demands on the political institutions to adapt to said differences. Therefore, state religion in the form of one subset of Christianity given the role of a particularistic hegemon over another form of Christianity would end up becoming an unpalatable political tool for dealing with future prospects of coexistence.

These events serve as a prototypical historical example of how a radical break in cultural unity, coupled with the material strength to enforce the longevity of said differences, would eventually lead to institutional changes. In this case the issue of religious pluralism would lead to the ultimate breakup of the marriage between politics and religion in Europe. But as we are about to see, this breakup of religious and political unity would entail much, much more than just the formal break between the Church and the state. Many of the political conflicts that would arise later in modern Europe, can from a traditionalist viewpoint be

regarded as societies tumbling down from this perceived older moral unity. However, as I stated in the opening lines of this thesis, this *metaphysical* discussion on the nature of reality – which even politics should in my view have to contend with – is curiously absent in much of modern political theory. This is especially true of liberalism and as we shall see, this shallow nature of modern politics will end up becoming a huge source of new forms of political and moral conflict when we enter what some have termed the post-modern era of political discourse. The reason for this is that these debates on the nature of representation can naturally not be regarded as something wholly isolated from other timely enlightenment debates that also, in one way or another, tie into this modern idea of the autonomous individual, capable of deciding for him- or herself. Furthermore, if the aforementioned “break” is to be viewed not only as a consequence of political convenience, but truly as a metaphysical break with the old philosophical world, the debate on what is real and knowable would arguably have to go on to live a life of its own and leave the old Christian cosmology and Aristotelian teleology behind – as indeed it has done (Juti 2019: 124; Mitchell 2019: 25-27). From this perspective, it is easy to see how debates on *who* is truly represented and equal under the liberal order would end up taking center stage, with many 20th century philosophers arguing that liberalism has not gone far enough in its analysis of how such concepts as representation, equality and freedom are to be interpreted. This can be argued both from a materialist and an idealist point of view.

(i) Why has representation not gone far enough?

How does this lack of self-awareness create problems and what sorts of problems are we talking about?

The fallout and legacy of early modern conflicts over the issue of representation can in many ways, in terms of its underlying ontology, be summed up in the word *naïve realism*. What both constitutional and cultural liberalism have in common – above and beyond the spirit of individualism, which was passed on through the Renaissance – is a disinterested attitude towards philosophical questions having to do with metaphysics. Even though highly individualistic philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) – the latter arguably a child of Protestantism, both in flesh and in spirit – have made valuable contributions to the literature on metaethics,

liberalism itself, as a political doctrine, has remained remarkably stagnant over the last couple of centuries and has done little in the way of actually justifying the Christian ontology inherent in its use of categories. Thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), John Rawls and Ayn Rand (1905-1982) are a testament to this. Meanwhile, the ethics of freedom and liberation generated by the modern political project, as well as the concept of universal reason, cut off from all reliance on tradition, lives on quite separately from political theory and will become both a starting point as well as a topic of contention within the post-cartesian metaphysical literature on the European continent. Later on, in the 20th century, the cows will truly come home to roost as vastly more robust metaphysical traditions worked out by thinkers such as David Hume (1711-1776), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), George Willhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and to some extent Friedrich Nietzsche submerge with the political philosophy of the leftwing thinkers in the west, leaving the liberal tradition essentially unguarded or tended to for centuries. Something that many of the late 20th century thinkers, who have historically underpinned the more radical factions of the so-called *New Left* have in common – including Herbert Marcuse (1889-1979), Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Judith Butler (1956-) – is that they all, to some extent exploit the insufficiencies and pitfalls of liberal ontology in order to further expand on the concept of freedom (Butler 1990: 74; Best, Kellner 1991: 63; Held 1980: 234).

For this very reason, all calls advocating for a safe return to “liberal values” as a quick fix for a polarized western society must in my view be regarded with some suspicion.

Fundamentally it all comes down to what we mean by liberalism. This is where the notion of *two liberalisms* comes into play. Liberalism, in the sense of individualism should be regarded as a steppingstone in the philosophical and historical processes that have fed into the very cultural upheavals that both Mitchell and Deneen respectively discuss in their books. A return to a prior stage of this process of modernist politics should therefore, for all intents and purposes, be considered an exercise in futility. Any self-proclaimed liberal in the cultural sense, who wishes to counter collectivist and identitarian assaults on the *metaphysical, ethical* or *constitutional edifice* of the modern West is going to have a rough time countering these reimagined concepts of freedom from an ethical point of view, while still remaining true to the inherent value of individual liberty. If you value liberty above all else, the argument goes, would it not follow ethically that a rugged individualist would want to shrug of any remnants of the Judeo-Christian tradition, if that tradition were to hinder the progress of a different kind of freedom? Here critical perspectives swear to deliver on the true promises of liberty in

a way that a liberal tradition lacking in said self-awareness could ever hope to do. Above and beyond that, it seems apparent to me that whenever various forms of collectivist identity politics are opposed by liberals, this is implicitly done in support of some other values besides freedom. The toppling of confederate statues in the US for instance, is clearly criticized on the grounds that this form of violent activism has set out to fully eradicate a common North American history and culture that still binds people together, no matter how politically incorrect and brutal that history may be. The same thing can be said for various nationalist critiques of multiculturalism in Europe.

What are the implications of this critique of liberalism? How are we to understand the existence of some proposed *conflict of interest* in this instance and what does the undoing of Christian ontology imply? The realization that *hermeneutic interpretation of reality* is the only avenue to conceptualizing reality we can talk about meaningfully and that particularist ethics are intimately entwined with the metaphysical view proposed by Left-wing idealist thinkers is key to understanding the problems we face when discussing the second of our two concepts of liberalism.

(ii) Constitutionalism and the Problem of Representation

Despite said misgivings, I maintain that we should not throw the baby out with the bath water. Constitutional liberalism *can* and *should* in my view be regarded as worth saving. My reasoning for this is grounded in both a particular axiomatic understanding of what is real and knowable in the world, as well as a normative schema that is contingent on this descriptive viewpoint. We will start this off by going over a very surface level argument for constitutionalism.

Conservative politics and reactionary politics differ greatly on the issue of political solutions to the problems we have discussed. From a conservative standpoint the constitutional government is what we as Western cultures are sociologically invested in. Even though authors such as Edmund Burke (1729-1797) may have concluded that the nature of republicanism was founded on problematic precedents, representative governments are, for all intents and purposes, what ontologically exists and have legitimacy (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 294-303). They are what our political futures will have to build on. Whereas for instance passivist reactionary politics entertain the idea that the collapse of the current political system

is desirable since the ensuing chaos will hopefully produce a new kind of order, there is no reason in my mind to assume that such an order would in any way be preferable to our current predicament (Tait 2019: 197). In order for us to avoid the pitfalls of the same kind of radical politics we here seek to problematize – be that passivist or revolutionary in nature – we have to, in some sense, assume that if one seeks to conserve the political past and the social support it still garners, one has to build on the political institutions as they exist today, rather than a-priori concepts.

This is for the most part an instrumental argument for siding with the political alternative of contingency. Given what we have discussed so far however, it follows that liberal constitutionalism must suffer from the same type of metaphysical ailments as any one individual's personal ethics, and here is where we run into the real problems concerning the immanent demands of identitarian politics.

Many of the challenges liberal constitutionalism faces today, have ostensibly to do with the issue of representation. These problems come about because of the aforementioned challenges posed to a common-sense metaphysical understanding of reality – the naïve realism of liberalism, which we talked about before, which accepts Christian ontology on face value and incorporates it into its language of legal rights and logic of representation. It is for this very reason that we today are witnessing what can justifiably be considered a form of postmodern politic enter the national political arena, not only in the form of activism and new social movements, but also within the confines of national parliaments and the political debates taking place there between elected members of parliament. The issue of non-binary trans-identity was for instance touched upon in the most recent Finnish presidential debate on 23rd of January 2024 (Internet 3). The contents of these debates do not only go way beyond what your average MP has the intellectual capacity to handle – given the fact that most MP's are not philosophers by trade – but they also fundamentally challenge both commonly held social-democratic and bourgeoisie notions of representation, inching closer to the kind of “individualistic” propositions on justice and equality that have become more prevalent in post-industrial society and which Ronald Inglehart is looking to explain from a materialistic point of view. This creates a number of practical difficulties for liberal constitutionalism, as it exists today, problems which if left unaddressed can in due time become real make it or break it issues for liberal constitutionalism instead of just remaining academic issues.

The challenge to representation comes in the form of new categories introduced from the metaphysical literature in philosophy. What is to be represented – that which the current system falls short of – are novel claims regarding that which can be said to be ontologically real; *new philosophical subjects* with wants, needs and interests – much like the protestant subjects of early modern Europe.

This problem of radically divergent metaphysical views is a problem that is then further exacerbated by an equally radical particularist view of collective representation.

Any political system left wanting in their ability to meet these needs can be argued to be fundamentally unjust. Such a system then faces two options. Its proponents can either (a) refute these claims on some basis or other or (b) be forced to adapt to a supposedly more equitable and apt language of justice.

(iii) A Deeper Look at the Background to the Problems of Representation

What do so-called identity politics stipulate at a very basic level when it comes to the issue of representation?

According to a collectivistic and identitarian logic of representation *identity* and *objective interests* necessarily go hand in hand – hence the significant amount of attention the new left devotes to the notion of *lived experience* (Brito Viera, Runciman 2008: 110-113). This epistemological claim is then prescriptively coupled with the idea of *identity-based proportional representation* in accordance with the concept of *equity* (a common English translation for what Ludvig Beckman terms *lika-utfall*) (Beckman 2009: 43-44). This is an eagerly sought after political remedy to male hegemony in society, advocated for by for instance feminist author Iris Marion Young (1949-2006) (Mörkenstam 2009: 145; Young 1990: 156-191). This line of reasoning is indicative of the fact that a manifestly different kind of conflict has emerged in the polity. The primary reason for why this logic creates a problem, is that liberal democracy is inherently individualistic and rationalistic by nature, meaning that voting preferences are assumed to reflect a type of rational-choice mindset on the part of the individual. It can therefore be argued that this set-up creates a big problem when considering the inherently *collectivist* implications of these two claims.

Political aspirations having to do with collective experiences and collective interest are of course almost as old as liberalism itself. The critique of the misguided individualist mindset is for instance what lies at the heart of classical Marxist critique of liberalism. This need not be an issue in any self-evident way of course, at least not from a social democratic point of view, since the constitutional framework as well as a free and open civil society make for excellent breeding ground for the mobilization of class interests. Therefore, it is quite conceivable – demonstrable even – that capitalism and workers’ interests can peacefully co-exist with capitalist structures through the creation of strong labor unions. However, the reason why collectivist aspirations do not become a problem in the example involving social democracy, has to do with the fact that social democracy and liberal constitutionalism have both historically operated on the same *ontological* playing field. This is not the case when examining the concerns of some of the present-day new social movements. The survival of liberalism as a neutral constitutional framework is therefore contingent on the fact that we all share in some sort of common metaphysic and value hierarchy. Cracks start appearing when the true nature of this framework is called into question by those who do not share in its particular brand of metaphysic, hereby calling into question its functional capability.

A clear understanding of the inner workings of the opposition mounted against liberalism will require a more in-depth analysis of the philosophical foundations that such ideological frameworks as intersectional feminism, queer theory and critical race theory all share in common (Ambjörnsson 2016: 37-44; Gemzöe 2015: 158-162). This analysis will not be conducted in chronological order. Instead, I will be covering key philosophical topics and breaking them down in an order which, I believe, will make these ideas more accessible to the reader. As I have stated prior, a coherent philosophical attitude towards this critique will require that we either reject or accept the premises handed down to us by said critics – this also follows since cooption in my view is neither possible or desirable, given the fact that liberalism and collectivist radical movements are diametrically opposed to one another. Rejecting these premises also seems to imply that the conflict at hand – as it has been described and theorized by these critics – is in some sense misguided ontologically and may, therefore, be misguided politically.

2.8 Liberal Functionalism and Particularist Conflict

In order for constitutional liberalism to remain true to the claim that it represents a value neutral framework for organizing differing moral views within a sovereign territory, it has to remain cautious of utopian ideals. Even though liberalism itself could be considered utopian by its own universalist standards, it nonetheless sets itself apart from other forms of ideology by formally refraining from privileging any moral system in particular (Shorten 1984: 30). Although liberalism could certainly be rightfully faulted, for having failed historically to live up to its own minimalist definition of morality – as evidenced by slavery and the disenfranchisement of women voters – these incoherencies were still solvable by deferring to the liberalist framework itself. When it comes to some of the particularist Left-wing critiques of liberalism, this is no longer the case. Leaving people to pursue the moral good of their own choosing is a form of freedom that opponents of liberalism, most notably classical Marxists, reject out of hand as a form of unfreedom (Freedman 1996: 456). So too do the post-structuralist thinkers, though understandably based on different premises than materialist thinkers. Instead of focusing purely on issues of economic justice these later day critiques of liberalism are mainly centered around social forms of injustice, some of which are said to be incorporated into the very philosophical framework of liberalism itself, hereby rendering it an inept system at best and an exclusionary one at worst (Best, Kellner 1991: 26; Sarup 1988: 1).

Though conservatism, communitarianism and Right-wing reactionary thought can rightly be regarded as being fiercely critical of the type of “technified” universalist thought that liberalism stands for, there, none the less, exist distinctly different points of departure and end goals that underlie conservative thought in general, which makes the distinction between Left-wing critiques and Right-wing critiques of liberalism analytically necessary (Tait 2019: 193). These discrepancies have largely to do with the epistemological issues that we have talked about, but they also tie in with descriptive sociological issues of what constitutes a society, what constitute politics as well as prescriptive views on what society ought to become (Tait 2019: 191).

Great many of the Left-wing schools of thought that denounce liberalism tend to have one crucial theoretical view of society in common. This is the *conflict-theoretical* view of sociology. Textbooks on the topic, such as Anthony Giddens’ and Philip W. Sutton’s classical book *Sociology* – which has been reprinted and revised numerous times over the years – usually start out by introducing the theoretical field of sociology by going over three

quintessential theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century, that have the most bearing on current debates in the field: that is to say Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920). After quickly moving past the deterministic thoughts of August Comte (1789-1857) – regarded by many as the father of sociology – these *three great ones* are most often credited as having generated three corresponding schools of thought within sociology. Durkheim's thought is viewed as a form of *functionalist* thought, positing that society ought to be viewed as a functional whole, rather like an organism, where each part has its own unique function to play in maintaining the survival of the entire organism (Giddens, Sutton 1989: 57-58). Functionalist theory states that the sociological actor is born into a preexisting social structure, which determines his or her actions in the social realm. This view of social action would later spark the well-known sociological debate on what has become known as the *actor-structure problem*, which tries to resolve the issue of how social change is possible under these conditions. A rival theory was constructed by Max Weber, who is most often credited as the progenitor of *interactionist thought*. Interactionist thought stipulates that social structures are the product of actors who negotiate the contents of said structures with one another. Weber's views do not directly solve the dilemma created by Durkheim's thought, but they may have provided a crucial building block for such solutions (Giddens, Sutton 1989: 61-64).

The third and final theoretical school of classical sociological thought, *conflict theory*, has its roots in Karl Marx's economic theory (Giddens, Sutton 1989: 42-43). Conflict theory can by and large be regarded as a critique of functionalism. Conflict theoreticians maintain that society cannot, in a certain sense, be described as a functional whole. Society is plagued by opposition and conflicts of interest, where existing economic and moral systems oppress, exploit, or otherwise invalidate some subjectivities for the benefit of others. If society indeed functions, the two crucial questions that present themselves for the conflict theoretician are first and foremost *for whom* does society function – and, better yet, *at the expense of who* does it function? In this sense conflict theory could be described as flying in the face of all aspirations of wanting to conceive of society as a functional whole and therefore as a unified society. This conclusion is of course not completely straight forward. Classical Marxism distinguishes itself from its later off shoots through its vision of an upcoming classless utopia. Marxism is also modern and universalist in its internationalist aspirations. Marxism could, therefore, just as easily be seen as an effort to unify people equally under a different paradigm (Geoghegan 1984: 83-90).

For the purposes of the analysis that we are about to conduct, the ahistorical and materialist views espoused by Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) are not as crucial for our understanding of present-day identitarian conflicts as some other thoughts espoused by both Left-wing and Right-wing thinkers. This should be apparent based solely on the fact that most of this thesis has been devoted to the study of philosophical and political ideas, only temporarily turning its focus to the material aspects of history. Classical Marxism dismisses ideas and ideology as the appropriate starting points for societal and economic analysis. Classical Marxists have historically taken pride in having stood for a fundamentally modernist and scientific view of the world (Nordin 1995: 442-444). Instead of engaging in what they saw as fanciful idealism, Marx and Engels conceived of Marxism as a discipline wholly devoted to the study of the ironclad material forces that have underpinned and have driven philosophical, religious, and economic change throughout history. In doing so, they have essentially attempted to overturn the *idealist* paradigm set up by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). A crude description of idealism might be rendered along the following lines: idealism is the philosophical view that that the material conditions of the world are secondary to and shaped by the prevailing ideas in society. Of course, the true epistemological implications of so-called German idealism are much more profound and far-reaching than this description might indicate. To further elucidate this matter, we will have to return to a more in-depth look at Hegel's writings later on in this text.

For now, suffice to say that the differing views on the proper mode of analysis is what once again necessitates differing solutions to the societal problems at hand. The classical materialist worldview stipulates that the exploitation of the labor force will inevitably create the conditions necessary for dissolving an age-old dynamic of oppression between the rich and the poor. This oppression has taken many forms over the centuries, but it has always been a class struggle (Engels, Marx 1848: 55). Marx and Engels predicted that this history would finally come to an end with the capitalist mode of production. Though oppression has historically always been the law of the land, serfs have at least been able to live off the land they cultivated. Within the logic of capitalism, workers enter an economic situation where *need* is no longer the governing force behind labor, but rather profit margins of private factory owners, who are having to compete in the liberal market economy. Work becomes a mundane repetitive action that serves to *alienate* the worker from his or her own product, and therefore their own humanity.

Another inherent aspect of the capitalist system, the one aspect that Marx in particular is perhaps most concerned about, is *exploitation*. The dawning of industrial society saw people moving from the countryside en masse into the big cities to become factory workers. Here they would live in squalid conditions, barely making ends meet. The reason for this was a form of economic exploitation which, according to Marx, consists of the owners of the means of production driving down wages while simultaneously trying to maximize the profit margins on the products they sell. This is essentially robbing the workers of a healthy share of the *surplus value*, leaving workers with the bare minimum for *reproducing* themselves. Marx's thoughts on this topic are rendered bare in the opening chapter in the first volume of *Capital* (1867) which offers the reader a meticulous analysis of different conceptions of work-related value (Marx 1867: 125-177).

Even if the rich dominating the poor is not in some sense a new phenomenon, the sheer scale, intensity, and nature of this domination becomes egregiously ramped up in the context of mass production in modern industrialized society. Ironically the conflicts inherent to the system will in due time unleash its own undoing. This is inevitable according to Marx. The fact that the factory owners need the workers to sustain themselves, is not only a testament to the fact workers are not powerless by any means, but that they are, from a holistic perspective, to be considered vital to the survival of the functional whole. As such, they should be recognized as moral subjects and not treated as disposable tools. This insight draws on older Hegelian ideas of how historical change is achieved through the synthesis of the thesis with the antithesis, a philosophical idea which we shall be covering later on.

The lessons to be learned from this underlying concept are, however, not simply straight forward. This is where the Marxist doctrine and British social-liberalism start going their separate ways. From a classical Marxist perspective this implicit equality requires the elimination of the element of domination, something which simply cannot be achieved under capitalism. The means of production need to be owned collectively, lest we never get rid of both exploitation and alienation. Before any of this can take place, however, the working class needs to become *proletarianized*, meaning they need to develop a class consciousness by realizing that the troubles that plague them as individuals have their origin in an economic conflict of interest that is inherent to the system; this means understanding that their *interests* are both *collective* and *objective* in nature. This realization would be Marx's and Engels'

estimate inevitably lead to the toppling of the capitalist system through revolutionary means and the creation of a new classless society.

There are quite a few parallels to be drawn between the Marxist vision of the world and the underlying philosophies of what we today have come to call identity politics. In my view, one of the more frustrating aspects of present-day debates centering around the topic of identity politics, is that any and all attempts to underscore this exact point, frequently tend to get dismissed as fearmongering, as being tantamount to a modern-day variant of the red scare. In other instances, the comparison gets dismissed as pure ignorance.

While there certainly are plenty of ideas that set these two traditions apart philosophically, the clear parallels, as well as the historical ties should not be ignored. Sociological conflict theory can, in a very abstract sense, most certainly be viewed as constituting an extension of Marx's and Engels' project. The continued emphasis of prevailing social conflict will however take on different dimensions which have their philosophical roots outside materialism and universalism. The differences between Marxism and identity politics therefore come down to the question of what is at stake, that is to say *the contents of conflict theory rather than conflict theory itself*.

To illustrate this point further, let us briefly touch on the issue of functionalism versus conflict theory, before we conduct a more thorough analysis on this issue. The reader may notice that when it comes to functionalism, it is not the idea of the continued existence an organic whole as such that is rejected by Marxists, but rather the Hobbesian vision of society, which, according to Marxists, view contentious and oppressive aspects of the social whole as natural (Freeden 1996: 428). Functionalism and the idea of a unified organic whole is, therefore, not rejected per se, but it critiqued on the grounds of some of its more liberal contents. It can be argued that in Marxism we see the impetus for the creation of a radically different, hitherto never imagined, whole in functionalist terms. This is after all what makes Marxism utopian. This aspect, coupled with the universalist dimensions of Marxist thinking, are what essentially make classical Marxism a modern invention. Utopia is the reimagining of this functional whole, the vision of people living under a different universalist paradigm.

The hallmark of later conflict theoretical thought can be summed up as the dismissal of a unified utopian vision of society in favor of a decentered, fragmented and particularist view of political settlement (Best, Kellner 1991: 20-24). Functionalism – as well as the entire idea

of a body politic in general – will, therefore, in more than one way become the archrival of later developments of conflict theoretical viewpoints. No longer will it be the case that functionalism is rejected simply on the basis of some of its constituent parts. From here on out the very idea of a unified functional whole will become viewed by some Left-wing thinkers as an inherently exclusionary view of the world. The reason for this turn in Left-wing political thought has largely to do with its return to older metaphysical debates that predate Marx. Why this turn would end up taking place will soon become apparent. In doing so, Left-wing philosophy would to some degree come to declare a materialist economic view of the world insufficient for redressing issues of inequity. The new theoretical tools mandated by the so-called *New Left* would end up placing a greater emphasis on the role of ideas, language, cognitive theory, the role of science as well as the potential prospects of a value neutral acquisition of knowledge. Ontologically the new battlelines would be drawn between *a new kind of proletariat* and dominant cultural identities; metaphysically they would in part be drawn between anti-realism and realism, rationalism and empiricism; politically and ethically the contentions would remain between collective interests and individual freedom.

2.9 The Metaphysics of the New Left

Truth-seeking as a philosophical venture has arguably, since the founding of Plato's academy in 387 BC, been intimately tied to the university institutions. The first two European universities, which were founded in Paris, Toledo and Bologna in the 12th and 13th century, were largely shaped by the ideals and principles that underlay this early historical precedent (Tergel 1973: 222-223). Earlier in the Middle Ages, the relationship between philosophy and theology was somewhat strained. For several hundred years of European history, the idea of philosophy being permitted to exist and operate outside the watchful eye of the Roman Catholic Church was inconceivable. Philosophy only had value in so far as it could aid the Church in elucidating God's word. Plato's philosophy was absolutely instrumental in this regard (Nordin 1995: 159-170). The founding of the first universities did not exactly change this predicament over night, but it did constitute an early sign of how theology and philosophy were starting to go their separate ways. These institutions would in turn end up setting the gold standard by which academic excellence would be measured all around Europe. It may seem reasonable to conclude that the birth of the modern-day university would also mark the beginning of free academic thought. Not everyone would agree. These

events could in some sense be regarded as the onset of a new kind of institutionalization of knowledge, an important locus of the present-day Left's critique of *knowledge production*.

Since modern epistemology began to take root in Europe after the 17th century, the validity of the idea of a kind of knowledge acquisition, which did not rely on traditional Aristotelian axioms or Christian cosmology in its truth claims, became the defining feature of the natural scientific discipline's own self-understanding (Juti 2019: 125-131). This idea, in turn, builds on the Cartesian model of cognition, that separates the subject from the object. It is the prospect of bridging this gap between the subject and object that is going to become the battleground between realism and anti-realism.

There does not, as we shall soon see, exist a clear dividing line between some aspects of the modern and the post-modern, in terms of the metaphysical problematics put forth by thinkers stemming from either of these two traditions. Even though enough difference exists, in order for these two philosophical epochs to be regarded as thematically distinct, there still exists a significant amount of overlap between these traditions. Descartes, himself a rationalist, has, as we've stated prior, played a significant role in laying some of the groundwork for the very problems we are seeking to redress. He also does not logically disentangle his own brand of universal knowledge from Christian cosmology, but ultimately the former ends up becoming logically contingent on the truth value of the latter (Juti 2019: 132). Unlike present-day disciples of the post-structuralist movement however, he is at heart a realist thinker. The same thing can be said for the early contributors to empiricists though. Even though both John Locke and David Hume sought to critique Descartes' claims to universal knowledge, these metaphysical precursors to the post-modern critique of modern epistemology, are in some sense still very much modern at heart.

In which way then, do modern and post-modern discourses start to converge, in regard to their treatment of metaphysical realism? This is a long story, but we can start this discussion off by saying that what we end up dealing with, in essence, is the submergence of *hermeneutics* and *quantitative theory*. These two subdivisions of science, that we touched upon briefly in the introduction to this thesis, end up marrying one another through the efforts of postmodern theorists (Hicks 2004: 25-27). To be even more precise, but without giving too much away just yet, we could say that the implication here, is not that the two components end up coherently co-existing in some harmonious fashion. Rather, what ends up happening is that all prospects of attaining propositional knowledge and explaining the world go belly

up as they submerge with ethics and hermeneutics (Best, Kellner 1991: 22). This project is largely achieved through the later historical developments in idealist philosophy, hereby making the object and the subject indistinguishable from one another. In such a world all that can be said to exist, are interpretative, constructivist discourses surrounding the nature of reality. Such discourses are in turn intimately tied up with ethics, which are collectively mediated and serve the interests of identity groups.

Since much of what we call knowledge gets “produced” within the walls of universities, it would seem appropriate that we start off this analysis of what has changed in Left-wing political thought by addressing the New Left’s view on the role of academia and on the relation between epistemology and politics. If indeed one of the most crucial points of contention between not only the post-modern Left and liberalism, but between the post-modern left and classical Marxists is epistemology and metaphysics, it stands to reason that changes in the Left’s attitude to metaphysical reality would serve as the proper starting point for further analysis.

(i) False Consciousness, Standpoint Epistemology and the Role of Science in Politics

When it comes to academic output, the prescriptive aspects of the kind of social analysis that is advocated for by the New Left, draws on yet another Marxist viewpoint, one that stipulates that scholars should not just devote their time and energy to analyzing the world *as it is* but should instead internalize the true lessons of the philosophical proposition that we, as human beings, are social creatures, capable of change. Hence, scholars should try to imagine how society *could be* and figure out practically useful theories that enable change (Larsson 1976: 132; Held 1980: 148-149).

In the classical Marxism of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, this theoretical proposition is formulated against the backdrop of the liberal economic theory of Adam Smith, which in turn is predicated on the Hobbesian vision of the human condition. The view of human relations as being plagued by individualistic strife and competition, as well as the idea that this strife somehow constitutes an inherent part of human nature, is vehemently opposed by Marx and Engels in the book *The German Ideology* (1932). Instead, Marxists suggest that what we call human nature is in fact something quite malleable and subject to change given the right material conditions. Therefore, what we call a dog-eat-dog-world and man’s propensity to act

in a merciless fashion against his fellow human beings, should not be taken on face value as representing some unchangeable trait or aspect of humanity, but should rather be viewed as a consequence of the very material conditions that people live under in modernized, Western, capitalist societies. The inability of the masses to recognize this fact has largely to do with them having developed a *false consciousness*. There are no quotes that elucidate this idea more clearly than the words used in the preface to Marx and Engels work, *The German Ideology* (Marx, Engels 1932: 29).

“Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relations according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us revolt against this rule of concepts. Let us teach men, says one, how to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says another, how to take up a critical attitude to them; says the third, how to get out of their heads; and existing reality will collapse”

The idea of false consciousness, which permeates both classical Marxist thinking and its later philosophical off-shoots, has its roots in Rousseau’s work *The Social Contract* (1762), specifically his thoughts on how it may be seen as morally legitimate to force an unfree subject to become free (Rousseau 1762: 32). The concept can be summed up neatly as constituting a social condition under which the ideas of a ruling class have been imprinted on the minds of an oppressed class of people. Though these ideas may be validated by said class of oppressed people, they do in fact run contrary to their own objective interests. This point of contention gets reiterated in various forms in Left-wing political thought throughout the decades; it appears in the critical theory of Marx Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and is evidenced by their advocacy of activist scholarship, that not only challenges preconceived notions of the human condition but also lends itself as a useful tool for political change. It serves as a pivotal building block in the radical feminist theory developed in the 1960’s by writers like Kate Millet and Adrea Dworkin (Gemzöe 2015: 48-52). Aside from being former leftist radicals, that had become disillusioned by the sexist dynamics inherent in the Marxist movement – which basically relegated women to the role of conducting household chores during political meetings – feminist do show other commonalities with earlier Left-wing theorists’ thoughts on false consciousness. The political tools that were deployed by radical feminist activists during the

1960's, most notably *consciousness raising* sessions, conducted within various women's groups, make this philosophical tie quite evident.

Marxist thought can therefore be argued to have played a major role in introducing later generations of Left-wing thinker to the philosophical idea that ideology and perceived "natural" ways of being may not be that easily separable from one another as one might think. By that same token, this line of reasoning suggests that scholarly output by social researchers may be inseparably intertwined with social activism in a way that might come across as quite alien to researchers working in the natural sciences, who are formally beholden to standards of neutrality and objectivity. It is therefore incumbent upon the socially conscious academic to reshape the world by negating those aspects of our collective body of knowledge that hinder radical freedom.

Some parts of this line of reasoning seem quite benign as well as commonsensical. The idea of science being a social activity, and the fact that scientists are social creatures like any other human beings, are both regrettable facts of life that make the susceptibility to *ingroup bias* a constant threat in some areas of scholarly praxis. Concern relating to the *insider-outsider* perspective in anthropological fieldwork is but one such area where the issue of *objectivity* and its relation to theory is routinely being called into question (Knott 2010: 259-273). There is therefore legitimacy to some of the concerns being raised by authors, who have argued along these lines. However, the more troublesome aspects of this kind of *standpoint epistemology* become evident when scholars in a more fundamental way no longer share in the same reality. Also, the issue of false consciousness seems less straightforwardly true.

It goes without saying of course, that the problematic implications inherent to this theoretical perspective are by no means limited to issues regarding science and its claims to objectivity. Since science is the professionalized arena for determining what *is the case* in the world, and since the *ought* and the *is* now inevitably submerge, the theoretical output of academia will – and already has to some extent – come to affect whether or not our political, legal and economic institutions are viewed as legitimate.

As stated prior however, the idea of using science to further a moral or political good in the world need not be seen as inherently harmful or problematic. Instead, the problems seem to arise from a general tendency by postmodern conflict theoreticians to further a philosophy that runs contrary to conventional truisms built into our political and legal language. It is for

this very reason that I bring up the issue of standpoint epistemology and metaphysics. Aside from this, some of the ideas on representation seem hard if not impossible to integrate with individualist, republican ideas about political representation. If we were to sum up the societal and political outcome of New Left politics, it would be *societal disintegration*.

(ii) A Swing Towards Metaphysical Idealism

The question then becomes, where does the impetus of modern-day identity politics to *disintegrate* come from? The answer to this question depends largely on the metaphysical views held by the individual conflict theoretician.

So far, we have concluded that the Marxism advocated by Marx and Engels constitutes a form of modernist thought – it is not by any stretch of the imagination postmodern or post humanist. It is modernist in the sense that it constitutes a form of abstract thought. Even though Marxism, according to its own self-understanding, claims to be a rock-hard history of science, which disavows ideology through and through, it nevertheless is modern in terms of its universalist scope and a-historicist abstraction. Another modernist aspect of Marxism are its *totalizing* features; a philosophical position which would later become heavily criticized by critical theorists and post-structuralists alike.

Later Left-wing thought, which drew inspiration from Classical Marxism as well as Maoism and Leninism, would during the mid-20th century increasingly give up on this unified utopian vision of society. These older tenants would eventually become criticized as constituting a form of economic reductionism. Within the New Left that emerged after the May 5th, 1968, riots in Paris and other big cities in Europe, leftist theory would increasingly, move away from questions regarding economic class and focus more on cultural analysis, the effects of colonialism, racial justice, feminism and gay rights. Even though critiquing capitalism as such never left the Left-wing political agenda, its scope of interests was widened (Larsson 1976: 133-138).

Metaphysically this movement would accordingly move away from materialist thought and inch closer to *dialectical idealism*. From such a perspective *new units of analysis* would present themselves and issues of injustice could no longer be solved simply by abolishing capitalism. The ills of society should therefore rather be viewed as consisting of an

accumulated effect of mutually supportive systems of oppression. Given different metaphysical premises, society could theoretically be conceived as being made up of other types of differences – differing *lived experiences*, different interpretations, different moral truths and so on. Therefore, any attempt at building a oneness in society could be seen as tantamount to exclusion and therefore oppression.

To understand the true meaning of metaphysical idealism and how it manifests itself in a modified form in both post-materialist and post-modern thought, we need to return to the modern roots of this philosophical perspective. This means examining the contents of so-called German idealism. This continued genealogical examination of Western philosophy will also help elucidate the points of convergence between the modern and the post-modern that we talked about before.

2.10 The Metaphysical Roots of Postmodern Skepticism

When mulling over what can be regarded as some very crucial misjudgments on the part of German idealists, one must nonetheless be careful not to sideline the very crucial role that British empiricism has played in paving the way for some of the very problems we have discussed. Even though most ethical problems relating to the Lyotardian idea of *a crisis of metanarratives* can, as we have alluded to before, be traced back to Descartes' problematic precedence of a technified view of morality, both John Locke and David Hume would respectively make contributions to modern epistemology, which in a lot of ways predated the skepticism of later German thinkers. These contributions were what initially prompted further developments and critiques of empiricist ideas within the idealist camp.

Although Descartes certainly set the tone for the modern epistemological era, later thinkers who implicitly accepted the subject-object dichotomy, would undoubtedly provide Western philosophy with something radically new in the way of theorizing *uncertainty*. Whereas Descartes was adamant about being able to bridge the gap between the subject and the object, Locke and Hume both remained somewhat skeptical of man's prospects of being able to gain absolute knowledge about *the things themselves* (Nordin 1995: 362-363). This critical attitude could be regarded as a sober pushback against the naïve optimism exhibited by the enlightenment era, but through the works of Hegel and later 20th century variations of dialectical thought, this sober attitude risks in my view to collapse into a potentially

dangerous form of anti-realism – one that would, as I would argue, have serious political consequences morally and culturally, which in the long run risk rendering liberal political institutions hollow.

What happens essentially, when we sever the epistemological ties between the philosophical subject and the object, is that the subject ends up becoming trapped inside his or her mind. Ideas therefore no longer bear a corresponding resemblance to the world outside with any degree of certainty. For this reason, there are not only no objective grounds for ascribing truth to one theory over another, but all talk of propositional truth essentially becomes inseparable from other forms of ideas and other forms of discourse (Hicks 2004: 62).

I will now give the reader a brief rundown of how Western philosophy ended up in this cul-de-sac of extreme skepticism. I will start off this analysis by covering the British empiricist John Locke and David Hume. From here I will be moving on to cover the German idealists, starting with Immanuel Kant, whose grand metaphysical work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) is in part a direct response to Hume's magnum opus *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740). I will then round off this part of the thesis by covering the parts of Hegel's philosophy that are relevant for this larger discussion.

(i) John Locke's Contributions to a Burgeoning Anti-Realism

Common sense dictates that when we assess the truth value of any given theoretical proposition, we are by and large trying to gauge the fit between a particular mental construct and the world around us. This is how great many laymen presumably believe theory works, at least when it comes to quantitative theory. To do "science proper", as we have explained in the intro, is commonly associated with methods employed by natural science and quantitative theory, which seeks to establish a causal connection between two or more variables.

This particular view of science makes a number of implicit assumptions regarding the nature of *true* scientific theory. It posits the view that ideas are able to accurately mirror the relationship between things in the world and that this relationship can be accurately mapped out using quantitative and experimental method. In doing so we take for granted that the mind is able to perform such a task, that ideas can be something beyond arbitrary labels we attach

to the world. This is assuming, in a sense, that ideas – at least empirical ones – have their true origin outside the mind and are not products manufactured by creative thought.

This is the essence of British empiricism. As opposed to rationalist thought, empiricism assumes that our ideas are products of the empirical world around us rather than the other way around.

As far as epistemology is concerned, John Locke is often viewed as an empiricist rather than a rationalist. Although Locke does indeed display many of the qualities of a 17th Century English empiricist, particularly in regard to his famous work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), he simultaneously departs from this pure empiricist outlook on the world in a number of ways. This holds true most notably for his view on morality.

In true empiricist fashion, Locke argues that there are no innate ideas known to man, that in the platonic sense lie implanted in our minds from the day we are born. All knowledge is ultimately derived from experience. The same goes for moral and religious ideas. The only thing innate in our minds is our capacity for understanding. The limit of this capacity is what is examined by Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Nordin 1995: 329).

The word *ideas* should here be understood in a logical sense, as referring to the constructs and representations in our mind. Locke famously distinguishes between *simple* and *complex ideas*, whereby simple ideas are those ideas that bare a direct relationship to the empirical world outside ourselves (Locke 1690a: 380). Complex ideas on the other hand are the products of our imagination and our capacity for reason. Although complex ideas too are ultimately derived from experience, there is a way by which human beings can use disparate simple ideas to construct more complex ones, that bare no corresponding relationship to physical reality (Locke 1690a: 159-160).

We should however be mindful of the gap that exists between *reality itself* and *our ideas about reality*. Saying that simple ideas bare a “direct relationship” to the world outside ourselves, does not imply that these ideas are photo-copied representations of reality itself. By stating this Locke is merely suggesting that these representations are not in their entirety disconnected from reality and that some sort of relationship exists between the object and its representation. Strictly speaking, Locke dismisses the very possibility of their being such a thing as a natural “science”. This may seem like a strange conclusion coming from a man who worked professionally as a medical doctor. However, we should keep in mind that Locke

is operating with a rather strict definition of the word knowledge. He makes it clear that there exist three types of knowledge; *intuitive knowledge*, *demonstrative knowledge* and *knowledge based on sensory input*. This last category does not live up to the stringent criteria for knowledge employed by Locke. The reason for this is that Locke does not view the impressions made upon the human mind by the outside world as being something akin to the *primary qualities* of the things themselves. These impressions constitute merely *secondary qualities*. What this implies is that our knowledge of the things themselves can never be as robust as our knowledge of mathematics, logic and or morality which are all fields of inquiry that produce statements, which are verifiable by the use of a set of rules intrinsic to the aforementioned systems (Nordin 1995: 332).

Moral truths, in Locke's view, are, therefore, demonstrable and in some ways more reliable than the findings in what he called not natural science but "philosophy of nature". This is where the rationalist aspects to Locke's philosophy start creeping in. Unlike the things themselves, ideas are units of analysis, that we have direct access to in their purest form. Moral truths are hereby knowable to the same extent that geometric and mathematical truths are knowable. For this reason, moral philosophy is encompassed by the first two categories of knowledge listed above (Nordin 1995: 335).

With John Locke's philosophy we are starting to witness the gradual breakdown of Descartes' cognitive model of reality. Whereas in the case of Descartes, the mind is and remains – by the grace of a benevolent God – in direct connection with the things themselves, Locke's thought is demonstrative of the slow emergence of a type of *representational* thought, one where the relationship between reality and our ideas about reality not only become conceptually distinct but will never truly converge with any degree of certainty.

However, as worrisome as Locke's view of natural science may seem to the casual observer, the theoretical implications of his line of thought are not quite as radical as we might think. This holds true first and foremost for the continued validity of the concept of *causality*, which is made evident by his view on primary and secondary qualities. The prospects of establishing causal connections between things in the empirical world will however be fundamentally undermined by the philosophy of David Hume.

(ii) The Skepticism of David Hume

In his magnum opus *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) the British empiricist David Hume (1711-1776) has his mind set on accomplishing very much the same epistemological task as the one performed earlier by John Locke in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689); the only difference is that Hume's work is more far reaching in its skeptical conclusions. It is therefore not entirely a coincidence that the works of Hume have become so closely associated with *skepticism* – rivalled perhaps only by the likes of Pyrrho. At the same time there lies something truly commonsensical in the ultimate conclusions drawn by Hume, something which brings his understanding of the world around him perhaps closer to that of 20th century British philosophers like G.E. Moore, than the German idealists (Nordin 1995: 564).

There are a couple of dimensions to Hume's philosophy that, for the purposes of this dissertation, deserve special attention. On the one hand we have the metaphysical outlook of Hume's philosophy that requires a brief rundown; on the other hand, there is the matter of Hume's view on logic and its relation to moral inquiry (Baghranian 2004: 282). This later topic is not connected to Hume's works on metaphysics and epistemology per-se, but it can hardly be overlooked, due to the fact that what has become known as *Hume's guillotine* (in some cases referred to as *the is-ought-gap*) ties in with the modernist departure from the old Aristotelian world view.

In his epistemological work in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), Hume – much like Locke – is on a mission to metaphysically examine man's prospects of gaining knowledge about the world around him. He does so by constructing what is formally known as a *correspondence theory* of knowledge (Hume 1739-1740: 78). In traditional empiricist fashion, he argues that the constituent parts of human knowledge ultimately derive from the empirical world around us. The content of our minds is composed of both *impressions* and *ideas*. Our impressions can roughly be divided into a handful of sub-categories. Firstly, we have *simple impressions* which correspond to and are primary to *simple ideas* inside our minds. The aforementioned forms of impressions function as the foundation for the most elementary parts of our ideas and can, according to Hume, be characterized as *impressions of sensations*. Hume distinguishes this form of impression from the second sub-category of impressions called *impressions of reflection*, which refers to our emotional responses to the world around us (Hume 1739-1740: 49-52).

What this of course implies is that our most elementary ideas about reality are not products of the mind, but a function of the impressions made upon us by an external world. Citing George Berkly (1685-1753) Svante Nordin summarizes Hume's thoughts on this topic as amounting to the basic empiricist axiom, that man is simply unable to construct these impressions out of thin air (Nordin 1995: 352-359). This does not of course mean that the dynamics and processes of man's mind in all other respects are in some deterministic sense tied to impressions coming in from an outside world. On the contrary, simple ideas readily lend themselves to becoming the building blocks of mental constructs that bare no direct resemblance to empirical reality. This is the realm of imagination, where *complex ideas* in part have their origin.

So far, we find ourselves in conceptual territory, that bares a close resemblance to the one occupied by John Locke; our simple ideas correspond to things in the outside world. This line of thought is mirrored to an extent in the philosophical output of later heirs to British empiricism. Such is the case for instance with the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) – with the exception of course that unlike Hume, Wittgenstein saw the world as made up of *facts* rather than things, that is to say, *the relations between things* (Wittgenstein 1921: 25).

The most striking difference between John Locke and David Hume is made evident in their differing conceptions of causality. In Hume's view, we can never truly have knowledge about the nature of *things themselves* – we are only permitted to talk about the appearance of reality. Of course, this proposition does not seem a far cry from common sense conceptions of scientific theory. It even jives well with naturalism's self-image as a scientific enterprise. What appears more problematic though, is that this *mere appearance* of *things* also applies to the supposed *deductive* character of perceived casual relationships between things. This is the central thesis of Hume's critique of causality. In a famous analogy involving billiard – a game that the philosopher himself had become well acquainted with during his pastime – Hume explains how the fact of one occurrence following another, like that of one billiard ball being set into motion after it has been struck by another, does not permit us to draw causal inferences about the goings on in nature, not even if a given pattern should occur on a regular basis. The very notion of philosophy or science being able to make deductive inferences based on this type of observation is dismissed by Hume in its entirety. Logical inferences can in this scenario only be *inductive* by nature (Hume 1739-1740: 121-131).

If we were to adopt Hume's view of the world, as either philosophers or scientists, we would be forced to accept that this is all that quantitative theory and science can ever hope to achieve, mapping out the terrain of recurring regularities in nature, regularities which regarding their constancy may be no more certain than the promise of a friend. Theory is, therefore, not only *not* the same as reality and reality is *not* the same as theory, but theory might on a more fundamental level be completely unable to *explain* reality. The difference between Locke and Hume is made all the more evident when contrasting this line of thought to Locke's conclusion that heat constitutes a secondary quality of fire (Nordin 1995: 332).

There is in my view a lot to object to here. Much of this critique we will have to address later, seeing as some of the more radical aspects of the skeptical fallout of modern epistemology is yet to be explored. On a very basic level, Hume's philosophy has been countered by German idealists in one of two different ways. Immanuel Kant attempted in his own view to save science from the looming skeptical pitfalls theorized by British empiricists, whereas the concept of epistemological realism can be seen as having been undermined even further by Hegel's concept of *absolute spirit*.

(iii) Immanuel Kant

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is often hailed, alongside such tinkers as Voltaire, as perhaps the penultimate enlightenment philosopher – a true champion for enlightenment reason (Hicks 2004: 41). This view, though common, is not as simple and straightforward as one may have first assumed, and as the analytic philosopher Stephen R.C Hicks would have it, this widespread conception paints Kant's philosophy in much too positive a light. Ultimately, whether one views Kant as a defender of reason or not comes down to the crucial question of whether one deems it possible for the subject to gain some sort of philosophical insight, that goes beyond mere appearances, and arguably Immanuel Kant doesn't pass muster in this regard (Hicks 2004: 52). Even so, the issue of universality and transcendence in Kant's philosophy is a complicated matter, and differing conclusions can conceivably be reached regarding this question. It matters for instance whether we are discussing these issues in relation to Kant's metaphysics or his contributions to moral philosophy. We will be delving deeper into Kant's *deontological* view of ethics later in this

thesis. For now, we will be focusing on his great metaphysical work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (titled *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in German).

In the history of philosophy, there have been few attempts at building metaphysical systems that have resulted in something quite as robust and ambitious in nature as that of Immanuel Kant. The brief overview of his thought offered up in this dissertation will, therefore, hardly do justice to the intricacies of his philosophical views. However, since there is a plethora of philosophical issues we have yet to cover, the rendering of such a shorthand version is by all accounts necessary.

Kant's quintessential work *Critique of Pure Reason* is in part a response to David Hume's work *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740). It is also a response to the looming danger of antireligious fervor that Kant saw running rampant in the writings of enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire (1694-1778) (Porter 2001: 29). An avowed atheist, Hume too gave voice to such sentiment in his work *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), in which he seeks to empirically debunk the deistic views on *natural religion* (Hume 1757: 3; Strenski 2006: 29-30). Like many other intellectuals of his time, Kant, therefore, saw the future of Christian faith being undermined by enlightenment thought on more than one front (Hicks 2004: 38). There was the proto-evolutionist view of history which treated religion and religious institutions purely as remnants of past superstitions, illogic, and tyranny – then there was the empiricist metaphysic which overturned the validity of older scholastic evidence for the existence of the Christian God. Where then was there room left for religious faith in this new modern world? This was the question that ultimately plagued Kant during his life.

Kant's willingness to retain the plausibility of a Christian cosmology is what leads to Hicks ultimately grouping Kant in with a sort of *counter-enlightenment* intelligentsia instead of viewing him as a true modern (Hicks 2004: 39; Nordin 1995: 400). It would however be somewhat misleading to treat Kant as just another reactionary. A defense of religion is also not Kant's only motivation for critiquing enlightenment thought. Hume's view of causality and the problematic precedent this sets for the credibility of the natural sciences is another factor that feeds into Kant's view of metaphysics (Kant 1781: 102-105; Nordin 1995: 398).

Like the empiricists, Kant argues that all our knowledge is predicated on experience. This aspect of his philosophy makes Kant a unique thinker in a lot of ways. Idealism formally constitutes a branch of *rationalist* thought, meaning that idealists argue for the philosophical position that *our experience of reality is logically contingent on our ideas about reality*. In

some ways this is true for Kant too, but not in the same sense as it is true for Hegel or for Nietzsche.

As the title of his work may suggest, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* dispenses with the idea of reason or cognition being some sort of passive monitor of objects. On the contrary, Kant views the subject as playing an active part in the construction of the world around him. Not conceptually or linguistically, as a sociological agent as other idealists may have concurred, but rather as a cognitive agent. Kant's philosophy can in some sense be read as an early precursor to modern-day psychology or as a cognitivist theory of perception. The world we study as scientists is therefore *constituted* according to Kant, but it is constituted quite differently from how other idealists might argue that the world is constituted.

Kant divides the world into two components – the *phenomenal world* and the *noumenal world*. The phenomenal world is the world of perceived relations between things, of regularities, of so-called *phenomena*. What we call the world around us is this *perceived* reality, which ultimately is shaped and formed by inbuilt *categories* in ourselves, what you might well call cognitive prerequisites for there to ever be such a thing as an experience in the first place (Nordin 1995: 400). Such categories include time and space. They exist *a-priori* as modes of perception, that is to say, they exist independent of experience and are not part of the world outside our own minds.

The noumenal world on the other hand is the world of things in themselves, the nature of the world as it exists beyond mere appearances. This is a world we can never truly have knowledge of. Our propositional knowledge is limited to the world of phenomena. The phenomenal world is therefore the only world science or philosophy has the ability to penetrate.

Knowledge of the relations between great many factual circumstances in the phenomenal world, constitutes what Kant calls knowledge *a-posteriori*, that is to say, our knowledge regarding the truth value of certain statements is contingent on our experience of said phenomena (Kant 1781: 97-102). This is not the case when it comes to *analytically true* statements. We do not for instance need to seek out points of reference in the empirical world to find out whether the shortest distance between two dots is covered by a straight line. Like categorical modes of perception, analytically true statements are likewise true a-priori.

Kant also argues for the existence of *synthetic judgements a-priori*. Such statements are synthetic in the sense that they constitute a mix of both a-priori knowledge and sense data. Kant deems that mathematically true statements are of this nature. The intuitive knowledge of the relations between numbered quantities constitutes a form of a-priori judgement, whereas the physical activity of arithmetic is a means of experiencing the truth of mathematical statements through acting on external reality. The truth of mathematical theory is therefore in part contingent on experience, while still having an a-priori element to it (Nordin 1995: 401).

By way of rescuing mathematical knowledge from the pits of the skeptical hell that Hume had created for himself, Kant also manages to salvage all future truth value attributable to statistical knowledge. In doing so Kant manages, in his own opinion, to overturn Hume's negation of causal relationships, hereby giving validity to the future existence of a natural scientific enterprise. The plausibility of a Christian cosmology is retained through the conceptual distinction being made between the phenomena and the noumena – the noumenal world being reality itself and in Kant's mind the true locus of God.

It goes without saying that Stephen Hicks is not convinced of Kant having salvaged anything from the perils of skepticism. He has no qualms about stating, for instance that a philosopher who perpetually traps the subject inside his or her own head is not a proponent of universal knowledge. Any science based off mere phenomena cannot in Hicks' view be considered to be in touch with reality in any meaningful way. In this thesis I do not take as strict a view on certainty.

If Kant can be said to be somewhat merciful to realism, more so even than Hume, then Hegel can by that same token be viewed as the fore figure or harbinger of modern-day relativist views. Historicism and particularism are in many ways the legacy of Hegelian thought.

(iv) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Absolute Idealism

If there is one philosopher besides Immanuel Kant, who could perhaps be considered more belabored systematically – in addition to his original literary output being almost impenetrable to the average reader – it would undoubtedly be Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Unlike Kant's philosophy, Hegel's thought remains fiercely relevant politically and is widely discussed both inside and outside of the academy. The proclivity of

Hegel's philosophy to be able to engage new generations of politically interested readers is in part owed to the utility that *Hegelian dialectics* has served as a conceptual tool for understanding historical change and the historicity of philosophical ideas in general. It is perhaps this component, more than anything else, that explains the eminent position that Hegel's philosophy has earned for itself in both Left-wing and Right-wing circles (Mehring 2019: 42; Sarup 1988: 12; Nordin 1995: 536-537).

Hegel's philosophy can in many ways be considered as much a politically and religiously motivated project as a philosophical one. This is made evident by the fact that after his passing the more or less coherent school of thought he left behind would end up splitting up into a Left-wing and a Right-wing faction – some of the Left-wing Hegelians would go on to form Marxism (Marx himself being a student of Hegel's protégé Bruno Bauer) (Liedman 2015: 59-67; Nordin 1995: 438-440). Hegel himself is widely considered a conservative thinker. In perhaps his best-known philosophical work *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) (*Phenomenologie des Geistes* in German) he develops further on the ideas he had put to paper in his first book, a critique of Schelling's idealism, titled *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* (1801). In a certain sense Hegel views philosophy as not entirely linear but as a series of philosophically distinct epochs. At the same time there is a cumulative aspect to his way of thinking about the world, whereby history not only changes but *develops* through distinct cycles towards an ultimate final goal or destiny, which he calls "the end of philosophy". This final goal was something he believed he himself was witnessing during his own lifetime through the formation of the Christian nation state (Kenny 1998: 457; Nordin 1995: 429-433).

Key to understanding this idea of development is Hegel's concept of *spirit* (*der Geist*) – a word that even appears to have found its way into common parlance. When we retrospectively describe distinctive attitudes or ways of thinking during a certain period of our own lives, we may now and again refer to these things as somehow being indicative of a kind of "spirit of the times". In my mind this analogy perfectly captures what Hegel has got on his mind when he uses the term spirit. The spirit contains within itself both the past and the present, being and our ideas about being. For Hegel the spirit is analogous to the concept of the Christian God, but it is also a form of *collective consciousness*. The spirit is us and it thinks and acts through us.

It is hardly surprising then, that Hegel's philosophy has become influential not only politically but also within other academic disciplines and sub-disciplines such as history and philosophy of history. The term *historicity* is a concept that has truly found favor with historians who like to emphasize the uniqueness and particularistic nature of conceptual life worlds. This underlying line of thought is present in each and every historical analysis that for instance talks about the *mind* in relation to some specific historical epoch – think any text that makes mention of such ideas as “the medieval mind” or “the renaissance mind”. The chapter on the philosophical roots of individualism in this very thesis operates with exactly this sort of understanding of social spaces in mind – the idea is also somewhat analogous to Edmund Husserl's idea of the *lifeworld*, which I made mention of in the introduction to this thesis.

When taken on face-value, this sort of conception of history appears to make immediate sense, but there are some potentially worrisome aspects to Hegel's thought.

What is implied through the somewhat muddled jargon above, is that in Hegel's thought the subject-object dichotomy is dispensed with completely (Hicks 2004: 58). In a radically more idealistic fashion, Hegel argues that our ideas about reality are negotiated and shared and are primary to every sort of perception, theoretical modelling of reality and so on. All that exists is the *absolute* spirit, that is to say, *ideas* – a collective mind that contains within itself all our individual minds. It is therefore useless to talk about any reality existing separate from our ideas about reality. Our ideas *are* reality, or rather, the only reality we are able to gain any sort of knowledge of. Therefore, if Kant – as we have just gone over in the previous section – argued for a kind of cognitive theory, where ideas can somewhat accurately mirror a reality that exists outside our consciousness, Hegel would assert that this continued distinction between object and subject is meaningless. There is simply no basis for assuming that our ideas bare any resemblance to anything outside ourselves.

One might, therefore, ask what constitutes knowledge from the point of view of this type of radical idealist perspective? This question can be answered in one of two ways. If we are to abide by the rules of classical Hegelianism there is universal truth to be found in the world – that truth, however, is a matter of historical discovery, the sum-total of that very dialectical process we mentioned earlier. “Truth” is in this regard universal, according to Hegel. The other conceivable answer, the one which is highlighted by Stephen R.C Hicks, is that truth is any theoretical, religious or philosophical perspective that reigns supreme in any given

historical time period. This is the highly particularistic and relativistic interpretation that has been drawn from Hegel's philosophy, mainly by late modern or postmodern philosophers, who have sought to dispense with the universalist standards of classical Hegelianism, while still clinging on to the dialectical nature of knowledge (Baghranian 2004: 71-75; Hicks 2004: 61). All knowledge can, therefore, according to this branch of Hegelian thought, be considered historical and tantamount to interpretation. This line of thought gets reiterated in Nietzsche's critique of the natural sciences (Best, Kellner 1991: 39).

One way the reader might get a proper grasp of the idealist conception of ontology is to reconsider the axioms of empiricism in the light of what we have just gone over, that is to say, the idea that all our ideas are contingent on sense experience. Consider this somewhat absurd hypothetical example. Imagine that an alien race arrived on earth, after something akin to a nuclear holocaust had taken place, and that they were going through the rubble of what has been left behind of a once thriving race of men. In what way is it plausible to suggest that the idea of what constitutes certain technology for instance is inferable through our sensory perception alone? Imagine further that they came across some everyday household item, like a kitchen appliance of some sort. Suppose instead of using a microwave the way this technology is intended to be used, namely, to heat up food, they instead were unaware of this function entirely and instead started using it for something else, like for decorating a home. In what sense is it accurate to suggest that this piece of technology *is* still a microwave? The issue of whether the microwave can still be used for heating up meals is irrelevant for the question at hand. The important issue here is that our social world of concepts and ideas is wholly separate from the world of things. In fact, to even word the philosophical problem at hand this way, by analytically separating the subject and its ideas from a world of objects becomes problematic. The point of this short thought experiment is therefore to illustrate the idealist frame of mind, how being can be argued to be contingent on our conceptualization of it.

How are we then to conceive of the historical changes that affect our view of truth according to Hegel? A second central concept to Hegelian thought – which we have already mentioned – is the notion of dialectics. Dialectics is in a sense Hegel's way of addressing Kant's view on *antinomies*, that is to say, the inevitability of having two or more valid scientific theories become mutually exclusive and contradictory within a totalizing system (Hicks 2004: 58-61).

It could, therefore, be argued that such a system violates Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction. If you view history and being as *a process of becoming* rather than a final product, however, the issue of ever-present logical contradictions need not be viewed as a problem. Hegel addresses this issue by arguing that the maturation process of the spirit, which we have described above, involves a type of dynamic between that which *is the case* and that which negates it. One may think of this process in relation to how our theoretical knowledge of the world changes over time through novel scientific discoveries. Even though Hegel himself does not employ the following terminology, it is quite common for textbooks in philosophy to conceptualize this process as a dynamic interaction between the *thesis* and the *antithesis* (Kenny 1998: 456). The term thesis denotes a coherent system of ideas. The antithesis on the other hand, is the disagreeable element in being, the negation of said system, that which does not allow itself to become coopted. This standoff ultimately forces the system to yield, to change so as to incorporate the antithesis through a process referred to in the philosophical literature as *synthesis*, hereby incorporating contradictions. Hegel relates this logic to his readers through the now famous parable of the master and the slave. In this short narrative the master, who is ultimately dependent on the hard work of his slave for his own livelihood, will eventually through this mutually dependent relationship become forced to recognize the slave as a legitimate subject with wants and needs (Nordin 1995: 434).

In some ways, the dialectical notion of historical change is nothing new. In his book *Negative Dialectics* (1966) Theodor Adorno argues that this notion of the dialectic is already present in Plato's conception of change to some degree – the idea that change occurs through a process of negation. As we have just argued, however, this also implies a potentially radical way of viewing epistemology. Theoretically it stands in stark contrast to the Aristotelian world view which we will get into later.

Hegelian dialectics have also played a major role in theories development by a number of different academic disciplines. Philosophically the underlying logic of the master and slave dynamic is expressed in the economic theory of Karl Marx. His rendition of the material determinism and its inevitable consequences coming to fruition through a revolutionary game of hardball played out between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is a well-known reinterpretation of this classic parable. It also permeates the work of great many phenomenological and existentialist writers in their conceptualization of *the other* in society (*l'autre* in French). A great many of the present-day ideological schisms, especially the ones

relating to the issue of politicized personal identity are philosophically grounded in these later 20th Century developments and modifications of Hegelian thought.

2.11 Metaphysical Idealism in the late 20th and early 21st Century

Some of the present-day debates centering around the politics of personal identity have now and again been described by their critics as *postmodern*. Whether or not one tends to agree with this estimate depends to a large extent on which issues of identity politics one chooses to focus on. Though some aspects of what could be described as postmodern thought definitely do play into some of the topics being debated, I personally prefer to use Ronald Inglehart's term *postindustrial politics*, seeing as this term appears to capture more of the nuances that go into the sorts of debates that, in one way or another, touch upon the issue of identity. The term also tends, in my view, to be overused as well as misused. Another perhaps equally fitting description of these debates would undoubtedly be to label them as *critical approaches*, stemming from the philosophical tradition of critical theory.

I will not be offering the reader a detailed look at either postmodern thought or the different strands of critical theory. This would be all too time consuming for the purposes of this thesis. By rendering such a comprehensive overview on these topics, I would also increase the risks of losing the reader in the weeds and impede their comprehension of the overarching genealogical aspects I want to focus on.

As is the case with scientific terms in general, the message they convey depends on their usage. The term postmodern has several different usages (Best, Kellner 1991: 1-16). A common denominator for all of them, though, is that they seem to denote something that comes after a period or movement that can in some sense be described as modern. As far as philosophical literature is concerned, the word postmodernism has frequently been used to describe movements within both epistemology and metaphysics that have made a radical break with theories within these same fields that have previously been regarded as modern (Hicks 2004: 15-20).

This is, however, by no means a clean break. The point of illustrating the philosophical connections between the political theories we are about to discuss, and older rationalist and empiricist traditions, is to draw attention to important points of convergence. As I have

mentioned before, the postmodern phenomena can in many ways be regarded as a radical form of idealist philosophy. The same can to a lesser extent be said for critical theory. Despite some vocal critics dismissing the connection between postindustrial politics and Marxism, it is none the less crucial here to highlight the philosophical origins of conflict theory and its relevance as a political tool for challenging prevailing norms and social structures. In the case of the Frankfurt school, this connection is of course more difficult to dispute (Held 1980: 192-193; Nordin 1995: 533-537).

As regards Hegel's legacy, it is difficult to pinpoint one single idea that stands out as the most crucial issue communicated by German idealists to later rationalist thought. What Hegel essentially achieved in terms of epistemology was to allow for the entirety of *being* to be captured by the mind. In Hegel's own view, this allows us to have unfettered access to reality since reality resides inside us. However, in the hands of his later detractors and admirers, Hegel's elimination of the subject-object dichotomy became synonymous with rolling out the red carpet for a very old-fashioned radical skepticism. After all, if the contents of our minds *is* being itself, then it could be argued that reality is constituted the way the mind wills it. A radical *social constructivist* sociology would through such reasoning be enabled by idealism to run amok. Even if the idea of viewing reality as it might be has its roots in the classical ideas of Engels and Marx, the radical implications of this idea become much clearer when the guardrails of materialism and realism are dispensed with. This is perhaps the most alarming aspect of some prevailing strands of post-industrial thought. The increasingly parochial demands being placed on science, culture and the legislatures by new social movements essentially constitute the political manifestations of such philosophies (Arpi, Wyndham 2020: 15-32).

From a conservative perspective, the end result politically, culturally and philosophically of this ideological death drive is disintegration of the functional whole – from the point of view of the new left, the end result is a radical, hitherto never imagined freedom. Issues that require redressing, therefore, involve the future of representation, culture, and metaphysics.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the development of these ideas was inevitable in any way. In my view, such a claim would implicitly signal either the kind of philosophical capitulation to material forces that I am attempting to critique, or a deterministic view of ideological processes. Left-wing idealism and left-wing identitarian thought has its own unique history which we need to come to grips with before moving on to consider the

institutional implications of these philosophies. As I have alluded to before, this involves a brief overview of two strands of left-wing idealist thought, namely critical theory and post-structuralism.

(i) Idealist Revisions of Marxist Thought

Besides being able to broadly define the ideas we will be critiquing in this thesis as belonging to the postindustrial brand of politics, we might also be able to group them in with some branch or another of so-called *new left* politics. As it turns out, these two concepts have some significant overlap in terms of the landscape of social changes they are both trying to navigate.

As far as the economic leftwing movements of the early 20th century are concerned, differing views on the prospects of labor unions being able to successfully mediate between workers and factory owners came to a head in many western countries through the representative efforts of social democratic politics. Marxists argued then – as they still do – for the implausibility of overcoming exploitation and alienation under capitalist conditions, since social democrats would inevitably become coopted by their capitalist rivals. Not all Marxist movements advocated violent revolution as the only viable means to change. Some British Marxists advocated for a form of *gradualist approach* (Geoghegan 1984: 83-90). British social liberals, in turn, who had managed to merge liberal philosophy with Marxism, argued for the plausibility of upholding working-class interests through these representative institutions.

In addition to this compromise between social democracy and free market capitalism, the accumulation of wealth in industrialized western societies would, according to some theorists, serve to further undercut the functional utility of the traditional economic class divide in representative politics (Dalton 2009: 54-55). The expansion of the middle class to include *blue collar* workers was, therefore, an important steppingstone in the consolidation of capitalism in the West. This also resulted in a form of self-reflective critique within Marxist circles as well as what a critic of Marxism might regard as a form of *ad hoc* theory on the part of Marxism. Politically and philosophically this self-reflective response to postindustrial society is what in some sense gave birth to what might collectively be regarded as the formation of the New Left (Bjereld, Demker 2005: 44).

What became dubbed by some Marxist authors, like Louis Althusser (1918-1990) *a crisis of Marxism in the West*, would hereby necessitate further inquiry into the truth value of Marxist claims. Since Marxist predictions had fallen short of delivering on their promises of an inevitable proletarian revolution, theoreticians and thinkers, particularly ones arguing normatively and ontologically from a Marxist perspective, had a burning urge to understand why this outcome had failed to materialize in the industrialized West, where conditions were supposed to be ripe for this kind of radical change (Giddens, Sutton 1989: 55-56). The answer to that question which soon started to emerge when various Left-wing thinkers began putting pen to paper was that ideology plays a much more significant role in shaping the wants and needs of the working class than what classical Marxists had perhaps been willing to admit. Such thoughts had their roots in two major Marxist thinkers, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and the Hungarian thinker György Lukács (1885-1971).

Even though ideas of false consciousness and religion being a form of opium for the masses, were well established parts of the classical Marxist doctrine, these ideas would find new interpretations through the creative efforts of 20th century Left-wing thinkers. Whereas classical Marxists place the role played by material and bodily suffering in the first room, the New Left sees greater significance in the political and philosophical ideas that plague any given time period – dangerous misstep by any estimate according to some of the more vocal critiques stemming from the old guard of materialists, such as the British Marxist historian E.P. Thompson (1924-1993), who critiqued Louis Althusser's views on Marx in his essay *The Poverty of Theory* (1978).

From an idealist perspective, it can therefore be argued that Marxism was perhaps not wrong in some of its descriptive assessments of industrial society. Its biggest flaw was failing to address the power of the lifeworld, and the fact that moral decisions do not follow organically from material conditions or through consciousness raising (Held 1980: 207-208). If postindustrial society indeed in some ways sedates the working class, making them decadent, consumeristic and less willing to overthrow the capitalist system, and this is to be condemned, it will have to be condemned on ideological grounds.

(ii) Critical Theory – An Overview

Despite numerous left-wing philosophies being hugely indebted to Hegel's conceptual framework, none of them – as could be expected – would go on to fully affirm or reproduce his metaphysical system. After all, many continental philosophers would take decisive measures during the 20th century to distance themselves from the kind of totalizing ambitions that had characterized much of German idealism from Kant onward. Much like Alasdair MacIntyre in the early 1980's, some Marxist schools of thought concluded during the 1920's that one would be hard pressed to neglect a certain arbitrary feel to the different axiomatic systems that had been deployed during the last two centuries – this includes Marxism. Chief amongst these critics were the founding members of the so-called *Frankfurt school*, an institution which has since become famous as the birthplace of *critical theory* (Held 1980: 200).

Since each and every one of the philosophers associated with the Frankfurt school – including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse – have all imbued Marxist philosophy with their own distinct perspectives, it is somewhat difficult to give an all-encompassing definition of what the word critical theory means. Their philosophies are still similar enough though, to enable us to talk about critical theory in somewhat general terms. Divergencies between these three thinkers will be pointed out when necessary.

Philosophers who have been associated with the early writings of critical theory, do not buy into Hegel's idealism on a number of points. They do not for instance see the construction of totalizing and closed metaphysical systems as the solution to real world problems. Instead, they view these types of philosophies as constituting the problem. *Identity thinking*, a concept frequently employed by Theodor Adorno, signifies a type of correspondence theory of knowledge, whereby identities, in one way or another, become fixed and knowable to the subject. This hypothetically accurate modeling of reality is the modus operandi of what critical theorists call *traditional theory*. Critical theory on the other hand suspends all prospects of this sort of positive, descriptive knowledge and proposes the viability of a kind of “negative knowledge” as well as the hypothetical realization of transcendence through the act of negation (Held 1980: 185).

Unlike Hegel, the critical theorists insist on the continued validity of the ontological distinction between the subject and the object. The idea of an absolute spirit, an all-

encompassing subject that constitutes reality is something that Horkheimer and Adorno both regarded as synonymous with other forms of bourgeois theory. Bourgeois subjectivity subsumes the object and turns it into something passive – something to be controlled and signified in an effort to create a final picture of totality. The success of such efforts to accurately describe the object will always elude man, however. Critical theory, as conceived of by Horkheimer and Adorno, argues for an open-ended dialectic, one in which the element of relativism is rejected along with the view of truth being inherently cumulative. What has come before in history is therefore not necessarily false. If a theory becomes irrelevant over time, this is simply a matter of that particular theory having lost its points of reference in the external world (Held 1980: 178). It is, however, also a consequence of something having changed in the social interaction between people.

Horkheimer and Adorno both operate within the phenomenological playing field that Kant helped create. The only reality we have access to is the empirical reality we perceive with our senses. This reality is however a function of both material modes of production as well as philosophical and ideological mechanisms. This thinking is partly in line with Marx's views on reality. Though Marx rejected the subject-object dichotomy and viewed reality as something contingent on labor, he still believed that the only reality we can talk of is empirical reality. But this reality is not a given reality in any shape or form, not for Marx nor for the critical theorists. As we have argued before, our perception of reality is, according to traditional idealist thought, primarily conceptual. Horkheimer, however, rejects the ontological views espoused by Hegel. Though it may be true that our concepts of reality change, this does not imply that any old conceptual framework is adequate for describing reality. What both Horkheimer and Adorno described as *immanent criticism* has the designated purpose of shining a light on the false reality we inhabit. It is primarily a critique directed towards our social and economic reality. Immanent criticism examines the forcefield and tension that permanently exists between the subject and the object when it comes to descriptive assessment of objects. This tension is one of the primary reasons for why Adorno and Horkheimer view the subject-object dichotomy as valid (Held 1980: 200-202).

When critical theorists examine the relation between the subject and the object they are primarily concerned with our ideas of reality and above all how the object – in this case a member of any marginalized group in society – characterizes its own being in terms that are implicitly symptomatic of a form of *false consciousness*. The aim for critical theorists is

therefore to shed light on the gap that exists between the promises of the ruling, liberal ideology and concrete social reality. When the object's being is in line with its own ideas about itself, emancipatory societal change occurs in some sense (Held 1980: 212).

Though this emancipatory goal is the primary concern for all three critical thinkers alike, some significant differences exist between them. Theodor Adorno advocates for a form of *negative dialectic*, through which we are, as theorists, encouraged to view the world through the eyes of the object. There is an interdependence that exists between the subject and the object and emphasizing the role of one over the other is what sets the problematic precedence of both identity thinking and skepticism (Held 1980: 204). In Adorno's view knowledge is the content of the mind, but this mind is not a Hegelian absolute mind, that can in regard to its inner workings be described in a-priori terms. The mind is rather something that is in a constant process of dialectical change and is always situated both materially and socially. However, Adorno's negative dialectic does not involve the element of synthesis. The process of negation hereby becomes a way of liberating the object from the clutches of totalizing systems of any kind – letting the other remain the other in an open-ended dialectic. Adorno also reminds us of the fact that no system has ever managed to describe or control the object for very long – in the end the object always stands triumphant (Held 1980: 217).

Adorno attempted to achieve change through his writings, which through their non-systematized, though still coherent structure, were intended to stimulate a *critical consciousness*. Herbert Marcuse on the other hand, was far more concerned with oppositional revolutionary politics, the ethics of which are primarily expressed in his 1965 essay *Repressive Tolerance*. The aim of Marcuse's philosophy is likewise to overcome the things that act as hindrances to self-consciousness.

Marcuse was a student of Martin Heidegger and uses his understanding of phenomenology as a jumping off point in his early philosophy. He partly agrees with Heidegger's premise of *Dasein*, that is to say, the idea that man's existence and essence converge – an idea that effectively serves to eliminate the subject-object dichotomy altogether – but insists that there are elements to being that are by no means intrinsic to being. Here Marcuse is explicitly calling class society into question. Through dialectical materialism, *true being* will emerge (Held 1980: 228). Marcuse does not, however, believe that materialism alone will aid a dialectical movement towards a classless society. Classical Marxists have been eager to negate philosophy, but Marcuse argues that only through a qualitative understanding, can we

come to grips with the problematic concepts that plague society and change them. Material conditions – suffering human bodies included – change nothing by themselves. Though Herbert Marcuse views the subject as situated in historical and material conditions, his philosophy is not deterministic. We are rational beings and for this reason said conditions themselves can become the subject of analysis and change.

What Marcuse calls *determinate negation* constitutes the opposition to and destruction of an established order of affairs (Held 1980: 229). This order that is to be destroyed is once again the aforementioned asymmetry between social reality and our ideas about reality. Like other critical theorists, Marcuse views philosophical concepts as being in a constant state of flux, but unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse incorporates several original Hegelian elements into his philosophy. He argues for instance that history has an end goal in the sense that the true meaning of concepts will become unveiled once their essence and existence submerge (Held 1980: 233).

What critical theory essentially boils down to is a critique of the ideas that lie embedded in our cultural and scholarly bodies of work; it can be viewed as a clarifying polemic of the unfulfilled promises of liberal society or as a subversion of reality. It is perhaps also one of the clearest examples of how political activism and academic scholarship have found each other in quite unexpected ways. Again, this need not be seen as a problem. Academic scholarship is certainly no stranger to normative theory. The problem, as I have previously explained, ties in with the fact that critical theory is not in my view any less ideological than the ideas it criticizes for being sectarian. If the aim of critical theory is to liberate man from the restrictive clutches of ideology, we may justifiably ask ourselves how critical theorists justify the fact that they are trying to achieve this goal by use of the practical aspects of what is very explicitly a Marxist framework. Horkheimer provides an answer to this question. However, it is perhaps hard for anyone not fully on board with Marxist theory, not to view this answer as a slight of hand. In his essay *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937) Horkheimer defines ideology as any system of thought that is one-sided and privileges certain sectors of society over others. Since Marxism implicitly takes every single subjectivity into account, it should not in his view be considered a form of ideology (Horkheimer 2002: 188-243; Held 1980: 192-193). A similar asymmetrical view on ideology is proposed by Marcuse in his aforementioned essay *Repressive Tolerance*, where he argues that progress in society requires the suppression of those voices that serve to uphold oppressive structures. Marcuse's

position should not be read as a reiteration of Karl Popper's (1902-1994) position on tolerance in his famous work *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), but rather as a critique of the concept of liberal tolerance. Marcuse argues that if we allow for the kind of anti-progressive sentiment or *pure tolerance* that Popper is willing to accept in an open society, inequity will prevail. Instead, conservative politics should be suppressed whereas subversive and even illegal forms of progressive, direct political action should be allowed for. The practical implications of this circumstance for both free speech in academia and the liberality of our political and legal institutions are in my view worth pondering.

Despite these issues, critical theory is still metaphysically grounded in the same ontological language that much of Western philosophy operates with. The function of language and its relation to knowledge would be subjected to a more radical critique by the so-called post-structuralists of the 1960's and 1970's.

(iii) Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism

In similar fashion to the analytic tradition in Britain during the early 20th century, continental philosophy would also end up taking a keen interest in language and its relation to epistemology. However, whereas philosophers like Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein were primarily interested in formal logic and how the ordinary everyday language used by philosophers may serve to create false representation of reality, many continental philosophers would conceive of language as constituting yet another barrier inserting itself between the subject and the object (Nordin 1995: 557-563).

The same issues that had surrounded the supposed crisis of Marxism, which had prompted the critical theorists to reimagine Marxism in the early part of the 20th century, would also come to affect thinkers like Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) and French Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) (Sarup 1988: 5-7). Both these men were deeply impressed by both Alexandre Kojève's seminars on Hegel's views on subjectivity as well as the *structural linguistics* of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). de Saussure proposed that there is a deep underlying system or structure to all human language. This is essentially an a-historic conception of language, that implicitly posits the idea of there being a stable relationship between *the signifier* and *the signified*. de Saussure's ideas were to become hugely influential outside linguistics as well, paving the way for an intellectual movement

known to historians as *structuralism*. One of the most well-known intellectual products of this movement comes from the field of anthropology. In 1962 French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) would cause considerable stir in intellectual circles through the publication of his famous work *The Savage Mind* (1962). In accordance with structuralist thought in general, the three main take aways from this work are (a) that the rules of language also apply to any other area of human activity where representation comes into play, (b) that signs of any kind can only be understood in relation to other signs in a systemic whole and (c) that this underlying system or structure is universal and stable (Nordin 1995: 539-541).

What then are the most relevant philosophical takeaways, when it comes to our description of the structuralist movement? In some respects, it could be argued that structuralist thought seems to posit a stable one-to-one relationship between *word and object*. This in turn, suggests an inherent proclivity of language to be able to clearly identify objects. Thinkers, who have been referred to as *post-structuralist* tend to take umbrage with both these ideas. They tend to agree with the first two conclusions listed above, but reject the last one. This is made most evident in the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) critique of structuralism, which he expressed in two of his most famous books *Writing and Difference* (1967) and *Of Grammatology* (1967). Like structuralist, Derrida argues that language essentially permeates the entirety of our being. If reality is language mediated, then it stands to reason that our understanding of ourselves as subjects is likewise contingent on the primacy of language. Signs can, however, never truly capture the true being of the things they signify. The reason for this is that being does not conform to the logic of *binary opposition*, which characterizes language – the only way we can understand the meaning of a word is to contrast it against the backdrop of that which it is not. Since philosophical concepts are signifiers, they too operate through a logic of binary opposition, and unwittingly reduce ontology to a catalogue of “half-truths”, stripping being of those elements which, in Heideggerian terms, could be argued to be *always already there*. Language is therefore both exclusionary and reductive. It is also, according to Derrida, fully self-referential, meaning words derive their meaning only through their reference to other words or their usage in a chain of signifiers. This chain – at least in theory is never completed – and, therefore, the true meaning of our words always eludes us. This means that there is no stable connection between the signifier and the signified and, therefore, no prospect of certainty when it comes to meaning (Sarup 1988: 32-36).

Through this line of reasoning, Derrida manages to cut the philosophical subject off linguistically from the outside world and undermines most if not all philosophical achievements of Western philosophy from Plato onward. These achievements constitute nothing more than feeble attempts at pairing a transcendental signifier together with a transcendental signified (Sarup 1988: 37).

The philosophical idea Derrida is perhaps best known for, is his literary method *deconstruction*. This is the method by which he attempts to bring western *phonocentrism* (the privileging of speech over writing) and *logocentrism* (the centering of all knowledge around this privileged status of the spoken word) to its knees. The aim of deconstruction is to point to how totalizing philosophical systems, expressed in writing, can be taken apart at the seams by pointing to the inevitable inconsistencies that will start to emerge in regard to how concepts are being applied in a philosophical text. These inconsistencies will emerge due to the futility of trying to use binary concepts to describe being, which is not binary.

Through Derrida's philosophy we, therefore, potentially end up face to face with the same sort of absolute idealism and relativism that the critical theorists sought to avoid. Derrida's thought is the penultimate expression of the idea that *everything* can be interpreted, and that all that exists ontologically is an ongoing endless flow of signification. For me to even describe logocentrism as a vehicle for "half truths" is, therefore, in itself slightly misleading. The true goal of deconstruction is of course once again freedom – freedom from the restrictive grasp of old philosophy. Though deconstruction is methodologically designed to apply to the written word, the basic ideas of deconstruction can be – and have arguably been – deployed politically against all expressions of logocentrism in the world. During recent years, the concept of gender has been thoroughly deconstructed by factions on the political Left.

But the issue of language is by no means the only distinguishing feature when it comes to post-structuralist thought. Liberation also means recognition of marginalized subjects. As is the case with critical theory, Nietzsche's thinking has had significant bearing on several thinkers associated with the post-structuralist movement, most notably Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Foucault's ideas on genealogy as well as the relationship between power and knowledge are to a large extent inspired by Nietzsche's philosophy. The proper understanding of the word *genealogy* is to describe it as the rendering of a discontinuous, non-linear view of history. Like Nietzsche in his work *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887),

Foucault is studying history in order to delegitimize a present state of affairs (Nietzsche 1887: 21-40). In *Madness and Civilization* (1961) he draws attention to how the mad have been treated as legitimate subjectivities in previous societies, how madness became pathologized in the modern world and ponders the issue of what this says about the world we live in (Foucault 1961: 35-44; Sarup 1988: 60-64).

In his later works, the concept of power is intimately tied to the *production of knowledge*. Foucault views *disciplinary power* as a decentered, amorphous entity – power is not something that any one person possesses or controls. Power structures are created by us as a society, and they operate through each and every one of us. They can, however, play into the hands of particular groups in a society, hereby privileging them over others. In Foucault's mind power rests, in one way or another, in one's ability to legitimately define and therefore control subjectivity (Sarup 1988: 66-69). Foucault would also use elements of his genealogical device in his three volumed work *The History of Sexuality* (1976), where he argues for the ability of the subject to be able to transcend restrictive forms of prescribed gender by modifying one's physical body – a transgressive act that serves as a form of micropolitics and which undermines and undercuts dominant power structures (Best, Kellner 1991: 60-65). Although Foucault himself was hesitant to join in with progressive political movements, many of his ideas have formed the foundation of great many present day new social movements that focus on issues of gender and sexuality.

In post-structuralism and in the later postmodern thought of Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) and Jean-Francois Lyotard, we start seeing left wing political and epistemological thought take a swing towards an even more idealistic conception of reality than the one conceived of by the critical theorists. Our next task will be to go over some of the societal and political implications of new left politics which have arguably been influenced by both these traditions of Left-wing thought.

2.12 Societal and Political Implications of New Left Politics

One of many pet peeves of the average reader of philosophy, is the fact that debates on important topics in philosophy seldom appear settled – at least not to the same extent as debates can appear settled within the methodological boundaries of empirical science, where so-called *paradigm shifts* appear to have rendered some theoretical perspectives outdated

(Kuhn 1962: 96-113). One reason for this is that empirical science, above all naturalistic science, can be considered downstream from a particular type of epistemology. If we as researchers can agree on the fact that quantitative, scientific truths can be uncovered through means of experimental method for instance, then it's hard to see how a researcher worth his or her salt could go on postulating the hypothetical connection between two or more variables once said working hypothesis has time and again been thoroughly debunked (Kuhn 1962: 70-95). This does not mean however that metaphysicians are doomed to a perpetuity of endless contention that never leads anywhere. After all, experience informs philosophy just as philosophy can be said to inform experience. If quantitative science can be considered an extension of or an empirical appropriation of a type of metaphysic, then experience of the external world might be able to aid us in settling questions on the truth value of differing metaphysical outlooks on reality. Of course, this approach is limited to particular types of questions in philosophy. Within the field of *metaethics* this quantitative point of view would undoubtedly cut less ice when considering the validity of normative moral statements. We could for instance argue for the existence of facts about morality, but to what extent normative statements can be logically predicated on such facts is somewhat debatable.

On that note, one thing that could be argued to have become abundantly clear through this brief overview of the New Left's politics and metaphysics, is that our shared sociological and affective attachment to particular objects of truth, refuses to lose its connection to the past. Although the juxtaposition of collectivism versus individualism is often thrust to the forefront of debates centering around the points of contention between liberalism and different strands of Left-wing politics, this conception can be misleading. Certainly, it is the case that Left-wing politics concern themselves with an emancipatory project that seeks to free people from identity-based oppression, but it should be noted that this oppression can be argued to be based off socially constructed categories (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 92-104). From an ontological point of view, labels such as race, gender, and sexuality refer to conceptual and linguistic categories that have become instituted in the world through social practice, but according to the New Left they have no relation to any essential qualities in the objects they refer to. For this reason, identity politics is required according to the left to help highlight the factual structures of the phenomenal world, so that change can become a viable alternative in the political future. In the long run the types of movements we have described seek to free the objects from the restrictive grasp of bourgeoisie identity thinking (Held 1980: 231). In this

sense, Left-wing identity politics could be seen as serving as a means for a more radical form of freedom, one that contends with all the metaphysical misgivings of liberal thought.

There are a number of implications to the metaphysical developments that followed the religious wars and the enlightenment that require further consideration. These are to a large extent genealogical, political and metaethical considerations.

(i) Genealogical aspects of New Left Politics

The metaphysical developments within continental philosophy, which we have just gone over, are in a sense a metaphysical continuation of Europe's philosophical past. At the behest of German metaphysicians, during the 18th and 19th century, philosophy became rife with abstract systematic theorizing, owing a great deal to earlier developments in modern political philosophy and epistemology. Later philosophical adaptations of these metaphysical thinkers would become overtly political and were driven by the same maxims of freedom, liberty, and individualism that the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and political liberalism had helped set up. Therefore, the ghost of genealogy continues to haunt even those movements, which seek to dispense with tradition. Simultaneously the ever-present quest for liberation will, in its more radical manifestations, contradict any hitherto existing conception of society – with the exemption perhaps of tribal societies.

Let's delve further into this issue.

The same metaphysic that informed Hegel's thought would also in part go on to spawn a number of individualistically minded philosophies such as Friedrich Nietzsche's call for the *revaluation of all values*, as well as the existentialism of the early 20th century (Nordin 1995: 463-470, Bakewell 2016: 1-49). The blatant nonconformity of these thinkers, as well as the mainstreaming of their thoughts, served to some extent to further bolster the ever-growing atmosphere of individualism in the West. The American Beat generation of the 1950's, drew heavily on the bohemian outlook on life, readily displayed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. The Beat Generation in turn served as a progenitor of the 1960's love generation (Harding, Planhammar 2005: 24).

However, in many respects these thinkers and literary figures were only responding to what had already in some sense become a “spirit of the times”. Non-conformity and the rejection of one’s own tradition didn’t start with these historical figures – and it would not end with them. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1929-) talks about these social processes under the broader sociological rubric of *detraditionalization*. Habermas does not, however, view these processes as inherently problematic, but rather as a potential stepping stone for further diversification of both intellectual and social life. When people are no longer held captive by traditionalist society, they are free to choose what sort of tradition they want to belong to – or for that matter, if they want to belong to any tradition at all (Engdahl, Oskar, Larsson, Bengt 2006: 78-79).

The concept of freedom that has been advanced by individualistic thinkers is ostensibly criticized by the critical theorists for constituting an aprioristic false freedom, that fails to account for the restrictive nature of all identity thinking. But there are other criticisms we need to consider, ones that posit very different kinds of questions about morality, tradition, and society than the critical theorists. These are critiques stemming further back in time, to the very birth pangs of the early modern period itself. What is viewed as troubling by such detractors, is the fact that this implicitly moral paradigm of freedom and diversification never seems to require justification in society.

An early commentator on the social conditions surrounding the phenomenon of detraditionalization was the sociologist, Max Weber, who we have mentioned earlier in passing. His concept of *disenchantment* signifies what Weber regards as the consequences of a dying world of religious belief. In traditional society, this deeper religious meaning has been built into the world and has expressed itself by giving life to art, architecture as well as the daily lives of ordinary people. This religious life world has served to bind people and cultures together and on an emotional level it has made man feel a part of some larger destiny. The modern counterparts that step in to replace this old lifeworld, are structured by a technified and instrumental value hierarchy. Just like the highest values of the old world were symbolically expressed in the objects it produced, this new world expresses itself through objects that communicate economic and practical efficiency. This serves to alienate man from his cultural surroundings (Engdahl, Oskar, Larsson, Bengt 2006: 69-77).

These sorts of criticisms of modern society emphasize the idea that man is by nature a social creature and therefore a cultural being. Though Weberian by nature, these theories draw

attention to the utility of a Durkheimian view of society. Such descriptive views are however not only functionalist. They are at their very core *teleological*. They place the life of man in a larger, *goal-oriented* context, which serves to provide humanity with social cohesion, a sense of purpose and – dare one say it – sacral or transcendental destiny. This conclusion is important, as it might point us in the direction of what has gone missing and what we perhaps ought to try to recover from the past.

The crucial question here, is to what extent the picture of politics offered up by the New Left is amendable to an image of society, conceived as a functional whole – the *body politic* that we have described before? The answer to this question, at least according to conservatives and other factions of the political Right, appears to be that it is not conducive to such ideas (Macintyre 1981: 71). If the left is to remain true to its open-ended Hegelian dialectic, it cannot even start to conceive of a political end goal without it becoming hopelessly utopian and aprioristic by nature. It can be argued short term, however, that the political strategy of identity politics, whereby systemic concepts become negated, and objects transcend themselves, does serve as a momentary refuge for the atomized individuals of the modern world, looking for a tribe or identity. The collectivist aspects of identity politics therefore serve to salvage the culturally destitute individual from the alienation and rootlessness of bourgeois individualism. This is essentially the answer to the question why a return to liberalism as a cultural paradigm is self-defeating. Viewed in this light, political and cultural liberalism constitute the steppingstones of what would chronologically emerge later in the history of philosophy.

(ii) Institutional implications of New Left Politics

The second important question we need to consider is whether a liberal constitution and the democratic process can survive the hypothetical onslaught of identitarian movements, were they (the politicians) to accommodate Left-wing grievances? Given the disunity between some factions on the Left, this concern cannot be addressed in any straightforward manner. It has to be addressed separately for each claim of grievance according to its underlying internal logic. Since philosophy usually operates on a very high level of abstraction, it can also be hard to decipher what practical implications ought to be discerned from the conclusions

drawn by any one political theorist. Some authors, it seems, are purposefully vague as to allow for some level of institutional creativity.

Since identity politics as a political phenomenon is at its heart a representational and emancipatory project, its justice claims have a direct bearing on how our political institutions will function in the near future. Ideal forms, like those of equity and identity-based collective representation, that frequent feminist literature for instance, can strike democratic theorists as a foreboding political norm when considering the fact that modern-day political representation rests firmly on the idea that electoral outcomes – broadly speaking – are supposed to reflect the will of the electorate rather than technocratic or paternalistic forces within the political elite (Beckman 2009: 43-44; Brito Viera, Runciman 2008: 110-113). Of course, various democratic innovations such as different types of electoral systems make it so that the distribution of seats in parliament never truly reflects the actual distribution of popular votes within the electorate. Nevertheless, what some theorists in this camp may be suggesting, is something far more radical, something akin to Jean-Jaques Rousseau's seemingly anti-democratic proposition that it can be considered morally legitimate to force unfree people in society to become free.

On a general level, the goal of achieving collective and proportional representation in legislative assemblies – something that has on and off been referred to as one type of structural litmus test for the prevalence of progressive attitudes in society – must not be considered antithetical to either democracy or liberal constitutionalism as such. What does raise concerns, however, is the question of *how* this political end is to be achieved. The advocacy by women's groups to have a larger number of female MPs in the legislative assembly in order to protect women's collective interests, can for instance in some cases be read off as a perfectly benign and legitimate form of political advocacy, by which said groups are simply encouraging women to vote for other women. Similarly, we should not be dismissive of any one party's decision to only run candidates of a particular gender, race, or sexuality for instance (though we may otherwise be critical of such discussions). Any type of gender-based quota affecting the makeup of the legislative assembly, however, does by most estimates run contrary to the democratic principle that legislative assemblies should mirror the wants and needs of accumulated individual voices in society, not conform to a prearranged mold that seeks to redress asymmetrical power relations.

When it comes to certain multicultural theorists, the historic nature of the individualism inherent in Western constitutions, has drawn criticism from thinkers such as Will Kymlicka (1962-) author of *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (1995) and Bhikhu Parekh who wrote *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000) (1935-) (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 268-287). These theoretical works are to be read as critiques of John Rawls' (1921-2002) liberal solution to the sorts of culturally determined conflicts of interest that might emerge in pluralistic societies. In his famous work *Political liberalism* (1993), Rawls elaborates further on the concept of *the veil of ignorance*, which he had theorized previously in his now classic work *A Theory of Justice* (1971) (Rawls 1971: 143-164). According to Rawls, rational members of a society will inevitably agree on a similar course of moral action when rendered ignorant of their own position in a hypothetical future society – that is to say, they will concede to abolishing politically institutionalized cultural hegemony to such an extent, that any culture will be granted a legitimate right to self-determinacy within the same sovereign territory as long as it adheres to liberal principles (Rawls 1993: 22-28). This implies that all members of a society would in such a situation agree to treating one another as equals under the law according to the principal that one man's rights end where another man's rights begin. However, according to Parekh and Kymlicka, these types of individualistic conceptions of coexistence and tolerance do not take into account the fact that there are some cultural practices that are radically alien to Western culture, and that the outlet for such practices would be severely hindered under liberal law. In order to remedy this, yet another kind of *difference* should be accounted for by having *collective rights* enshrined in our Western constitutions. Theoretically, such *collective rights* can in some cases infringe on individual rights, sometimes in an oppressive manner, something which Kymlicka himself acknowledges (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 273). This type of multicultural ethic is underpinned by a particularist conception of society and an ethic that necessarily negates the continued existence of liberal jurisprudence.

But as we have noted prior, the affects of New Left politics are by no means exclusively bound up with parliamentary politics or voting. When discussing Derrida's philosophy in an earlier section, I mentioned how gender has become deconstructed in recent years. What do I mean by this?

The concept of transgenderism, which for the longest time was defined in naturalistic terms, and which in the modern historical context had its foundations in psychiatry and medicine,

has in recent years been reconstituted as a radical political category, the validity of which has incidentally become one of the most polarizing debate topics imaginable, both between conservatives and left-wing identitarians, as well as within the feminist camp itself. *Trans-medicalism* is by and large considered anathema in some progressive circles. This is a realist hypothesis that proposes a knowable, essentialist connection between mind and being. As much as the issue of so-called *non-binary gender identity* has become the epicenter of heated political quarrels, it has understandably also generated scientific controversy surrounding the epistemological issue of what is truly knowable about human nature and specifically the relation between sex and gender. Philosophically this conceptual shift has its foundations in not only Derrida, but more formally in queer theory and philosophers such as Judith Butler (1956-), who could be viewed as perhaps the closest thing to a living descendent of the old postmodernist and poststructuralist guard of the 1970's and 1980's. Her view of gender as a *performative act*, that is ultimately the cultural manifestation of discourse and of how language operates, can in a certain sense be considered a radical form of idealist thought. All the epistemological issues we have talked about before, concerning the impossibility of attaining a-priori knowledge of man's social being, are made manifest in Butler's philosophy. Though the existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) had contemplated similar notions in her famous work *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir's ideas about gender are thoroughly informed by the existentialist notion of free will or how man's *existence* is primary to his *essence*, something post-structuralism ostensibly sought to refute (Gemzöe 2015: 140-146). On Butler's account subjectivity is constructed by social discourse – how we practice gender is not something we are free to put together as we see fit. The social context plays an overwhelming role in supplying the tools through which we perceive ourselves as belonging to a binary. The concept of gender, by Butler's estimate, encompasses more than what is sometimes referred to as *gender roles*, that is to say culturally mediated roles which, are differently determined for men and women. In queer theory the very concept of men and women are reduced to mere performative acts, an expression of the fact that our language operates through binary opposition. Though biological bodies may differ, there is – according to idealist thought – no way of determining that some types of social conventions may be determined by biological differences. From an idealist point of view, this would entail stepping outside of history and language. In order to be understood correctly, questions such as “what is a man?” and “what is a woman?” need to be examined in a particular social context. These words by themselves refer to nothing stable outside of language and culture itself. Butler seems to have revised her position somewhat since the 1990's, on account of

this poststructuralist view having come to be viewed as all too restrictive for the perusal of *self-identification* (Internet 4).

When it comes to the broader discussion of impediments to the democratic process, this last point is important. It is this greater emphasis being placed on the issue of the self-constituting subject, and the endless possibilities of being, that an unrestrained metaphysical idealism creates, which could potentially result in, what I consider a political breeding ground for an endless litany of different types of subjectivities – a veritable nightmare for democratic representation, whereby a finalized mapping out of legal subjects perpetually eludes representative institutions. Above and beyond that, the perpetual deconstruction of existing categories, such as binary gender in legal language, has every potential of sending a coherent logic of representation into a state of conceptual free fall. This is a reasonable conclusion, given the fact that the proposition put forth by queer theoreticians is that our conceptual repertoire is not only in a state of flux, but ever expanding.

This element of self-identification can in some ways be construed as a misreading of Butler's original poststructuralist position. We must not forget, however, that ideologies and other systems of thought can in some respects be likened to living things, in the sense that they are in a perpetual state of change, constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted. This should be quite evident when examining the changing nature of Marxist thought alone during the 20th century. This is the case, not only academically, but it is also true for ideologies and how they exist outside the world of academia. In the form of new social movements, ideologies seem to almost take on a life of their own. This could be due to some laymen involved in said movements not having a proper understanding of particular systems of thought, but it may also be attributed to a genuine will on the part social agents to want to reconstitute an ideology and how it operates.

(iii) New Left Politics and Metaphysical Realism

The issues I have covered so far in this section of my thesis are mainly of practical concern. They constitute the basic outlines of what might be at stake politically as well as socially, from the point of view of anybody who does not normatively agree with some of the tenants of the New Left. However, it may once again be worth considering the contents of the opening lines to this thesis – questions concerning normative ethics are never fully cut off

from the metaphysical and ontological literature in philosophy. This should by now have become abundantly clear, when considering how many normative issues have been dealt with in the previous section alone. The issue of what constitutes a *meaningful* moral quandary ontologically is never far from one's mind.

From a communitarian point of view, it can be argued that some aspects of the contentious political landscape that we have seen emerge since the mid 2010's, is in part a consequence of the incommensurability between warring world views. This is the point put forth by Mitchell in the opening chapter of his book *Limits of Liberalism* (2019). The battle lines in this war have been drawn along several fronts – between globalism and nationalism; between proponents of deeper European integration and national sovereignty. A third battle is more explicitly being fought out between the proponents of older moral and epistemological views. According to Mitchell, these aforementioned issues are interrelated, although in the latter case the deeper, underlying philosophical contentions that unite all of these disputes, are dragged out into the open in a much more obvious manner (Mitchell 2019: 1-24).

If New Left politics can be broadly defined as the perpetual chipping away at the conceptual and moral structures of a traditionalist life world, then the critique of Left-wing identitarian movements always appears to boil down to disagreements over what constitutes our conceptual reality and our moral reality. These critiques are at their core conservative in the sense that they seek to reclaim or preserve older concepts. They do this for the purposes of maintaining the presumed functional utility of continuity and or with reference to the inherent truth value of these older concepts. This is true for both explicitly conservative detractors as well as some defectors within the Left-wing camp.

My opposition to the tenants put forth by the New Left is going to be conservative in more than one sense. What this critique in essence boils down to, is the preservation or the conservation of a conceptual world that contains within itself more than just normative axioms, which are contingent on history and the interplay between different types of material and ideological power holders. This conservation can therefore be considered both metaethical and ontological in character. When it comes to normative aspects of morality, I am willing to concede to a certain degree, that ethics are in part axiomatic systems and therefore in part constructed and historical. This is particularly true for the *ought* aspects of said systems. However, normative ethics still contend in different ways with an underlying reality of the world we inhabit. As we shall see, this is most certainly the case when it comes

to one of the central issues under debate, namely the conception of the subject. The reason for why this is the case in my view, has to do with the fact that the traditional conceptual world, can in regard to many of its central categories, be shown to reflect *an underlying, knowable, ontological reality*. If normative ethics concerns itself with the wants and needs of the subject, it will at some point have to address questions concerning the nature of reality and what is contained therein. The completion of this task, as we have seen, has been attempted through the metaphysical, ontological and metaethical output of the New Left.

One problem concerning both axiomatic systems, such as the ones theorized by Immanuel Kant, as well as historical accounts of knowledge accusation, such as the ones put forth by critical theorists and post-structuralists, is that they appear to varying degrees to have contributed to a skeptical view of philosophical systems, hereby cultivating a plausibility structure of a relativist view of philosophy. But is this a coherent way of looking at either metaethics or ontology?

2.13 A Changing of the Guards? Towards a Return of an old Ontology

As Mitchell argues in his book, the philosophical break that modern epistemology makes with the so-called old world, is in large parts a break with Christian scholasticism and its Aristotelian components. As we have argued before, this break has severe implications for formal logic, which would gradually start distancing itself from Aristotle's syllogisms and inch closer to the foundationist framework – a true hallmark of modernist thought – that became adopted by both Descartes and Hobbes. This will also come to affect moral philosophy and how modernist thought has come to view the discovery of moral truth as something akin to the scientific inquiry into the nature of things. This was supposed to take place through the universal application of the correct *method*, that is to say, through the construction of axiomatic frameworks, thought experiments and formulas, through which man would supposedly come to grips with the objective truths about morality. Many thinkers critical of the enlightenment project have argued that this later component of modernist philosophy constitutes an abject failure. The merits of this claim can certainly be argued back and forth. The fact that liberal democracies and the modern nation state have preserved peace and prosperity to a degree that seems unprecedented in comparison with the atrocities that have taken place under traditionalist rule in pre-modern society is hardly in dispute. This

issue has not gone unnoticed by academic and public intellectuals like Steven Pinker, who wrote about the decline of violence in his famous work *The Better Angels of our Nature* (2011). Mary Kaldor's (1946-) empirical work in the book *New and Old Wars* (1999), also deserves an honorary mention. In this work Kaldor argues that the process of democratization has led to a decrease in interstate armed conflicts between democratic nation states (Pinker 2011: 59-128).

Despite these reservations, we should avoid engaging in a wholesale devaluation of the communitarian critique. I would argue – as would Mitchell and Deneen – that the communitarian critique of liberal philosophy, still holds true and is of considerable value when trying to escape the metaethical cul-de-sac created by universalist thought – a dilemma, which has arguably been compounded by the ideological feedback loop of left-wing critiques.

We will return to these very important metaethical issues momentarily. First, we shall explore the issue of whether or not some aspects of modern metaphysics and ontology, in particular the ones provided to us by critical theorists and post-structuralists, can be critiqued from a conservative and communitarian perspective. Given the fact that we have started off this chapter by mentioning Aristotle and how his philosophy appears to conflict with modern Left-wing epistemology and politics, it only seems appropriate that we would start off this analyses by mulling over the basics of Aristotle's philosophy.

(i) Aristotle and Ontology

From a historical perspective it comes across as somewhat of a misnomer to label Aristotle's thought conservative. Political conservatism should appropriately be viewed as a product of the emergence of modern-day mass parties. The modern world is historically something very far removed from ancient Greek culture. Still, from a conceptual point of view, it makes somewhat more sense that Aristotle's philosophy should be covered under this rubric. The reason for this connection is in my view predicated on the fact that modern critiques of both traditional morality and ontology exist in opposition to the concepts proposed by the old world. Any defense of Aristotelian philosophy will almost by definition be construed as an expression of conservatism, given the modern rules of the game – especially given the fact that topics such as ontology, which up until very recently in history have not been considered a part of politics, have now become thoroughly politicized by the New Left.

As we have alluded to before, one way of conceptualizing both the modern and postmodern political Left is to conceive of this movement as a delegitimizing force mounted against the conceptual world of traditional society. We have gone over the modern rationalist roots to this philosophy in the previous chapters. What might come across as less clear is how exactly Left-wing political thought, rooted in German idealism might conflict with Aristotelian thought.

If Hegelian thought has come to characterize our knowledge of being as *a process of becoming*, Aristotle posits a somewhat cruder correspondence theory of knowledge, whereby philosophical concepts, which are frozen in time, are knowable simply through the human capacity for reason (Nordin 1995: 121-122).

Unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle did not believe that general philosophical concepts, which have become known as *universals*, exist in a transcendental world beyond our own, but they reside inside the *individual* things themselves, as a life-giving principle or force – much like a soul or essence (Nordin 1995: 105). The universal does not appear to us as such, in pure form the way Plato envisioned, but rather what truly exists is the individual, which manifests aspects of the universal in both *form* and *matter* (Nordin 1995: 104-109; Juti 2019: 31-69). What is implied through this reasoning, is the fact that there is a stable point of reference between a word or concept and the things they refer to. This is an idea that thoroughly flies in the face of both critical thinking and post-structuralist theory – as the latter would have it, there are no given or stable connections between the sign and the signified. This was essentially the post-structuralist (or to put a finer note on it, *deconstructionist*) critique of structuralism, put forth by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in his famous work *Writing and Difference* (1967). Philosophical disagreements over the relationship between concepts and objects go way further back in time and in some sense, they do not constitute a novel element in philosophy. What appears new to the debate are some of the questions touched upon. Whereas Plato's philosophy lent itself easily to cooption by Christian theology, Aristotle's writings were for a long time deemed controversial by the Catholic Church in Europe. During medieval times the realist reading of Aristotle's philosophy was challenged through the emergence of *nominalist* thought – spearheaded by William of Ockham (1285-1349), which maintained in a somewhat similar fashion to the post-structuralist thought, that concepts constitute nothing more than names, which we use to label and categorize things in the world (Tergel 1973: 239).

The word *essentialist* is sometimes used – often as a pejorative – by dialectically minded theorists to denote and characterize any type of thinker or scientist who argues for the existence of this sort of stable connection between concepts and objects. What is of course implied by Aristotle, is that words denote some form of immutable inner nature within individual things, as it is through this nature that words and labels become *meaningful*. Thinkers who argue from the kinds of idealist perspectives we have gone over earlier, would of course posit a contradictory theory according to which things have the ability *transcend themselves*. Left-wing philosophy can therefore be argued to constitute a type of ongoing inventive enterprise, involved in the remaking of the world, whereas conservatism takes in the world as it is.

Although both German idealism and Aristotelian philosophy can in a broad sense be viewed as different offshoots of rationalism, idealism none the less builds off the cognitive model set up by Descartes, which actualizes the ever-present threat of an epistemological chasm between the subject and the object. The skeptical outcome outlined above is but one consequence of Descartes' dualism.

However, all concerns about potential tensions between the subject and the object may perhaps in some ways not be entirely unwarranted when it comes to Aristotle. Valid reasons exist for modern theorists to want to take up philosophical arms against the supposed “given” world posited by Aristotelian thought. This is perhaps most famously true for feminist critiques of Aristotle's views on the subordinate role of women, which he, according to his teleological view, sees as natural. These views are expressed by Aristotle in his works *Politics* (1254b) as well as *Nicomachean Ethics* (8.10.1160b23-1161a4). The same type of equality-based objection can be levied against his view of slavery (Nordin 1995: 119). Therefore, any political theory wishing to adapt aspects of Aristotelian ontology, while simultaneously wanting to retain the institutional structure of political liberalism, would inevitably have to repudiate these kinds of exclusionary elements in Aristotle's thinking. This is essentially a critique of what ought to be, what is changeable morally and can in my view be formulated on moral grounds.

However, the insistence that we have to view Aristotle as in some ways constituting a product of his own time, is not tantamount to saying that all concepts are potentially historical in nature. With reference to our previous discussions on the controversies surrounding the socially constructed character of gender for instance, we ought to ask ourselves whether or

not the binary categories of sex and gender are truly the products of language and social relations, or whether they reflect some underlying reality in the nature of being.

These are the battlelines which emerge in identitarian debates over ontology and metaphysics. They are in most cases debates concerning the moral recognition of new forms of subjectivity. At the surface this seems an honorable endeavor on the part of social activists, but there are legitimate ethical and epistemological concerns that have been raised in recent years by the scientific community which have to do with the wellbeing of medical patients – especially young children claiming to be trans – as well as the reliability of self-diagnosis. The opposition mounted against radical idealist politics need not in every single instance be motivated by a hatred of *the other*, but can just as easily be grounded in genuine concern for both one's fellow human beings, as well as scientific truth (Internet 5; Internet 6).

As I have stated prior, I will not be delving deeper into the finer details surrounding any given Left-wing political topic de jour, as most of these issues are intricate enough philosophically to warrant a whole separate thesis devoted solely to each and every one of them. Sufficed to say that if something in being is subject to change, then philosophy and science need to figure out some reasonable standard for determining which branch of metaphysic holds true under any given political debate. This might seem like asking an awful lot, but what needs to be stated clearly, is the fact that what Left-wing critiques of liberal and traditional ontology entail, is a radical challenge to the kinds of subjectivities that our moral and constitutional language take for granted. A world where moral subjects are entitled to choose a reality of their own liking and where institutions are legally required to adhere to the validity of said reality, poses a potential threat for not only the wellbeing of moral subjects and the preservation of realism in natural science, but also to a coherent logic in political representation (Arpi, Wyndhamn 2020: 38-40).

From a conservative perspective this comes down to preserving a shared ontological world view, which our social morality and constitution can continue to contend with. What this means, in turn, is that utterances such as “truth” or “reality” cannot, if we are to remain true to the claim that there are aspects of reality that exist independent of interpretation, be formed along moral lines. This means that truth cannot be construed in its entirety along relativistic, subjectivist or constructivist lines or reasoning. The conservative opposition to a radical idealist dialectic needs to be metaphysical in character. It is therefore incumbent upon me, the

writer of this thesis, to assist my reader in figuring out where the basis for such an endeavor could be found philosophically.

(ii) George Edward Moore and Science as the Long Arm of Philosophy

Whether or not critical theory lives up to its own claim to fame by contributing to a type of negative truth, one that avoids the relativistic pitfalls of history, is in my view debatable. The presumption that negation will contribute to truth is in my view no more certain than the idea that this exact same goal can be achieved through the process of synthesis. Then again, I am not building a case for idealism.

The broader point I want to make, is that the “out with the old, in with the new” attitude towards philosophical concepts, does not do much in the way of discrediting the truth value of older philosophies. Nor do claims of *self-transcendence* on the part of the subject necessarily make such claims valid in an ahistorical sense. Therefore, in the case of critical theory, concepts such as “truth” and “reality” will always remain just as suspended as they do in the case of the relativistic scenarios said theorists are looking to avoid through a negative dialectic. If we are to get to the bottom of the truth, we must consider reevaluating the idealist claim that man cannot be studied outside his social and historical setting since he is always, from the moment of birth, part and parcel of such a social context (Held 1980: 203-204). This means resurrecting the kind of “identity thinking” a la Aristotle, a la Locke, a la Hume that the critical theorists sought to dispense with.

Although from the viewpoint of a few academic disciplines, notably within the humanities departments, where critical perspectives have become influential, it may appear that so-called identity thinking or naïve realism constitutes a metaphysical dead end, the correspondence theory of knowledge, as it is formally known, has never of course been truly dead and buried. This is after all the dominant epistemological paradigm by which much of natural science operates (Johansson, Ekenberg, Masterton, Remes 2014: 56). The logic behind quantitative hypothesis testing for instance, implies that the relation between theory and being ought to be construed crudely as a responsive, one-way relationship between the researcher and the object. This is an empiricist idea, one that goes all the way back to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who allegorically talked about strapping down nature and forcing her to answer questions (Nordin 1995: 273-280). Such analogies have of course not gone unchecked by

critiques who argue that this is fundamentally a masculine approach to doing scientific research – one built on dominance and control – and asserting that researchers should be more mindful of how they come to affect the objects under study.

Although there is certainly something to be said for this type of critique, especially when it comes to doing research in the social sciences, one nevertheless needs to be mindful of not dismissing the fundamental point being put forth by Bacon in this instance. In the view of the empiricist tradition, truth and reality have a corrective function in so far as they systematically affirm or disqualify a proposed hypothesis. In the case of idealism, words and concepts can have an uncanny ability to muddle reality. This is one of the fundamental claims of *analytic philosophy* – a philosophical tradition founded on empiricism and whose forebearers have been quite adamant about contrasting their own philosophical endeavors against the backdrop of the perceived sophism, perpetrated by proponents of what they dismissively labeled “continental philosophy”. In fact, the term is often used with this underlying dismissive connotation (Glendinning 2006: 3). Commonly associated with seminal philosophical figures such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) analytic philosophy examines, among other things, the foundations of formal logic as well as the meaningful use of language and its association to philosophical problems. In his renowned work *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921), Wittgenstein lays out his view of how philosophers are to properly conceive of the work they do. According to Wittgenstein’s early philosophy, which constitutes just the sort of correspondence theory we have been discussing, philosophical problems do not exist. The only reason they appear to come about is because we insist on using language incorrectly, in a non-meaningful way. Much of philosophy would therefore in Wittgenstein’s view be guilty of just this sort of misuse of language. The proper goal of philosophy is to map out the accurate relations between concepts and facts. Propositions which violate this type of logic are in Wittgenstein’s view meaningless. This implies that philosophy leaves the world the same way it finds it. Intact (von Wright 1957: 128-143; Nordin 1995: 568-571).

This view of language and being is directly relatable to the issues of idealism and the sorts of problems that might come about by imagining the world *as it might be*. One might therefore ask oneself accordingly, *does an observable phenomenon itself go away just because the logical description of a phenomenon is altered or negated?*

Providing the kind of answer to this question that goes beyond mere axiomatic stances in metaphysics implies – as far as I can determine – that philosophy is forced to reach outside the confines of its own area of study. This means using empirical data and scientific theory to mediate between different epistemologies and metaphysics. This need not be seen as a capitulation or ineptness on the part of philosophy, in my view. After all, just as the sciences are downstream from different epistemologies and metaphysics, these same epistemologies and metaphysics can be bolstered by empirical findings and methods. Science and philosophy are in this sense not wholly separate enterprises, just as experience and theory are not entirely separate. If theory is indeed meant to model reality, then there is reason to believe that theoretical models and reality can align with one another to such an extent that one theory has more explanatory value than another. This form of reasoning requires that we view science and method as the practical applications of epistemologies and metaphysical stances. Science should therefore not be viewed as an enterprise that is somehow cut off from philosophical investigation, but should perhaps more appropriately be viewed as *the long arm of philosophy* – an extended aspect of a “love of knowledge”.

When we are talking about the reality of phenomena in this instance, we are in a crucial sense talking about the statistical reality of the phenomena, the interrelation between two variables. This means essentially to evoke the validity of causal relationships and overcoming David Hume’s age-old skepticism regarding this concept (Kenny 1998: 391-401). Affirming the validity of statistical relationships between two variables as a concept, opens for a meaningful discourse – in the analytic sense – on the correlation between two or more statistical relationships, thereby paving the way for the validity of *quantitative models* and *theories*.

If we are to escape the trappings of idealism in discussions surrounding the topic of human nature – or nature altogether – we need to establish that (a) causal relationships are knowable through mathematics and experience and that (b) man’s nature can be studied in isolation from history. Theories and models hereby become something other than merely interpretive frameworks.

The source material for such a critique can be found in the writings of yet another analytic philosopher, George Edward Moore (1873-1958). Moore’s name has in some sense become synonymous with a type of commonsense approach to the problems posed by idealism and skepticism – the quintessential proponent for “naïve realism”, a title one can choose to view as either a badge of honor, won in a battle for a commonsense view of the world, or it can be

viewed plainly as a pejorative. Moore's critique is not original as it touches upon a similar form of reasoning that Hume himself was forced to adopt when debating his stance on skepticism. Hume concluded that although philosophers may take on skeptical attitudes towards phenomena like causality, they seldom practice this way of thinking in their day-to-day life. The fact that we can perceive things repeatedly dropping to the ground when we pick them up and let go of them mid-air, will likely make it so that we do not attempt walking over a cliff's edge thinking that there is a realistic chance we might be able to walk on air. The presumption that the world is ordered in a particular fashion, and that y follows x, sometimes demonstrably as a causal connection, will in practice always take precedence before theoretical skepticism when it comes to the issue of how real humans live their lives. This sort of critique of idealism by Moore is made present in his famous essays *A Defense of Common Sense* (1925) and *The Proof of an External World* (1939) (Nordin 1995: 564).

When it comes to the issue of naturalistic science being able to lend philosophy a helping hand in mediating between conflicting metaphysics, I would refer my reader to immerse themselves in studies conducted in developmental psychology in order to develop a fuller understanding of how the historicity of man's nature might be overcome. For such purposes twin studies and studies conducted on newborns are of special interest (Leman, Bremner, Parke, Gauvain 2019: 360-390). If we are to conceive of man as a product of his environment, then it follows logically that those phenomena, which are theoretically attributable to socialization processes, should not be observable in children pre-socialization. This is a point that can be argued for most any concern relating to metaphysical disputes over man's nature, but in this particular instance, empirical science might assist us in viewing for instance the theoretical connections between sex, divergent personality traits and gender in a different light.

(iii) On Conserving Several kinds of Concepts

When it comes to the metaethical opposition to deontological ethics, I will be grounding this critique in Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of abstract ethical thought, as it has been outlined in his famous work *After Virtue* (1981). Ironically MacIntyre's reasoning lands us in what can rightly be called a particularist view of ethics, a metaethical view which posits that moral reasoning is always contextually grounded – a typical communitarian critique of

universalism, one according to which abstract moral thought is a self-deluding enterprise, an ethic which is not self-aware regarding the true origins of its legitimacy. Although I somewhat disagree with Macintyre's ultimate conclusions, where he ends up rejecting any and all prospects of bridgebuilding between ethical systems – something that he ultimately walks back in his later work *Who's Justice? Who's rationality* (1988) – his particularist views might actually be able to aid us in realizing the self-defeating nature of liberal ethics (Mitchell 2019: 116). That being said, I do not agree that this necessarily pertains to the viability and longevity of political liberalism.

Macintyre's philosophy speaks to the unifying nature of ethics, as well as the indivisibility of religiosity, ethics, and politics. Whereas particularist ethics have received an undue amount of negative attention in philosophy, the coercive and divisive consequences of universalism, has largely gone under the radar. Macintyre emphasizes the point that moral truths should not be likened to scientific truths, that their inherent truth value ultimately rests on us believing in them (Mitchell 2019: 123-125). This is a point that cannot be stressed enough when it comes to our timely debates about social cohesion and unity.

2.14 The Pitfalls of Individualism and a Communitarian Alternative

Provided we can reach an agreement on what the world is made up of ontologically, we will find it easier to move on to discussions about the metaethical underpinnings of a thriving culture.

We started out this thesis by mapping out the genealogical origins of individualism or social liberalism. We demonstrated how the idea of the autonomous individual, possessing an autonomous mind came to be viewed by philosophers as the starting point for both political and metaphysical inquiries. We have also demonstrated how the protestant concept of the individual has in some ways turned the renaissance idea of the dignity of the individual into something sacrosanct, something that cannot be called into question without fundamentally violating liberal principles. This is in my view a misconception of liberalism, the function of which was to create a universally agreed upon political framework for mediating between different traditions. The purpose of liberalism was never to turn individualism into a cultural way of life. In some ways it may be a misconception on my part to characterize, social liberalism as misinterpreting the contents of the political liberalism, since the social and

philosophical attitude of individualism chronologically precedes the coming into being of our legal and political institutions. In other instances, it may come across as less of a misconception, since individualists and social liberals do often enough adopt the language of the social contract when taking part in discussions concerning moral issues which fall outside the realm of legal disputes, concerning actual rights and political freedoms.

We have also seen how some of the countercultural movements, even collectivist ones can be partially viewed as the philosophical offsprings of modernisms quest for freedom. Although identitarian grievances are mobilized along the lines of shared group interests, we must not forget that these shared interests only come about as a result of claims of identity-based oppression. *Philosophies of difference* tend primarily to take umbrage with issues of *social labeling* and the cultural practices that go along with them. Therefore, the aims of such movements are usually to free individuals from collective social labels and the restrictions they set on individual freedom. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule and collectivist aspirations to preserve group identity and cultural tradition certainly do exist, for instance in the form of multicultural theory.

What seems less clear, however, is the answer to the question why some people tend to join the ranks of collectivist movements, having been brought up in highly individualistic cultural milieus, such as Western societies? Thus far, we have shown that philosophical ideas do not come about in a vacuum but build off older concepts and traditions. But if this is the case, should we not be seeing more fragmentation taking place in society instead of polarization? As I have explained above, the want to free individuals from established categories can most definitely be construed as a continuation of Renaissance individualism, but there is also a slightly schizophrenic aspect to identity politics, which seems to undermine the expressed purpose of such movements.

Setting aside Ronald Inglehart's materialist explanation of the rise of post-materialist values, a potential answer to this question can be found with conservative and communitarian critiques of modern views of morality. I will also briefly be returning to the issue of sociological views on religion and its function in society. The reason for this being that the functionalist view of religion posited by Émile Durkheim shares some interesting commonalities with the conservative one.

(i) Atomized Individuals and the Want for Telos

The cultural image of the heroic individual has led a prosperous life in both art and philosophy and continues to assert its hegemonic status in the modern West. In the history of philosophy, this was a life that existed side by side with the metaphysical developments we discussed earlier, and it would subsequently submerge with various other strands of philosophical thought, most notably German idealism in 1800's and phenomenology in the early 20th century (Nordin 1995: 521-531).

Friedrich Nietzsche proclaiming the death of God in *The Gay Science* (1882) certainly served to make waves both culturally and philosophically. Whether Nietzsche was merely diagnostically tapping the vein of prior philosophical sentiments espoused by anti-religious thinkers of the enlightenment, such as David Hume or the Marquis de Sade, or actively hoping for the demise of Christian cosmology and morality is difficult to determine (Porter 2001: 29; Nordin 1995: 450-458). A bit of both seems to be involved. This is made abundantly clear in his later work *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), where he traces the origins of Christian values to early days of semitic religions and argues that Christian virtues are at their heart cynical powerplay perpetrated by the weak, who want to usurp societal control from the strong (Nietzsche 1887: 31-33). The genealogical element in Nietzsche's work, serves the purpose of discrediting the value and credibility of Christian morality. If morality is to be understood as nothing more than an expression of a "will to power" there remain no valid justifications for why the strong should not be encouraged to reclaim their strength instead of being beholden to a *slave morality* which only serves the wants and needs of the weak, namely the clerics. Nietzsche, therefore, called for a *reevaluation of all values* and the creation of a highly individualistic new morality (Nordin 1995: 467). Nietzsche would soon, however, realize the full implications of the burdensome task he'd chosen to undertake. He realized that morality cannot and will not function without a center, something akin to a religious authority. His aspirations of wanting to become something of a new messiah for this post-Christian morality was something that, according to some biographers, may ultimately – in combination with the onset of syphilis – have contributed to his deteriorating mental state (Bakewell 2016: 20).

The declining role of monotheistic Christian religiosity that Nietzsche predicts in the West, does not, however, imply that he saw religiosity disappearing as such. On the contrary, Nietzsche feared that other forces would eventually come to fill the vacuum created by

Christendom's decline. Primary among them, political ideologies such as fascism and communism, which were both on the rise in Europe during the late 19th century.

Overall Nietzsche's sentiments on the topic of religious decline are not straightforwardly gleeful. Part of what made this cultural event so mentally taxing for Nietzsche was the fact that he was well aware of the looming dangers that lay behind the corner in history. This is made evident, not least by such renowned and melancholy quotes from Nietzsche as the following lines from *The Gay Science* (1882), translated by Walter Kaufmann (Nietzsche 1882: 134-135):

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?”

The words in Nietzsche's work are uttered by a mad man who goes through a crowded market square, armed with a lantern, asking people he encounters whether they've seen God. The crowd, consisting mostly of secular 19th century people, are bemused by the man's antics. Finally, the mad man throws his lantern to the ground, and it shatters. The segment concludes with the man stating that he's arrived too early – the people do not yet grasp the significance of what has come to pass.

Nietzsche's view of religion shows a degree of overlap with the so-called functionalist view of religion, famously theorized by the sociologist Émile Durkheim, the father of *functionalism*, whose viewpoints on sociology we've already to an extent familiarized ourselves with. According to Durkheim religion and religiosity are not social phenomena that can be defined solely in relation to something transcendental, as a belief in a non-material divine being or force. On the contrary, religion concerns itself in the abstract with the highest values in society, that which is holy, which means that other social phenomena that one would not conventionally conceive of as religious phenomena can take on a religious function in society, especially once the plausibility structure of traditional religion has died off. The function of religion is to bind society together around a common center. This is the

function that religion serves in a functional whole. Durkheim espouses these views in his famous work *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) (Strenski 2006: 294-297).

To some extent, it's worth considering, whether not Durkheim's analysis is contemplating a world which is already exhibiting tendencies towards religious decline, rather than describing universal tendencies, common to both modern secular societies and traditional ones. From a purely Nietzschean point of view, the supposedly abstract values exhibited in our social structures and institutions are downstream from these highest values, which in the traditional context derived their legitimacy from a divine being. The most overt institutional expression of this derivative nature of Western value structures in the pre-modern world was, undoubtedly, the institution of absolute monarchy. In some sense therefore, the abolition of this institution was but one step in a slow but gradual process of picking apart the conceptual architecture of the pre-modern world. The metaphysical and metaethical fragmentation that characterizes modern society can be seen as a final step in this process of fragmentation – it is one aspect of a type of civilizational end terminal and a direct consequence of God's death, something Nietzsche argued people of his own time had failed to realize.

What we are therefore seeing in modern ideologies are logical constructs and values which implicitly and ultimately derive their legitimacy from their derivation from a Christian cosmology. Whether or not we as individuals believe in the ontological existence of a Christian deity becomes irrelevant in this context. What is relevant is the fact that we believe and act out the laws that have been passed down from such a doctrine; it has become impregnated on the social norms that govern us sociologically and we do not escape them easily. This is in essence what Nietzsche refers to when he asks us “What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?”.

Other philosophers and scientists have made remarks around similar lines. The post-modern sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) argues in his famous work *Fatal Strategies* (1983) that we as a post-modern society are but toying around with the pieces of a broken world. More importantly, this is the exact point made by the communitarian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose philosophy in the work *After Virtue* (1981) we shall be discussing in a moment. Before moving on, though, we need to address the question we asked ourselves at the beginning of this chapter, namely what is it that makes people join political ideologies with the same fervor as they would a religious movement?

A philosophical tradition that owes a great deal not only to phenomenology but to Nietzschean philosophy is undoubtedly the existentialist movement of the early 20th century. Unlike Nietzsche, however, they combined the notion of radical freedom that they'd inherited from liberal thinkers with a greater sense of optimism. Instead of focusing in on the problems of nihilism and political extremism, they chose to embrace the possibilities offered by the crumbling of traditional society. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in particular honed in on the idea that man is the only being in nature for whom *existence* precedes *being* (Nordin 1995: 523). This position constitutes one of the most radical conceptions of human freedom ever to spring from the imagination of a philosopher. It stands in stark contrast to the ontological stance espoused by Aristotle and is in some sense only matched historically by the Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his thought in *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486).

One of the most crucial questions addressed by existentialist philosophy is the question of how man is to handle the radical freedom he's being offered in the post-Nietzschean world, a world where he is essentially responsible for his own being and is forced to invent his own meaning in a social setting where meaning is no longer built into the structure of the universe. For some people this load is too much to bear. Thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir have argued that when faced with this prospect of radical freedom some people will be overcome with a dizzying sense of vertigo. Such people will opt for surrendering their freedom in exchange for protection from authoritarian leaders (de Beauvoir 1947: 85-86). This same argument is echoed in the works of Theodor Adorno and the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980).

This critique can be examined from several different viewpoints. Although concerns over the spread of authoritarianism in the modern world were and are certainly warranted – as they certainly were for Nietzsche – there's nevertheless something to be said here for the genealogical origins of the existentialist ethic, the function of tradition in a society as well as the proper understanding of the word society. The same brush that is used to paint the authoritarian subject in dark hues can and is used by the existentialists to highlight the individualist shortcomings of the traditionalist subject. We must keep in mind that as far as the existentialists philosophers are concerned, the self-actualization of the subject and freedom take precedence over all other philosophical goals at every turn. Society as a

functional unit is of very little concern for the existentialists. Tradition and culture are conceived of here as something that appears to hinder personal freedom and growth.

The want for cultural purpose and the need for a *shared existential* destiny are concerns which either appear to go under the radar for thinkers like Sartre and de Beauvoir or these issues are simply lacking in importance. As is the case with most other individualist philosophers, the existentialists also share the same lack of philosophical self-awareness when it comes to acknowledging the historical processes that produced their own thinking – existentialism, viewed in this light, is the end product of a functional society with a tradition.

Where Friedrich Nietzsche sees both potential and danger in the death of the traditional world, existentialists see nothing but possibility. Not only that, but the want for something resembling an Aristotelian sense of *telos* is thoroughly pathologized by the existentialists. But we hardly need to discuss the reasons why this type of reasoning is self-defeating.

Existentialism is a prime example of liberal subjectivity run amuck and one of the primary progenitors of the fragmentary social state we today find ourselves in.

If a cohesive society is to be considered something to aspire to, and if we are to be frank about the nature of the moral disputes that are ravaging modern politics, we need to fundamentally reconsider the nature of moral truth.

(ii) The Interrelatedness of Conflicting Ethical Theories

Friedrich Nietzsche's vision of the functional longevity of a Christian ethic, one that persists as a conceptual structure outside the purview of monotheistic religion and Christian cosmology, is by my estimate on point. What this implies is that our secular moral language does not escape the clutches of history quite as easily as we might have imagined.

However, if one of the most important functions of moral language is to provide shared tools for moral problem solving, how come our moral and political debates are marred by such severe disagreement? One of the most troublesome aspects we are having to face up to, is the fact that our moral language, though derivative of Christian ethics, is not systematically coherent. It is merely *genealogically interrelated*. This is the case even with conflicting moral doctrines.

But how can this be? How can moral systems, which share the same genealogical origin with one another, diverge logically in completely different directions?

According to Mitchell, this is a clear-cut consequence of philosophical abstraction, whereby philosophy has become uprooted from its cosmological foundations. At the outset of his most famous work *After Virtue* (1981), the Scottish moral philosopher Alasdair Macintyre discusses this predicament initially in relation to modern political debates having to do with such contentious issues as abortion, but in later chapters he goes on to show how the same processes that have produced fundamental conflicts and divergencies between the modern-day democrats and republicans in the United States, have been present philosophically since the earliest days of the enlightenment (Macintyre 1981: 75-92). One 18th century thinker who has perhaps contributed more than anybody else to this fragmented moral landscape is without a doubt David Hume.

In his book Mitchell argues that David Hume's famous *is-ought gap* is perhaps one of the most consequential breaks with traditional metaethics that the world of philosophy has ever known. Much like Descartes, Hume seeks to dispense with a particular type of logic passed down by the old world. He sets his sights on the ethical dimensions of Aristotelian *teleology*, the proto-biological view of man espoused by Aristotle in two of his most renowned philosophical works, *Nicomachean ethics* and *Politics*. Teleology essentially weaves moral imperatives together with the facts of the world.

Breaking down the concept of teleology etymologically, the Greek word *telos* can roughly be understood as a sort of goal or implicit purpose. The other root word *logos* is Greek for reason or explanation. Aristotele sees the entirety of the world as essentially goal oriented, moving from potentiality to actuality (Kenny 1998: 128-129). Like the seed of a plant has the potentiality to grow into a tree, so too does man have the potentiality to blossom into something which is congruent with his inner purpose or true nature. Man's *telos* is to live a life guided by virtue. This life of virtue, however, is not something that unfolds automatically merely by dint of us simply existing as human beings. We must actively recognize virtue and choose it. What separates men from plants, mammals and other organisms is that human beings are moral and social creatures capable of vice and of deviating from this path.

The broader philosophical traditions of virtue ethics, which goes beyond Aristotle's own contributions to ethics, and which has been developed upon further by later philosophers,

refers to this kind of ethical practice as *human flourishing*. Striving after human flourishing means living in accordance with one's *telos*, which involves living in accordance with one's true nature in a sense. This is a type of moral *good*, the realization of which requires that moral subjects stick to a type of middle ground that avoids extremes. The same definition of the moral good applies to other instances of ethical activity. Physical health constitutes a kind of moral good, and it is defined as the middle ground between excess pleasure and deprivation (Nicomachean ethics: 2.71107a8–1108b5).

From a modern and individualistic point of view, this type of “given” view of the world might come across as a distinctly rigid and alien way of approaching ethics. We are used to thinking about morality, at least to some extent, as subjective. What is good for one person may not be ideal for another. This attitude has its roots in the enlightenment treatment of morality, and as Mitchell might argue, it ties in with Hume's philosophy in particular. The teleological approach to ethics takes issue with this kind of subjectivism.

What is made abundantly clear by this short overlook of Aristotelian metaethics, is the fact that being itself is intimately tied up with ethics. Morality and ethics should not be viewed as a system of abstract rules, based on different axioms, but as an expression of what is, a way of being. What is implied here, as Mitchell explains, is that virtue ethics are in some sense alien to the way we approach moral dilemmas presently. When we approach moral dilemmas from an Aristotelian point of view, we try to find answers to our questions by examining the world around us instead of deferring to ethical systems. Here, Mitchell makes a comparison with a clock. In the simplest of terms, in order to get an answer to the question of what a clock *ought* to do, is predicated on the answer to the question of what a clock *is*. The same thing can be said for human beings. With reference to our earlier discussion on ontology, Aristotle views human beings as imbued with an inherent nature. They are not deterministically governed by this nature however, which means they may be able to deviate from it in various ways by giving into excess. The *is* and the *ought* are hereby in Aristotle's view inseparable (Mitchell 2019: 99-101). On Hume's view, however, this relationship between ontology and ethics is severed and will remain severed for a considerable amount of time. The reason for this being that according to Hume Aristotle's thinking constitutes a type of logical fallacy. Our notion of what things are does not permit us to draw conclusions about how things ought to act in the world (Baghranian 2004: 282). As far as philosophy is concerned, the issue of what humans ought to do will therefore no longer be governed

ethically by reference to their place in the cosmos. Instead, de ontological and universalist ethics have attempted to address ethical dilemmas by theorizing ethical systems and methods, which are to be considered objective and knowable simply by way of reason (Collste 2010: 55).

Hume's break with teleology is simultaneously a break with the kind of holistic and situated view of ethics we have discussed before. The is-ought gap – or *Hume's guillotine* as it is also known – can by and large be seen as the nexus of the sort of moral confusion Alisdair Macintyre argues against. The conceptual interrelatedness of moral theory provides evidence for the historical residue inherent in our moral language, whereas the so-called *incommensurability* that Macintyre speaks of is a direct consequence of moral language having become uprooted from the very tradition that gave birth to it (Macintyre 1982: 7-59).

(iii) Alasdair Macintyre and the Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

When John Rawls' famous work *A Theory of Justice* (1971) first came out, it was as much a groundbreaking achievement for like-minded liberals wanting to champion liberal values as it was a lightning rod for critics. Some of these critics we have already mentioned in passing. In many ways they all share in a similar kind of particularist critique of universalism – the exception here being the libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick who of course shares in Rawls' liberal tradition to some degree (Roberts. Sutch 2004: 236-241). Feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young critiques the fact that Rawls only focuses in on the issue of distributive justice, hereby sidelining most other forms of social inequality. Nozick on the other hand refutes the idea of equality having anything to do with the distribution of wealth. The most compelling case that has ever been made against Rawls' universalist philosophy however – at least in my view – comes from the so-called *communitarian* school of thought, not least the philosophy of Alasdair Macintyre.

Communitarian thought is not exactly synonymous with conservatism, even if the two concepts show some degree of overlap. Communitarianism should more appropriately be understood as a form of epistemological stance, than a political philosophy, which is essentially what conservatism is. For this reason, a fellow communitarian and a critic of Rawls, Michael Waltzer (1935-) can in some ways be viewed as less of a conservative than Macintyre (Roberts, Sutch 2004: 241-245). The same thing goes for the multicultural theorist

Charles Taylor (1931-). It can be argued that there is a conservative streak to communitarian though in the broadest sense of the word. The crucial difference concerns the issue of *what* is to be preserved. The conservatism of Edmund Burke (1729-1797) for instance, aspires to preserve the authoritative role of national, cultural, and social institutions within the nation state. In his ethics on multiculturalism Taylor is more concerned with preserving the cultural integrity of *the other* in pluralistic societies.

Macintyre argues for a cultural and societal return to a restored and holistic version of our lost Christian heritage. This return must be conceived of as cultural rather than legal, simply because Macintyre does not see a viable or pragmatic path to this sort of fundamental societal change due to the fact that liberal epistemology has become thoroughly institutionalized in both law and politics. He also realizes that this return cannot be achieved just as easily as if we were to turn back the clock. This return must be understood as a gradual return, that occurs communally and with careful consideration for the cultural obstacles that exist for this project presently.

In the opening chapters of his famous work *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair Macintyre draws our attention to some very telling surface-level aspects of the tangled mess that is the present state of political and ethical discourse (Macintyre 1981: 7-9). The reason why political debates surrounding topics like abortion become such lightning rod issues, is because of the inherent *incommensurability* of our moral language. In order for the opposing sides to come to some sort of resolution in an ongoing political conflict, the two sides need to share in a similar axiomatic worldview. These axioms, however, are not axiomatic in the conventional foundationist sense (Johansson, Ekenberg, Masterton, Remes 2014: 148). They are not to be understood as constituting logical propositions, which are self-evidently true and therefore require no further justification, rather they are to be viewed as articles of faith. They derive their status as knowledge through us believing in them. These beliefs about moral truth forego all other sorts of moral inquiry (Mitchell 2019: 123-125).

In Macintyre's view this is the proper way of conceptualizing the idea of *moral truth*. This is all morality can ever hope to achieve in terms of truth seeking and it stands in stark contrast to modernist conceptions, which treat moral propositions as something akin to scientific truths. This *technified* tendency is made evident in practically all metaethical theories which have cropped up since the enlightenment. It is certainly evident in how contract theories conceive of moral knowledge. Even though there is a distinct relativistic streak to liberalism,

in the sense that it concludes that there is no way of knowing what moral truth truly entails, it nonetheless argues for an objective method for rationally drawing conclusions about the concept of justice. John Rawls' neo-Kantian position can certainly be grouped in with this grand tradition of modern-day contract theory.

In *A Theory on Justice* (1971) John Rawls attempts to resolve the political conflicts surrounding the issue of *distributive justice* in society rationally by asking his readers to follow his reasoning in a type of thought experiment, which he calls the *original position*. In similar fashion to earlier contract theorists such as Hobbes and Rousseau, Rawls asks us to picture how egotistic individuals, now confronted with the potential prospect of an uncertain future predicament, will inevitably be forced to contend with certain rational incentives set up by the original position, and are essentially forced by these incentives to create a fair and just society. In the case of John Rawls, the so-called original position involves a group of people, forced to construct the economic rules for a future society which they themselves will become a part of. The negative consequences of man's egotistical nature are mitigated through a regulatory mechanism built into this original position. Here we refer to the aforementioned incentive structures, whereby any insight into one's own economic or social status in the hypothetical society under construction is obscured by what Rawls calls *the veil of ignorance*. This creates the legislative impetus for the creation of tax laws which do not favor any one economic class. In Rawls' view income inequality is justifiable under the prerequisite that the plight of the poor is mitigated by this arrangement. What Rawls' thought experiment is designed to produce is an incentive structure for the discovery of what justice means. In his later works, such as *Political Liberalism* (1993) and *The Law of Peoples* (1999), Rawls expands on his theory of the original position and applies it to conflicts surrounding issues of multiculturalism and international law.

Macintyre's implicit critique of Rawls' thought – and indeed of all deontological ethics – can be boiled down to the classic communitarian comeback phrase “no man is an island”. The essential message being conveyed by the communitarian camp in this instance is the fact that we cannot make judgements beforehand about how a social actor is going to behave or act under any given circumstance. People are products of their environment. For this reason, people are cultural beings with particularist values (Swift 2014: 143-146). This creates potential problems for the construction of supposedly universal rules, which we are all expected to abide by as rational subjects. Challenges for upholding the liberal order do not

only come from different civilizational traditions in a multicultural context, but from within the philosophical remnants of our own tradition. Macintyre's main objective in *After Virtue* is to debunk the supposed objectivity of not only liberal ethics, but of all modernist theories about ethics. Our knowledge about morality does not follow the logic of propositional knowledge, and any attempt to steer moral inquiry away from tradition is essentially a fool's errand.

Macintyre's view has been criticized as anti-rational (Mitchell 2019: 125). This criticism is in some ways warranted. It would for instance be a valid criticism to argue that Macintyre's philosophy undermines any prospect of moral philosophy being able to operate outside the epistemological confines of a religious substructure. This is indeed a problem, and the implications of this criticism should not be taken lightly by anyone valuing freedom and democracy. We have to keep in mind that since Thales and the earliest days of philosophy, philosophers have essentially justified the continued existence of philosophy as an independent enterprise by pointing to the validity of idea that universal reason is able to attain knowledge about all things without reference to dogma (Nordin 1995: 21-49). In many cases this self-understanding has served as the very basis for challenging convention. In fact, the inherent value of the philosophical project has been held in such high regard that philosophers have been willing to put their lives on the line in order to uphold it. This "love of knowledge" – which is what philosophy essentially means – has been symbolically etched on the brain of every first-year philosophy student who has ever seen Jacques-Louis David's painting of Socrates about to empty a beaker of hemlock after he has been sentenced to death.

The fact that there appears to be a somewhat rebellious bent to the philosophical enterprise, has of course not gone unnoticed by authorities within many of the world's major religions. The Muslim world was once a thriving epicenter of philosophical and scientific discovery, until reactionary forces started clamping down on philosophy after they realized that abstract thought constituted a potential threat to religious orthodoxy. In the case of Western culture, the relationship between Christendom and philosophy has not always been a straightforwardly amicable affair either. For a long period of time philosophy, as an intellectual practice, was only admissible in so far as it served the ends of religious institutions.

Regardless, though there may be valid reasons for being wary of Macintyre's conclusions of what constitutes an adequate remedy for our present state of moral disarray, these criticisms

should not be used to disregard the sort of danger that may result from the abandonment of tradition.

(iv) Macintyre's Philosophy as a resource for Creating Unity

As stated prior in the introduction to this thesis, I do not wholeheartedly ascribe to Macintyre's philosophy. When it comes to some very central aspects of his thought, such as his passivist approach to politics and his view of liberalism as an institutionally untenable project, I tend to disagree with Macintyre on a number of issues, even if I to a large extent share his particularist view of ethical systems.

Let us start off with the issue of passivism. My main objection to Macintyre's normative stance on this issue, has largely to do with the fact that this stance is understandably not conducive to a reformist vision societal change. Macintyre essentially argues that people sharing in a traditionalist ethic need to cultivate this ethic bottom-up, in isolation and take a passive attitude to the rest of society, which in any case is destined to crumble under the weight of its own self-contradictions. This is the only tenable way of keeping a Western traditionalist ethic alive (Mitchell 2019: 97).

Macintyre may have a point in that this may indeed salvage culture, but it does not do much in the way of salvaging society at large. As we have argued before, the prevailing of a common national and cultural identity is in my view a crucial prerequisite for the survival of our political institutions. If our liberal democracy is to be saved, this calls for an urgent philosophical remedy aiming at social cohesion. It goes without saying also, that such a remedy entails a wholesale rejection of social liberalism *as a cultural paradigm*. This does not imply that cultural values reminiscent of liberal ones, such as tolerance, can still be maintained in some fashion within Western society, but the underlying logic guiding our morality must change. This means for instance that tolerance towards sexual minorities, would be argued for as *logically equivalent propositions*, but they would not derive their moral legitimacy from an abstract system of values.

Interestingly enough, Macintyre may himself have provided some of the philosophical tools needed for this project. In his later work *Who's Justice? Who's Rationality?* (1988), Macintyre is looking to remedy some overtly relativistic conclusions that appear to result

from the sort of particularism he argues for in *After Virtue*. One such conclusion that can conceivably be drawn from Macintyre's early communitarian work, is that traditions are to be regarded as self-contained ecosystems and that meaningful dialogue between them is essentially impossible. This line of thought is analogous to the cultural relativism espoused by anthropologists like Franz Boas (1858-1942) and Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) (Eriksen 1995: 15-16; Lassiter 2009: 93). In the philosophical literature, one of the more contemporary proponents of cultural relativism is Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose philosophical idea of *the language game* has had a huge influence on some of the more relativistic strands of cultural theory (von Wright 1957: 201-215). Not entirely satisfied with the relativistic implications of his early thought, which essentially makes it impossible to claim superiority for any one specific tradition over another, Macintyre decides to revise some of his earlier ideas (Mitchell 2019: 116-119).

In *Who's Justice? Who's Rationality?* Macintyre makes three key assumptions. Firstly, he adopts a linguistic view of culture. The second assumption he makes is that morality is constantly evolving. The third assumption is that morality must be able to solve new problems that present themselves within a given culture.

A number of implications follow. First off, if morality is to be conceived of as a form of language, then morality cannot be regarded as a closed system. Just like with other forms of language, a non-native speaker can become acquainted with a foreign culture, learn its language, and simultaneously learn in what ways his or her own language is equivalent to the language under examination. Macintyre concludes that if one moral language is better suited for addressing the problems of another moral language, the former language is morally superior to the second one (Mitchell 2019: 120-123).

Once, again, in our tolerant Western social contexts, words like "superior" have an almost unjustifiably harsh ring to them and may obscure the key philosophical idea being communicated in this instance. The main takeaway here is that moral systems may in some ways be particularistic, but they are, as we have mentioned before, equivalent in certain regards. They are furthermore open-ended, and they communicate. This creates hope for our prospects of building bridges across differing systems of thought. This is incidentally the aim of *intercultural and interfaith dialogue*.

The question we as a society ought to ask ourselves, however, is what we are looking to achieve through such dialogue. More fragmentation? More recognition of the other without some minimal requirement of assimilation? Or should we, despite differences strive for something more unified and cohesive? This is where conservatives and social liberals diverge. In my view, we are presently witnessing the potential dangers of moral pluralism run amuck. If we want to salvage our political institutions, we need urgently to conceive of a future that recognizes the validity of the past and engages with it meaningfully whilst constructing the future. This is essentially a conservative vision of society. Not only that. It is in my view the only meaningful way of conceiving of a society.

Most conservatives would, therefore, undoubtedly agree that some degree of plurality is essential for a vibrant and thriving culture. After all, no conservative philosophers advocate for a closed society. On the contrary, just like liberals, such as John Stuart Mill, they recognize that a *stagnant culture* cannot contend with a changing world. This is certainly the conclusion reached by MacIntyre in *Who's Justice? Who's Rationality?* The point of contention here is how this change occurs and what degree of plurality is admissible before a culture has essentially become negated. When we talk of culture, historically and linguistically, we tend to refer to cohesive social units which are united by a common history and mythology. Theorists like Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) may implicitly undermine the value of such phenomena by reference to their merely constructed nature, but the fact remains that culture serves a functional purpose and is essential to the survival of a society. The inherent danger of excessive moral pluralism is not a particularly difficult social conundrum to conceive of logically. Something that is morally and culturally a little bit of everything is simultaneously nothing in particular. If morality is indeed aimed at solving problems, a society like the one prescribed by social liberalism can hardly be expected to agree morally on very much, much less solve problems. Does such a "society" even deserve to bear its name?

2.15 Some Final Words

What lies at the heart of us reuniting with tradition, is the implicit reunification with some aspects of the religious past of Europe and the Americas.

Towards the end of this thesis, we have concluded that the Nietzschean critique of modernity is predicated on a functionalist understanding of the role of religion and that this vision exhibits some significant overlap with conservative vision of what a society is (Andreasson 1984: 59-63). If we were to in this instance to apply Aristotle's thinking about universals to the idea of society, we might argue that society cannot be conceived of any which way we choose. There comes a point where, what is contained within the geographical borders of the sovereign, ceases to be the kind of functional whole, we call a society.

Edmund Burke, widely considered the father of modern conservatism, argued that we ought to be mindful of conserving the fabric of society and the political institutions which have grown out of them. These are not the product of the kind of abstract reasoning that contract theoreticians were applying to the world. What exists ontologically, what we are sociologically and emotively invested in, are cultural traditions. Any type of political change conceived of by either politicians or philosophers must take this fundamental human condition into account and precede with caution. Conservatism is in this sense not anti-change as some critics of this political philosophy would have it. Conservatives advocate for a form of *bottom-up* model for political change, one where change occurs communicably at a grassroots level before becoming institutionalized (Andreasson 1984: 48-54). These thoughts are largely reflected in the thought of a more contemporaneous conservative philosopher, Roger Scruton (1944-2020).

A respect for tradition must therefore take this fundamental nature of society and morality into consideration when constructing the future. But what are the practical and philosophical implications of this project and what problems may we yet encounter? Western societies in their present pluralistic state can hardly be expected to develop unified religious cosmology for instance, at least not in the short term – both a multitude of religious confessions and atheism prohibit this. These are but a few of the possible obstacles one may encounter.

As is the case with many other philosophical treatises, the practical applications of this project must remain somewhat vague, so as to allow for political creativity. The aim of this thesis has been to provide my readers with the philosophical tools appropriate to get the project off the ground and to show that at least in theory, particularist ethics do not stand in the way of communication and that the continued amendment of some unifying cultural paradigm therefore remains a viable alternative for the future. What this also implies is that the liberal institutions are not inherently untenable. However, their longevity rests on our willingness to

work towards cultural unity. The problems we are experiencing within a cultural sphere in the West are after all not rooted in the institutional framework itself, but in our willingness to commit to the philosophy that created it ethically and ontologically.

There are conceivably objections that can be levied against the ideas I have outlined here, both from a conservative and socially liberal point of view.

From a multicultural perspective, we might reasonably assume that if continuity with the past is to be prioritized this means that assimilation is on the agenda, which means that the cultural expressions of the old Christian life world cannot be subjugated to the type of social engineering that abstract theories of social justice might require. From a functional perspective, cultures are not something we simply carry inside our own minds. They find expression in the lives we live, the cities we build, the art we enjoy. This is implying for instance that old European architecture cannot be treated by theorist the way a tailor might treat a piece of fabric that is to be tailored into a suit or a dress, that is to say, turned into something entirely new in accordance with an abstract idea. Analogous top-down political processes are precisely the sort of thing that tend to alienate people from their culture and create disharmony within societies. What needs to be emphasized however, is the fact that assimilation does not go hand in hand with coercion. If we remain true to the conservative paradigm of organic change, political goals such as assimilation need not be viewed as denoting authoritarian concepts.

But our problems do not end here.

If culture and norms are to be considered downstream from religious beliefs, are we not in that case talking about creating something resembling Nietzsche's surrogate for a dying religious cosmology? Perhaps a secular or quasi-religious cultural narrative? In some ways, the answer to this question is yes. But if that is the case, Right-wing reactionaries might object that we have stopped short of reaching the very top – the *logos* if you will – of our metaethical value structure? This may indeed constitute a problem. We may even consider whether this implies that through our conclusions in this thesis we have once again merely attempted a return to an earlier stage of the very process of disintegration we are seeking to remedy. Since the critique I have outlined above is conservative rather than reactionary, this means that many of the problems perhaps contained within the conservative framework itself may be antithetical for the kinds of goals we are looking to accomplish. In fact, the goal itself

might be a half-hearted solution, leaving the very problem of religious decline and religious disunity unaddressed.

Of course, this does not mean that the only viable way forward is a return to embrace reactionary thinking. What it does mean however is that under such circumstances, liberal democratic institutions and social cohesion may be in trouble yet. How exactly we are to interpret the social and political outcomes of Macintyre's initial future vision for politics and tradition in *After Virtue* remains an open question. Rivaling conceptions of the future social conditions, such as Gilles Deleuze's (1925-1995) idea of *nomadic subjects* are in my view hardly of interest for anyone concerned with issues of a more far-reaching civilizational decline and its implications for modern democracy (Best, Kellner 1991: 76-110; Braidotti 1994: 21-68).

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