

## Political Philosophies and Political Ideologies

Charles Blattberg  
(Université de Montréal)

“Those who urge us to remember that our only clearly demonstrable task is simply to keep the ship [of state] afloat have a rather curious view of the purpose of ships.”

Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Thinking about politics is hard. It’s not just that political questions rarely allow for easy answers, it’s that they also tend to touch us to the core, since the values involved are *our* values, the ones that make us who we are. It doesn’t help that grasping them fully often requires taking into account a wide range of subjects, which is why those who would study politics need to be specialists as well as generalists. And when you have to find your way around both the forest and the trees, it’s easy to get lost.

I’m going to propose a new approach to finding our way around. It’s based on a distinction between political philosophies and political ideologies that, I will argue, supports a new conception of the political spectrum, one that’s both more realistic and, ultimately, *better* for politics than are the alternatives. Before saying anything more about it, however, I need to explain what I mean by “politics.”

If you look the word up in the dictionary, you’ll find references to struggles over power or to the management of, or decision-making by, governments or other such organizations. To be sure, there’s a lot to be said for these definitions, but they all nevertheless fail to capture what seems to me to be politics’ essence: *responding to conflict with dialogue*. Because when people’s values conflict, if they are to deal with it politically then they must strive to hear each other out rather than use force. After all, force is the basis of war rather than politics.

Note that I mean to refer here strictly to public conflicts, those that arise between many people. The private realm is the locus of morals as distinct from politics (though morals, too, are

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<sup>1</sup> (London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 6th ed.), p. 10.

dialogical). Ancient politics, which tended to be conceived in “classical republican” terms, drew a sharp line between public and private: the household, a domain of inequality and force, was considered private, and the *agora*, where citizens were seen as equals (excluding, of course, women, metics, and slaves), was public. Modernity, and so modern politics, has witnessed the rise of civil society, with its subdivisions of the public sphere and the market economy; it’s situated in between the home and the *agora* (now “the state”). So civil society can be said to straddle what has become a rather blurry public-private divide. Then again, rather than divide it makes more sense to speak of a spectrum with public and private at either pole and civil society spread out over the centre. Regardless, modern politics distinguishes itself from the premodern by virtue of the fact that its dialogues take the existence of civil society for granted. For modern politics upholds – to varying but always significant degrees – a respect for the individual, which is the basis of civil society’s integrity.

I’m going to present, one at a time, five contemporary philosophies: neutralism, postmodernism, pluralism, patriotism, and anarchism.<sup>2</sup> Each comes with its own conception of politics at its best, and each relates in a different way to the various ideologies – including not only the “big three” of liberalism, conservatism, and socialism, but also feminism, ecologism, and nationalism. As we’ll see, depending on the philosophy it’s associated with, each of these ideologies can take an antipolitical as distinct from political form, which is to say one that stands as an obstacle to dialogue. When it does so, it should be grouped together with the consistently antipolitical ideologies: fascism, communism, libertarianism, and populism.

Returning to the philosophies, I should point out that, in keeping with the proposed definition of politics, I distinguish between them by virtue of their different conceptions of what it means to engage in dialogue. Being philosophies, they’re obviously going to be very general such conceptions, though they can also differ in terms of how general they conceive themselves to be: some are abstract and so claim universal relevance, while others are more relative to context. I should also mention that their different conceptions of dialogue are connected, implicitly or explicitly, to other philosophical questions, not least those concerned with the nature of the interlocutors as well the medium of their speech, that is, language. Moreover, when it comes to what people say within these dialogues, to their substance as distinct from their form, we may

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<sup>2</sup> I originally introduced the first four of these in *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics: Putting Practice First* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

identify different three broad topics or types of political justification, namely governance, recognition, and welfare.

Finally, we should also recognize how the different philosophies tend to affirm different conceptions of values. Regarding individual liberty, for example, philosophers have conceived of it in terms of negative liberty, authenticity, self-ownership, experiments in living, autonomy (in both Kant's sense of self-determination and in the one based on having cultural options to choose from), and non-domination. How, exactly, these different conceptions are to be realized in different, conflictual situations is not a philosophical matter, however. Because while we can expect to hear a great deal about generalities such as overarching principles or maxims, we shouldn't expect philosophers to advance specific positions on specific political matters.

Ideologists, by contrast, do little else. Instead of advocating general accounts of dialogue (though they will always assume one of these, even if only implicitly) ideologists do indeed aim to provide guidance as regards specific issues. So we can expect them to make proposals about the kinds of things we should be saying in response to given political conflicts. They'll do so, moreover, on the basis of claims about how the values in conflict should relate: to some, for instance, liberty is more important than equality, while to others it's the opposite. And so on.

Ideology, then, is the stuff of political culture – of symbols, mores, institutional design, and policymaking. By conceiving of it in this way, I evidently mean to avoid the pejorative connotations that Marx and others have given the term, and so return to the less polemical use of it found in the writings of Destutt de Tracy and his fellow *idéologues*, who were responsible for its coining. Not that I have nothing critical to say about ideological thinking; on the contrary, I will argue that it plays an important though not always helpful role in politics. That said, it's enough at this point to recognize that anyone who asserts a relatively coherent account of how we should rank our values upholds an ideology. Whether or not their doing do so is no more than a rationalization of their material interests is another matter.

### **Neutralism: Pleading for Justice**

This past century, there have been four basic kinds of neutralism advanced within anglophone

political thought: the utilitarian,<sup>3</sup> Kantian,<sup>4</sup> contractarian,<sup>5</sup> and analytical Marxist.<sup>6</sup> By calling all of these approaches “neutralist,” I’m obviously using the term in a much wider sense than is typical in the literature. Essentially, I mean to refer to the stance we’re expected to take when applying a theory of justice, understood as consisting of either a single principle or a systematically unified set of principles. How neutralists come to their theories varies, of course, with perhaps the best known route being John Rawls’ suggestion that we aim for “reflective equilibrium.” To Rawls, we should reformulate incommensurable (because contextual or “thick”) everyday ethical maxims into commensurable (because abstract or “thin”) principles that can then be interlocked together to form a theory.

However arrived at, all neutralists assume that having such a theory is essential, since it is only by applying one that we can respond to conflicts justly. Needless to say, we should also expect there to be differences over how a given theory should be applied. This is one of the reasons why neutralists often appeal for analogy to games: just as players turn to a neutral referee or umpire for the application of their game’s rulebook, politicians, political parties, interest groups, and individual citizens should all have recourse to a neutral authority such as the supreme court when questions arise as to how the constitution, which is seen as an expression of the theory, should regulate practice.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); R.M. Hare, “Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism,” in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and John Harsanyi, “Rule Utilitarianism, Equality, and Justice,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 115–27.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 2nd ed.); Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, exp. ed.); Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); and, though no anglophone, Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); James Buchanan, *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); and David Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes From Marx* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and John Roemer, *Free to Lose: An Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> On Rawls’ “well-ordered” (i.e. theory-governed) society as like a game, and those involved in politics as like its players, see my “Taking Politics Seriously,” *Philosophy* 94, no. 2 (Apr. 2019): 271–94. And for the older, related idea of the political theorist as comparable to an arbiter, see Plato, *Laws* 62d11–628a4; Plato, *Eighth Letter* 354a1–5; and Aristotle, *Politics* 1284b25–34, 1997a5–7.

So when people advance their different positions during the application process, they may be seen as *pleading* their case, just like the captains of opposing teams do whenever there's a disagreement over how the rulebook should be applied. However, pleading lacks the exchange of, and so change to, ideas that's essential to genuine dialogue. True, both judges and referees will often pose questions to those making their respective cases, but when it comes time to truly decide they normally go off alone, returning only once they're ready to hand down their decisions. Implicit here is the idea that the rules are not being changed, merely applied, since everyone agrees that rulebooks should never be rewritten during play. So although some neutralists (especially the contractarians and some of the Kantians) model their theories on imaginary dialogues, all assert that they shouldn't be made subject to the dialogues of actual, everyday politics. Because the work of theory should be completed *before* any application.<sup>8</sup>

But this means that pleading is, ultimately, a unidirectional mode of discourse. And that is why I think we shouldn't view neutralism as dialogical. After all, one of the meanings of the ancient Greek prefix *dia* is "between," which implies the presence of at least two sides, both of which should be capable of undergoing change. So if politics is indeed a matter of responding to conflict with dialogue, this means that neutralism should be considered an antipolitical philosophy.

To be sure, there are neutralist theorists, especially those that defend versions of "public reason" or "deliberative democracy," who claim to give dialogue an important role. But they also tend to distort it by requiring interlocutors to respect certain theoretical rules established in advance. These ensure that any exchange will be highly circumscribed, since the most fundamental questions will have presumably already been answered by the theory.<sup>9</sup> In fact, one of the things that get decided beforehand is none other than ideology. Because the ranking of values that I've suggested is strictly the purview of ideology is, in neutralism, something that's logically derived from philosophical tenets, that is, from the theory of justice. In fact, neutralists tend to see philosophy and ideology as so closely linked that they often fail to distinguish between them at all. Think of the liberalisms defended by Kantians or utilitarians such as Bentham or Mill; the socialisms of analytical Marxists or utilitarians such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb; or the

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<sup>8</sup> Whence, for example, Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 161: "Liberal principles meet the urgent political requirement to fix, once and for all, the content of certain political basic rights and liberties, and to assign them special priority. Doing this takes those guarantees off the political agenda and puts them beyond the calculus of social interests."

<sup>9</sup> See my "Patriotic, Not Deliberative, Democracy," in *Patriotic Elaborations*.

libertarianisms of most contractarians today. To all these thinkers, once you've the correct theory, you've the correct ideology.

But doesn't this mean that there's a contradiction at the heart of the neutralist project? This is because it seems that whoever is applying the theory must somehow be both neutral and yet also biased in favour of one of the "teams"? How else to explain that Ronald Dworkin, for example, has advocated deep principles that he believes all Americans share – principles that "are sufficiently basic so that a liberal or conservative interpretation of them will ramify across the entire spectrum of political attitudes" – while at the same time asserting that the correct interpretation of those principles constitutes none other than "a form of liberalism"?<sup>10</sup>

So neutralism neglects an important feature of ideology, namely, its relative autonomy from philosophy. To derive an ideology from a philosophy is to assume that the latter is systematically unified – that it can be, and indeed has been, articulated in a self-sufficient and wholly non-contradictory way, i.e. as a theory. "Self-sufficient" implies that one need not rely on anything outside the theory for its application; and "wholly non-contradictory" means that all of its parts are fully interlocked and so, in this sense, completely reconciled with each other. Of course, it's for this reason that neutralists are able to claim that certain values – the most important ones according to their preferred ideology – deserve to be awarded an absolute or uncompromisable status, and so to transcend the vicissitudes of everyday politics. Because it is, after all, only within the chaos and flux of the everyday that such values are ever challenged. By incorporating them within a theory, then, neutralists believe that they have sealed them off from the "corrosive waters" of political practice.

The belief in systematic unity is thus essential to neutralism; but it is unwarranted. Rather than argue the point here, however, I will merely say that it's been my experience that the incommensurability of values is simply not the kind of thing that can be theorized away. To assume otherwise is, as Isaiah Berlin once put it, to hold "perhaps one of the least plausible beliefs ever entertained by profound and influential thinkers."<sup>11</sup> For the attempt to subsume incommensurables into a theory can easily distort or, worse, fail to grant some of them a place outright. Think of the neglect of very real consequentialist concerns by Kantians; of various formal duties by utilitarians;

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<sup>10</sup> Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Berlin, "From Hope and Fear Set Free," in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.), p. 259.

of the respect for the individual by Marxists; and of pretty much everything but this respect by contractarians. There appears to be something inherently Procrustean about the projects of neutralist theory, given its attempt to force what is an inherently messy – and sometimes even dirty – world into the purity of a systematically unified order.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, that is why I would go so far as to suggest that there has never been, and never will be, a universally accepted political theory. And though many consider theory and reason to be synonymous, I would add that theorising when it's not appropriate to do so – by which I mean outside of the natural sciences – is, at best, an aesthetic activity. At worst, it is simply irrational.

### **Postmodernism: Creative Openness to the Other**

But should we even be trying to respond to conflicts with reason? Postmodernist political philosophers would say “no,” or at least “not exactly.” They have a paradoxical relationship with neutralism; we might even describe them as “anti-neutralist neutralists.” In postmodernism, theoretical reason is both “totalizing” and yet, to a degree, escapable. That's why, when faced with a theory of justice, the first thing the postmodernist thinker will do is try and “deconstruct” it, that is, uncover its self-contradictions in order to demonstrate that it is not systematically unified after all. The assumption otherwise is what led to the totalizing, which is seen as doing violence to all those “others” who do not fit in the system. By deflating the neutralist's pretensions to unity, then, the postmodernist strives to make room for “difference,” and so to protect all those who would suffer from being fixed within a theory's sights (the ancient Greek word *thēoria* means both “viewing” and “contemplation”). Because as Emmanuel Levinas once asked: “How can the Other . . . appear, that is, be for someone, without already losing its alterity and exteriority by way of offering itself to view?”<sup>13</sup>

So while clearly subversive of theoretical reason, postmodernists also don't consider their approach to be completely free of it. For one thing, it is theories that they tend to deconstruct, indeed so much so that they may even be considered parasitic on them. For another, they believe language depends on theory in order to fix its meanings, and since the deconstructing practice is

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<sup>12</sup> See my “[Dirty Hands: The One and the Many](#),” *The Monist* 101, no. 2 (Apr. 2018): 150–69.

<sup>13</sup> Levinas, “The Poet's Vision,” in *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 130.

itself recognized as linguistic, it cannot be wholly untheoretical. That's why, as Linda Hutcheon points out, we are left with a

paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world . . . [Postmodernism is] a critique both of the view of representation as reflective (rather than as constitutive) of reality and of the accepted idea of "man" as the centred subject of representation; but it is also an exploitation of those same challenged foundations of representation. Postmodern texts paradoxically point to the opaque nature of their representational strategies and at the same time to their complicity with the notion of the transparency of representation – a complicity shared, of course, by anyone who pretends even to describe their "de-doxifying" tactics.<sup>14</sup>

Fragmentation and paradox, and the openness to difference that they are assumed to provide – this is the heart of the postmodernist endeavour.

There are two main postmodernist currents: the poststructuralist, which originated in France, and the pragmatist, which first emerged in the United States. The former tends to emphasize the indeterminacy of all meaning and the role of (especially theory-wielding) power in fixing particular meanings, while the latter stresses how theoretical reason's rigidity tends to interfere with "what works." Both would nevertheless sever the logical tie that, as we've noted, neutralists assume exists between philosophy and ideology. Because if theories are inherently contradictory, then it simply cannot be possible to derive an ideology from one of them. Whence Richard Posner on the relation between pragmatism and liberalism: "The connection between the liberal-visionary and the pragmatic is purely historical and contingent."<sup>15</sup> Or here is Richard Rorty on pragmatism and feminism:

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<sup>14</sup> Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002, 2nd ed.), pp. 11, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Posner, *Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 46.



Pragmatism – considered as a set of philosophical views about truth, knowledge, objectivity, and language – is neutral between feminism and masculinism . . . Neither pragmatists nor [poststructural] deconstructionists can do more for feminism than help rebut attempts to ground these [masculinist] practices on something deeper than a contingent historical fact – the fact that the people with the slightly larger muscles have been bullying the people with the slightly smaller muscles for a very long time.<sup>16</sup>

The poststructuralist feminist Judith Butler would surely agree: “there are no necessary political consequences for [poststructuralism], but only a possible political deployment.”<sup>17</sup> And so on.

Evidently, the relation between philosophy and ideology is as underdetermined in postmodernism as it is overdetermined in neutralism. Not that this has prevented postmodernists from advocating on behalf of their preferred ideologies. Posner and Rorty, for instance, along with Charles Anderson, have all declared themselves to be pragmatic liberals, while among the poststructuralists we could place Butler’s feminism alongside Hélène Cixous’ as well as recognize William E. Connolly’s liberalism or Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe’s socialisms.<sup>18</sup> Despite, or because of, these differences, none of these thinkers will ever be found claiming that “philosophy itself” calls on us to support one particular ideology or other.

All this is in keeping with the postmodernist concern for maintaining an openness to difference – something that, it’s worth noting, requires much more than being sensitive to irreducibility and so to incommensurable values. What’s needed instead, the postmodernist claims, is something much more like the kind of openness that characterizes artists as distinct from critics, which is to say those who are engaged in “creation” as distinct from “interpretation.” This, I think, is what

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<sup>16</sup> Rorty, “Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View,” in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 232–33.

<sup>17</sup> Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” in Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> See Rorty, “Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism,” in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Anderson, *Pragmatic Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Connolly, “Identity and Difference in Liberalism,” in R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson, eds., *Liberalism and the Good* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Cixous, “Extreme Fidelity,” trans. Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers, in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Sellers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988); Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (London: Verso: 2002), ch. 5; and Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 1985).

Žižek means when he suggests that “Politics itself is, in the final analysis, always the politics of fantasy. It needs to imagine answers to antagonisms.”<sup>19</sup> Or as Rorty has put it: because “‘immanent’ criticism of the old paradigm is relatively ineffective,” we need to see how “the freer the imagination of the present, the likelier it is that future social practices will be different from past practices.”<sup>20</sup> It’s for this reason that, on those few occasions when postmodernists can be found recommending dialogue or something like it, we should see them as calling not for the exchange of interpretations, which seems to me to be the essence of dialogue, but for something that approximates the kind of talk that artists sometimes engage in. Of course, this then leaves us with the implication that postmodernism should be seen as yet another form of antipolitics.

Even so, the main problem with it is quite different from the neutralist’s. The question almost poses itself: Does the postmodernist have adequate resources to respond when, for instance, a fascist such as Benito Mussolini declares something like the following:

From the fact that all ideologies are of equal value, that all ideologies are mere fictions, the modern relativist infers that everybody has the right to create for himself his own ideology and to attempt to enforce it with all the energy of which he is capable.<sup>21</sup>

To reply that it’s a mistake to attempt to derive an ideology from philosophy doesn’t say very much; indeed, Rorty himself has admitted that pragmatism “is as useful to fascists like Mussolini and conservatives like Oakeshott as it is to liberals like Dewey.”<sup>22</sup> That said, it strikes me that a concern for maintaining openness to difference is not really compatible with fascism, since the

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<sup>19</sup> Žižek and Noam Yuran, “Disaster Movies as the Last Remnants of Utopia [Interview with Žižek],” *Ha’aretz*, May 21, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Rorty, “Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction,” pp. 227, 231.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Henry B. Veatch, *Rational Man: A Modern Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Rorty, “Feminism and Pragmatism,” in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 213 n. 23. Elsewhere, Rorty tells us that “The frequent complaint that a philosopher who holds the pragmatic theory of knowledge cannot give you a good reason not to be a fascist is perfectly justified. But neither can she give you a reason to be one.” So it “seems to me that I am just as provisional and contextualist as the Nazi teachers who made their students read *Der Stürmer*; the only difference is that I serve a better cause. I come from a better province.” *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), pp. 29, 80.

form of creativity that it relies on can also be said to support a minimal global ethic, one that rules fascism out.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless, if creativity really is their primary concern, then postmodernists should accept that neutralist theories are, in their own way, also creative. The only complaint – though it’s a serious one – that they ought to be lodging against neutralist ideologies has to do with their self-proclaimed exclusivity. Then again, surely everyone who prefers one ideology over others does so while hoping that their compatriots, at least, will favour it as well.

To which I would add that the imagination, even when freewheeling and so productive of fantasy, cannot be simply equated with creativity. Because imagining is, after all, a kind of skill, and this makes it a form of technical reason. True, artists and not only artisans rely on it, but if the former are truly to create then they also require something more: that mysterious thing often called an “inspiration.” And isn’t there something irrational about being inspired?

Regardless, talk of reason leads me to want to point out how, alongside its theoretical and technical forms, there exists at least one other form of it that people can invoke in response to a conflict: I call this “transformative reason.” Aristotle identified something like it with his account of prudence or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), though it strikes me as overly rigid given that it’s a matter, metaphorically speaking, of aiming an arrow at a fixed target – the target having supposedly been already revealed by theory.<sup>24</sup> And whereas theory is, as already noted, best grasped in ocular terms, the transformation of meaning through reason is instead something aural-like. This is because it is dialogical and, as already noted, dialogue requires that we give our interlocutors a hearing. It also strives to be as sensitive as possible to the particulars of a given context, and in a way that makes it possible for incommensurability not to entail incomparability – as long, that is, as we use our reason to “listen” rather than “look” for the truth. All of which is to say that we *can* respond to a conflict between incommensurable values reasonably, though only if we’re willing to engage in dialogue, dialogue and so politics.

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<sup>23</sup> See my “[On the Minimal Global Ethic](#),” in *Patriotic Elaborations*, pp. 180–83.

<sup>24</sup> For the metaphor of practical wisdom as like aiming an arrow, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999, 2nd ed.), 1094a24–25. Note that it’s because the target is set by theory rather than by prudence that Aristotle claims “we deliberate about things that promote an end, not about the end.” *Ibid.*, 1112b34–1113a1.

### Pluralism: Good-Faith Negotiations

This is precisely what value pluralist political philosophers advocate. And given their own wariness of theoretical reason outside of the natural sciences, they can be said to share in the postmodernist's opposition to any attempt at deriving ideology directly from philosophy. Thus does Berlin, for example, declare: "Pluralism and liberalism are not the same or even overlapping concepts . . . I believe in both liberalism and pluralism, but they are not logically connected."<sup>25</sup> This is also Stuart Hampshire's position, though he's a pluralist socialist.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, both Berlin and Hampshire agree that there exist numerous often conflicting and incommensurable values in the world, and both insist that we respond with neither pleading before an authority responsible for applying a systematic theory of justice, nor a creativity that's open to the difference of the other. Rather, what we ought to do is negotiate in good faith.

Negotiation means making concessions in order to reach a balanced accommodation. To be sure, neutralists often also speak of "balancing," but their assumption that this can be guided by theory assumes, we might say, a single beam balance, a metaphor which implies that the values are commensurable. That's why, to neutralists, any compromises made along the way can be understood to cancel each other out, allowing those who make them to keep their hands clean. Pluralists are not so sanguine. To them, compromise entails dirtiness and, in the worst cases, tragedy.<sup>27</sup>

The justice associated with the idea negotiating in good faith must be distinguished from substantive justice, which for the pluralist is embodied in the accommodations that people aim for when negotiating – accommodations that, we've seen, will be strongly influenced by their preferred ideologies.<sup>28</sup> Good-faith negotiation should also be distinguished from the realpolitik kind, in which concessions are made strictly because they're seen as being in one's strategic

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<sup>25</sup> Berlin and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Peter Halban, 1991), p. 44; see also Berlin and Bernard Williams, "Pluralism and Liberalism: A Reply," *Political Studies* 62, no. 2 (June 1994): 306–309, pp. 308–309.

<sup>26</sup> See Hampshire, "Epilogue," in Hampshire and Leszek Kolakowski, eds., *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and *Justice Is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ch. 3.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. p. 64; Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (London: Penguin, 1989), esp. pp. 170–77; and Bernard Williams, "Politics and Moral Character," in Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> See Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, pp. 27–37.

interests. People engage in realpolitik essentially because they believe that they have more to gain from it than from using more unadulterated forms of force. That's why realpolitik is in no sense dialogical – it may be *dia*, but it has no place for *logos*, “reason/speech” from the Greek – and so why it should never be confused with real politics. By contrast, good-faith negotiations are mainly supported by *toleration*, which is pluralism's central political virtue. Pluralists come to it from their recognition of the plurality of values in the world, and so from the idea that there will always be people who, though in conflict with us, are nevertheless ethical and so deserve a certain minimum of respect. Yes, they are our adversaries, but it is still legitimate for them to pursue their distinct aims.

Think of the famous 1997 agreement between paramilitary groups to decommission their arms as part of the Northern Ireland peace process. It was important precisely because it implied good faith between the parties. The same may be said of the September 1993 handshake between Palestine Liberation Organisation chairman Yassar Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn – though that deal collapsed. Still, “the handshake” is probably the most potent symbol of the willingness of adversaries to engage in dialogue and so politics: while shaking hands, people physically touch each other and so are especially vulnerable, yet no harm is done.<sup>29</sup>

In advocating for good-faith negotiations, pluralists rule out all of the antipolitical ideologies while simultaneously making way for a wide range of political ones. That said, the decision to favour one ideology over others will never be as indeterminate in pluralism as it is in postmodernism, since pluralists see it as based on an interpretation of one's political culture, “the general pattern of life in which we believe.”<sup>30</sup> And we can readily see how, since different contexts require different compromises when values conflict, different societies will develop different traditions of compromise. The same may be said, and for the very same reason, of certain ideologies, which is why they will achieve a traditional status within given societies.

So pluralist political philosophy asserts a degree of independence between ideology and philosophy. Pluralists come to their ideologies from neither theory nor a creative openness to the

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<sup>29</sup> See Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), p. 34. Apparently, it was only during modern times that the handshake also came to serve as a greeting.

<sup>30</sup> Berlin, “Introduction,” in *Liberty*, p. 47; see also p. 42; as well as “Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.), p. 19.

other but, as we've seen, from dialogue as negotiation. That's why one cannot turn to either philosophy or art for an account of why, during the previous century, the Scandinavian countries were mainly homes to democratic socialist political cultures; the United States moved from a duality of liberalism and conservatism to the mosaic of liberalism, conservatism, and authoritarian and woke populisms that characterizes its politics today; and Canada, despite the powerful ideological winds blowing in from the south, has managed to remain largely liberal. All these can be considered manifestations of how the citizenries in these countries have tended to negotiate their differences over substantive justice.

There is thus, at least relative to neutralism, a great deal of room for change in pluralist politics. But it's not enough. Because any change seems limited to determining the various balances that must be struck whenever we're faced with a genuine political conflict. This stands to reason, since while balancing may be seen to take place within the dimension of the contextual or thick, which is where the values clash and so where accommodations must be reached when they do, pluralists also assume that there exists a universal or thin dimension of normative meaning, one where a value's fixed and isolable core is to be located. It is to this core, which constitutes the value's "soul" or "skeleton," that its "body" or "flesh" is fastened whenever it is present in given thick contexts.

So it's the latter that, as Joseph Schumpeter once put it, negotiators "maim and degrade" whenever they compromise.<sup>31</sup> And that's why people tend to decry compromises as "shabby," especially when they feel that they've made too many of them in response to a given conflict. Whence the difficulty of claiming that the changes wrought are "for the best," that they contribute in some sense or other to progress, to improving the practices that express the values in question.<sup>32</sup> Progressive change is also ruled out because of pluralism's tendency to portray society as a whole as fragmented, both as regards its values and the ways of life containing them, since this leaves little room for the idea that all citizens share a common good, and that when they make concessions this might contribute something positive to it. Think of Bernard Williams' claim that ethical life can never reflect "a satisfactorily functioning whole," since "some widely accepted parts of it may

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<sup>31</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1987, 6th ed.), p. 251.

<sup>32</sup> So while I wouldn't go as far as Paul Dumouchel, who claims that pluralism is inherently conservative, I do think it assumes a very limited conception of politics-led change. See Dumouchel, "La tolerance n'est pas le pluralisme," *Esprit*, no. 224 (Aug.-Sept. 1996): 165-81, p. 181.

stand condemned in light of perfectly plausible extrapolations of other parts.” Apparently, this is what it means to have a “realistic view of communities.”<sup>33</sup>

But must realism always be so pessimistic? Yes, if we accept the idea that values have thin and isolable cores. Because it supports the popular misconception that whenever the ways of life that express these values conflict, they “clash,” “collide,” or “bang together,” since that’s what separate, or at least separable, things do whenever they come into contact in an antagonistic way. Thus are we left with an inherently adversarial, zero-sum conception of conflict, one that makes it seem as if the best we can do is, once again, to compromise, for that’s what comes from balancing values *against* each other.

What’s missing from this picture is a place for a more reconciliatory approach to conflict, one that would have us try to integrate the values instead of balancing them. It requires a holistic, rather than atomistic, conception of the values and so of how they may conflict: values aren’t separable, much less separate, entities that bang together so much as integral parts of an organic whole. Instead of the clashing or colliding of atoms, then, we should conceive of their conflicts in terms of disharmonies or disturbances that have arisen within certain regions of a whole. This allows us to focus on the whole instead of its parts, and so to entertain the possibility of transforming that whole such that the parts can be reconciled, further integrated with little or no compromise. Dissonance become consonance. Considered from a society-wide or even global perspective, whole groups or ways of life may thus be reconcilable, and thereby contribute to the progressive development of the political communities associated with them.

### **Patriotism: Conversing about the Common Good**

So aspires the patriot. Negotiation, the patriot is well aware, certainly entails compromise, but whatever’s compromised can still be considered shared by the political community as a whole. On top of this, the holism characteristic of the patriot’s conception of values – one that, incidentally, draws on the philosophies of language of those such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Williams, “Pluralism, Community and Left Wittgensteinianism,” in *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989, 2nd ed.), esp. part 3; and Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

– makes way for the possibility that conflict resolution can consist of not only negotiation but also conversation.

When conversing, interlocutors aim for much more than the “damage control”<sup>35</sup> that characterizes negotiation. This is because they hope to reach a shared understanding rather than an accommodation, something that requires them to genuinely *listen* to each other instead of merely hearing the other out in order to get clear about demands to be negotiated. One asks not *what* they want by *why* they want it; only this way can it become possible to determine, not the minimum trade-offs or concessions necessary for reaching an accommodation, but whether what one’s opponent is saying has some truth, some justice to it. The central question becomes: Can we learn from them? We are to pose it even though, given the conflict, we strongly suspect that they’re wrong. But are they *completely* wrong? It is because this latter question is, if one is being honest, often very difficult to answer with certainty that it makes sense to try and transform one’s position in order to incorporate, and so share in, whatever might be true about the other’s another. By so doing we could reconcile with them and thereby contribute to the common good.

Modern patriots inherited this ideal from classical republicans, who were the first to praise people as “patriots,” long before nationalists laid claim the term. Another patriotic ideal comes from feminism: that we should try to avoid zero-sum, adversarial responses to conflict, since these are encouraged by macho cultures, the ones that love a good fight.<sup>36</sup> Instead, we should always distinguish between those opponents who are indeed enemies and so must be engaged adversarially, and those who are friends of a sort, friends because fellow citizens.<sup>37</sup>

Not that doing so is easy; after all, there are a number of ways in which conversation is even more challenging than negotiation. For one thing, as already noted, transformation entails changing to one’s values as a whole, since they are all more or less integrated (as distinct from “interlocked,” which is the term I used above for the systematic, as distinct from organic, kind of holism associated with neutralist theory). And when making changes to one part necessarily affects all the others, transformation is a truly comprehensive phenomenon; whence its great difficulty. So while

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> See Janice Moulton, “A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method,” in Susan Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1983).

<sup>37</sup> See my “Opponents vs. Adversaries in Plato’s *Phaedo*,” in *Patriotic Elaborations*.



conversation doesn't maim or degrade the values being discussed, it can easily "break" them – although the hope is that, just as with broken bones, they will heal into something stronger, i.e. that the values will become truer, in their newly articulated and better understood form, to the whole of which they're a part. So where pluralists may be said to reverse Clausewitz's famous dictum and see politics as like war carried on by other means, patriots would instead have us paraphrase a line from Yeats: "Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body [*is*] bruised to pleasure soul."<sup>38</sup>

While this patriotic politics of reconciliation can be potentially progressive in a way that's unavailable in pluralism, we must acknowledge that this potential is not always present. After all, if others are willing to do no more than negotiate, then no matter how much we may desire it, conversation with them will simply not be viable. *Everyone* must be willing to engage in the kind of speaking and listening that it requires.

Conversation, then, is always fragile. Perhaps this accounts for why, today, our politics tends to be dominated by neutralism, postmodernism, and pluralism, and so why the attempt to reconcile our conflicts is admittedly often futile.<sup>39</sup> Still, patriots refuse to give up hope. Because every once in a while one hears of incidents such as the following, as recounted by Susan Bickford:

[This is] the story of a particular exemplary action that happened several years ago when, in the midst of feminism's "sex wars," I attended a protest on the campus where I was a graduate student. A feminist group at this public university had originally designed the action to protest the student union's sale of pornographic magazines like *Playboy*. News of this protest spawned a simultaneous counter demonstration by feminists supportive of anticensorship principles and alternative sexualities. So there we were, lines of feminists, both sides chanting and holding signs, one side with a

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<sup>38</sup> Yeats, "Among School Children," in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989, 2nd ed.), p. 217.

<sup>39</sup> For a compelling account of the presence in the anglophone world of uncompromising stances (which, I would claim, are encouraged by neutralism), as well as those willing to do no more than negotiate (as advocated by pluralism – postmodernism paradoxically combines these with the former), see Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998). Two qualifications to my praise of this wonderful book: there are times (e.g. ch. 4) when Tannen fails to appreciate that dialogues involving compromise necessarily have an adversarial dimension; as well as others (ch. 8) when she mistakenly equates "criticism" or "opposition" with zero-sum adversity (even though one can criticize or oppose in the hopes of reconciling with others rather than pressuring them to make concessions).

bullhorn, the other without. I was not involved in organizing either protest, and frankly I do not remember being very thoughtful about my own participation; I had not done much representative thinking, let us say. That failure was made clear to me by the gutsy act of a woman on “the other side,” who came over and spoke with several of us. I cannot remember her exact words, but what she said was something like “I want to hear what you have to say, I don’t want us to just yell at each other. Tell me what you want, why you’re doing what you’re doing.” It was not a loving or peaceful act. Her face was tight and pinched, her compadres were chanting in the background, and what she was doing was clearly difficult for her, perhaps more so because she was the only one, on either side, who made that effort. She must have felt acutely vulnerable, “appearing” in that particular way and place – not as someone who floated above the conflict, not as someone who stayed “at home,” but as someone who, quite literally, travelled: from her group to ours and back.<sup>40</sup>

If she had said only “Tell me what you want” and left it at that, then we might see her as a practitioner of pluralist politics, as someone willing to do no more than negotiate with her adversaries. But in asking to hear what they have to say, it’s clear she was announcing her willingness to listen, to come to understand and perhaps share in their position – or at least to develop a new one that they could all endorse, together.

All this suggests that patriotism should be situated somewhere between neutralism’s belief in the possibility of a unified political society, on the one hand, and pluralism’s fragmentation of it, on the other – all while striving to avoid the paradoxes of postmodernism. Patriots can also be said to take up a position between the neutralist’s unification of philosophy and ideology and the postmodernist and pluralist’s separation of them. Because patriots accept that while philosophy may help us say certain things about politics in general, it cannot – on its own, outside of the context of a given political community – lend support to any particular ideology. That said, because the common good can sometimes be fulfilled creatively as distinct from interpretively,<sup>41</sup> we also need to make room for an apolitical – but still not antipolitical – patriotism. But given that, in

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<sup>40</sup> Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 172.

<sup>41</sup> See my “Good, Bad, Great, Evil,” in *Patriotic Elaborations*.

politics, creative solutions tend to be the exception, never the rule, and given the well-known dangers associated with the charismatic leaders that often advocate them, it (almost) always makes sense to begin with dialogue instead.

Which brings us to patriotism's central political maxim: "conversation first, negotiation second, force third." It tells us that there can be no politics when there is a ruler present, that is, someone or something that is sovereign, that has the last word. For the decision about when we should be moving between these three is a matter that citizens must make for themselves.

### **Anarchism: Creative Propaganda**

This may sound like anarchism and, to a degree, it is. Indeed, where some anarchists are strictly non-violent, and others are the opposite, most seem to think that they could adopt something like the patriot's maxim – although they'll be quick to emphasize their greater optimism. This is because, in anarchism, while it may be the case that force is unavoidable right now, this shouldn't be seen as our permanent fate. On the contrary, if not for the presence of unjustifiable forms of authority and the coercive hierarchies associated with them, force would never be necessary. That's why we need to abolish the state and its corrupt laws, since no other institution interferes as much as it does with the spirit of voluntary cooperation, which comes naturally to people.

To the patriot, by contrast, the world is "broken," which means that there will always be times when reconciliation and even accommodation are impossible. For example, when faced with people who would violate the laws that express the common good, it is usually wrong to negotiate, much less converse, with them. So while anarchists are right that politics can never be well-ordered, this doesn't mean that we ought to tolerate actions that would upend the government. It is legitimate for the police to enforce the law.

Of course, anarchists also sometimes disagree sharply among themselves, and just like the followers of the other philosophies this will often be over ideology. Because when it comes to the question of what the ideal anarchist society should look like, the answers have ranged from the extreme individualist and so libertarian, to the collectivist and so socialist (including syndicalist and communist variants).

That said, a deep, metaphysical disagreement has also arisen between some anarchists. Alongside the more traditional forms of anarchist philosophy, which can be seen to affirm a monism that shares something with neutralism and its idea of a fully coherent rulebook, some

relatively recent anarchists have come to adopt versions of the claim about the brokenness and so disunity of the world – albeit in a paradoxical way that recalls postmodernism rather than pluralism or patriotism.<sup>42</sup> Still, both sides in this intramural anarchist debate believe that those on the outside who reject anarchism should be persuaded to come in via the use of a creative form of propaganda (using the term in its original, non-manipulative sense). This ranges from education by anarchist intellectuals to “propaganda of the deed,” which once referred to armed local rebellions and even terrorism but today tends to take the form of (albeit sometimes violent) demonstrations. And even though, as any anarchist will tell you, their use of this propaganda is driven by a rage against injustice and the corrupting influences of the system, I can’t help but point out that none of it is dialogical – which is only to be expected, since who can truly hear the other side when, as Irving Layton once put it, “Their fists are heavy with universal love”?<sup>43</sup>

Among themselves, however, anarchists can be expected to deliberate, since where if not within the collective could they hope to approximate life as it will be lived once all authoritarian structures have been overthrown?<sup>44</sup> Yet even here one has to wonder if they ever really manage to hear each other. This is not only because of the standard reason that it’s often hard, not to mention painful, to listen to someone who is close to you and yet disagrees. For there’s also the fact that, while conversation is no skill that can be mastered, it’s still a habit that, one imagines, is difficult to acquire when one believes deeply in “the wisdom of the use of force.”<sup>45</sup> So you will understand why “anarchist politics” strikes me as a contradiction in terms.

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<sup>42</sup> For an example of the more traditional, because monistic, approach, one that draws on the Enlightenment, see Noam Chomsky, *On Anarchism* (New York: The New Press, 2013). As for those anarchists that share a paradoxical, because “pluramonic,” metaphysics with postmodernists, see Todd May, “Anarchism from Foucault to Rancière” and Gabriel Kuhn, “Anarchism, Postmodernity, and Poststructuralism,” both in Randall Amster *et al.*, eds., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Layton, “With the Money I Spend,” in *A Wild Peculiar Joy: The Selected Poems* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2012), p. 305.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Francis Dupuis-Déri, “The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, and Deliberative Practices,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, no. 2 (2010): 45–82.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

## A New Political Spectrum

Of the five philosophies described above, I evidently favour patriotism. And as I implied in the introduction, this patriotism would have us conceive of the political spectrum in a new way. Here's why.

Especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many believe that the very idea of a political spectrum has lost its relevance, since the terms “left” and “right” are no longer meaningful.<sup>46</sup> Others continue to assert the efficacy of one or other of the two classic conceptions of them. Each of these derives from a different understanding of how they were first invoked in post-revolutionary France, when those who sat on the left side of the National Assembly were said to be for progress and against reaction, and those on the right the reverse. To some, then, the spectrum is based on the notion of *attitudes to direction of change*: those on the left are progressive in the sense that they favour change from the status quo to something new, whereas those on the right are retrogressive because they hope to return to a previous state of affairs.<sup>47</sup> To others, the spectrum is based on *attitudes to equality*: those on the left favour it, while those on the right are more open to inequalities.<sup>48</sup>

The first approach, it must be said, has the problem that it would have us describe liberals in the United States today as right-wing, since they would have American public policy approximate the country's New Deal past. But the second fails to explain why one particular value, equality, should be given a special status vis-à-vis all the others; nor can it account for the tendency to identify American neo-conservatives, or Russian communists, as right-wing even though each favours the forceful imposition of its preferred form of equality (democratic and economic, respectively).

To be sure, one could always argue that the mistake lies with those who would describe American liberals as left and their neo-conservative compatriots or Russian communists as right.

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), esp. the introduction and chs. 1–2 (though note the qualification on p. 251); and Berlin and Steven Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin in Conversation with Steven Lukes,” *Salmagundi*, no. 120 (Fall 1998): 52–133, esp. p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Leon Baradat, *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact* (New York: Routledge, 2020, 13th ed.), ch. 2.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, trans. Allan Cameron (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). For their part, Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien argue that left and right disagree over the kind of economic equality government should promote, that of outcome or of opportunity, respectively: *Left and Right in Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

But I think there's something to these descriptions. So I would like to propose an alternative conception – one that, I believe, makes better sense of both these descriptions as well as of how the idea of the political spectrum has (or at least should have) been used throughout its history.

The alternative takes its cue from Gianni Vattimo's assertion that "nonviolence" is the central characteristic of the left.<sup>49</sup> Given it, as well as the assumption that we may respond to conflict with either conversation, negotiation, or force, I'd like to suggest that we describe those optimistic "doves" who believe that progress through conversation is feasible as being on the left; those pessimistic "hawks" for whom force is unavoidable as being on the right; and those who are neither and so favour negotiation as being in the centre. Such a spectrum, then, can be understood as based on the idea of *attitudes to conflict*.

Now, since conflicts can be very different, not to mention change, it makes no sense to assume that people should situate themselves on this spectrum in any permanent sense. I've long thought it odd that so many, so often, choose to declare themselves "lifelong members of the left" or "inherently right-wing" and so on, as if where they are and so the situation they find themselves in is irrelevant to their politics. I suspect that vastly overreaching conceptions of rationality or human nature are at work here or, at the very least, that people are simply letting their temperaments or personal sensibilities interfere with their judgment. Regardless, the basic point I wish to make is that one's decision about how best to respond to a given conflict should depend on the conflict and nothing else.

So this excludes ideology. However, it goes without saying that ideology is one of the main source of people's temperaments or personal sensibilities. The problem, you might say, is that we often turn to our preferred ideologies for guidance too soon. Ideology is helpful, when it is helpful, only *after* the conversation has broken down; before then, we should try and listen to our political opponents with an open mind and so transform ourselves on the basis of what we hear. Ideologies interfere with this because, as the historian Lewis Namier once noted, there's a certain "fixity" to them: "the less, therefore, man clogs the free play of his mind with political doctrine and dogma,

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<sup>49</sup> As cited in Bobbio, p. 94; see also pp. 28–34 of Vattimo's *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, trans. David Webb (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), a book that can be read as a polemic against fundamentalisms, especially those based on metaphysical (or as I would call them "theoretical") philosophies.

the better for his thinking.”<sup>50</sup> Otherwise put, instead of travelling by conforming to an ideological map, we need to be willing to explore – and to do so with those with whom we disagree.

That said, when the time for negotiation has indeed come, then patriots will indeed turn to the ideology that they believe best expresses the common good. And this ideology, it should be clear, by no means has to be conservatism. True, conservatives are often said to exhibit the greatest love for their country, but patriots are those who love what they believe to be the *true* identity of their country, or countries should they feel loyalty to more than one, or even of the world.<sup>51</sup> And whether current practice expresses that identity well must remain an open question. It’s always possible that radical reforms will be necessary if citizens are to live up to their shared ideals. So we can understand why Hannah Arendt once declared that “intense discontent [is] the hallmark of true patriotism and true devotion to one’s people.”<sup>52</sup> Because true patriot love often entails criticism.

Although not partial to any particular political ideology, patriotism does rule out all of the antipolitical ones – those which, again, would consistently undermine political dialogue in favour of either nondialogical forms of talk or other, more blatant forms of force. This is obvious when it comes to fascism or revolutionary Marxism, implicit in the case of neutralist liberalism, and inevitable when it comes to such one-dimensional ideologies as populism or libertarianism. All should thus be considered so far to the right that we might wonder whether they even merit a place on the political spectrum as I have been defining it at all. After all, it’s supposed to be a *political* spectrum, and so one where we should expect to find positions which assume that there will be at least some occasions when dialogue can serve as a viable alternative to force.

Note that, when it comes to those ideologies that may be considered political, there is no call for situating them on the spectrum in any permanent sense. True, conservatives will tend to be found towards the right, but there are times when even they will conclude that a given conflict may be negotiated in good faith and, at least on those occasions, they should be seen as having moved closer to the centre. Indeed, since each political community can be said to lay claim to its own political culture, each may be said to have its own “home” ideology or ideologies, the one(s) shared

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<sup>50</sup> Namier, “Human Nature in Politics,” in *Personalities and Powers* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), pp. 7, 5.

<sup>51</sup> See my “[Patriotism, Local and Global](#),” in Mitja Sardoč, ed., *Handbook of Patriotism* (Berlin: Springer, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Herzl and Lazare,” in *The Jewish Writings*, eds. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 338; consider also the contrast that Theodor W. Adorno *et al.* assert between “genuine” and “pseudo” patriotism in their *The Authoritarian Personality: Part One* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1950), pp. 107–108.

by most of the citizenry. Those political parties whose foremost aim is electoral success can therefore be expected to compete over it or them. Think of how, following the mid-1970s, American Republicans and Democrats strove to represent right-wing and centrist conservatives, respectively; following the polarization instigated by Donald Trump, however, each now aims to install different home ideologies upon a relatively fragmented country: authoritarian populism in the case of the Republicans, and liberalism and woke populism in the case of the Democrats. Canada, for its part, still largely claims a single home ideology, which is why those of its political parties that genuinely wish to form the government, namely the Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrats, have for quite some time now worked to present themselves to the electorate as the best representative of Canadian liberalism.<sup>53</sup> Or think of Israel, a country which has faced numerous existential threats to its security since it was re-established in 1948. Because of this, it has tended to give nationalism – that of its majority Jewish nation and that of its minority Palestinian Arab nation – a virtually overriding place in its politics. Only in more mature political cultures can nationalism be present strictly as an adjunct to one of the other more sophisticated political ideologies.<sup>54</sup> Hopefully, the day will come when Israelis – both Jewish and Arab – will be able to see it in this way.

## Conclusion

There are a number of benefits that can come from approaching politics in the way I've been suggesting. For one thing, it should help overcome the inherently misleading terms of what, in anglophone political philosophy, has been known as the “liberal-communitarian” debate.<sup>55</sup> Consider that Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, two of the debate's major communitarian representatives, are actually liberals of a sort.<sup>56</sup> Even Alasdair MacIntyre, who clearly is a

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, H.W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and William Christian and Colin Campbell, *Political Parties and Ideologies in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1990, 3rd ed.).

<sup>54</sup> See Michael Freedman, “Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?” *Political Studies* 46, no. 4 (Sept. 1998): 748–65.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Adam Swift and Stephen Mulhall, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 2nd ed.); as well as my “Liberalism after Communitarianism,” in Gerard Delanty and Stephen Turner, eds., *Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2021, 2nd ed.).

<sup>56</sup> This is surely one reason why neither has been comfortable with the label “communitarian.” Walzer lumps himself in with the liberals in “Liberalism and the Art of Separation” and “The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,” both in *Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory*, ed. David Miller (New Haven: Yale University



nonliberal participant in the debate (he advocates a premodern form of politics) has rejected the communitarian label.<sup>57</sup> It hasn't helped that those such as Michael Sandel continue to equate liberalism with the various forms of neutralist liberalism,<sup>58</sup> thereby perpetuating the misrepresentation of an ideology that, as Michael Freeden has shown, has long exhibited much richer forms than are those compatible with a neutral framework.<sup>59</sup> Also relevant is the fact that Berlin, universally recognized as a liberal, is more open to compromising liberalism's core value of individual liberty than is a so-called communitarian such as Walzer.<sup>60</sup> As is the reality that ostensibly anti-communitarian neutralist liberals such as Rawls and Dworkin actually embrace a strong (though I would claim misconstrued) conception of the common good, as Taylor has acknowledged.<sup>61</sup>

All this should help us appreciate how liberalism needs to be seen as but one modern ideology among many – even if it remains the most popular among Western political thinkers today. So we should eschew the misleading description of the West as the home of “liberal democracy,” since this obfuscates the fact that democratic socialism, conservatism, feminism, nationalism, and ecologism claim places as respectable ideologies among the diversity of Western democratic political cultures. The relevant distinction should be not between liberal democracies and other regimes, but between regimes that are “political” and those that are not.

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Press, 2007). And Taylor gives “one of the many reasons” why he’s “unhappy with the term ‘communitarian’” in “Charles Taylor Replies,” in James Tully and Daniel Weinstock, eds., *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 250.

<sup>57</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Spectre of Communitarianism,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 70 (Mar.-Apr. 1995): 34–35, p. 34: “I have myself strenuously disowned this label, but to little effect.” Daniel A. Bell is, to my knowledge, the only nonliberal who has embraced it: *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Amitai Etzioni, who has also done so, seems to me better described as a pluralist liberal (though one who occasionally also voices patriotic concerns): *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> See the following by Michael Sandel: *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2nd ed.); “Introduction,” in Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and its Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); and *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>59</sup> See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chs. 4–7; and his *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> As we can gather from Walzer's declaration, in *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 279, that the “autonomous person” is “the ideal subject of the theory of justice.”

<sup>61</sup> See Taylor, “Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 195.

Moreover, the spectrum I've been proposing could also help us account for the tendency of many of those on the left to exhibit a unique form of bitterness towards their opponents. This is something that they do in addition to the natural aversion that all who take their politics seriously feel towards fellow citizens who are sympathetic to ideologies different from their own. The feeling in question is only natural given the frustration everyone feels when they think that they've found a reconciliatory solution to a given political conflict, one that contributes to the common good of all, and yet which for whatever reason is rejected by those to the right. Think of the old proverb about leading a horse to water but not being able to make it drink; then imagine how disturbing it would be if one felt that the horse's obstinacy was preventing others from drinking as well.

That said, there are also those today who, while claiming to be members of the left, feel frustrated, or worse, for a reason that has little if anything to do with an interest in reconciliation. These are the "fascist left," as they are sometimes called, and they're not really on the left, as I have been defining it, at all. To them, words are not the carriers of dialogue but weapons in disguise – arrows that, tinged with self-righteousness and what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*, are aimed at all who are perceived to be self-serving enemies of social justice or an identity-based conception of equality. So we can understand why, today, some have acknowledged that to be woke often implies "an aggressive, performative take on progressive politics that only makes things worse."<sup>62</sup> Because woke "leftists" are ultimately no less antipolitical than are the soldiers of *realpolitik*; their place, in consequence, is on the far right.

Which is where they can be seen to join the other, authoritarian populists. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, both kinds of populists have become influential in the West, making the already-difficult politics of patriotism even more of a challenge. To this must be added the always-persistent threat of technocracy, which has been kept in check of late only in the worst possible way, since the politicization of expertise is something almost as dangerous as when experts depoliticize politics. And let's not overlook the ever-growing threat of aestheticization, when politics is used in the service of one form or other of disinterested enjoyment instead of being taken seriously.<sup>63</sup> To which we must add other looming dangers, whether to the environment, to our

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<sup>62</sup> Aja Romano, "A History of 'Wokeness'," *Vox*, 9 October 2020.

<sup>63</sup> See my "Taking Politics Seriously – but Not Too Seriously" (which is a longer version of the paper cited in fn. 7).

health, or to our security. It goes without saying that all of these can interfere with politics, even undermine it altogether.

Yet it is normally none other than politics that's required if we are to respond to these threats properly. So we have no choice but to invest our hopes in dialogue. That said, we also have reason to appreciate that there's much to be gained from politics, at least when it's at its best. Because though conversation is indeed fragile, as we've seen, it can also be very powerful: when a discussion in response to conflict succeeds, there is no better way of realising and developing our values. That's why even now – perhaps especially now, when an edifying politics of the common good seems a remote dream – we should be doing everything possible to inculcate its virtues, to defend and encourage it. Patriots of the world, converse! You have nothing to lose.