

Kai Nielsen's Political Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Overview

I pass now to what the philosophy of liberalism would be were its inheritance of absolutism eliminated. In the first place, such liberalism knows that an individual is nothing fixed, given ready-made. It is something achieved, and achieved not in isolation but with the aid and support of conditions, cultural and physical: – including in “cultural,” economic, legal and political institutions as well as science and art. Liberalism knows that social conditions may restrict, distort and almost prevent the development of individuality. It therefore takes an active interest in the working of social institutions that have a bearing, positive or negative, upon the growth of individuals who shall be rugged in fact and not merely in abstract theory. It is as much interested in the positive construction of favourable institutions, legal, political and economic as it is in removing abuses and overt oppressions.

– John Dewey, “The Future of Liberalism”¹

Kai Nielsen describes himself as a liberal socialist cosmopolitan nationalist.² He is the first to admit that the self-description is a mouthful, if not an outright contradiction. Egalitarian, analytic Marxian, critical theorist, and pragmatist might also be added to this jumble, complicating matters even further. Our aim in this introduction is to demonstrate how these disparate

commitments come to form a thoughtful and attractive stance in political philosophy. More generally, we attempt to prepare the ground for the essays that follow by sketching some of the details of Nielsen's views along with the intellectual context in which they are couched. The introduction is in three main parts, corresponding roughly to the three sections of the volume. First, we set out some of Nielsen's metaphilosophical views and the significance they have for his political philosophy. In the second section, we discuss Nielsen's egalitarianism and socialism, emphasizing in particular how the former grounds the latter, and, inversely, how Nielsen regards socialism (of a particular non-dogmatic stripe) as the real-world normative upshot of a philosophical belief in equality. In the final section, we turn to questions of global justice and Nielsen's views on cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and multiculturalism. In particular, we set out his account of the political and economic institutions required by justice and his defence of secession for liberal nations based on democratic self-determination.

I. METAPHILOSOPHY, CRITICAL THEORY, AND WIDE REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM

Throughout his long and productive career, Kai Nielsen has returned, consistently and in a wide range of contexts, to questions about the practical role of philosophy.³ More than most philosophers, he has wrestled with questions about philosophy's role in intellectual culture. What is philosophy and what might it yet become?⁴ To what may it plausibly aspire? Such questions are for Nielsen among the most interesting and exciting ones philosophers can grapple with, even if the human impact of other social, political, and economic questions is more urgent and, thus, more deserving of intellectual attention.⁵

Nielsen's keen interest in metaphilosophy is in many ways the upshot of having come of age philosophically against the backdrop of logical positivism in American philosophy departments and, later, the 1953 publication of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Nielsen was twenty-seven years old when the *Investigations* appeared posthumously, and Wittgenstein's bold "therapeutic" enterprise – his attempt to show the "fly the way out of the fly-bottle"⁶ – has had a lasting and profound impact

on Nielsen's thinking. Much like Stanley Cavell, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, and other philosophers of his generation, Nielsen learned how to think about philosophy in Wittgenstein's wake.⁷

Nielsen believes that it is not (and cannot) be the business of philosophy to locate timeless essences and objective truths (where "objective truths" are taken to mean something like "mind or language independent truths"). Philosophy cannot hope to penetrate mere appearances and arrive at a synoptic vision of how things truly are.⁸ "There is no such thing," Nielsen has it, as "the one true or uniquely adequate description of the world."⁹ On Nielsen's view, this does not entail a general skepticism, nihilism, or relativism. There are still better and worse ways of thinking about things – though, of course, "better" and "worse" here will invariably be to some extent time and context dependent.

With the later Wittgenstein and the logical positivists, Nielsen rejects metaphysics on the grounds that metaphysical propositions are nonsense (or "cackle" as J.L. Austin put it).¹⁰ It is human practices all the way down. There is no method with which to evaluate our current practices by reference to something that is not itself just one more practice. Even our most abstract theorizing – about the universe, the nature of mind, truth, goodness, rationality, and so on – is itself just more human practices, differing only in complexity perhaps from the other practices we seek to evaluate. As Nielsen puts it, "We can gain no Archimedean point or skyhook – no 'moment of transcendence' – to appraise our practices. We have no understanding of how to think outside or beyond our practices."¹¹ We are here like the sailors on Neurath's boat, bound to replace the wooden planks of our vessel (incrementally, in a piecemeal fashion) always while aboard it. The fundamental error of metaphysics, then, is that it aspires to a perspective *outside all human practices*, a point of view untainted by contingent social and linguistic norms. Metaphysics seeks (impossibly) what Thomas Nagel calls "The View from Nowhere" and there is, Nielsen has it, no such perspective to be had.

We are language-using animals with our practices firmly embedded in the world – where else could they be embedded? – which is not identifiable apart from these practices. And we do not have questions external to the framework and questions

internal to the framework that are in any fundamental sense different kinds of questions, for we have no inner/outer distinction. There is no intelligible question about how mind or language hooks on to the world. Both are part of the world. Where else could they be? What we always have is part of the world interacting with other parts of the world.¹²

Such pronouncements get their purchase from (among other things) the anti-representationalism to which Nielsen is firmly committed. Nielsen rejects the idea that language "represents" the world, and the corollary that true propositions are *made true* by their faithful fit – their "correspondence" – with reality. It may seem counter-intuitive to think in this way (one often hears contemporary analytic philosophers speak their "realist intuitions"), but Nielsen, child of logical positivism that he is, has little time for the philosophical theses – realism, representationalism, and the correspondence theory of truth – to which such intuitions typically give rise. The main problem, he thinks, is a verificationist one: it is that we lack a clear idea of what it would mean for bits of language – sentences, propositions, "marks and noises," as Rorty has referred to them – to stand in relations of "fit" or "correspondence" with bits of non-language (the world). In what could such relations consist? What criterion or method of verification might we consult in order to distinguish (supposedly) accurate representations from their inaccurate counterparts? If there is no way to get between language and its object in order to differentiate between the two, we must give up the idea that some of our beliefs correspond to a non-linguistic reality while others fail to achieve this correspondence. As Rorty hyperbolically put the point, we must give up the idea of "Nature's Own Language" – the idea that the world favours certain descriptions of itself over others. "The world does not speak," Nielsen is fond of saying, "only we do." In short, absent some criterion for success in having achieved an "accurate representation of reality," there is no choice but to conclude that, while we may (and do) enjoy causal touch with the world, no good sense can be attributed to the view that we interact with the world *representationally*.¹³

One might wonder how (or if) such metaphysical views have shaped Nielsen's political-philosophical thinking. Nielsen has at times denied that philosophy and politics are tightly or necessarily linked,

suggesting that the connections between one's views on such philosophical topics as the nature of truth, knowledge, rationality, and morality and one's political commitments are looser than many people suppose. The idea is that philosophy turns on a separate normative axle from politics, that there is ample space for political disagreement among philosophers with otherwise similar metaphysical views.¹⁴ On the one hand, many thinkers with whom Nielsen is in broad political agreement – G. A. Cohen or Andrew Levine, say – find many of the metaphysical views to which Nielsen is committed hopelessly wrongheaded. On the other hand, as the example of Richard Rorty, a New Deal liberal, confirms, general agreement on metaphysical matters is no guarantee of general agreement on political matters. "Rorty ... should not be so spooked by the ghost of 'grand theory,'" Nielsen has remarked, "that [he continues] to ignore the careful and politically relevant work of analytical Marxians such as G. A. Cohen, John Roemer, Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and David Schweickart."¹⁵ Even so, and whatever is to be made of the connections between philosophy and politics in general, it is instructive to see how the metaphysical theses to which Nielsen is committed and his political philosophy are made to hang together.

While Nielsen is skeptical about "grand theory," and while he rejects philosophy as a foundational discipline,¹⁶ he thinks philosophy can assist us in making sense of the world – where "making sense of" is taken historically, contextually, and fallibilistically – and provide us with a vision for how it could be improved. The echoes here of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach – "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world ... the point, however, is to *change* it"¹⁷ – is by no means accidental. Nielsen believes that, "after the demise of the tradition," there remains an important role for a kind of *critical theory*. Such a theory borrows selectively from the Frankfurt school – from Adorno, Horkheimer, and, importantly, Marcuse and Habermas – but it is above all distinctly "Marxian" in character.¹⁸ Such a critical theory, Nielsen explains,

identifies with working-class interests and seeks to sharpen them in ways that will lead to the end of class society, and to the liberation of working people from domination and subservience.... It seeks to show how workers, and others as well,

are dominated and forced into conditions of subordination and sometimes even servitude by the workings of the capitalist system, including the domination of the rest of society by the capitalist class.¹⁹

Marxian critical theory is thus an empirical theory with an emancipatory intent.²⁰ While it aims to provide an accurate (causal, empirical) account of things, its research program is animated by a decidedly normative perspective.

There are connections between a critical theory of the sort sketched above and Nielsen's interest in wide reflective equilibrium (WRE) that are worth examining more closely.²¹ Just as Marxian critical theory represents the most promising mode of social criticism after the eschatological certainty of earlier Marxian thinkers has been set aside, WRE names the most promising method of justification after the great foundationalist expectations of earlier philosophers have been eschewed.²² If we accept that there are no deep normative foundations to which we can turn when seeking to justify our moral and political beliefs, the best we can hope for is to bring our moral intuitions, principles, and best empirical studies into wide reflective equilibrium.

WRE is a coherentist method of justification. It starts with a society's ... most firmly held specific particular considered judgments or considered convictions and seeks to forge them into a consistent and coherent whole along with other considered judgments (judgments at all levels of generality) and as well with other relevant beliefs that are generally reasonably, uncontestedly, and widely held in the society.²³

On Nielsen's view, in short, Marxian critical theory and WRE are products of the same metaphilosophical picture: both reject the pretensions of Philosophy (big P) in favour of the fallibilist, contextualist, and historicist (though non-relativistic and deeply reflective) orientation constitutive of Wilfrid Sellars's (small p) philosophy. Just as the conclusions of an emancipatory critical theory are subject to revision and correction, so too shall 'no wide reflective equilibrium ... be unconditionally final: the

'last word' written in stone."²⁴ We cannot look around our own corner (as Nietzsche put it) to "anticipate the deeper changes in consciousness, not in our own community and certainly not in any other.... Eternal vigilance is no guarantee of eternity."²⁵ Taking Marxian critical theory and WRE seriously suggests that there is no point in rendering final pronouncements on normative matters in advance or *a priori*. Both suggest that complex social, political, and economic problems cannot be worked out from the comfort of the armchair – that observation, experiment, historical knowledge, and contextual sensitivity are indispensable. We philosophers may hanker for something more grandiose, for the ability to meditate about normative questions from the point of view of eternity, from *nowhere*. For better or worse, Nielsen regards that as an impossible aspiration. The world is always in flux, the future always open and uncertain.

Marxian critical theory and WRE shouldn't be regarded as consolation prizes or as philosophies of retreat. As Rorty well put the point, "We should not regret our inability to perform a feat which no one has any idea how to perform."²⁶ We have no choice but to muddle along, gather evidence, test our claims, correct our errors, keep an open mind, and try to have our beliefs and commitments cohere with each other in some kind of justificatory web.

2. EGALITARIANISM AND SOCIALISM

Like most people who think of themselves as egalitarians, Nielsen's belief in political equality has its roots in a conviction about the equal moral worth of human beings, *viz.*, everyone's life matters equally; no one's life matters more than anyone else's. This conviction does not by itself recommend a scheme of distributive justice: it says little or nothing about the kind of political arrangements entailed by a commitment to equality, nor about *which* substantive things (if any) people should have equal amounts of. Rather, it bolsters the moral conviction that when we abstract from our own personal points of view, when we see the world "as if from a great height, in abstraction from the engagement [we] have with this life because it is [ours],"²⁷ we cannot but conclude that everyone's life matters and matters equally. To be sure, this conclusion will not resonate with everyone. As is the case with all fundamental moral commitments, moreover, it is difficult

to imagine how a debate about its truth might be settled without either party – egalitarian and skeptic alike – eventually claiming something like Martin Luther’s “Here I stand; I can do no other.”

Like most contemporary Anglophone political philosophers, Nielsen regards John Rawls as a pivotal figure. Indeed, Nielsen places Rawls alongside Aristotle and Hobbes as history’s most important political philosophers.²⁸ Despite his deep appreciation of and admiration for Rawls’s work, his critical engagement with Rawls’s theory of justice represents one of Nielsen’s most important contributions to the academic literature on egalitarianism. Nielsen differs from Rawls in two important respects. First, he has argued that Rawls’s theory of justice is insufficiently egalitarian, in large part because on Nielsen’s reading Rawls’s “difference principle” implies some sort of class stratification.²⁹ (Nielsen has recently weakened this claim; see below.) Secondly – and this is importantly related to Nielsen’s first line of criticism – Rawls has remained for the most part noncommittal about the economic and social institutions that would properly implement his principles of justice, thus demonstrating an insensitivity to the point that institutions must be appraised in part by the extent to which they contribute to class divisions.

As is well known, Rawls’s highly influential difference principle (that social and economic inequalities be arranged to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged) is designed to be sensitive to those situations in which an egalitarian redistribution removes, or would be thought to remove, the incentive for people to work harder or deploy their talents efficiently. The idea, plainly put, is that intelligent, reasonably altruistic young people who have a choice of career would not submit to the rigours of medical school and practice, say, without superior compensation.³⁰ Many dismiss any form of egalitarianism that goes beyond the difference principle as absurd. After all, it would lead to everyone, *including* the worst off group, being worse off.

How does Nielsen’s egalitarianism go beyond Rawls’s difference principle? As we have already seen, Nielsen begins with the principle that everyone’s life matters equally. Egalitarianism comes in many forms – there are many ways in which a concern for equality can rear its head, and many dimensions along which people can be made equal. Like Rawls, moreover, Nielsen regards equality as an extrinsic value: equality is not valuable in

itself; it is valuable only because it represents a necessary (though insufficient) condition for people to exercise their autonomy and to satisfy their needs:

[A]s far as reasonably possible, conditions should be brought into existence or, where in existence, sustained, which make for an equal satisfaction of the needs of everyone at the highest level of need satisfaction for each compatible with the needs of everyone being so treated.³¹

From the principle that everyone’s life matters equally and the ideal of achieving universal autonomy and need satisfaction, Nielsen concludes that equality of condition, particularly equality of wealth, is what egalitarian justice requires.³² Nielsen argues that, where such equality of condition does not prevail, social hierarchies will arise as a matter of course. Such hierarchies in turn (and in practice) create power asymmetries that will invariably contribute to the violation of the principle of the basic moral equality of all persons with which we began. A genuinely free society, therefore, must also be an egalitarian society. It must not only provide people with equal rights, opportunities, and liberties but also with substantial material equality so that no members can use their greater share of resources to coerce or oppress others.³³ Under capitalism, Nielsen believes that class divisions will continue to structure society, leading to unequal power relations between the owners of the means of production and the workers. Nielsen argues on this basis that an egalitarian society will also be a socialist society defined by, among other things, the common ownership of the means or the *principal* means of production.

It can be plausibly argued that the difference principle accommodates Nielsen’s concerns, given the assumption that, properly understood, it would permit more autonomy and satisfy more needs than a more strictly egalitarian principle. It is important to keep in mind here that Rawls believes that primary goods – “all purpose means” such as rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth that every person is expected to want whatever the plans of her or his life – are the proper metric of distributive justice.³⁴

In his reply to Norman Daniels in *Reason and Emancipation*, Nielsen allows a conditional reading of the difference principle that states “If certain

incentives work to make the worst-off as well-off as possible, then it would be irrational to reject them in favor of strict equality, once we rule out envy."³⁵ Under this reading of the difference principle, inequality can only be justified *if it is necessary*.

This concession brings Nielsen closer to Rawls. Rawls has often been interpreted as offering a justification for welfare state capitalism with its provisions for unemployment, social security, as well as substantial public goods such as universal health care.³⁶ It comes as a surprise to many that John Rawls himself claims that "justice as fairness" is compatible with and requires either democratic socialism or a property-owning democracy.³⁷ The nature of a property-owning democracy is somewhat indeterminate, but it surely and minimally requires significant government interference to ensure that the ownership of the means of production is fair among citizens.³⁸

Do Nielsen's criticisms of Rawls miss the mark then? One difference that remains is that Nielsen's response to the "equality of what" question (in light of *what* should egalitarians redistribute goods and resources?) is much broader and includes welfare or well-being along with primary goods and/or capabilities. Nielsen advocates a form of equality of *result* or *outcome* – grounded in what Nielsen has referred to as his "weak consequentialism" according to which the morality of an action is judged *at least in part* by its consequences.³⁹ He is inclined to think that, when people's needs have been met, we ought to continue to aspire to an equal satisfaction of *wants*.⁴⁰

Another fundamental difference between Nielsen and Rawls involves their understanding and employment of wide reflective equilibrium (WRE). Rawls excludes from wide reflective equilibrium controversial metaphysical, epistemological, and scientific theories. The argument in *A Theory of Justice* proceeds independently of specific facts about the society of the choosers behind the 'veil of ignorance' – indeed, they know neither the type of society they live in nor their place in history. Rawls does not employ reflective equilibrium as a form of critical theory nor does he admit ideological theories or disputed views about economics, imperialism, human nature, class, gender, or race.

In contrast, Nielsen writes,

[I]n the realm of ideal theory ... liberals and radicals, social democrats and socialists, can, rather extensively, join forces. When we turn ... to the real world and to a consideration of the

But the elements that go into *wide* reflective equilibrium, if thought through carefully, burst asunder all autonomous conceptions of moral philosophy, redefining moral philosophy in such a way that it becomes a part of a general conception of critical theory tending an emancipatory approach to human problems (including moral problems) that remains systematically empirical-cum-theoretical, where moral theory and social theory come to be closely integrated into the human sciences.⁴¹

Nielsen's egalitarianism is based largely on his analysis of capitalism and what he takes to be its inevitable harms.⁴² His domain of inquiry is not the principles of justice for *only* liberal societies, but rather justice for *any* society. This requires an appeal to controversial claims about economics, sociology, human nature, and naturalism. For example: "Many people's beliefs are distorted by ideology and adaptive preferences." "Market socialism can efficiently allocate goods." "Workplace democracy can provide the basis for an efficient and more humane economic system." "Human beings are capable of rejecting the urge to dominate each other and can develop a large scale, classless society." "Naturalism is the most reasonable view about the nature of reality." Reasonable people reject all of these claims. Nielsen's socialism is central to his views; Rawls, to the extent that he might be thought a socialist, makes socialism a relatively minor part of his system.

Another key difference is to be found in their attitudes towards ideal theory. Nielsen has on many occasions engaged in ideal theory, but with considerably more ambivalence than Rawls. Rawls believes that there is a properly philosophical task that involves organizing our intuitions, considered judgments, and moral principles within the scope of moral theory. Nielsen holds that any boundary between moral philosophy and other disciplines is a convention that should be analyzed and rejected if it is without practical import, if it does not contribute to improving the world. Many of the recondite debates engaged in by ideal theorists turn out, he thinks, to be superfluous:

thick texture of facts and conceptualizations of political sociology, history, and political economy, I would argue ... that the prospects for an extensive equality of condition which also carries with it autonomy – equal autonomy for all – and fraternity are, as near as we can be, to being impossible without socialism and that socialism ... must, to be acceptable, be some form of market socialism.⁴³

Socialism is a dirty word in many circles, either identified with violent, despotic planned economies or considered to be an economically unworkable ideal the attempted implementation of which would cause widespread misery. Indeed, Nielsen cites Andrew Levine to the effect that “actually existing socialism is capitalism’s best argument in defense of itself.”⁴⁴ Many political philosophers are egalitarians; far fewer are socialists. Nielsen’s socialism is yet more radical in arguing that there is a continuum between reform and revolution.⁴⁵ In cases where the injustice and misery is great enough and the probability of long-term success sufficient, violent revolution can be justified.⁴⁶ In a revealing autobiographical remark, Nielsen writes:

... by the time I began to teach I had settled down into something like Deweyan social democracy. I thought that if we would hold on to our brains and be patient, we in North America, and eventually in the world, could in time end up like Sweden. The Vietnam War changed that. It was an eye-opener for me. In being part at that time of the internal resistance in the United States, I became convinced that such liberal reformist measures would never work, and *slowly* I became a Marxist, or, as I would now prefer to call it, a Marxian.⁴⁷

There are two parts to Nielsen’s support for socialism. First, he supports the plausibility of G. A. Cohen’s reconstruction of historical materialism in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense*.⁴⁸ Cohen’s version of historical materialism presents an empirical, non-teleological theory that purports to show how society may develop. Cohen holds that a society’s productive forces determine its economic structure (this is referred to as the “primacy

thesis”); its economic structure further influences the superstructure, most notably the legal and political institutions. The “development thesis” claims that productive forces tend to develop over time. (Nielsen follows Joshua Cohen in holding that the historical record falsifies the developmental thesis when applied to particular societies, but argues that it may hold when applied to the history of humankind as a whole).⁴⁹ The endogenous growth of human productive power and technological change provides reasons for a particular trajectory of history. Nielsen does not believe that the modes of production sustaining today’s capitalist societies must push us toward socialism, but he does believe that this is a possibility worth striving toward.

The second ground for the feasibility and desirability of socialism is the possibility of a functioning, democratic, market socialism. Nielsen follows John Roemer and David Schweickart’s proposals for market socialism. We cannot undertake a full description (let alone a defence) of the most developed accounts of market socialism here. However, most versions of market socialism require the public ownership of the major means of production and the democratic organization of firms in which workers elect managers. Firms compete for customers and may go out of business if they fail to operate efficiently. Businesses are taxed and the government uses these funds to provide public goods not allocated by the market, as well as to promote investment. Nielsen allows the private ownership of small businesses in cases where the owner is also a worker.⁵⁰

Though we do not know how market socialism would fare if implemented (the chasm between theory and practice is wide here), Nielsen makes a persuasive case that it is an institutional ideal worth seriously considering and, more importantly, worth experimenting with. Analytic Marxism and advocacy for socialism largely disappeared after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the supposed global triumph of liberal democracy. The last twenty years have shown that history did not end and that the apparent demise of socialism was perhaps prematurely declared. The Washington Consensus has done a great deal of damage in the developing world and even the IMF has distanced itself from “one-size-fits-all” demands that states open their countries to free trade, privatization, and the implementation of austerity plans. The global recession that began with the U.S. sub-prime mortgage fiasco has made clear the need for more oversight in the financial markets. In the United States, the comparative lack of a safety net for

the unemployed and uninsured is evident to many. Most proposals look backward to welfare state capitalism. Philosophers like Nielsen by contrast provide an ideal to look forward to.

3. COSMOPOLITANISM, NATIONALISM, AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

In his 1985 book, *Equality and Liberty*, Nielsen writes, "The principles of radical egalitarian justice I have articulated are meant to apply globally and not just to particular societies."⁵¹ A significant part of his work over the last twenty-five years has involved defending and elaborating on this claim, culminating in the papers collected in *Globalization and Justice*. At the same time, Nielsen confesses that he sometimes feels "that it is indecent to talk about global justice or engage in exercises setting out principles of global justice."⁵² Much academic work on global justice, he sometimes complains, needlessly transforms banal truisms and moral platitudes into highly technical, arcane debates, replete with the requisite jargon and distinctions.

Absolute poverty afflicts hundreds of millions of people who don't have enough to eat and lack access to clean drinking water or basic vaccines. Young children are forced to abandon their school and work to support their families. Refugees flee murderous regimes while the most powerful members of the international community stand by idly, unwilling to do more than sustain – and only barely – the survivors in UNHCR camps.

That there are human beings living such miserable, humiliating lives is shameful; that we inhabit a world of obscene inequality makes such injustices more shameful still. The wealthiest quintile of the world's population commands more than 90 per cent of the global income while the poorest quintile survives on roughly 0.25 per cent.⁵³ More than 1 billion people subsist on less than one dollar per day, and roughly the same number of people lack access to clean water. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that roughly 1.3 billion people – almost one fifth of the world's population – live below the poverty line.⁵⁴ Nearly 800 million people do not have enough food, and about 500 million people are chronically malnourished. More than 10 million children – 98 per cent of

them from the planet's poorest countries – die each year before their fifth birthday for reasons directly attributable to extreme poverty.

Statistics like these are horrifying. The disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is greater today than ever before.⁵⁵ Unthinkable human misery has persisted in a time of unprecedented opulence. Even within affluent societies, some people's life prospects are radically inferior to other people's life prospects. Some people enjoy the resources, freedoms, and opportunities a real chance at a good life requires; many more do not. That so much in this world is horribly wrong is evident to anyone who cares to look.

In recent years, Nielsen has often compared the world to a pig-sty in his writings. Though he has few illusions about the so-called Marxist regimes and their atrocities, the collapse of socialism as a guiding ideal in much of the world depresses him. Some on the left – including, ambivalently, Nielsen himself – find hope with Hugo Chávez, but Venezuela's social reforms, it is worth stressing, have depended heavily on high oil prices. Moreover, Chávez has increasingly curtailed the judiciary and media and squashed opposition to his "Bolivarian" revolution.⁵⁶ For Nielsen, as for Rorty, the left is the party of hope.⁵⁷ Without a vision of a better world to work toward, however, hope dwindles. Our title for this collection, *Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will*, comes from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.⁵⁸ Nielsen's vision of the world is grim, yet his politics are optimistic – some would say utopian. But without a vision of a better world to work toward hope dwindles.

What then is the value of sophisticated philosophical inquiry? Nielsen's answer is that philosophical inquiry, conceived along contemporary disciplinary lines, is of limited value. On Nielsen's view, moral theory is unlikely to be of much help. However, a critical theory employing wide reflective equilibrium that includes not only our moral intuitions but also scientific and social scientific research may allow philosophers to become public intellectuals. His work has increasingly moved in this direction. At Concordia University in Montreal, the assigned readings for Nielsen's 2003 seminar on "Globalization, Imperialism, and Global Justice" included David Harvey's *The New Imperialism*, Jan Aart Scholte's *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, Richard Falk's *The Declining World Order*, and Thomas Pogge's *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Of the four, only Pogge has a philosophical

background, and he has increasingly collaborated with economists and moved in the direction of providing policy recommendations.⁵⁹

Despite the increasingly practical nature of his analysis, Nielsen's account does contain many philosophical arguments and positions. To begin, he is a cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitans hold that every human being is of equal moral worth. More controversially, they contend that justice applies globally, not merely within the nation, state, ethnic group, or similar association. We have duties of justice to all humans, irrespective of individuals' group membership (though this does not rule out some special associative duties owed to compatriots and others). Though cosmopolitanism has attracted many supporters over the last decade or so, it is still a relatively controversial position.⁶⁰ Philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, David Miller, and Michael Blake have argued that the conditions that give rise to claims of justice do not occur on a global level.⁶¹

None of these philosophers deny that there are moral duties to alleviate absolute poverty. Compassion and a regard for people's common humanity serve here as a ground for eliminating misery. What they deny is that such duties are rightly characterized as duties of *justice*, in principle enforceable through the use of coercion. Indeed, Nagel, Miller, and Blake endorse egalitarian justice *within* societies but explicitly deny that the imperatives of distributive justice apply between societies. On their view, the necessary institutional arrangements that give rise to claims of justice simply do not occur outside of the state.

Such theorists endorse a version of what Richard Arneson calls "sufficientarianism," a version of the doctrine that what *really* ought to trouble egalitarians is not inequality as such but the poor absolute condition of those at the bottom.⁶² As long as everybody has a decent quality of life, the comparative squalor of some states to their opulent neighbours is not by itself *unjust*.

Nielsen has not weighed in on this debate at any length, though it is clear that he believes that egalitarianism does extend beyond borders. He is one of the few theorists who has argued in favour of a world government on the grounds that this would provide the conditions for global egalitarianism that many critics claim is currently lacking. It is likely, too, that he considers these debates somewhat superfluous given the miserable state of the world. A good deal of philosophical work on global justice is conducted at a high

level of abstraction. Philosophers are content to follow Rawls in doing "ideal theory," articulating the principles of justice that would be used to guide the institutions of the best feasible society. They regard substantial policy recommendations as beyond their competence (often rightly so!) but wrongly think that their moral principles can float free of detailed engagement with the way the world actually works.

Nielsen dedicates *Globalization and Justice* to the anti-globalization movement and writes: "May it flourish, grow, and win." Nielsen reported on the protests against the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. He may well have been the only protester in his seventies near the wall and police that shielded the political and business elites from criticism.⁶³

Nielsen's target is not globalization *per se*, but *capitalist* globalization, particularly the form that has taken place under the "Washington Consensus."

What anti-globalizers are really set against (whether they recognize it or not) is imperialism, and most particularly capitalist imperialism and the imperialists' use of globalization increasingly to exploit people, though some people are exploited more harshly than others – for example, Colombian poor workers more harshly than Danish poor workers. Capitalism's relentless pursuit of surplus accumulation, a persistent and tenacious pursuit of profit, is endemic to it.⁶⁴

Globalization is likely unavoidable and in many respects positive. New technologies and ideas do enormous good and the opportunity to travel broadens many people's range of freedoms. Yet Nielsen believes that there is considerable evidence that capitalism not only harms people but because of its very structure must continue to harm people. A just world for Nielsen will invariably be a socialist world:

Socialism is and always has been an internationalist movement. Socialism may, of course, start in one country or at nearly the same time in a cluster of countries, but it can never be stable or be what it aspires to be until it is worldwide.⁶⁵

The driving force behind capitalism is the maximization of profits, quite independently of the intentions of individual capitalists: the very nature of the system eliminates competitors who sacrifice profits for social goods. Moreover, capitalists use state governments and international organizations such as the World Bank and IMF to further their interests, entering markets and overriding the efforts of national governments to provide alternative economic arrangements or a social safety net. Nielsen accepts what he calls a weak version of the *capitalist domination thesis*: capitalist economic systems have a strong influence on societies' political institutions (as well as their cultural institutions).

Contemporary cosmopolitans for the most part eschew socialism as either unfeasible or undesirable. Nielsen addresses this concern in a commentary on Charles Beitz and Henry Shue's seminal works on global justice: "[their analysis] looks at the world as if capitalism and a capitalist world order did not exist and then talks about international justice independently of the facts about imperialism, exploitation, class division, the imperatives of capitalism and the like."⁶⁶

According to Nielsen,

We will not get beyond an ideological understanding of how global justice requires a north/south redistribution, and what that redistribution is to consist in, if we see the issue as simply a conflict between affluent nation states and poor ones and do not understand it in terms of capitalist domination rooted in the imperatives of the capitalist mode of production.⁶⁷

What would global market socialism look like? Global socialism would be built on the wealth produced by capitalism. It would use markets for allocation, but the guiding principle for production would not be profit but rather human need (and not the needs created by the advertising industry).⁶⁸ There would be a democratic form of collective ownership and a division of powers, many devolving to nation-states, municipalities or worker-controlled firms with feedback mechanisms between levels. Global socialism would require a form of world governance. Nielsen himself suggests we could have a world federation of nations built out of a reformed General Assembly.

For a clear idea of Nielsen's views about a just global institutional structure, we must discuss his liberal nationalism. Nielsen is a Quebec separatist and a liberal nationalist,⁶⁹ but also holds that "[his] commitment to nationalism and, under certain conditions, secession, takes second place to [his] Marxian internationalism or, if you will, cosmopolitanism."⁷⁰ Despite the priority of cosmopolitanism, Nielsen believes that the two do not in fact conflict but rather complement each other. Cosmopolitans should be liberal nationalists. A just global institutional structure will be organized in a way that permits the self-determination of nations.

How are the two seemingly conflicting ideals of national self-determination and cosmopolitanism reconciled? Nielsen defends the paradoxical claim that cosmopolitans ought to be sympathetic to liberal nationalist projects. National self-government provides an effective forum for democracy, as well as a key source of identity for most people. Indeed, cultural membership and group identity should be thought of as Rawlsian "primary goods," a position for which Will Kymlicka has argued. Furthermore, *liberal* nationalism in the actual world provides a better basis for cosmopolitanism and global justice than versions of cosmopolitanism that are non-nationalist or anti-nationalist. As a result, Nielsen supports a presumptive moral right for a liberal nation to secede from the state if the majority of the citizens clearly express a preference to do so.

Nielsen denies that his commitment to nationalism arose from his affiliation with the Quebec sovereignty movement. Rather, he locates it in his reading of Isaiah Berlin's *Vico and Herder* and in Herder himself⁷¹:

The Enlightenment, and Marxism as one of its heirs, has seen very well indeed how tradition and local attachments fetter us. It took, as a way of counterbalancing that, Herder to show us the importance of local attachments in enabling us to find significance in our lives and to sustain that sense of significance. He showed us how we could have that without falling into cultural chauvinism.⁷²

When Herder's insight is generalized to contemporary times, national identity becomes a universal good arising from the need for self-definition:

Self-definition is an indispensable condition for human flourishing. But self-definition involves, though it, of course, involves much more than this, seeing ourselves as New Zealanders, Dutch, Irish, Ghanaian, Canadians, or whatever. Or at least this sense of national identity has come into being with the establishment of industrial societies. And in all societies that we know anything about, group identity is important. It is plausible to regard national identity as a form of group identity appropriate to, and functional for, modern industrial societies.⁷³

Cosmopolitans, on Nielsen's account, must not only recognize the equal moral worth of humankind and exhibit common concern for its well-being, they ought also to take an active interest and pleasure in the diversity of human cultures. Cosmopolitanism can take a moral form according to which every human being matters equally but remain neutral with regard to institutional arrangements. Or it can prescribe specific institutions for its realization such as increased centralized power (e.g., in the UN), or, in Nielsen's case, a plurality of liberal nations within a world state. Since national identity matters to most people, cosmopolitans should prescribe nationalism as long as it remains compatible with cosmopolitan ideals. Furthermore, under present conditions, nations play a fundamental role in guaranteeing democracy as the primary forum under which people can achieve self-government. The qualification is that only *liberal* nations are compatible with cosmopolitanism.

The consequence is that when a majority of members within a liberal nation vote to secede, they have a right to do so. Nielsen likens this right to no-fault divorce. It is important to understand how radical Nielsen's view is, its similarities to what many sovereigntists maintain notwithstanding. For example, it contradicts the Supreme Court of Canada's opinion *Reference re Secession of Quebec* ([1998] 2 S.C.R. 217).⁷⁴ Most theorists argue that secession should be difficult since it often leads to violence and the widespread violation of human rights. Nielsen denies this holds when liberal nations secede from liberal democracies.

Notably, only *nations* have a right to secession. Nielsen follows David Miller in defining nations as historical communities that share a common history, language, and culture, as

a group of people who recognize one another as belonging to the same political community, acknowledge special obligations to each other, and either have or aspire to political autonomy in virtue of the characteristics they believe they share, such as a common history, attachment to a geographical place and to a public culture that differentiates them from their neighbours.⁷⁵

Nielsen rejects the partition of Quebec because Anglophones and Allophones in Quebec do not constitute a distinct nation.⁷⁶ What distinguishes nations from ethnic minorities (composed of immigrant groups) and national minorities (who do not aspire to form their own political community) is their territorial and political nature. Nations of course rise and fall, but when they do exist, they aspire to some form of self-government. They need not wish to form their own state and, indeed, this is unfeasible in the case of many smaller nations who lack the infrastructure to support a viable state. But they *may* aspire to statehood and when they do, they should have this right:

... we should realize that in our state system, given the present strategic importance of nations, democracy is best attained or approximated by a liberal nationalism or by a people, generally with social liberal commitments – socialist or social democratic commitments – that will carry with it a cosmopolitanism organized in a nation-state or a multi-nation-state, which will be nationalistic if their nations are threatened or insecure. Both realize democracy more adequately than other forms of political liberalism, including its anti-nationalist cosmopolitan forms.⁷⁷

Nielsen's global socialism and his cosmopolitan nationalism raise some concerns. One question is how Nielsen reconciles his arguments for liberal nationalism with his ideal of a world government that would be a federalist,

constitutional democracy. Some form of world government is needed to ensure that justice is upheld in the international sphere. Max Weber's understanding of the state as holding a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence over a territory is important here. Without some means of enforcing rules, there is little hope for a stable and just international regime. Powerful states will renege on their agreements when it suits their leaders, genocide will continue in regions of little geopolitical consequence, the global poor will remain voiceless in their penury. However, an *effective* form of global government may not sit easily with the self-determination of liberal nations. There is something to the fear of some Quebec sovereigntists that even the status of a "distinct nation" as a federal system may undermine the shared political culture that motivates secession.

Turning now to socialism in general, rather than an aspect of Québécois political culture, we should note that it requires robust participatory or deliberative democracy at a grassroots level. It requires a democratic *culture* as much as it requires democratic institutions and procedures. As Nielsen conceives of it, socialism relies on a conception of *homo politicus*: people will take an active interest in collectively running their political and working lives. What happens when local and global interests conflict? On the one hand, considerable local control is necessary both because of the limits of information (local people have a better understanding of their needs and resources) and because of the desirability of democracy. On the other hand, what is good for the locals is not necessarily good for humanity.

Consider the vast difference in resources around the world. What would happen if Saudi Arabians, Russians, or Canadians, say, wanted to keep their resources for their own populations, unless they received significant payment? Would the reformed General Assembly arrive at a decision and send in an occupying force if the Canadians resisted? No doubt there are reasonable solutions in many cases, but the pluralism that characterizes most contemporary states will be less tractable on a global level. There is powerful evidence that robust democracy and the desire to contribute to the common good relies in part on the relative homogeneity of the population.⁷⁸

Finally, there is a tension between Nielsen's pragmatism and his *global* socialism. Pragmatists favour – or ought to favour – experimentation in the arena of social and political affairs. As a matter of fact, we don't know what a democratic, market socialist society will be like at the level of the

nation-state, let alone at the global level. Nielsen is surely correct that we should construct reasonable social theories that attempt to explain how, for instance, market socialism can work. But theory will come up against the world in unpredictable, perhaps appalling ways. This might suggest that we should not aspire to global socialism until we have more reliable evidence that it is feasible and desirable at the level of the nation-state.

Global poverty is enormously complicated and its causes are sometimes counterintuitive.⁷⁹ Nielsen in many places suggests that what is required is the redistribution of wealth from the North to the South. As he well knows, this is too simple, even if the message that *some* action on the part of the privileged is necessary. It ignores the vices of an international aid bureaucracy beholden, not to the people it is supposed to help, but to wealthy private and public funders with their own agendas. It overlooks the possibility that food aid can undermine local agriculture, creating dependence. Most damningly, it risks dismissing the possibility of *capitalist* solutions such as microloans or the removal of trade barriers such as agricultural subsidies and tariffs. One of the most successful means of lifting people out of poverty is microcredit.⁸⁰ But this is a *capitalist* strategy – a strategy employed *within* a capitalist economy – that provides the poor with access to private property.⁸¹

Capitalism is a complex, flexible economic system, and we should be careful to distinguish between the capitalism of William Blake's satanic mills and the nineteenth-century robber barons which dominated American industry and the capitalism of much of the developed world. This isn't to claim that contemporary developed democracies approach an ideal of the just state. Rather, it is a demand for sensitivity to detail and nuance to the range of possible economic systems, including so-called mixed economies.

We do not suggest that Nielsen has not or cannot respond to these concerns. Unfortunately, while Nielsen at times resembles Dewey or Rorty in rejecting theory and advocating practical measures, he in many respects remains a highly abstract theorist. He is somebody who has dedicated most of his life to philosophy. Readers will look in vain in his books and essays for detailed analyses of the economic and sociological literature. Instead, they will find careful, often compelling philosophical arguments, but relatively little in terms of specific evidence.

This is perhaps to be expected. Nielsen has given cogent reasons for moving beyond the traditional disciplinary barriers set by twentieth-century analytic philosophy. His work provides an ideal for philosophical practice: it liberates younger philosophers from the strictures of insular, professional philosophy. Best of all, he leaves work to be done toward articulating an empirically informed, coherent account of a better world, uninhibited by the strictures of professionalized philosophy. The legacy of a political philosopher is not so much in the solutions offered but in the problems posed and the paths opened for further investigation. It remains to be seen whether greater numbers of political philosophers will move still further away from (big-P) Philosophy's abstraction and generalization and instead acquire the tools to do, as well as evaluate, social science.⁸²

A NOTE ON THE SELECTION OF THESE PAPERS

Toward the end of an unusually long meeting in the University of Calgary philosophy department, Nielsen's colleague Thomas Hurka is said to have quipped: "I'd like to state for the record that during this meeting Kai has completed a monograph, four articles, and an edited collection." Nielsen's legendarily voluminous productivity is partially accounted for by what he has called his "compulsive busyness."

Selecting thirteen papers from Nielsen's over four hundred publications is a difficult task. This volume offers a selection of what we judge to be Kai Nielsen's best work in political philosophy. We acknowledge at the outset that different papers could have been chosen. Whether another set of essays would have been more illuminating, more representative of Nielsen's political-philosophical vision as a whole, or superior in some other respect, we can only leave to readers to decide.

Two aspects of Nielsen's work in political philosophy posed a further challenge to our editorial task. First, there is some repetition and overlap among Nielsen's political essays: his ideas have changed over time; emphases have shifted; criticisms have been modified and sharpened; positions have been restated and reframed; claims and arguments have been expressed in new and different ways. This raised for us a number of difficult questions: Should we include Nielsen's most recent papers on a particular issue or

topic? Should we opt instead for the papers Nielsen himself thinks best or most edifying on that topic? Or should we rather let our decisions be guided by the critical attention some of his essays have enjoyed?

The second major editorial challenge we faced – a challenge closely related to, and perhaps even the corollary of, the first – stemmed from our judgment that there is no definitive paper people ought to read if they want to know (in a nutshell, as it were) what Nielsen thinks about equality, wide reflective equilibrium, critical theory, global justice, socialism, and other topics that he has discussed repeatedly over the years. In the end, no collection could have assuaged all of these complications. There are simply too many papers to select from, and too many plausible criteria against which to select them.

Our main goal in selecting the papers we did was to give readers an idea of the scope of Nielsen's contribution in political philosophy, as well as to provide the intellectual context to appreciate its significance. We have tried to include papers that fully state Nielsen's views on the topics discussed in the introduction and have for the most part selected papers that have not appeared in previous collections. There is also an emphasis on recent publications, particularly when Nielsen's views have evolved over time. We hope that the volume will demonstrate the breadth of Nielsen's political-philosophical writings and the eclectic mélange of sources and influences from which they draw.⁸³

Above all, our aim is that the essays collected here show how Nielsen's ideas in political philosophy hang together, how they come to constitute an original, elegant, and mutually reinforcing whole. We seek to show how Nielsen's political philosophy represents a humane vision guided by the conviction that human beings can rationally administer their own affairs in accordance with their best ideals and most worthy values.

- 1 Address at the twenty-fourth annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, New York University, December 28, 1934. It is reprinted in Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey*, 292-99.
- 2 Nielsen, "Toward a Liberal Socialist Cosmopolitan Nationalism," 437-63.
- 3 We confine our discussion here mainly to Nielsen's work from the eighties up to the present. However, it is worth noting that Nielsen was a leading proponent, along with Stephen Toulmin, of the so-called good-reasons approach. See Nielsen, "Class Conflict, Marxism, and the Good-Reasons Approach," 89-112. There is a clear link between Nielsen's earlier work on the "good-reasons approach" and his later ruminations on wide reflective equilibrium and critical theory. See Nielsen, "The 'Good Reasons Approach' and 'Ontological Justifications' of Morality," 116-30. Unfortunately, a full elaboration of these connections takes us beyond the scope of this introduction.
- 4 For Nielsen's sustained treatment of these issues, see Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition and On Transforming Philosophy*. Also see Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*. An abbreviated list of other papers include "On Finding One's Feet in Philosophy" (included here); "The Poverty of Moral Philosophy" (included here); the essays in parts two and three of Nielsen, *Naturalism without Foundations*; "On Needing a Moral Theory"; and "The Very Idea of a Critical Theory."
- 5 Nielsen has remarked that he should have liked to dedicate more time and intellectual energy to metaphysical topics but feels that his effort is better spent in the service of moral and political causes such as equality, socialism, global justice, and human emancipation. Spending too much time on metaphysical questions would be like "fiddling while Rome burns."
- 6 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 309.
- 7 The influence of John Dewey should not be overlooked, though Dewey plays a less significant role than Wittgenstein or Rorty. See Nielsen, "Dewey's Conception of Philosophy," 110-34.
- 8 There is nothing inherently problematic about an appearance/reality distinction. Ordinary people make use of such a distinction without difficulty all the time. As Nielsen might say, this sort of distinction only becomes problematic when it becomes metaphysical, when philosophers take it as their unique task to view the world "under the aspect of eternity."
- 9 Nielsen, "Metaphilosophy, Pragmatism and a Kind of Critical Theory," 126.
- 10 Not all repudiations of metaphysics rely on the claim that metaphysical propositions are nonsensical. This is significant since Nielsen sometimes lumps together his rejection of metaphysics with other philosopher's views in ways that obscure important differences. When Nielsen writes, for instance, "It is clear that, like Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, Burton

- Dreben, the logical positivists, Richard Rorty, and, in effect, W.V.O. Quine and Donald Davidson, I reject metaphysics regarding it as nonsense." Nielsen, *Atheism and Philosophy*, 10-11. It is easy to get the (erroneous) impression that all of these philosophers reject metaphysics in the same way and for the same reasons. To consider only the example of Richard Rorty, it is not that metaphysics is nonsense *per se*. Rather, on Rorty's view, metaphysics is a language game (or series of language games) that has outlived its utility, one we would do well, therefore, to eschew.
- 11 Nielsen, "Metaphilosophy, Pragmatism and a Kind of Critical Theory," 122.
- 12 Nielsen, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 327. As Hilary Putnam says, in a passage which amplifies what Nielsen says here, "[E]lements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language independent' is fatally compromised from the start. Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere." H. Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 28.
- 13 Whether and to what extent Nielsen considers himself a nominalist (à la Goodman, Rorty, or Foucault) is not entirely clear. Still, one imagines that he would express considerable sympathy with Richard Rorty when he writes, "none of us antirepresentationalists have ever doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us. What we question is whether they

are representationally independent of us. For X to be representationally independent of us is for X to have an intrinsic feature (a feature that it has under any and every description) such that it is better described by some of our terms rather than others." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, 86.

- 14 Consider, as Nielsen notes, that "One can be an anti-foundationalist and a consistent and plausible one (e.g., Nietzsche or Burke) and still not be a political liberal and one could make a reasonable case for political liberalism, as J.S. Mill and Kant did in their time and C.I. Lewis did in ours, while remaining a foundationalist."
- 15 Nielsen, "Taking Rorty Seriously," 504.
- 16 Nielsen would be quick to remind us that "philosophy" is an academic discipline formed by the exigencies of the modern university and bureaucratic power struggles within the humanities and social sciences. It is questionable whether people included in the philosophical canon up through the nineteenth century would recognize philosophy as currently practised. Readers might wish to ask themselves whether they can recognize a common denominator shared by Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Kripke, Heidegger, Rawls, Foucault, and David Lewis that makes them all practitioners of a single, coherent discipline.
- 17 See Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 145.
- 18 Nielsen prefers the designation "Marxian" to "Marxist." The former picks out someone broadly committed to the approach and moral-political vision of Marx, whereas the latter denotes a dogmatic follower. To

- put the point by way of an analogy, almost everyone working in biology today is a "Darwinian" but very few (if any) are "Darwinists." As Nielsen explains: "I regard Marx and Engels, and Rosa Luxemburg as well, as master thinkers of modernity. Much of my thinking has been formed and sustained by them. But I use 'analytic Marxian' advisedly, on analogy with 'Darwinian' rather than 'Darwinist.' Modern biologists are overwhelmingly Darwinian, but they are not 'Darwinists.' They realized — and how could it be otherwise with a broad-ranging scientific account — that Darwin was wrong about many things. But their very way of thinking was deeply formed by Darwin and they regard him as a scientific giant." Nielsen, "Socialism and Egalitarian Justice" In *Globalization and Justice*.
- 19 Nielsen, "Analytic Marxism: A Form of Critical Theory," 131. An earlier and shorter version of this article appears as Nielsen, "Analytic Marxism Streamlined," 79–89.
- 20 For those who worry that the phrase "empirical theory with an emancipatory intent" reveals a deep confusion of "is" and "ought," it is helpful to recall that Nielsen, following Hilary Putnam in particular, denies the rigid bifurcation of facts and values. Nielsen thinks that it is sometimes possible to derive a moral (though not a logical) 'ought' from an 'is.'
- 21 See Nielsen: "On There Being Wide Reflective Equilibria," (in this volume); "In Defense of Wide Reflective Equilibrium"; "Philosophy within the Limits of Wide Reflective Equilibrium Alone"; and "How to Proceed in Social Philosophy."
- 22 Indeed, one of Nielsen's main worries about critical theories of the Frankfurt school is that they often remain beholden to the synoptic ambitions of Classical Marxists, "[they] have been grand, sweeping theories of society with a wide scope, giving us programmatic schemes of an all-encompassing sort. But analytical Marxism maintains a disengaged character and self-consciously modest and critical stance." Nielsen, *Globalization and Justice*, 122.
- 23 Nielsen, "On There Being Wide Reflective Equilibria" (in this volume, 41).
- 24 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 25 Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 319.
- 26 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 340.
- 27 Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 216.
- 28 See Nielsen's reply to Norman Daniels, "Nielsen and Rawls on Egalitarianism," 294. This pronouncement came out of a conversation with G. A. Cohen, who takes Plato (not Aristotle) as the most significant political thinker of antiquity. Cohen has recently written: "I believe that at most two books in the history of Western political philosophy have a claim to be regarded as greater than *A Theory of Justice: Plato's Republic* and *Hobbes's Leviathan*." G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, 11.
- 29 See Nielsen, "On the Very Possibility of a Classless Society," 191–208. Macpherson has been an important influence on Nielsen's criticisms of Rawls.
- 30 For important criticisms of Rawls's so-called incentive argument for
- inequality, see G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*.
- 31 Nielsen, "Radical Egalitarianism Revisited," 181.
- 32 It is important to point out that Nielsen does not endorse the untenable view that each citizen be afforded equal shares of money. One need only quickly reflect on what money is, how it works, and what it is for, to see the incoherence of that ideal. As Walzer writes, "We may dream of a society where everyone has the same amount of money. But we know that money equally distributed at twelve noon of a Sunday will have been unequally redistributed before the week is out. Some people will save it, and others will invest it, and still others would spend it (and they will do so in different ways)." Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, xi. Indeed, money exists precisely to make just these kinds of transactions possible. It wouldn't be money if those who had it were not permitted to save, invest, and spend it. When Nielsen endorses equality of wealth, then, he has in mind the more radical (and socialist) idea of each person sharing equally in their society's productive forces and sharing equally in the fruits of those productive forces. Nielsen's "equality of wealth" needs to be understood against the background of this radical socialist transformation.
- 33 See Nielsen: "Radical Egalitarian Justice," and "Radical Egalitarianism Revisited." Also see Nielsen, "On Liberty and Equality."
- 34 Rawls depicts these goods as "all-purpose means" in the sense that, "They are things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else
- he wants. Regardless of what an individual's rational plans are in detail, it is assumed that there are various things which he would prefer more of rather than less. With more of these goods men can generally be assured of greater success in carrying out their intentions and in advancing their ends, whatever these ends may be." Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 92
- 35 Daniels, "Nielsen and Rawls on Egalitarianism," 283.
- 36 C.B. Macpherson drew this conclusion in *Democratic Theory*, 77–94; and "Rawls' Models of Man and Society," 341–47. Cf. Nielsen, "On the Very Possibility of a Classless Society."
- 37 Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 139; also see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 239–42.
- 38 See Freeman, *Rawls*, 226–35.
- 39 See Nielsen: "Rights and Consequences: It All Depends," and "There Is No Dilemma of Dirty Hands." Also see Barry, *Liberty and Justice: Essays in Political Theory*, 2.
- 40 See Nielsen, "Impediments to Radical Egalitarianism."
- 41 Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition*, 232.
- 42 See, for example, Nielsen, "Nozick and Socialism: Some Sociological Critiques," 222. "Nozick is utterly — or so one would judge from reading *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* — innocent about power and particularly about the way a drive for power works in our societies. That is to say, he is utterly innocent about the capitalist system. His account requires him to assume that those bent on accumulating wealth, and with that wealth unavoidably power, will restrain

themselves when they reach the limits set by the Lockean proviso."

43 Nielsen, "Radical Egalitarianism Revisited," 186.

44 Nielsen, "State Bureaucratic Socialism and Freedom." He cites Levine, *Arguing for Socialism*.

45 Nielsen: "On the Choice between Reform and Revolution," and "On Justifying Revolution."

46 Nielsen: "On Justifying Violence," "On Terrorism and Political Assassination," "Political Violence and Ideological Mystification," and "On the Moral Justification of State Terrorism."

47 Nielsen, "Reply to Andrew Levine and David Schweickart," 202.

48 G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. For Nielsen's writings on historical materialism, see Nielsen, "On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously"; "If Historical Materialism Is True, Does Morality Tatter?"; "Afterword: Remarks on the Roots of Progress"; "Reply to Andrew Levine and David Schweickart on Marx and Marxism."

49 See Joshua Cohen, "G. A. Cohen: Marx's Theory of History"; and Nielsen, "On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously."

50 See Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*; Schweickart, *Against Capitalism*; and Schweickart, *After Capitalism*. Roemer's version of market socialism in particular is one about which Nielsen has expressed his enthusiasm. Briefly, Roemer's proposal involves "two kinds of money." One is used for the purchase of ordinary goods, while the other "coupon" currency can only be used for buying shares of mutual

funds in companies. Only coupons can be used to purchase shares of mutual funds, not money. Only mutual funds can purchase shares of public firms, using coupons. An equal share of coupons is distributed to each member of society upon reaching the age of majority, and while citizens are free to trade their stock in mutual funds for stock in other mutual funds, they cannot liquidate their portfolios (cf. Roemer 1993, 96). Plainly, since coupons and mutual funds can only be traded with other coupons and mutual funds, each citizen will necessarily hold a (profit-sharing) stake in the country's firms, whether they want to or not. The coupon system, Roemer explains, "is meant to endow each adult citizen with a stream of income during his lifetime, his transient property right in the nation's 'public' firms. Only during his lifetime does a citizen have an entitlement to the profits of firms. Because shares can be purchased only with coupons, and coupons cannot be sold by citizens for money, rich citizens will not generally own more shares than poor citizens." Putting aside the proposal's many intricacies, Roemer's version of market socialism is designed to preserve the efficiency of free-market capitalism – as with capitalism, the assigned task of firms under this scheme is to maximize profits within the limits of the law – while honouring the quintessentially Marxian (egalitarian) dictate according to which the primary means of production be publicly owned, by citizens in common. The main ambition, says Roemer, is to provide a "future for socialism" – "to sketch blueprints for a feasible socialism, to provide a basis, once again, for daring to believe

in the dream." Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*, 124.

51 Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty*, 291.

52 Nielsen, "Is Global Justice Impossible?," 131.

53 See Pogge, "The Bounds of Nationalism," for a more detailed analysis of this calculation.

54 The "poverty line" is defined as "that income or expenditure level below which a minimum, nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable." See the United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 1996, 20. All other statistics are cited from the 2005 edition of the same report.

55 As the 2000 United Nations Human Development Report explains: "Global inequalities in income increased in the twentieth century by orders of magnitude out of proportion to anything experienced before. The distance between the incomes of the richest and poorest country was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973 and 72 to 1 in 1992." See Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 224.

56 See Vivanco and Wilkinson, "Hugo Chávez versus Human Rights." Also see Human Rights Watch, *Political Intolerance and Lost Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights in Venezuela*. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/venezuela0908web.pdf>. Also, see Lomnitz and Sánchez, "United by Hate: The Uses of Anti-Semitism in Chávez's Venezuela."

57 Nielsen borrows this phrase from Richard Rorty. "The Left, by definition, is the party of hope. It

insists that our nation [and indeed, our world] remains unachieved." Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 14.

58 In a December 19, 1929 letter from prison, Gramsci writes, "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will." (Gramsci 2011) The phrase also appears in *Passato e presente* and *Ordine Nuovo* (Gramsci 1971, n. 75). Gramsci attributes the phrase to the French writer Romain Rolland. Nielsen often refers to Gramsci's phrase to reconcile his socialist convictions with his pessimism about the social, political, and economic status quo. It appears in "Is Global Justice Possible?" and he makes mention of it in the interview published in this collection.

59 See, e.g., Hollis and Pogge, "The Health Impact Fund: Making New Medicines Accessible to All."

60 Some recent defences include: Nussbaum et al., *For Love of Country*; Jones, *Global Justice: Defending Cosmopolitanism*; Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*; Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice without Borders*; and Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*.

61 Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice"; D. Miller, "Justice and Global Inequality"; D. Miller, "Against Global Egalitarianism"; and Blake, "Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy."

62 Arneson, "Why Justice Requires Transfers to Offset Income and Wealth Inequalities." Also see Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal."

63 Footage of the protests is captured in Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan's film "The Corporation."

Part 1

METAPHILOSOPHY: CRITICAL THEORY AND WIDE-REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM

- 64 Nielsen, "Globalization as a Tool for Imperialism," 191.
- 65 Nielsen, "Response to My Critics," 148.
- 66 Nielsen, "Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory," 37.
- 67 Nielsen, "Global Justice and the Imperatives of Capitalism," 608-10.
- 68 See Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.
- 69 See Nielsen, "Secession: The Case of Quebec," 29-43, for a defence.
- 70 Nielsen, "Reply to Michel Seymour," 393.
- 71 See Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*; and Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment."
- 72 Nielsen, "Cultural Identity and Self-Definition," 383. Also see Nielsen, "Undistorted Discourse, Ethnicity, and the Problem of Self-Definition."
- 73 Nielsen, "Liberal Nationalism, Liberal Democracies, and Secession," 261.
- 74 Available at <http://csc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1998/1998rcs2-217/1998rcs2-217.html>. Also see Buchanan, "The Quebec Secession Issue: Democracy, Minority Rights, and the Rule of Law," 238-71.
- 75 D. Miller, "Secession and the Principle of Nationality," 266.
- 76 Nielsen, "Against Partition."
- 77 Nielsen, "Toward a Liberal Socialist Cosmopolitan Nationalism," 451-52.
- 78 E.g., Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum."
- 79 A very small sample of the literature includes, Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*; P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion*; Sachs, *The End of Poverty*; Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work*; and Easterly, *The White Man's Burden*.
- 80 Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. See Yunus, *Banker to the Poor*.
- 81 See Alison Benjamin, "Dollar a Week Bank Is Still a Success."
- 82 For a sampling of political thinkers whose work should be read broadly along these lines, see, among others, Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*; Beitz, *Political Equality*; A. Phillips, *Which Equalities Matter?*; Shapiro, *Democratic Justice*; Walzer, *Thinking Politically*; and Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*.
- 83 On his own eclectic mélange of sources and influences, Nielsen writes: "My own predilection is for the work of Karl Marx and John Dewey (as different as they are from one another) and my predilection among our contemporaries is principally for the work of, and to work myself in the light of, *perhaps* the unstable - even an overly eclectic - mix of Amartya Sen with a toss of John Rawls, Brian Barry, and G. A. Cohen thrown in, and, in other ways, and for different purposes, of Edward Said, David Harvey, and Noam Chomsky, and with something of Ludwig Wittgenstein's and Richard Rorty's metaphilosophy and historicism." Nielsen, "The Global Crisis of Values: The Poverty of Moral Philosophy" (in this volume, 79).