

25 Lemoine, in *Le Monde diplomatique*, 1.

26 For the distinction, see Scholte, "Global Capitalism and the State."

27 *Ibid.*

28 McNally, *Another World is Possible*.

29 Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 163. See also Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*; and, more extensively, Walzer, "Governing the Globe."

30 See Archibugi et al., *Reimagining Political Community*; Falk, "The United Nations and Cosmopolitan Democracy"; and Held, "Democracy and the New International Order," for such modest proposals.

31 Nielsen, "Liberal Nationalism Both Cosmopolitan and Rooted"; "Liberal Nationalism, Liberal Democracies, and Secession"; "Le nationalisme cosmopolitique"; and *Globalization and Justice*.

32 Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*; D. Miller, "Cosmopolitanism: A Critique"; R. Miller, "Reasonable Partiality towards Compatriots"; and Tan, "Priority for Compatriots: *Commentary on Globalization and Justice*."

33 Couture and Nielsen, "Cosmopolitanism and the Compatriot Priority Principle."

34 Quine, "Two Dogmas in Retrospect."

35 H. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*.

36 Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*.

37 I believe staunchly – speaking in my own voice – that there should be no

compatriot priority there. But that, no doubt, is a contestable and contested issue. Still, I do not think it should be for a cosmopolitan and an egalitarian.

38 Nielsen, *Globalization and Justice*; and Scholte, "Global Capitalism and the State."

39 One worlders could consistently be non-nationalists or even anti-nationalists, but they can be, and often are, liberal nationalists. In my view, they should be liberal nationalists in Quebec, Wales, Scotland, or Catalonia and even in Ireland. I do not say that there is a place for that everywhere. It certainly was not so in what was once Yugoslavia.

40 Couture and Nielsen, "Introduction: Cosmopolitisme et particularisme."

41 Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 192–94; and Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*.

42 Couture and Nielsen, "Introduction: Cosmopolitisme et particularisme."

43 Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*; and Sachs, *The End of Poverty*.

44 The kind of *realpolitik* and geopolitical worries that have been nagging me come to the surface over presently alarming issues about the control and fate of the poles (and, most urgently, the Arctic) and loom for the future concerning outer space. See the important review article by Dominique Kopp, "Russia: The Polar Grab – Ultimate Struggle for Ultima Thule," 8–9.

Afterword

An Interview with Kai Nielsen on Political Philosophy

Interview conducted by Alexander Sager (AS)
and David Rondel (DR) in Montreal on June 1, 2010.

DR: Do you recall when you first regarded yourself as a leftist – when you first had this self-image of yourself as on the Left, and also how you came to think of yourself in that way? Is there any point in your life that you can recall where you may have been impressed with rightist political views in any way?

KN: I will answer the last part first. I've never been impressed by rightist views, but I've been impressed by liberal (*not* neo-liberal) views for a long time. I would have earlier regarded myself as a social democratic liberal – someone like John Dewey. I lived in the United States and foolishly thought we'd be like Sweden in thirty years. But even then, I went back and forth between social democratic views and more fully socialist views.

I can give you an impression of when I first got the sense that there was something that moved me left (I would never have so called it then) – that there was, that is, something rotten in Denmark. I grew up in a little Midwestern American town during the Great Depression where I saw, as a little boy, a number of things that left their mark on me. My parents did financially well during the Depression, as they had before and did after it. For example, we had a maid to pick up after us, particularly me. But across the ravine from our house lived a bunch of poor people and, as you know kids will do, I used to go home after school with some of my schoolmates to play ball with them. In one of the houses I visited, the only ball they had was

something they had tied together with string. I remember that the house was unheated and the mother's face looked ravaged. There was almost no furniture. The father was away on the road looking for work. Many of the houses in our town were like that. But when I came home, I had a maid that picked up my clothes and books wherever I threw them. I had warmth and comfort and plenty to eat. I couldn't believe that this difference could be right. I realized then there was something wrong with the kind of society that would allow this. I had various awarenesses of this. Seeing, for example, people that worked on Work Projects Administration (the Roosevelt Administration's project for creating jobs), standing in lines leaning on their shovels. I remember asking my father (who was conservative, though I, in those days, never thought about this) as we drove by our big car - a predecessor of the Cadillac - "Who are these people?" And he said, "People hired by Roosevelt for the Works Project Administration. They could get real jobs if they wanted them. They don't have to live off the dole." It was experiences like this that impressed me and rooted what would become my turn to the left, later my firm socialism. If only my father would have read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

Another example, this one racial: One of my close schoolboy friends was black - a Negro, as we said then. One day after school, I invited him to come home with me to play. I noticed when we entered the house that our maid, who was Swedish, looked startled when she saw him. When he left, my mother came to me and said, "Don't ever bring George back here again." And my father, to stamp this in, called up George's father and told him not to allow George to come back.

These things stand out in my memory. But there were others like them. So I saw what would likely make many, who begin to think as they grow older, move to the left. And I moved to the left.

When I was a beginning undergraduate student in college, I was reading people like - just imagine it - good old Stalin. We used to call him Uncle Joe. I read a little of Stalin, more of Lenin, and a little more of Marx, though not systematically. It was during the Cold War and I was a freshman in what the Americans call college. I also began to read a lot of people who were attacking Marxists and I became, without abandoning my early feelings, much more of a social democrat as a result of this. Those are my earliest political influences as I neared adulthood. I guess social democrat or not, I

always thought of myself as a socialist. But I was mixed up between being a socialist and a social democrat. I just wanted some kind of society that was rather more decent than what I saw in my world. I thought then that things need not be that bad.

DR: So hearing that account, one might have the impression that your parents didn't have that significant an impact on shaping your political world.

KN: I don't think they did. I didn't even think of my father as a conservative, though I realized much later that he was. I was fond of him. All he read was the *Chicago Tribune*, which then advertised itself as the world's greatest newspaper. My father was a Danish immigrant who came to New York City when he was fifteen. He didn't know a word of English then. They put him into the first grade in school and he hated it. What could he do? He couldn't speak any English and here he was with these little English-speaking kids. He was fifteen and they were five or six. He left school and just sort of made it on his own, as you could still do then.

My mother had a rather different background. She was Métis. Her mother came from Lac St. Jean, though she herself never spoke French. Her mother immigrated early to the United States before she could speak. I can illustrate in certain ways how different my mother was from my father. A few years before the Second World War, a friend of my father, who was his subordinate in an insurance company where my father was a superintendent, was invited to our summer home. This was during the Joe Louis/Max Schmeling boxing match. We were at our summer house, which had a big American flag on one wall and a big Danish flag on the other. This friend of my father, whom I called Uncle Percy, began to talk about Hitler - the Louis/Schmeling fight was a big German-American affair - and he said, "Well, there was one good thing Hitler did. He got after the Jews." My mother got up and walked out of the room and, after he had left, she told my father to never let Uncle Percy into the house again.

But I didn't have much sense of my parents as being political. My father, as conservative as he was, wanted me to become a corporate lawyer. I wanted to be a novelist! Even when I started studying quite different things, he always supported me, gave me money and I was never without anything.

He never pressed me to be a lawyer. So my parents, as I've said, had little influence on my political development.

DR: Moving ahead a little bit to when you started doing philosophy and thinking philosophically, do you recall when you first encountered Marx's work? Did it impress you then as it turned out to impress you later? If it did impress you then, what impressed you about it?

KN: It did impress me then. I didn't read *Capital* at first. I read the *Communist Manifesto* and things like that. Marx wanted a world where people stood as equals, wanted progress in the world, wanted capitalism overthrown, and was against religion and for the workers. That sort of thing impressed me. That was what I wanted too. For a long time afterwards, I had a struggle with myself. When people criticized the Soviet Union, I kept making excuses for the Soviet Union, saying that what we heard was American propaganda and that it can't be as bad in the Soviet Union as it was said to be. But things were certainly bad enough, particularly under Stalin. But I didn't believe the things I read about him then. Moreover, even before that, I was also reading people like Nietzsche and Dewey and some others. So Marx came along with others and *initially* had a short-run influence on me.

DR: As a graduate student, you were schooled in North Carolina pretty much exclusively both at Chapel Hill and then at Duke.

KN: I was, starting in my third year, an undergraduate at Chapel Hill. But I didn't begin at Chapel Hill. Perhaps I should tell you something about my beginning studies. It may reveal something about the reactions I came to have about religion. I first attended a little academy (St. Ambrose) – it was, as well as an academy, what the Americans call a college (undergraduate university). I went there because I wanted to play basketball and St. Ambrose had the best basketball team in town. I don't think my parents wanted me to go there because they had the usual prejudices, though not strong ones, against Catholics. But they let me go because they knew how much I wanted to play basketball there and that had nothing to do with religion. Moreover, at that time I had not the slightest interest in religion. After the war, I went back to St. Ambrose for two years of college before I transferred

to the University of North Carolina. So my first college (university) was a Catholic school. There were two people who influenced me there. One was a priest who knew a lot about literature and talked about it in a really interesting way. The other was a layman who came from Montreal and had studied at the University of Toronto – at St. Michael's College – with Gilson and Maritain. His name was Frederick Flynn and he taught philosophy at this small Catholic college. You had to take a lot of philosophy in Catholic schools back then. Perhaps you still do. It was required and most of the students – most of them Catholics – hated it. Most of these courses at that school were unbelievably boring, taught by priests from scholastic manuals and most of these priests were not very interested in philosophy. I took a course from Flynn who taught Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. He was very different from the rest. When he talked about Aquinas, instead of just saying the proofs work, he said there were problems with them. And we talked about them and he found that I had an interest in these things. I was by then struggling with religion and he told me I should also read some Scotus, Ockham, and Maimonides and to read the philosophers themselves, not just the manuals. He impressed me and made me interested in philosophy. It was at this time that I also read Santayana and that had a secularizing effect on me. My previous wartime reading of Nietzsche and Dewey had a similar effect. At that time in my life, there were lots of conflicting currents tumbling around in me.

DR: Your graduate studies came at a pretty tumultuous time, particularly in the South of the United States. Can you say something about any recollections you might have about race relations in North Carolina at that time? And also, any kind of civil rights or political activism you might recall or might have participated in.

KN: I can tell you something about all of that. There was still segregation at that time. The University of North Carolina was not only segregated by race but by gender as well. There were only male students at UNC initially (except for graduate school). This was also the case when I taught at Hamilton College and Amherst College. I guess there are only two all-male schools left in the United States now, but back then there were a lot of them. But there was also racial segregation in North Carolina, including at the liberal

University of North Carolina. The University of North Carolina and Duke University had no black students at all. That was called "separate but equal." But that, of course, was not true.

By that time, I was sensitized to this, so I joined various challenging movements, particularly radical ones, though in the eyes of the establishment, they were all radical movements. It was a period during which I quickly became very radical. During a U.S. presidential race, Henry Wallace (not George Wallace), who had been vice president under Truman, formed a new party and ran for president. I joined a student movement supporting Wallace. (Wallace was a kind of social democrat but his party made the tactical mistake of accepting help from the American Communist Party and that finished them.) Paul Robeson, a black and prominent member of the Communist Party, was an articulate supporter of Wallace. I had seen Paul Robeson play the lead part in *Othello* in San Francisco during the war when I was still in the service. I remember responding then, "Jesus, what is this?" I was spellbound. We students at Chapel Hill arranged for Paul Robeson to come to campus to talk in support of Wallace and this third party. But he was a member of the Communist Party and by that time had been blacklisted. The university, after a lot of liberal dithering, finally said we could not meet in the lecture hall we had planned for and with their initial agreement. So we went to an empty lot that belonged to a gas station in downtown Chapel Hill that had closed for the evening. I introduced Robeson and he talked there. For that I got a cross burned in front of my house that night. Robeson has been a kind of hero of mine, besides being a wonderful singer and actor. People have told me that he was also a great football player at Princeton – something I didn't care about anymore. I believe he was what is called an All-American. He was a fighter for equality and all the way down an anti-racist and a good communist. He fought valiantly for a cause that slowly destroyed him. Tears come to my eyes when I think of him.

DR: Going forward a little bit, what about your opposition to American involvement in Vietnam?

KN: That is what really and permanently radicalized me. That's when I gave up the notion, "Oh, we'll be like Sweden if we just go steady and keep

struggling." Pragmatists like Sidney Hook had an effect on me. Hook came to Chapel Hill while I was still an undergraduate there and made a very powerful case against the Soviet Union – or so it seemed to me then. With such influences, I moved more towards what would be called the left wing of the Democratic Party or towards a mild social democracy. But the Vietnam War changed me. I, Hilary Putnam, Noam Chomsky – a bunch of us – were on platforms all the time. I was always ambivalent because I wanted to study philosophy – I was teaching at NYU then – and I had to take a lot of my time demonstrating and speaking, though I don't regret that I did it for one moment. But I wanted to work at philosophy, too.

I was naive then. I remember participating in a big demonstration in Washington – Chomsky spoke and Howard Zinn spoke to an enormous crowd with black and red flags of radical defiance flying. And I remember saying to myself, with joy in my heart, that this is the beginning of the end. How innocent I was. But, that naïveté aside, the Vietnam experience deeply influenced me and set me on a more radical – a more firmly socialist – course.

Only later, at Calgary, did I learn a lot about Marx. I realized the Political Science department there was full of reactionary Straussians. And so I said to myself, "Look, there isn't anyone else to teach Marx, so I will." I think the department was pretty surprised. I taught with Bob Ware, another radical who was an Oxford graduate – an American who got a D.Phil. from Oxford under, of all people, Gilbert Ryle. We jointly taught Marx until I retired from Calgary. (I should add that I didn't teach only these courses but also seminars on Rawls, Sidgwick, Wittgenstein, pragmatism, Habermas, and the like.) Together, Ware and I learned a hell of a lot about Marx and the Marxian tradition. We used to give a course we called "Marx and Engels" which was always just an introductory course. Then in the second term we would study some important Marxist figure or subject – I think the first time we taught Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*. I really learned a lot from this teaching. I learned a lot with my students and with Bob. But I never had any courses like this at all when I was a student myself. There weren't any such courses.

DR: You were talking a little bit about other anti-war intellectuals around the Vietnam era. And many of them – I'm thinking particularly here about

Chomsky - arrived at the judgment that anti-war resistance would be more effective to conduct from home. So Chomsky never left the United States - the same is true of Putnam and many, many others. So I'm wondering if you recall considering that argument - whether it would have been to the benefit of the anti-war movement to stay at home.

KN: I did stay at home during that time. At that time, NYU was, among the student body and *some* of the professors - my friend, Bertell Ollman, for example - a pretty radical place by North American standards. Many of the more radical students came to me for consultations as well as courses. They were trying to decide whether they should join the army and try to muck things up from inside or whether they should join resistance at home or go to Sweden or Canada or somewhere else. They talked to me a lot about that. And I advised them in various ways - ambivalently - but a lot of them, including me, felt we should stay, if we could, in the United States during the war. It was only in 1969-70, when things quieted down and the anti-war movement had evaporated, that I left the United States.

DR: Do you recall the thinking and the circumstances that ultimately led you to depart for Canada? And also, upon arrival in Calgary, what were your impressions of Canada?

KN: I was excited about going to Canada. I had an idea by then that people like David Barrett were making Canada a much more socialist-friendly place than the United States. There were some wild accounts in the United States about Canada. For example, that British Columbia under Barrett was becoming the Cuba of the North and a lot of ridiculous things like that. But I still had an idea that I was coming to a place that was more left wing, more radical, more open. Then, when I got to Calgary, I slowly came to realize that though the climate wasn't reactionary, at least not in the university, it was not radical. Calgary, to put it mildly, wasn't a socialist-friendly place. Yet, they didn't go on about anti-socialism as much as in the United States.

The philosophy faculty at Calgary was standardly liberal. Eastern Canadians at that time didn't like to go West (Vancouver apart) and that included Calgary. They thought it was a terrible thing. To go to Alberta, Saskatchewan, or Manitoba was like going to prison. They would have

put themselves out in the wilds. I heard much later about a party at the University of Toronto that a friend of mine was at where some graduate students were talking about that crazy American who left NYU for Calgary. This was a time when they were building Canadian universities, new ones, and Calgary was one of them. They had a hard time getting Canadians to teach there. I didn't know anything about this when I first came. As a result, they had at that time in the philosophy faculty people from Britain, Germany, India - Ali Kazmi, who came later, was from Pakistan - as well as people from the United States. The staff wasn't particularly political, though some were - Bob Ware, a former American like me, for example. There were a lot of Brits who came from Oxford, and they were much more liberal than the ordinary population. So I thought it was a kind of liberation. But that was idealistic and naïve. I think of Canada now, and even of Quebec, as comprador nations of the United States (Quebec less than "English Canada").

DR: You mentioned a moment ago that you did stick around in the anti-war movement until the early 1970s at which point you said it was unbearable and impossible.

KN: It wasn't working anymore: there wasn't then any anti-war movement. But there were a lot of students - hippie types - who were wandering all over, hitchhiking all over the United States and Canada. There was a lot of this anti-establishment kind of thing. I had a colleague at Calgary - Shep Saslow - who got fired shortly afterwards. He thought of himself as political, but he was more concerned about smoking pot and joining his students in a pot circle. (The only time I ever tried pot was once with the "radical" students - they sat around in a circle and talked vaguely about life.) Most of the graduate students at that time at Calgary were American draft resisters; but many weren't like that. I don't know how many grad students the department had then, but I think maybe three quarters of them were American draft resisters and sometimes somebody from the UK, but there were almost no Canadians. A lot of the American students liked Calgary. They thought it was just like home - only the mailboxes were painted red.

DR: We've talked already about your growing up in a Midwestern town.

KN: Hick-town *par excellence*.

DR: So you have this American background. You are American-born and there are other intellectuals of your generation – I'm thinking in particular here of Richard Rorty – who have managed to retain a certain pride and love of the United States despite, of course, being critical of various atrocities and abuses of American power and so on. So someone like Rorty, for instance, will always supplement his critiques of American power with the stories of progressive visions of Emerson and Whitman and Dewey and so forth. Have you anything even resembling this kind of attenuated American pride and is it something even remotely important to you? Does your American background mean anything to you personally?

KN: Rorty and I are completely different in our circumstances. He, after all, lived close to NYC and he was practically a red diaper baby. He grew up with Sidney Hook – the radical young Sidney Hook – bouncing him on his knee. He had a completely different cultural background than I had. He was introduced to an intellectual and political elite early on. And, after all, he was only fifteen when he went to the University of Chicago. I didn't have any of that. I lived in a little town – more accurately, a cluster of towns that maybe were altogether 100,000 in population – situated between Iowa and Illinois on the Mississippi River. It was just a typical backward Midwestern place. I didn't hate it. I didn't know anything else. But I read a lot of literature my mother kept giving me and that I later sought out for myself and that gave me another sense of life. My father never read anything but the newspaper his whole life – the stock market columns, mainly. I read a lot. I only became anti-American during the Vietnam War, and even then, and still now, it wasn't against the American people but the American government and its compliant media. But I never had the attraction for America that Rorty had. I always thought it was too bad I hadn't been born in Europe, particularly Sweden. But that did not entail a hatred of the United States. Rather, just an indifference. I guess I am atypical. Eric Hobsbawm's fondness for the place always puzzled me, he being a deep Marxian. It seemed mainly about its jazz. When I was asked to teach American philosophy at Amherst, I didn't

teach Emerson or Thoreau but the pragmatists with, for a counter-balance, a now-forgotten American philosopher, Alexander Johnson, who was an extreme empiricist. He even tried to make the logical constants denoting. After leaving the United States, I never felt any longing for it. There are certain places I like to see – the Oregon coast, New York City, Boston, Amherst, Chapel Hill – and certain other places I would like to visit, but I have no attachment to America, though, as I said, no dislike of Americans. I have a sadness concerning the cultural impoverishment that so many suffer from with no decent education. I hated, and still hate, American foreign policy. If I had been in Germany, I would have hated German foreign policy or now in Italy or France. But Rorty has a kind of love affair with America. I said to him about his book on America, "It's strange; you're a cosmopolitan, really a cosmopolitan. Why do you care about America so? It'd be nice if America became more like Europe."

DR: This is my last question before Alex will take over and I think it's a good segue from autobiography into some matters philosophical. This is a very sort of broad question, but I am wondering if you think there's an important connection or any connection at all between the kind of radical atheism that you defend and have defended for a long time – the thesis probably for which you are most famous, all things considered – and your politics?

KN: That's a good question. The connection is much more indirect. My first atheism – when I first drifted towards atheism – was not linked with politics at all. The little college I first went to was taught by Dominicans, but some – perhaps many – were often liberal by Catholic standards. I can remember seeing them on picket lines. I didn't have any sense at all about Cardinal [Francis Joseph] Spellman and all those incredible Catholic conservatives. I didn't see how conservative – even reactionary – many Catholics were or, rather, the Church with its hierarchy was. I had a kind of Santayana and Cardinal Newman picture of Catholicism. Remember, Santayana, after early retirement from Harvard, lived in a monastery with priest robes on, utter atheist that he was. But I didn't go that way or even Newman's way or, for something different, Maritain's way. I thought for a while that Catholicism was a nice dream – a fable, but still a nice dream. At first, I had much of Santayana's attitude. So I didn't link it as something in conflict

with my politics, partly because of seeing my own professors/priests on the picket lines. I didn't then see what the Catholic Church was really like – though not all of the faithful, both clergy and lay persons, are like that. I'm now completely different, but that wasn't what moved me towards atheism or, for that matter, to radicalism. These were two quite separate things. I think what moved me politically was what I experienced as a boy and what I thought about it later when I read things like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and John Dos Passos's *USA*. There was a thinker who probably influenced me more than any other very early on. He is completely forgotten now, but he ran for president in the United States. His name was Norman Thomas and he was hardly a socialist, though he thought he was. He proclaimed socialism. He was kind of a social democrat – not like New Labour, but like the earlier social democrats, like Olaf Palme in Sweden or Tommy Douglas in Canada. My radicalism had completely different roots than my atheism, though they later came to meld. Certainly, I have nothing but love and admiration for Father Berrigan, a priest made famous for his opposition to the Vietnam War and the U.S. intervention in Latin America – the cruel face of American imperialism.

AS: I'm going to begin by asking some follow-up questions. Speaking of religion, have you ever had an interest in or sympathy for Liberation Theology?

KN: No. I know a couple of liberation theologians – one quite well – and I like and respect them. But I would tell them, "Why do you bother with religion? Just go for politics." But I admire priests who resist – Father Berrigan, for example – particularly in Brazil or Italy or against the Nazi regime. I see them as comrades. I sometimes think that it would probably be much better if they just became secularists. But that's probably an ethnocentric and mistaken view on my part because maybe they are the only kind of people who could be successful in radical movements in certain countries and for certain people. Moreover, there are plenty of good and thoughtfully intelligent people who in one way or another are religious. For me, it is much more a theoretical matter. I don't see how people with any kind of education could be religious. Yet, some are. Moreover, I do not see with Kierkegaard why we should crucify our intellects and be religious (for him, of course, Christian). But that means I'm looking at religion *instrumentally*,

and indeed I do. There is no attraction for me in Liberation Theology or any religion or theology. Theology is something that at best should disappear. But there are some intelligent people – though I think they are confused – that do not think this way.

AS: David was asking about your attachment or lack of attachment to the United States and I was wondering how that plays with your Quebec nationalism. You have written fairly extensively on cosmopolitanism and nationalism and argued that the two, in fact, do not conflict. Some might find it puzzling that you defend liberal nationalisms, but nonetheless do not personally have any deep attachment to any particular political community.

KN: I'll come to that last part a little later. You will see why. When I lived in the United States, particularly when I first became politically aware, I thought of nationalism as a disease – something to get rid of. I thought nationalism was something that people, when they became better educated, would forget. What turned me came much later, after I came to Canada – but my defence of nationalism wasn't connected to my living either in Canada or Quebec. It was actually an intellectual thing. I read Isaiah Berlin on Herder and Vico and I said to myself, "Ah, people do need local attachments – it's important to them. It's part of their culture and something that often is a deep part of their lives." I had earlier just thought people should forget about local attachments. But I read Berlin's account and I thought it was impressive, indeed compelling. So then I read Herder himself afterwards and found that a big disappointment. Berlin's better on Herder than Herder. Perhaps he manufactured his own Herder, which, I am told, was a typical thing for him to do. But he set out an account of things in this domain that was very attractive. So that started me to think about nationalism – or really basically about cultural identity and protection and the importance of language to a people. This was something in my time that you could easily forget about in the United States. Not, of course, just language period, but a particular language and how language – a particular language – was important to people (all people) and how it in part defined their approach to life. My earlier study of anthropology in graduate school helped me here. But my defence of nationalism came through no political orientation at all

initially, but just my intellectual background from anthropology and from reading Berlin on Herder and other people broadly in sync with him.

But for the political attachments: Perhaps people think, "Ah, it's because of your partner that you became a Quebec nationalist." That had nothing to do with it. I mean she [Jocelyne Couture] tells me rather bitterly about the October Crisis days and yet, as a matter of fact, I had always admired Trudeau. I still admire him in a certain way, though I think he was very bad for Quebec. And the October Crisis and the War Measures Act deserve all the condemnation they can get. When I came to Quebec, I never felt any Canadian nationalism, nor did I when I lived outside of Quebec in Canada. I liked a lot of people in Quebec, as I liked a lot of people in other places where I've lived. A lot of my colleagues were completely alienated by Calgary. I never felt that way. I found it was a great place to hike in the mountains. It wasn't as crowded as it is now. But I don't think I'd like to be there now. I was never attracted to any Canadian nationalism. I thought - and still think - it is better to be a Canadian than an American, but Harper makes it increasingly difficult. What sustains me is the intellectual culture I am a part of and the books I read and films I see, the thinking I do and the considerations I have, and the interactions I have with people close to me, including pre-eminently my partner.

But when I came to Quebec having this background, I began to talk with a lot of people, most particularly with Jocelyne Couture and Michel Seymour, vis-à-vis nationalism and with that, along with my reading, I began to see the importance of sovereignty for Quebec and indeed for all people. It didn't abolish my internationalism or cosmopolitanism, but it nuanced it. I began to think about these matters and eventually to write about them. But the initial thing was just the importance for everyone of local attachments, along with, where this is possible for them, being cosmopolitans. I quickly saw how, if you were not an ethnic nationalist but a liberal nationalist, there was no incompatibility between cosmopolitanism and that kind of nationalism. Indeed, you could consistently be a radical (socialist) liberal nationalist.

AS: Do you feel much of an influence from later writers on nationalism - people like David Miller or Will Kymlicka?

KN: I tend to be not very sympathetic to communitarianism. I am sympathetic, like G. A. Cohen, to the notion and importance of community. But I have all the Rawlsian difficulties with it as well as the Marxian ones. I think there are interesting things in Kymlicka and in David Miller, but I see the conservative Oakeshott inside of communitarianism, including theirs. David Miller defends communitarianism about as well as anybody can, I think. He's extremely articulate, but I've always thought one shouldn't go that way and that he was rather ill-connected with a lot of empirical reality. It would have helped him to read and take to heart more Bertolt Brecht. Think of Brecht's *Keiner oder Alle*.

AS: Let's move on to more general questions about political philosophy. One thing you've said in a few writings is that you consider that the three major political philosophers are Aristotle, Hobbes, and Rawls. Why those three?

KN: Let me go at this indirectly. I had a shock on a train ride with G. A. Cohen. He asked me who the three most important political philosophers were. We first excluded Marx, great as he was, for not being a political philosopher. I said Aristotle, Hobbes, and Rawls. He said I was wrong. It was Plato, Hobbes, and Rawls. I always found, and still find, shocking as this might sound, Plato to be a great bore - except for the Gyges ring thing, which made me think about why be moral. I guess my anti-Platonism is deep, but Aristotle seems to have his feet on the ground *for the most part*. But, after reading Cohen's last big book, I now see and regret his attachment to Plato. Concerning Locke and Rousseau and other candidates, I was too much of an analytical philosopher to be able to read Rousseau decently and Locke's individualism put me off. I was never attracted to Hegel - I used to think he was a reactionary and, like Russell thought, a buffoon. But I've come to see that both are false. I now think of him as an obscurantist who was probably helpful in that he attuned philosophy to a sense of the importance of history. He brought a historicism - a global historicism - and challenged the *philosophia perennis* that ruled our philosophical life from Plato to Kant. I am sympathetic with that, as I regard myself as a historicist

and a holist, but not a Hegelian holist. (I argue this in what I hope will be a future book, *Toward an Emancipatory Social Science*.) I think Hegel made us see the importance of time held in thought. I think that's marvellous, but why did he have to take so much jungle with him? Perhaps he couldn't help it – that was the tradition in which he was acculturated. My own feeling was that it was too bad Marx hadn't grown up in England.

AS: He probably would have been a liberal [laughing]. But with regard to Aristotle and Hobbes, do you feel you have any direct influence from Aristotle's politics or from Neo-Aristotelian thought or from Hobbes and Hobbeseans?

KN: I like Hobbes for his tough-mindedness and his clarity. But I've never been attracted to Hobbes's contract theory – something that is central to his thought. I tried to take as little of that as possible from him or from Rawls. And Rousseau never affected me, nor did Locke. What attracts me to Hobbes is what he says about the state of nature, about the conditions of life, his hardness and clarity. That's what I really love. I came to that when I was teaching at Amherst where I had to teach in a Humanities course the historian – the first one in the West at least – Thucydides. He was required reading in that course. He fascinated me with his realism and political understanding. He struck me as more important than Plato and even Aristotle. Not surprisingly, Hobbes translated his *Peloponnesian War*. There's a side of me, it's actually a side of Marx as well, that takes political realism seriously. And Hobbes both exemplified and taught us political realism – much, but not all, of what we now regard as political realism. Not a bleeding morality, no political moralism. Marx inherited that. It came to me rather late in the day. And Bertolt Brecht stamped it in.

AS: What about Aristotle?

KN: Aristotle never influenced me as much as Hobbes, but I like his sense of practice, his sense of context, what he said about virtues. That was important to me. And he, unlike Plato, usually had his feet on the ground.

AS: Have you explored many Aristotelian themes in your own writing? I am wondering about connections to practical reason and the good reasons approach, or perhaps some of your ethical work.

KN: No. Remember – it must be strange for the two of you – but I grew up, came of age intellectually, in a time when logical positivism was really strong, at least in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. (The Nazis had stamped it out in Germany and Austria, where it had its home.) It was just beginning to die down, but it had an enormous influence on me. Pragmatism came first for me and for my generation and for a lot of other Americans, but then, like many at the time, I said, "Ah, the positivists usefully cleaned it up." And for a long time I turned my attention away from the pragmatists with the thought that everything the pragmatists do the positivists can do better. But I no longer think this. My attitude now toward pragmatism is much like Rorty's.

With that shift in influence, I started to write my doctoral dissertation on the normative neutrality of metaethics. The emotive theory had an influence on me then. I still think of Charles Stevenson as a much more important thinker than is commonly recognized – something that now may seem like best-forgotten history. I came to think this in spite of my scholastic background, where my professor (Flynn) taught me how to read texts like Aristotle's and Aquinas's, which a lot of people don't know how to do anymore. When I came to the University of North Carolina, I was an English major. My honours thesis was on James Joyce, but I took a lot of philosophy courses. I was taught mainly by professors in what Santayana called "the genteel tradition" – they didn't know anything about analytic philosophy or care. But reading independently of my teachers, I went in a different direction. Dewey had prepared the way for that and logical positivism stamped it in.

Moreover, later on, some younger professors started to come to Duke when I was a graduate student there. They were mostly from Harvard, and they were all more or less Quineans and they also had a lot of Russell and the background of logical positivism. They influenced me. I thought at that time, "Well, look, why should we philosophers study Aristotle or Plato any more than physicists have to study Newton or Galileo?" And I remember preparing for my graduate exams. Like everyone else at that time, I had to

take one on the history of philosophy. I did all right in logic and I did all right in epistemology and ethics. But I thought then, "Why should we read these old people?" I said to myself, "That just takes us backwards." So I read Father Copleston as the quickest way to find out about Leibniz and Hegel. And the department flunked me on that part of the exam – probably with good reason. The head of the department called me in and said, "You have to take some reading courses in the history of philosophy." But they did that stupidly. The first thing he assigned to me was Hegel's *Greater Logic*. I took a quick look at it and said to myself, "That man can't distinguish contraries from contradictories. Why should I read any more?" But they consoled me, "Keep reading, keep reading." Moreover, I could not see what the *Greater Logic* had to do with logic. I was later told that it had nothing to do with it, but that it is important all the same. I remained baffled and dismissive. Had they given me the *Phenomenology* or something of his writings on history, I might have gotten something out of it, though probably even then, my positivism was too engrained and would have blocked me. The other thing the head wanted me to do, at least seemingly irrelevantly, was to take a reading course with him on Whitehead. That seemed, and still seems, like a very strange way to teach history of philosophy. I read some Whitehead and it was *mildly* interesting, though turgid and obscure. I continued to think there was a better way to spend my time. But relevance to your point – I blocked out as much of the history of philosophy as I could in my dissertation writing and the beginning stages of my teaching. So I never did much, unfortunately, with Aristotle on practical reasoning, though I did something with, besides Toulmin and Baier, von Wright.

I started to work on my thesis with the emotivists and with Hare, whom I liked less than Stevenson, but still liked. Then I came upon Toulmin and, later, Baier. And Wittgenstein had come to influence me enormously. Perhaps the earlier influence of pragmatism paved the way for that. *Philosophical Investigations* hadn't been published yet when this influence started. One of my professors, one of the few older ones not in the genteel tradition, gave me his manuscript copy of the *Blue Book*. I read it in one sitting, the scales dropping from my eyes. I had been trying as background to my thesis to read people like Church, Carnap, and Reichenbach, and they, for the most part, bored me and didn't help at all. I had a hard time understanding Church, but I thought then from reading Russell and the positivists that

logic was the key to philosophy. So I had to keep going at it. After the *Blue Book*, I dropped all that Russellian stuff about the foundational import of logic and about the normative neutrality of metaethics and moved in a Wittgensteinian direction, and the way I went about ethics was Toulminist, one of Wittgenstein's students, though he was also influenced by Collingwood. (By the way, as legend has it, Wittgenstein called Toulmin 'The Clown.' He, so the legend goes, had nicknames for his prize students. He called Anscombe, in a perfectly unconsciously sexist fashion, "Old Man.") And so I proceeded with what was then the main opposition to non-cognitivism – something I had earlier been captured by. I started to read the Good Reasons Approach and that's sort of how my dissertation developed, though I did not change my mind about Stevenson. Quite a bit of it is in my book, *Why be Moral?*

AS: So the third figure you listed is, of course, Rawls, whom you have written on a great deal and thought about a great deal. So I want to ask a series of questions about Rawls and your view of his place in twentieth-century and twenty-first-century political philosophy.

KN: The first thing about Rawls – I read his early *Philosophical Review* piece reviewing Toulmin and another reviewing a Swedish philosopher I admire (one of the great non-cognitivists), Axel Hägerström, and I thought vis-à-vis Rawls, "Ah, here's somebody to listen to." I'm talking about 1950 now. After that, Rawls began to write more extensively – it was 1958 when his classic "Justice as Fairness" was published. His work came to influence me a lot – "Justice as Fairness," of course, but "The Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics" as well. And they have continued to influence me down the years to his last major publication, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" (1995). I met Rawls early on and we spent an evening talking together. When I came to Amherst, I invited Rawls to give a talk there. Rawls used to be a stuttrer. The paper he was reading at Amherst (later published) was called "The Sense of Justice." Halfway through it, he broke into such a stutrer that we had to close the whole thing down. But "The Good Reasons Approach" was linked in my mind in a certain definitive way with Rawls, though for Rawls it was too consequentialist. I have always been ambivalent about that. But that is not to say that Rawls did not have an enormous influence on me.

AS: Do you think his influence on political philosophy since *A Theory of Justice* has been on the whole positive? I ask this because I want to ask about your philosophical commitments and some of the skeptical things you've said about the practice of political philosophy.

KN: I think the answer is yes and no – yes in certain respects and no in others. One of the last M.A. students I had at Concordia wrote about Rawls. He was a bright student, initially trained in orthodox economics. Among the questions I asked him during his M.A. exam were, “Do you think, as a result of Rawls, that the political climate generally and the political culture among intellectuals has advanced and that it in that respect Rawls's work has been instrumental in improving the political climate of our societies? Do you think things are better politically now than in 1950? Do you think Rawls has helped make things better or that the world around him has grown better because of his work since he started to write in 1950?” Rawls, as I see it, has had almost no influence on that political debate. He is too much into ideal theory, I guess, for that. He had incredible integrity and intelligence and so forth, and had a firm grasp on what a modernist moral point of view's structure is, but I thought (and he likely in some moods felt himself, though I don't know that he did) that his work had been in vain. His *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* gives some suggestions on that. It has not in the sense that it carries on ably and innovatively in a theoretical tradition and that he has had his influence on the philosophical tradition. In that way he has certainly pushed things forward.

Related to what I have just been saying – you can see how balkanized our intellectual culture has become. I read a big book called *Spectrum* by Perry Anderson, an able and non-*parti-pris* Marxist historian. In this carefully reasoned and carefully argued book, he has maybe forty pages devoted principally to the discussion of Rawls but also to a certain extent on Habermas and the relation between them. It's incredibly informed. He knows Rawls back and forth and Habermas as well, but it is mainly on Rawls that he concentrates his critical and acute expository attention. I found it brilliant. I looked it up in the philosophical literature about Rawls and nobody has read it. No philosopher I know of, except me, has ever gotten into it. It is not even cited in their bibliographies. This shows how balkanized and intellectually insulated our philosophical world has become. That wasn't

so for Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, or even for Hegel. Philosophers now aren't the cultural gods they once were. We have come down in the world.

AS: He had, I recall, a very critical essay in *The New Left Review* on Rawls, the Italian philosopher Bobbio, and Habermas – on the three of them.

KN: He was the editor of *The New Left Review* for a few years and that is where I first encountered his work. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time. It was an earlier version of what he came to write and explicate later. The reason I mentioned Anderson is because I think that Rawls's influence has been patchy and I think this is an unfortunate thing. If people paid more attention to him – and he had a wider intellectual critique by progressive intellectuals, including some public intellectuals – then the United States might have been a somewhat more progressive country and there would not have been any cultural or political space for a Tea Party. But maybe that gives too much weight to what public intellectuals can do anywhere! Remember: Rawls wrote the preface to the French translation of *A Theory of Justice* and said, “Well, I know on the Continent that you call me a welfare-state liberal. I'm not a welfare-state liberal. I'm what you would call in your context a social democrat. I think that the only plausible view that fits with mine is a liberal socialism or a property owning democracy.” He never explained the latter very clearly. He was often thought of by the Left – take C. B. Macpherson, for example – to be a welfare-state liberal. Even I wrote an article about him saying – unfortunately and mistakenly – what a welfare-state liberal he was. And that was wrong, just plainly wrong. But that's how he's perceived and not only in the Anglo-Saxon world. Outside philosophy and legal theory and some political science, he's had almost no influence and certainly not one that catches the political orientation of his thought. Rawls, I fear, was too otherworldly.

AS: Why do you think that particular claim Rawls has made – that his theory is compatible in politics only to socialism or a property-owning democracy – has gotten so little attention from people writing on Rawls?

KN: I'm tempted to make what might be a *parti-pris* ideological, unfair remark. It is that our society is so bloody conservative, including most of

its intellectuals – and that applies particularly to philosophers. Still, I don't know how to more generally and more properly answer your question. I would love to have someone who does intellectual history investigate the causes of that, if indeed it is so, and why it has gotten so little attention. After all, his preface was translated back from the French into English. And it would be interesting as well to see how and why so few French intellectuals took much notice. But this is the kind of work we philosophers do not do and indeed are not trained to do. It would be interesting to see whether it has had a different impact on the whole Continent than it has had in North America. I think it has been much the same in Germany, Italy, and Spain, as in France. But I don't know the answer to that and it would take a certain amount of research work in intellectual history. I would guess that Rawls's influence in politics has been minimal. There are a few Rawls specialists in those countries, and some very able ones, but my surmise is that they carry very little influence there. They are, in that respect, like our specialists on Gadamer or Schmitt.

AS: What about Rawls's methodology: the original position, and most particularly reflective equilibrium? This has influenced your work greatly. I wonder if you want to reflect a bit on the methodology of reflective equilibrium and its consequences for political philosophy.

KN: Yes, I have [reflected on it] and I will again. It has influenced me tremendously. I've picked from Rawls what I wanted for my purposes. I am not a historian of ideas. For Rawls, the original position as an instrument in a contractarianism is at least as important for him as his use of reflective equilibrium. I've never been caught, as I have already remarked, by his contractarianism or by any contractarianism. It always seemed to me that his ideal requirement that there has to be no disagreement at all was utterly unrealistic and, more importantly, it seemed to me to have no practical or intellectual value. When I first read about the original position, I was trying to figure out exactly what the original position was. As a methodological device, it seems to me to be useless.

A later essay of Rawls's – one which G. A. Cohen mentions only in a few words in his recent book and he rejects it utterly – "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" – had a big influence on me as well as his

presidential address. But I'm not a Rawls scholar. I greatly admire Rawls, and certain things of his which I've taken for my own purposes are, of course, of great importance to me. I hope I have not distorted them in using them. For example, consider his *wide* reflective equilibrium position; his coherentist position with "wide" as the important qualification. It can't be a *pure* coherentist position. With a pure coherentist position, you could make Christian Science have a coherentist justification. Note here and relevantly a remark about Cohen: Cohen has a long footnote where he says, "I take and examine Geoffrey McCord's conception of reflective equilibrium and that I have no trouble with." But that turns out to be *narrow* reflective equilibrium. And he says, just after his discussion about this, "When reflective equilibrium is used in a wider way, I leave it." That, I think, is telltale of his Platonism. He wants to have fact-insensitive values be the most crucial ones. But for me, that is not so and my reflective equilibrium is like Rawls's – a wide reflective equilibrium. And that does not lead to fact-insensitivity and it isn't compatible with a *pure* coherentism. Fact-sensitivity *pace* Cohen in morals is crucial.

AS: You've said in a number of publications that you think that the consequences of applying wide reflective equilibrium to political questions is that disciplinary boundaries disappear. There is no longer a particular capacity that political philosophers have that economists do not and so on.

KN: Exactly.

AS: That would seem to have a radical if not devastating effect on the profession. What do you think a philosophy department would look like in the future if we took this to heart?

KN: Do you mean the whole philosophy department or political philosophy?

AS: Let's talk about the whole philosophy department.

KN: I think the whole philosophy department would look very different. It has already become so marginalized that interesting political thought and discussion has to move or morph. It, like Classics, though for better

reasons, in effect would disappear – or more probably, break up into several separate departments. Of course, I don't know if this will happen. If Rorty is right, philosophy, as it is, is becoming increasingly marginalized and should morph into quite different subjects. Philosophy, as we know it, would have a very small part in these new disciplines – some part to clarify things a bit but not much more than that. And that mainly comes to a cleaning of the Augean stable. Other than that clarifying work, it would morph into social geography, social anthropology, sociology, economics, history in general, and perhaps cognitive science. It would, that is, morph into a somewhat distinctive social science – what I call an emancipatory social science and social theory. That is what I hope will happen. Will it happen? I don't know. Perhaps my remarks are an old man's bad reaction, frustrated with a lot that goes for philosophy. I still read the philosophical journals, and sometimes there are good articles, but most of them, it seems to me, are dry and boring. They're going over things without much improvement, often in a somewhat different idiom, repeating what philosophers have been doing for years. Sometimes, though rarely, they break into something different, but often deal with something that is utterly trivial.

I still find people writing about the subject I laboured with in my *Why be Moral?* I spent a lot of time, perhaps wasted time, as Rorty thinks, writing about that question in an earlier phase of my work. I have come to realize, as Putnam does, and a lot of philosophers have taken it on now, that where you use, and unavoidably so, thick descriptions, you don't find any ability to untangle the normative from the non-normative. The two of them run together and this will have an effect on our inquiries. You can't, *contra* Hare, disentangle the factual for many, indeed most, of the normative things you want to say. Suppose I say, "You're being rude." Now, that's a normative remark but it's also a descriptive one. Someone might say, "Give me only the normative part and distinguish it." You can't do it. And once you realize that happens and you begin to take this to heart with all kinds of political considerations, political *philosophy* should start (though not just for this reason) to begin to disappear and become more generally political thought and social political studies. Most political studies departments used to call themselves political science departments; now, many more accurately call themselves political studies departments or just politics departments. I think that political philosophy will, or at least should, morph straightforwardly

into political and social thought. It should not go around doing the peculiar philosophical things – metaphysical, epistemological, metapolitical – it does now. It will be in some considerable respects a different thing and the skills people will have will be different. Instead of people reading Church and Carnap, they'll study Durkheim and Weber. I never read them until late in my life and that was unfortunate and a big mistake on my part. I wasted precious time with Church and with Quine's *Methods of Logic*. Some might say that answers only to your interests and to those with your interests or with those interests broadly. But if your interests are in logic, it is a different matter. That is fair enough. But it in effect makes out what I think matters and what I think philosophy is, has been, and should morph into. Logic should become a special part of the mathematics department. Logicians should *not* be required to study Plato, Aristotle, Scotus, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, or Rawls, though they should know Quine, Kripke, and Wittgenstein.

AS: On a somewhat different topic, I am curious of your impression of how the university has changed during your time as a professor, how your experience differs from the experience of people graduating with PhDs today and how social, economic, and institutional factors have influenced this change.

KN: That's a lot and I can't answer all of it. I think universities have changed. For example, the professors who get jobs now – tenure-track jobs, at least – will usually be able to teach their specialty right away and they won't be so held down by enormous introductory courses or by teaching things that none of the senior professors want to teach. But you also have as part of the university system (and indeed functionally a very important part – one that takes in a lot of income and serves a lot of students) *lumpenprofessoriat* – sessional instructors with enormous introductory courses, scant protection, and zero time for research. What is happening here is good for some people and bad for others. But it is also in crucial ways bad for the university structure in general – that is, if you don't think of it as a money-making operation. There are a lot of other things as well. There are things that are both better and worse at the same time, but the worse, I fear, grows larger.

When I was head of the department at NYU in the 1960s, I would have lunch with the dean and together we would decide, over lunch, the salaries of our colleagues in the Philosophy department – who would get

raises and who would go up in rank. When Sidney Hook hired me while I was at Amherst College to come to NYU, we sat on the porch of a friend of his at Amherst and talked for two hours. I didn't even know I was being interviewed. Luckily, I didn't say anything pro-Marxist. Hook finally said, "Ok Kai, would you come to NYU next Fall?" And that was it. He didn't consult anyone. Paul Edwards said to me that I should come in the Fall to meet our new colleagues who, along with the old ones, didn't know of my hiring or often of anyone else's. It was very informal and that was nice in some ways. By contrast, when I was at Calgary, you had to go through long meetings of the whole Humanities division, though not about hiring, but there were things about tenure, ranking and salaries, etc. Hiring was done by the whole department in conjunction with the dean. The head couldn't do what Sidney Hook did at NYU. For many things, the heads of departments would meet for a week or two in consultative processes with the dean and there was endless bureaucracy. It is *probably* necessary in order to keep some fairness in the process. But it is also a pain in the ass for anyone who cares about intellectual life, who wants to get on with academic work. Perhaps people doing that kind of work should be pure administrators, but that has its plain downside, too. I don't know what to do about it. But it needs radical change and not just tinkering with.

AS: One thing I tell students who are thinking about going into graduate school is that, these days, graduate school is a professional degree. You have to look at it from a very early stage as a job where you are expected to be a member of the department, you're expected to publish ...

KN: Even, shockingly, before you get your degree.

AS: Yes. And if you have ideals about a wonderful period in which you can read a lot of philosophy and think about things and use that as a period where you can consolidate your own views or think about what you want to think about, well, you probably shouldn't go to graduate school in these days ... unless you are independently wealthy. Is that your sense as well of how it is these days? You have to start from basically the beginning being career-minded about it or you will either be a sessional instructor with part-time contracts or you will have to find something else to do.

KN: I think that's exactly right and it's criminal. When I went to Duke as a graduate student, I got a scholarship which was more or less automatically renewed unless you were making a big mess of things. I was the assistant to the Chair and sometimes when he was gone, though they wouldn't officially allow this at Duke, I taught for him. You didn't have to do a lot of paperwork or reports or grade yourself as you went along. It was true for both the professoriate and the graduate students. And I really had a free time to do the things you just said. Still, when sometimes people say, "We professors should make more money as some other privileged people do because we had to suffer all the way through graduate school," I think, even after all is said, it's a hell of a lot better to be going through graduate school than to be pumping gas or doing any kind of manual labour. When I went through, it was one of the best times of my life. Now it is in many ways terrible, though still not as terrible as pumping gas or working in construction or in a supermarket. In graduate school now, you have to constantly be preparing things. Much of it is a waste of time for everybody. You have to fill out a dossier for this and for that repeatedly. It was nothing like that when I went through graduate school. Sometimes it was hard to get jobs, but not as hard as it is now. But once you got one, you had in the olden days another disadvantage you typically do not have now when you came to teach. You ended up teaching what none of the established professors wanted to teach - what the *lumpenprofessoriat* teach now. But that was a temporary thing. You still had a lot of time to do your own research. In my time, you were often actually discouraged from publishing by many people - at least at the school where I taught. They said, "Don't publish now. Wait until you know what you want to say." The English, especially, even regarded it as vulgar to rush into print. That was, to be sure, a bit overstated, but it had a point. And some took the 'Don't publish now' slogan so much to heart that they never published.

AS: What about the increased privatization of universities and in many places, not all places, the withdrawal of government support and the demand that faculty members acquire grants?

KN: Bluntly, I think this is horrible. It wastes intellectuals' time. I never had to do this. The only grant I ever had in my life was when I was at Concordia.

Jocelyne [my partner] said, "I'm applying for a grant and I'll write one for you." I didn't want to take the time to apply for a grant and it wasn't necessary. But, due to her efforts, I got one anyhow. Now you have to get grants or you don't get promoted. Publishing papers and books is not enough. I think that is absolutely dreadful. Such matters should be – and could be – reversed. There was an editorial in *The Guardian Weekly* about taxes and that sort of thing regarding particularly the United States and how the Swedes had to pay more than Americans do in taxes. Then the article pointed out what Swedes got for their taxes. A lot of things in Sweden are free: university education, for example, and a whole lot of things like that. This is the way things should go and without a lot of policing and grant applications and the like. If we (taking the university and community as a whole) care about the intellectual life, there will be no such hoops, or at least very minimal ones. Some people, of course, will get grants that they don't deserve. But they do so now. There is an art in writing such applications. Artful phonies get through. Why go through such gymnastics? What does this have to do with the intellectual life or the maintaining of good universities?

AS: I have two final questions. One is a philosophical question and the other is a political question. The philosophical question is, in your judgment, what work in recent political philosophy do you think is going to endure?

KN: I would hope – though I don't know what to expect – the tradition of Rawls and Sen will endure if anything like philosophy endures. Cohen, I think, was a great articulator of historical materialism, both as an articulator of what it was in Marx and in developing it and modifying it. He made it clear once and for all that there were crucial things in Marx that could stand the closest rational scrutiny. But I think, contrary to my expectations, his moral and political philosophy is pretty close to being a disaster. I've read his last two books very carefully – the big one and the little one – and I say to myself, "How the devil does Jerry want this to contribute to socialism, which remained so important to him?" He was always a socialist and a Marxian one, too. Some people say he gave up fundamentalist Marxism. But he didn't give up what I call Marxism – on analogy with Darwinism. Giving up fundamentalist Marxism was a good thing, even if he did it in his adult life.

I was a non-cognitivist for a long time. Whenever I hear people defend it – there are very subtle versions of non-cognitivism now – I think, and it's linked with my work on *Why be Moral?*, there is something there of importance that is hard to conceptualize correctly. You do not want to reduce (as has been done) non-cognitivism to a boo/hurrah account. You want to say it's something other than that. It is hard to give a proper articulation to it. It's all right to say that moral judgments are true or false. Indeed, it should be unproblematic. You can say mathematical judgments are true or false, or aesthetic judgments are true or false, but that's just a formal thing. But how do you warrantably assert, how can you establish, the truth of a fundamental moral judgment once you've granted that there can be one? (*Perhaps* something that it is a mistake to do.) There are people who call themselves moral realists. It doesn't seem to me that they have ever been able to resolve such an issue or show how our really basic moral judgments are warrantably assertable and thus show their truth aptness. There is a deep place where something like a non-cognitivist thrust enters. That is – or so I believe – just how it has to be. I think, that is, that remains. But still I have just gestured at what *that* is. Maybe we will get a clearer articulation or maybe some people will fruitfully go back to Stevenson or to Gibbard. Gibbard probably has the most sophisticated statement of non-cognitivism on offer. Maybe that tradition will come back in a certain way, linked maybe with people like Sen, attracted to the methodological parts of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But you cannot, if you want to engage in the moral life, be just *observing* sentiments; you must *endorse* certain ones. A bad person could indeed write a good book on moral philosophy. But that is a different matter. You can't not engage in such endorsement if you want to be a moral agent – a decent human being. Maybe something like Smith's thing will come back. But I think the main influence that will remain will be Rawls and a whole group of people that work in that tradition. But philosophy will go in a more sociological and anthropological direction. It will also be more skeptical than Rawls (or for that matter Baier) that there is something that is *the* moral point of view, and it will be less hung up with ideal theory.

But I don't see many prospects for moral philosophy. I think it has had its day. I mean political moral philosophy. I think there will be political normative thought. Marx, for example, was contemptuous of moral *theory*. Whenever it was brought up, he would break into belly-laugh. People have

said, "Therefore, he is against morality." But if you read *Capital* you will see it's full of passionate moral judgments and, for the most part, not judgments made without reason. So he was not against morality, any more than was Brecht, or against saying certain things are unjust or evil or vile. What he was suspicious about was moral theories, their relevance, and also about their ideological nature. Do we need moral philosophers? I share scepticism here with Marx. That is also a place where my pragmatism comes in. Does it make a practical difference whether we take certain positions in political philosophy, particularly in normative political philosophy? The real work seems to be done by social scientists, particularly historians like Eric Hobsbawm or Perry Anderson, or a person for all occasions like Tariq Ali. That seems to me where the action is. Indeed, scepticism isn't quite right about moral theory. Rejection is better. But that doesn't come to a rejection of morals or to a rejection of attempts to shape our world for the better and to seek a reasonable conception of what that would be.

AS: What about Habermas and the earlier critical theorists?

KN: I am glad you asked me that. I was once very influenced by Habermas, and one of the last seminars I gave was on Habermas and Rorty. I think political philosophy – and this might be too strong – might disappear and even, to put it normatively, will disappear. One of the projects I have is to go back to Rawls and Sen and some other people – perhaps Dworkin – and I want to ask what, if anything, is there in their work, work which is obviously important in some ways, for which someone needs some minimal philosophical training to grasp – that is, to learn some vocabulary and techniques that are not already in the repertoire of many non-philosophers (say, that of a lawyer, anthropologist, or some other well-educated person with some understanding of politics and its cultural life)? I am sceptical of this need for mastering philosophy's specialized vocabulary and techniques. But I think very little should remain of philosophy if that goes. But this goes with my rejectionism. Still, I'm not on the same side as Rorty who thinks philosophy will just become useless. I think there are still some points where the kind of clarification that analytic philosophers are adept at has a point – like, for example, the Putnam points about descriptions and evaluations, facts and values, as he put it. There is still some room for that. But that is

cleaning the Augean stables and little, perhaps nothing, more. There will remain, of course, the history of ideas. But the *history* of philosophy is no more philosophy that then history of physics is physics – though this is not to say that the history of ideas is unimportant.

I don't think I ever urged anyone to go study philosophy. Some people will probably be obsessed with philosophy enough so that they will try to study it in some way and in effect go against my rejectionism. That will be something that will probably always obtain. But I think if you really care about politics and society, there are other things that you can better spend your time with. You learn more from literature about how life should be lived – more, for example, from reading *Middlemarch* than you do from studying John Stuart Mill, and I don't count John Stuart Mill as nothing. And you learn more from Tariq Ali, Mike Davis, or Eric Hobsbawm about how society is structured and how it should be ordered than from moral and political philosophers.

However, I have not answered your question about Habermas. I'll have a shot at it now. There was a time when I was taken by Frankfurt-style critical theory, including Habermas's attempt with the aid of contemporary analytic philosophy and contemporary sociology, to rationally reconstruct it. Prior to reading much of Habermas, I had been struck by parts of classical critical theory, particularly by Max Horkheimer's work and some things in Herbert Marcuse. Theodor Adorno, by contrast, who is typically thought to be the deepest of the classical critical theorists, was (and still is) a black box to me, except when he wrote jointly with Horkheimer, as in their wonderful *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*. Thinking of what the Frankfurt School was trying to achieve and some of its particular attempts, it seemed to me an important project that some should clarify and develop, particularly in the way that Habermas developed it and even more so in the way that Raymond Geuss sanitized Habermas's account in Geuss's neglected but important book on Habermas and critical theory. However, after Habermas published his massive two volumes on communicative action, I began to grow less sympathetic to him. However, I think he has, and importantly, developed a central idea – a breakthrough in our accounts of rationality – in what he called 'communicative rationality.' Like instrumental rationality in its domain, communicative rationality in its domain is an important and unproblematic notion – a distinctive

conception of rationality. However, it is not, as David Hume and Bertrand Russell mistakenly thought, that instrumental rationality what the whole of rationality. Both communicative rationality and instrumental rationality capture unproblematically something about rationality. Communicative rationality captures something of what Horkheimer, Marcuse, and much of rational philosophical tradition obscurely, problematically, and mystifyingly characterized as substantive rationality. But we need not have Habermas's vast and often obscure machinery for a clear and useful conception of communicative rationality. In short, Habermas is too much of a *philosopher* (to use G. A. Cohen's phrase). In the last seminars I gave, I set Habermas off on various topics (germane to both) against his analytical counterparts Rawls, Rorty, Davidson, and Brandom. And in all these cases I found Habermas wanting. With his 'Kantian pragmatism' – something that seems to me oxymoronic – he is at a great distance from critical theory. Habermas, unlike Rawls or Rorty, has sunk too much into the rationalist philosophical tradition – his vague talk of going 'post-metaphysical' to the contrary notwithstanding. I think in Habermas's and Rawls's seminal exchange in *The Journal of Philosophy* that Rawls generally has much the better of it. However, at one crucial point that very well *may* not be so. That is over their opposing conceptions of what it is to do moral philosophy. I hope to someday return to that, for I remain ambivalent here and it seems to be something that very much needs sorting out.

AS: I think it's fair to say that in recent years your vision of the world has become increasingly dystopian and pessimistic. You have compared the world, a number of times, to a pig sty.

KN: Yes, and when I think about global warming, to a global insane asylum. Those are two metaphors that I love and believe are quite apt for our condition.

AS: Do you see any hope in the near future or the far future, given things like environmental degradation and global warming and what currently looks like has turned into a global recession? Is there any hope on the horizon in your view?

KN: If I were a betting person, I would be incredibly pessimistic. I would have no hope. My view has grown darker and darker as my life goes on and as I read and study. We have, for example, the double-whammy – the mixed cocktail – of population growth and global warming. When I was born there were 2 billion people in the world; now, what is it, 7 or 8 billion?

AS: 6.5 billion, I think.

KN: It is predicted that by the middle of this century it will be 9 or 10 billion. At the same time, global warming will increase both desertification and flooding. Flooding will increase in places like Bangladesh. Desertification will increase in Africa. And nobody is doing anything about it seriously enough. In the 1960s, for example, when I went on a Vietnam war protest to Washington, there were great masses of people struggling against our condition and this was true in spades in Europe after the Second World War. There were political movements even in the United States, but also all over the world which were moving in what I would regard as a progressive direction. Socialism used to be thought by capitalists and their sympathizers to be a threat. Now it's a joke. So, things look very bad. But, after all, I'm an agent in the world; a human being struggling for some decency and respect and caring for human beings – all human beings. The things that Brecht so wanted. That's why you have the title for my book (*Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will*) – from Gramsci, of course. I would put it somewhat differently now. With me there is a pessimism – a growing deep pessimism. People often ask me, "How can you be a Marxian with such pessimism? How, with your historical materialism, can you be such a pessimist?" I think, *au contraire*, how can you not? I think – to go at this indirectly – Cohen is right about this. There will be change in the mode of production and eventually capitalism will disappear. But that it will be followed by socialism is not written in the stars. It may well be followed instead by a technological authoritarianism or some such dreadful thing. We don't know what will happen. So we can't, if we would be non-evasive, have the kind of optimism that many Marxists have had. I never had it, but I wasn't always as pessimistic as I am now. But this results from some specific things that have gone on and are going on in the world. We Marxians are not in a position to say history is on our side. I don't want you to change the

title of the book but what I would speak of now is still the pessimism of the intellect; no longer of the *optimism* of the will but of the *determination* of the will. I think we will be defeated. But that, of course, and thank the non-existent God, is not certain. But this does not lessen but strengthens my determination to fight for socialism. It is the only way we can have a decent world – a morally tolerable world.

Maybe things won't be as disastrous about global warming as some people, including me, think. But it is going to be very bad. I have two grandchildren, 12 and 10, and they are bright and interesting and I think to myself, "Oh God, what kind of a horror of a world will they live in when they are my age – if they ever get to be my age?" Our times may very well be a picnic compared to theirs.

As Perry Anderson put it nicely, we socialists have been defeated – disastrously defeated. We, if we have our brains about us, must acknowledge that, but our head is not bowed. We are not like the coal miners returning to the pits at the end of *Germinal*. So we should struggle and soldier on. What other choice do we have? Should we just crawl into our holes? We are agents in the world, not just neutral observers in the world. So we have to struggle if we want to live with ourselves, but I wouldn't bet my farm that we'll win. I will not go in for betting at all. Neo-liberalism linked with conservatism has taken over and still is taking over the world even after our severe dip which really may not be over. We may have a double-dip neo-liberalism and the conservatism that goes with it. But it is beginning to crack badly. We talk about recession – it may well be a depression. Look at the levels of unemployment and how they are growing. We don't know how people will react if it goes on. I mean, we may, at least in the United States, get Tea Party people all over the place. And then things will get much worse, but people have been irrational before. But it is possible that there will be left movements developing again, or at least somewhat progressive movements, and it is possible that they may have some effect. Whether it is called socialism or not, I don't care. I call it, and not without reason, socialism. In fact, I would say something even worse: socialism is just the beginning stage of what Marx regarded as communism. And in saying that, I will be misunderstood by most people for they have a totally mixed up view of what communism is. I don't care much about whether it is called socialism, communism, or whatever. But I do care about radical change and

see the necessity for it to be *now*. Yes, I have a kind of dystopia. The deepest moral urges in me make it imperative to fight back against our capitalist world and to not bow my head to evil – bow my head to the horrible world we have now with all its domination and indifference to misery.

Note

- 1 See the editors' introduction for a brief discussion of the title.