

Aj = liberal, secular -

- C. Boyer -

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The Western liberal media had their laugh when, in August 2007, the Chinese State Administration of Religious Affairs passed "Order Number Five", a law due to come into effect on September 1st, which covers "the management measures for the reincarnation of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism". This "important move to institutionalize management of reincarnation" stipulates the procedures by which one is to reincarnate - to cut it short, it basically prohibits Buddhist monks from reincarnating without government permission: no one outside China can influence the reincarnation process, only monasteries in China can apply for permission.

Before we explode in rage at the Chinese Communist totalitarianism which now wants to control even the lives of its subjects after their death, we should remember that this measure is not foreign to European early modern history. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the first step towards the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years War, declared the Prince's religion to be the official religion of a region or country (*cuius regio, eius religio*). This resulted in the acceptance of toleration of Lutheranism in Germany by Catholics; however, when a new ruler of a different religion took power, large groups had to convert religions. The first big institutional move towards religious tolerance in modern Europe thus involves the paradox of the same type as the Chinese Order Number Five: your religious belief, a matter of your innermost spiritual experience, is regulated by the whims of your secular prince.

The Chinese government is regulating something it not only tolerates, but even supports. Its worry is not religion, but social "harmony" - the political dimension of

religion. In order to curb the excess of social disintegration caused by the capitalist explosion, Chinese officials now celebrate religions and traditional ideologies which sustain social stability, from Buddhism to Confucianism, i.e., the very ideologies that were the target of the Cultural Revolution. In April 2006, Ye Xiaowen, China's top religious official, told the Xinhua News Agency that "religion is one of the important forces from which China draws strength," and he singled out Buddhism for its "unique role in promoting a harmonious society," the official formula for combining economic expansion with social development and care.

The role of religion as the force of stability against the capitalist dynamics is thus officially sanctioned - what is bothering Chinese authorities in the case of sects like Falun Gong is merely their independence from the state control. In the same vein, the problem with Tibetan Buddhism resides in an obvious fact which one tends to forget: the traditional power structure of Tibet, the head of which is Dalai Lama, is theocracy. Dalai Lama unites religious and secular power - so when we are talking about reincarnation of Dalai Lama, we are talking about a method of choosing a head of state. It is strange to hear those who complain about the Chinese non-democratic pressure on Tibet to worry about the rights of Dalai Lama - a non-democratically-elected leader if there ever was one.

In the last years, the Chinese changed their strategy in Tibet: more than on sheer military coercion, they now rely on ethnic and economic colonization, rapidly transforming Lhasa into a Chinese version of the capitalist Wild West with karaoke bars intermingled with the Disney-like "Buddhist theme parks" for the Western tourists. In

short, what the media image of the brutal Chinese soldiers and policemen terrorizing the Buddhist monks conceals is the much more effective American-style socioeconomic transformation: in a decade or two, Tibetans will be reduced to the status of the native Americans in the USA. It seems that the Chinese Communists finally got the lesson: what is the oppressive power of secret police, camps, and Red Guards destroying ancient monuments, compared to the power of unbridled capitalism to undermine all traditional social relations?

There is even more to it. It is all too easy to laugh at the idea of an atheist power regulating (and thereby admitting) something that, in its eyes, doesn't exist. However, do WE believe in it? When, a couple of years ago, the Taliban forces in Afghanistan destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, none of us, the benevolent Western observers outraged at this horror, believed in the divinity of Buddha. We were so outraged because the Taliban did not show the appropriate respect for the „cultural heritage“ of their own country and the entire humanity. Instead of just respecting past culture, like all people of culture, they really believed in their own religion and thus had no great sensitivity for the cultural value of the monuments of other religions. The paradox is that the Buddha's statues were much more an authentic spiritual challenge and counterforce for the Taliban than for the liberal Westerners.

Perhaps, we find China's reincarnation laws so outrageous not because they are alien to our sensibility, but because they spill out openly the secret of what we are all doing. Are the Chinese not doing what all "civilized" governments are doing: respectfully tolerating what one doesn't take quite seriously, and trying to contain its political consequences through legal regulations?

*So, to protect China's capital, we should fear
become more people's liberal ideology. Djk*

stalks us, I would be inclined to greet that Monster with a yawn.¹

The problem here is not Caputo's conclusion: if one can achieve all that within capitalism, why not remain there. The problem is the underlying "utopian" premise that it is possible to achieve all that within the coordinates of the present global capitalism. What if the particular malfunctionings of capitalism enumerated by Caputo are not only accidental disturbances but structurally necessary? What if Caputo's dream is a dream of universality (the universal capitalist order) without its symptoms, without its critical points in which its "repressed truth" articulates itself?

So, after denouncing all the "usual suspects" for utopias, perhaps, the time has come to focus on the liberal utopia itself. For liberalism, at least in its radical form, the wish to submit people to an ethical ideal that we hold for universal is "the crime which contains all crimes," the mother of all crimes - it amounts to the brutal imposition of one's own view onto others, the cause of civil disorder. Which is why, if one wants to establish civil peace and tolerance, the first condition is to get rid of "moral temptation": politics should be ~~thoroughly purged of moral ideals and~~ rendered "realistic," taking people as they are, counting on their true nature, not on moral exhortations. Market is here exemplary: human nature is egotistic, there is no way to change it - what is needed is a mechanism that would make private vices work for common good, ~~(the "Cunning of Reason")~~. In his "Perpetual

¹ John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 124-125.

Peace," Kant provided a precise formulation of this key feature:

"many say a republic would have to be a nation of angels, because men with their selfish inclinations are not capable of a constitution of such sublime form. But precisely with these inclinations nature comes to the aid of the general will established on reason, which is revered even though impotent in practice. Thus it is only a question of a good organization of the state (which does lie in man's power), whereby the powers of each selfish inclination are so arranged in opposition that one moderates or destroys the ruinous effect of the other. The consequence for reason is the same as if none of them existed, and man is forced to be a good citizen even if not a morally good person.

The problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved even for a race of devils, if only they are intelligent. ⁿ The problem is: 'Given a multitude of

rational beings requiring universal laws for their preservation, but each of whom is secretly inclined to exempt himself from them, to establish a constitution in such a way that, although their private intentions conflict, they check each other, with the result that their public conduct is the same as if they had no such intentions.' A problem like this must be capable of solution; it does not require that we know how to attain the moral improvement of men but only that we should know the mechanism of nature in order to use it on men, organizing the conflict of the hostile intentions present in a people in such a way that they must compel themselves

a century ago, the symptomatic exception was the unique Ayn Rand, who advocated market liberalism AND full individualist egotism deprived of all traditional morality of family values and sacrifice for the common good.) Today, however, we seem to be entering a new era in which both aspects can be combined: figures like Bill Gates pose as market radicals AND as multiculturalist humanitarians.

Here we encounter the basic paradox of liberalism. Anti-ideological and anti-utopian stance is inscribed into the very core of the liberal vision: liberalism conceives itself as a »politics of lesser evil,« its ambition is to bring about the »least evil society possible,« thus preventing greater evil, since it considers any attempt to directly impose a positive Good the ultimate source of all evil. Churchill's quip about democracy as the worst of all political systems, the only problem being that all others are worse, holds even more for liberalism. Such a view is sustained by a profound pessimism about human nature: man is egotistic and envious animal, if one builds a political system which appeals to his goodness and altruism, the result will be the worst terror (both Jacobins and Stalinists presupposed human virtue). However, the liberal critique of the »tyranny of the Good« comes at a price: the more its program permeates society, the more it is turning into its opposite. The claim to want nothing but the lesser of evils, once asserted as the principle of the new global order, gradually takes over the very feature of its enemy it wanted to fight. The global liberal order clearly asserts itself as the best of all possible worlds; the modest rejection of utopias ends with imposing its own market-liberal utopia which will become reality when we will properly apply market and legal Human Rights

mechanisms. Behind all this lurks the ultimate totalitarian nightmare, the vision of a New Man who left behind the old ideological baggage.

As every close observer of the deadlocks of Political Correctness knows, the separation of legal Justice from moral Goodness - which should be relativized-historicized - ends up in a stifling oppressive moralism full of resentment. Without any "organic" social substance grounding the standards of what Orwell approvingly referred to as "common decency" (all such standards are dismissed as subordinating individual freedom to proto-Fascist organic social forms), the minimalist program of laws which should just prevent individuals to encroach upon each other (to annoy or "harass" each other) reverts into an explosion of legal and moral rules, into an endless process of legalization/moralization (where "endless" refers to what Hegel called "spurious infinity") called "the fight against all forms of discrimination." If there are no shared mores that are allowed to influence the law, only the fact of "harassing" other subjects, who - in the absence of such mores - will decide what counts as "harassment"? There are, in France, associations of obese people which demand that all public campaigns against obesity and for healthy eating habits be stopped, since they hurt the self-esteem of obese persons. ~~The militants of Veggie Pride condemn the "specism" of meat-eaters (who discriminate against animals, privileging the human animal - for them, a particularly disgusting form of "fascism") and demand that "vegetophobia" should be treated as a kind of xenophobia and proclaimed a crime.~~ (And so on and so on: incest-marriage, consensual murder and cannibalism... The problem is here the obvious arbitrariness of the ever new rules - let

us take child sexuality: one can argue that its criminalization is an unwarranted discrimination, but one can also argue that children should be protected from sexual molestation by adults. And we could go on here: the same people who advocate the legalization of soft drugs usually support the prohibition of smoking in public places; the same people who protest against the patriarchal abuse of small children in our societies, worry when someone condemns members of foreign cultures who live among us for doing exactly this (say, Romas - Gypsies - preventing children from attending public schools), claiming that this is a case of meddling with other "ways of life"... It is thus for necessary structural reasons that this "fight against discrimination" is an endless process endlessly postponing its final point, a society freed of all moral prejudices which, as Jean-Claude Michea put it, "would be on this very account a *society condemned to see crimes everywhere.*"³

The ideological coordinates of such liberal multiculturalism are determined by the two features of our "postmodern" *zeitgeist*: universalized multiculturalist historicism (all values and rights are historically specific, any elevation of them into universal notions to be imposed onto others is cultural imperialism at its most violent) and universalized "hermeneutics of suspicion" (all "high" ethical motifs are generated and sustained by "low" motifs of resentment, envy, etc. - say, the call to sacrifice our life for a higher Cause is either the mask for a manipulation of those who need war for their power and wealth, or a pathological expression of masochism) ~~and~~

³ See Jean-Claude Michea, *L'empire du moindre mal*, Paris: Climats 2007, p. 145.

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(this either/or is an inclusive vel, i.e., both terms can be true at the same time). Another way to formulate Badiou's insight that we live in a world-less universe is to claim that today's functioning of ideology no longer relies on the mechanism of interpellation of individuals into subjects: what liberalism proposes is a value-neutral mechanism of rights etc., a mechanism "whose free play can automatically generate a desired political order, without at any point interpellating individuals into subjects" (94). The nameless *jouissance* cannot be a title of interpellation proper; it is more a kind of blind drive with no symbolic value-form attached to it - all such symbolic features are temporary and flexible, which is why the individual is constantly called upon to "re-create" itself.

Fighting "patriarchal" culture is the consequence of these premises. What Marx and Engels wrote more than 150 years ago, in the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto* "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." - is still ignored by those Leftist cultural theorists who focus their critique on patriarchal ideology and practice. Is it not the time to start to wonder about the fact that the critique of patriarchal "phallogocentrism" etc. was elevated into a main target at the very historical moment - ours - when patriarchy definitely lost its hegemonic role, when it is progressively swept away by market individualism of Rights? What becomes of patriarchal family values when a child can sue his parents for neglect and abuse, i.e., when family and parenthood itself are *de iure* reduced to a temporary and dissolvable contract between independent individuals? (And, incidentally, Freud was no less aware of this: for him, the decline of the Oedipal mode of

socialization was the historical condition of the rise of psychoanalysis.)

We encounter here again a coincidence of the opposites: in our predominant ideology, radical historicism coincides with ruthlessly measuring all the past with our own standards. It is easy to imagine the same person who, on the one hand, warns against imposing on the other cultures our Eurocentric values, and, on the other hand, advocating that classics like Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer - Huck Finn novels should be removed from school libraries because they are racially insensitive in their portrayal of Blacks and Native Americans...

Years ago, J. Habermas made a perspicuous critical observation about those who see as the predominant feature of our era a drift towards new forms of "totalitarian" bio-power (rise of torture, ethnic slaughters, police control, mass extermination in concentration camps, etc.): it is not only that there is more torture and killing in reality; in most of the cases, we simply perceive more of it because of the media coverage and, above all, because our normative standards are higher. Can we even imagine a World War II in which the Allies would have been measured by today's standards? We are now learning that there were serious tensions among the British and the US headquarters concerning the (predominantly British) tactics of ruthlessly bombing German civilian centers which were of no military value (Dresden, Hamburg...); even in the UK itself, many officers, priests and intellectuals were asking the question if, by doing this, the UK is not starting to resemble the Nazis. The whole debate was totally hushed up and never reached the public. On the US side, recall the ignominious dispossession and internment of the entire

Japanese ethnic population: while today, there are even Hollywood films condemning this act, nobody, including the Left, protested in 1942. (Or, in the opposite direction, what if Colombia, Afghanistan, and other opium producing nations were to apply to the US the same logic as the British empire and other Western powers did in the 1840s against China as a pretext for the Opium War? China was attacked for refusing to allow free import of opium, since opium was catastrophic for the health of the thousands of ordinary Chinese: those who reject free trade are barbarians who should be forced to accept civilization... Imagine, then, Colombia and others issuing the same ultimatum addressed at the USA!

The same goes not only for the historical dimension, but also for different countries today: the very fact that Abu Ghraib tortures turned into a public scandal which put the US administration in a defensive position was in itself a positive sign - in a really "totalitarian" regime, the case would simply be hushed up. (In the same way, let us not forget that the very fact that the US forces did not find weapons of mass destruction is a positive sign: a truly "totalitarian" power would have done what cops usually do - plant drugs and then "discover" the evidence of crime...) The widespread protests of the US public, especially students, against the US engagement in Vietnam was a key factor in causing the US withdrawal - however, is the very fact of such a protest in the middle of a war not in itself a proof of high US ethical and freedom standards? Imagine a similar movement, say, in England when it joined the World War I: Bertrand Russell was interned for his pacifism, and for years he had to submit the manuscripts of his books to a state censor. (He mentions this fact in the

foreword to the later new edition of his popular *History of Western Philosophy*, ironically admitting that the censor's remarks were often insightful and helped him to make the manuscript better.) When Leftists today complain about the violations of human rights in Guantanamo, the obvious counter-question is: do we all not know that there must be dozens of much worse places in China, Russia, in African and Arab countries? The standard Rightist-liberal complaint that the critics of the US "apply different standards", judging the US much harsher than other countries, misses the point, which is that the critics tend to judge each country by its own standards.

~~The "regulative idea" that underlies today's global liberal justice is not only to bring out all past (acts which appear from today's standards as) collective crimes; it also involves the Politically Correct utopia of "restituting" past collective violence by payment or legal regulations. Here is the Associated Press item from July 26 2002:~~

~~*Obesity Cited in Fast Food Suit.* A man sued four leading fast food chains, claiming he became obese and suffered from other serious health problems from eating their fatty cuisine. Caesar Barber, 56, filed a lawsuit Wednesday in Bronx Supreme Court, naming McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken. "They said '100 percent beef.' I thought that meant it was good for you," Barber told *Newsday*. "I thought the food was OK. Those people in the advertisements don't really tell you what's in the food. It's all fat, fat and more fat. Now I'm obese." Barber, who weighs 272 pounds, had heart attacks in 1996 and 1999 and has diabetes, high blood pressure and high~~

arduous negotiations, representatives of the working class and of the global capital should reach an agreement on how much the working class should get as compensation for the surplus-value appropriated by capitalists in the course of history? So, if there seems to be a price for everything, why should we not go to the very end and demand from God Himself a payment for botching up the job of creation and thus causing our misery? And what if, perhaps, He already paid this price by sacrificing his only son, Christ? It is a sign of our times that this option was already considered in a work of fiction: in *The Man Who Sued God*, a new Australian comedy from 2002, Billy Connolly plays the owner of a seaside caravan park whose boat is destroyed in a freak storm; his insurance people tell him it's an act of God and refuse to pay up. Enter a sharp-witted lawyer (Judy Davis) who comes up with a clever argument: If God destroyed his boat, why not sue God in the form of his representatives here on earth - the churches... This is the true utopia, the idea that a legal order can pay back for its founding crime, thereby retroactively cleansing itself of its guilt and regain its innocence. What is at the end of this road is the ecological utopia of humanity in its entirety repaying its debt to Nature for all its past exploitation.

There is a problem with this liberal vision of which every good anthropologist, psychoanalyst, or even perspicuous social critic like Francis Fukuyama, is aware: it cannot stand on its own, it is parasitic upon some preceding form of what is usually referred to as "socialization" which it is simultaneously undermining, thereby cutting off the branch on which it is sitting. On the market - and, more generally, in the social exchange

based on the market - individuals encounter each other as free rational subjects, but such subjects are the result of a complex previous process which concerns symbolic debt, authority, and, above all, trust (into the big Other which regulates exchanges). In other words, the domain of exchanges is never purely symmetrical: it is an a priori condition for each of the participants to give something without return so that he can participate in the game of give-and-take. For a market exchange to take place, there has to be subject here who participate in the basic symbolic pact and display the basic *trust* in the Word. Of course, market is the domain of egotist cheating and lying; however, as Jacques Lacan taught us, in order for a lie to function, it has to present itself and be taken as truth, i.e., the dimension of Truth has to be already established.

Kant missed the NECESSITY of unwritten, disavowed, but necessary rules for every legal edifice or set of social rules - it is only such rules that provide the "substance" on which laws can thrive, i.e., properly function. (One can again imagine, along these lines, yet another version of the Kantian secret clause enjoining the states to always take into account the unwritten rules, without publicly admitting it.) In a scene from *Break Up*, the nervous Vince Vaughn angrily reproaches Jennifer Anniston: "You wanted me to wash the dishes, and I'll wash the dishes - what's the problem?" She replies: "I don't want you to wash the dishes - I want you to want to wash the dishes!" This is the minimal reflexivity of desire, its "terrorist" demand: I want you not only to do what I want, but to do it as if you really want to do it - I want to regulate not only what you do, but also your desires. The worst thing you can do, even

worse than not doing what I want you to do, is to do what I want you to do without wanting to do it... And this brings us to civility: an act of civility is precisely to feign that I want to do what the other asks me to do, so that my complying with the other's wish does not exert pressure on him/her. The movie *Borat* is at its most subversive not when the hero is simply rude and offensive (for our Western eyes and ears, at least), but, on the contrary, when he desperately tries to be polite. During a dinner in an upper-class house, he asks where is the toilet, goes there and then returns with his shit carefully wrapped in a plastic bag, asking the landlady in a hushed-down voice where he should put it. This is a model metaphor of a truly subversive political gesture: bringing those in power a bag of shit and politely asking them how to get rid of it.

Marcel Mauss, in his *Essay sur le don*,⁴ first described the paradoxical logic of *potlatch*, of the reciprocal exchange of gifts. A true gift is by definition an act of generosity, given without expecting something in return, while exchange is by definition reciprocal - I give something, expecting something else in exchange. The mystery here is: if the secret core of *potlatch* is reciprocity of exchange, why is this reciprocity not asserted directly, why does it assume the "mystified" form of two consecutive acts each of which is staged as a free voluntary display of generosity? Marshall Sahlins proposed a salient solution: the reciprocity of exchange is thoroughly ambiguous - at its most fundamental, it is destructive of social link, it is the logic of revenge,

⁴ See Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don," *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris: PUF 1973.

tit-for-tat.⁵ If, upon receiving a gift, I immediately return it to the giver, this direct circulation would amount to an extremely aggressive gesture of humiliation, it would signal that I *refused* the other's gift - recall those embarrassing moments when old people forget and gave us next year the same present back... To cover up this aspect of exchange, to make it benevolent and pacifying, one has to *feign* that the gift of each of us is free and stands on its own. This brings us to potlatch as the "pre-economy of economy," its zero-level, i.e., exchange as the reciprocal relation of two non-productive expenditures. If gift belongs to Master and exchange to Slave, potlatch is the paradoxical exchange between Masters. Potlatch is thus simultaneously the zero-level of civility, the paradoxical point at which restrained civility and obscene consumption overlap, the point at which it is polite to behave impolitely.

The key feature that opposes potlatch to direct market exchange is thus the temporal dimension. In the market exchange, the two complementary acts occur simultaneously (I pay and I get what I paid for), so that the act of exchange does not lead to a permanent social bond, but just to a momentary exchange between atomized individuals who, immediately afterwards, return to their solitude. In potlatch, on the contrary, the time elapsed between me giving a gift and the other side returning it to me creates a social link which lasts (for a time, at least): we are all linked together with bonds of debt. From this standpoint, money can be defined as the means which enable

⁵ See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter 1972.

us to have contacts with others without entering in proper relations with them. (Is the function of the masochist practices of bonding not (also) to supplement this lack of social bond proper, so that, in it, the foreclosed returns in the real - the suspended symbolic bond returns as literal bodily bonding?)

This atomized society where we have contacts with others without entering in proper relations with them, is the presupposition of liberalism. The problem of organizing a state thus cannot be solved "even for a race of devils," as Kant put it - that it can be is the key moment of the liberal utopia. ~~One should link this Kant's reference to a race of devils to another detail of his ethical thought.~~ According to Kant, if one finds oneself alone on the sea with another survivor of a sunken ship near a floating piece of wood which can keep only one person afloat, moral considerations are no longer valid - there is no moral law preventing me from fighting to death with the other survivor for the place on the raft; I can engage in it with moral impunity. It is here that, perhaps, one encounters the limit of Kantian ethics: what about someone who would willingly sacrifice himself in order to give the other person a chance to survive - and, furthermore, is ready to do it for no pathological reasons? Since there is no moral law commanding me to do this, does this mean that such an act has no ethical status proper? Does this strange exception not demonstrate that ruthless egotism, the care for personal survival and gain, is the silent "pathological" presupposition of Kantian ethics - namely, ~~that the Kantian ethical edifice can only maintain itself if we silently presuppose the "pathological" image of man.~~

way it is, without moralistic prejudices, as a mechanism regulated by laws (of passions) like any other natural mechanism. It is only in this modern universe that society appears as an object of a possible experiment, as a chaotic field on which one can (and should) apply a value-free Theory or Science given in advance (a political "geometry of passions," economy, racist science). Only this modern position of a value-free scientist approaching society in the same way as a natural scientist approaches nature, is ideology proper, not the spontaneous attitude of the meaningful experience of life dismissed by the scientist as a set of superstitious prejudices - it is ideology because it imitates the form of natural sciences without really being one. "Ideology" in a strict sense is thus always reflexive, redoubled in itself: it is a name for neutral knowledge which opposes itself to common "ideology." (Even in Stalinist Marxism, which - in total opposition to Marx - uses the term "ideology" in a positive sense, ideology is opposed to science: first, Marxists analyse society in a neutral scientific way; then, in order to mobilize the masses, they translate their insights into "ideology." All one has to add here is that this "Marxist science" opposed to ideology is ideology at its purest.) There is thus a duality inscribed into the very notion of ideology: (1) spontaneous self-apprehension of individuals with all their prejudices; (2) neutral, "value-free" knowledge to be applied onto society to engineer its development - this latter is ideology because it presupposes that ideas can rule the world: one can master society by way of applying to it a theoretical project.

What is missing here is what, following Marx, one can call the "base" of freedom. The properly Marxist notion of

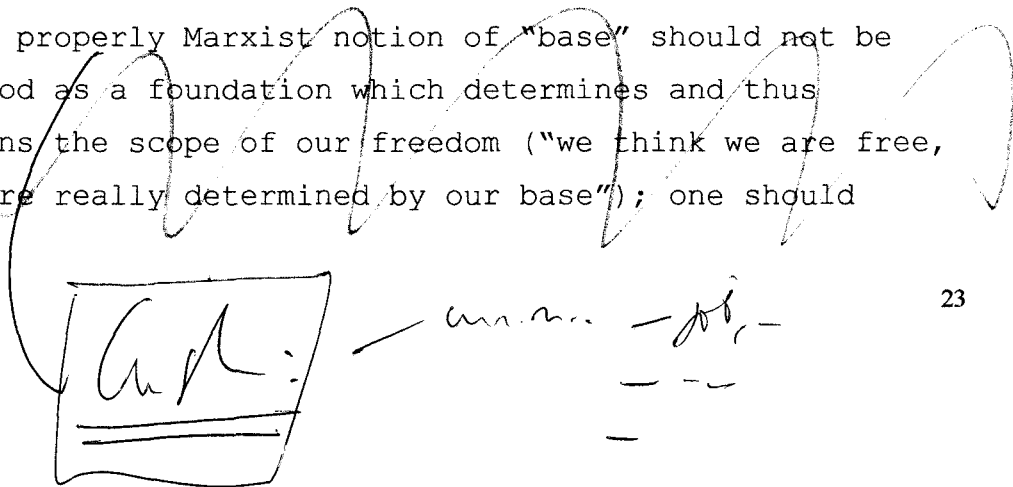
"base" should not be understood as a foundation which determines and thus constrains the scope of our freedom ("we think we are free, but we are really determined by our base"); one should rather conceive it as the very base (frame, terrain, space) OF and FOR our freedom. "Base" is a social substance which sustains our freedom - in this sense, the rules of civility do not constrain our freedom, but provide the space within which our freedom can only thrive; the legal order enforced by state apparatuses is the base for our free market exchanges; the grammatical rules are the indispensable base for our free thought (in order to "think freely," we have to practice these rules blindly); habits as our "second nature" is the base for culture; the collective of believers is the base, the only terrain, within which a Christian subject can be free; etc. ~~This is also how one should understand the infamous Marxist plea for "concrete, real freedom" as opposed to the bourgeois "abstract, merely formal freedom": this "concrete freedom" does not constrain the possible content ("you can only be truly free if you support our, Communist, side"); the question is, rather, what "base" should be secured for freedom. For example, although workers in capitalism are formally free, there is no "base" that would allow them to actualize their freedom as producers; although there is a "formal" freedom of speech, organization, etc., the base of this freedom is constrained.~~

In a perspicuous short essay on civility, Robert Pippin⁶ elaborated the enigmatic in-between-status of this notion which designates all the acts that display the basic

⁶ See Robert Pippin, "The Ethical Status of Civility," in *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 223-238.

subjective attitude of respect for others as free and autonomous agents, equal to us, the benevolent attitude of making the step over the strict utilitarian or "rational" calculation of costs and benefits in relations to others, of trusting them, trying not to humiliate them, etc. Although, measured by the degree of its obligatory character, civility is more than kindness or generosity (one cannot oblige people to be generous), it is distinctly less than a moral or legal obligation. This is what is wrong in Politically Correct attempts to moralize or even directly penalize modes of behaviour which basically pertain to civility (like hurting others with vulgar obscenities of speech, etc.): they potentially undermine the precious "middle ground" of civility. In more Hegelian terms, what gets lost in the penalization of un-civility is "ethical substance" as such: in contrast to laws and explicit normative regulations, civility is by definition "substantial," something experienced as always-already given, never imposed/instituted as such. Pippin is right to link the crucial role of civility in modern societies to the rise of the autonomous free individual - not only in the sense that civility is a practice of treating others as equal, free and autonomous subjects, but in a much more refined way: the fragile web of civility is the "social substance" of free independent individuals, it is their very mode of (inter)dependence. If this substance disintegrates, the very social space of individual freedom is foreclosed.

The properly Marxist notion of "base" should not be understood as a foundation which determines and thus constrains the scope of our freedom ("we think we are free, but we are really determined by our base"); one should



purest coincides with (or, more precisely, appears as) its opposite (as non-ideology). And, mutatis mutandis, the same goes for violence: social-symbolic violence at its purest appears at its opposite, as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air that we breathe.

This notion of civility is at the very heart of the impasses of multiculturalism. A couple of years ago, there was a debate in Germany about *Leitkultur* (the dominant culture): against abstract multiculturalism, conservatives insisted that every state is based on a predominant cultural space which the members of other cultures who live in the same space should respect. Although liberal Leftists attacked this notion as covert racism, one should admit that, if nothing else, it offers an adequate description of facts. Respect of individual freedoms and rights, even if at the expense of group rights, full emancipation of women, freedom of religion (inclusive atheism) and sexual orientation, freedom to publicly attack anyone and anything, are central constituents of the Western liberal *Leitkultur*. This should be the answer to those Muslims in Western countries who protest against their treatment, while accepting it as normal that, say, in Saudi Arabia, it is prohibited to pray publicly in other religions than Islam. They should accept that the same *Leitkultur* which allows their religious freedom in the West, demands of them to respect all other freedoms. To put it succinctly: freedom of Muslims is part and parcel of the freedom of Salman Rushdie to write what he wants, you cannot get just that part of Western freedoms which fits you. The answer to the standard critical argument that Western multiculturalism is not truly neutral, that it privileges specific values, one should shamelessly assume this

paradox: universal openness itself is rooted in Western modernity.

And, to avoid any misunderstanding, the same applies to Christianity itself. On May 2 2007, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican's official newspaper, accused Andrea Rivera, an Italian comedian, of "terrorism" for criticizing the Pope. As a presenter of a televised May Day rock concert, Rivera attacked Pope's position on evolution: "The Pope says he doesn't believe in evolution. I agree, in fact the Church has never evolved." He also criticized the Church for refusing to give a Catholic funeral to Piergiorgio Welby, a victim of muscular dystrophy who campaigned for euthanasia and died in December 2006 after a doctor agreed to unplug his respirator: "I can't stand the fact that the Vatican refused a funeral for Welby but that wasn't the case for Pinochet or Franco." Here is Vatican's reaction: "This, too, is terrorism. It's terrorism to launch attacks on the Church. It's terrorism to stoke blind and irrational rage against someone who always speaks in the name of love, love for life and love for man." It is the underlying equation of intellectual critique with physical terrorist attacks which brutally violates the Western European *Leitkultur*, which insists on the universal sphere of the "public use of reason," where one can criticize and question everything - in the eyes of our shared *Leitkultur*, Rivera's statements are totally acceptable.

Civility is crucial here: multicultural freedom also functions only when it is sustained by the rules of civility, which are never abstract, but always embedded in a *Leitkultur*. Within our *Leitkultur*, it is not Rivera but *L'Osservatore Romano* which is "terrorist" with its

dismissal of Rivera's simple and reasonable objections as expressions of "blind and irrational rage." Freedom of speech functions when all parties follow the same unwritten rules of civility telling us what kind of attacks are improper, although they are not legally prohibited; civility tells us which features of a specific ethnic or religious "way of life" are acceptable and which are not acceptable. If all sides do not share or respect the same civility, then multiculturalism turns into legally regulated mutual ignorance or hatred.

Where we should distance ourselves from Michea is with regard to his all too great Orwellian confidence in the traditional ethical substance of "common decency" among ordinary people: faced with the present ecological, biogenetic, etc. challenges, this domain of traditional "organic" mores literally *lost its substance* - one can no longer rely on it as the impenetrable "spontaneous" life-world background which will provide a kind of "ethical mapping," enabling us to find our way in the present conundrums.

How, then, does the public political space function in such a universe? Recall the psychoanalytic distinction between *acting out* and *passage a l'acte*: acting out is a spectacle addressing a figure of big Other, leaving the big Other undisturbed at its place, while *passage a l'acte* is a violent explosion destroying the very symbolic link. Is this not our predicament today? The big demonstrations against the US attack on Iraq offer an exemplary case of a strange symbiotic relationship, parasitism even, between power and protesters. Their paradoxical outcome was that both sides were satisfied. The protesters saved their beautiful soul: they made it clear that they do not agree

with the Iraq policy of the government. Those in power could calmly accept it, even profiting from it: not only did the protests not in any way prevent the already-made decision to attack Iraq; paradoxically, they even provided an additional legitimization of the attack best rendered by none other than George Bush, whose reaction to mass demonstrations protesting his visit to London was: "You see, this is what we are fighting for: that what people are doing here - protesting against their government policy - will be possible also in Iraq!"

The celebration of this pan-European movement against the Iraq war by people like Habermas was thus perhaps a little bit misplaced and too quick: the whole affair was rather a supreme case of a fully co-opted acting out - and our tragedy is that the only alternative appear to be violent outbursts like the French suburb car burnings two years ago - *l'action directe*, as one of the post-1968 Leftist terrorist organizations called itself. What is needed is the act proper: a symbolic intervention which undermines the big Other (the hegemonic social link), re-arranging its coordinates.

--- Nowhere is the predominance of the liberal "axis of Good" Market - Human Rights more palpable than in the case of the European Union, where, in spite of all the talk about the shared European cultural tradition, the process of building a European unity always get down to two things: the Common Market and the common network of Legal Regulations. It is deeply symptomatic that those who want to define Europe by a more specific civilizatory criteria are as a rule conservatives who insist on European values and wanted to include Christianity into the failed European

constitution. Perhaps, it is time to change this and meet the conservatives at their own terrain.

The case of Poland is exemplary here. A scandal ripped the country in March 2007, the so-called "Oleksy-gate": a tape of a private conversation was rendered public on which Josef Oleksy - the former prime minister and one of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD, ex-Communists) leading figures - made disparaging remarks about the SLD politicians, characterizing them as "a bunch of losers and swindlers," cynically boasting that the SLD really introduced capitalism into Poland, that the SLD leaders do not care about Poland, but just about their own survival and wealth, etc. The truly shocking feature of these tapes is a certain coincidence: Oleksy used exactly the same words as the Rightist anti-Communist opponents of the SLD who refused to admit its legitimacy, claiming that it is a party without a proper program, just a network of ex-nomenklatura swindlers minding their own business interests - this harsh external characterization was now confirmed as the inner cynical self-designation of the SLD itself... a sure sign that the first task of the new Left in post-Communist states is to reject all links with the ex-Communist "Left" parties which, as a rule, are the parties of the big capital.

The counterpart to this scandal is the unheard-of mobilization of an ideological dream: Poland has the distinction of the first Western country in which the anti-modernist backlash has won, effectively emerging as a hegemonic force. Calls for the total ban on abortion, the anti-Communist "lustration," the exclusion of Darwinism from primary and secondary education, up to the bizarre idea to abolish the post of the President of the Republic

and proclaim Jesus Christ the eternal King of Poland, are coming together into an all-encompassing proposal to enact a clear break and constitute a new Polish Republic unambiguously based on anti-modernist Christian values. The lesson is thus clear: the fundamentalist populism is filling in the void of the absence of a Leftist dream. Donald Rumsfeld's infamous statement about the Old and the New Europe is acquiring a new unexpected actuality: the emerging contours of the "new" Europe of the majority of post-Communist countries (Poland, Baltic countries, Rumania, Hungary...), with their Christian populist fundamentalism, belated anti-Communism, xenophobia and homophobia ~~etc.~~

So, again, which Europe do we want? In his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, the great conservative T.S.Eliot remarked that there are moments when the only choice is the one between sectarianism and non-belief, when the only way to keep a religion alive is to perform a sectarian split from its main corpse. This is our only chance today: only by means of a "sectarian split" from the standard European legacy, by cutting ourselves off the decaying corpse of the old Europe, can we keep ~~the renewed~~ European legacy alive. The task is difficult, it compels us to take a great risk of stepping into the unknown - yet its only alternative is slow decay, the gradual transformation of Europe into what Greece was for the mature Roman Empire, a destination for nostalgic cultural tourism with no effective relevance.

The conflict about Europe is usually portrayed as the one between Eurocentric Christian hardliners and liberal multiculturalists who want to open the doors of the European Union much more widely, to Turkey and beyond. What

if this conflict is a wrong one? What if it remains a conflict of two utopias, the liberal and the fundamentalist? What if cases like Poland should compel us to *narrow* the entry, to re-define Europe in such a way that it would exclude the Polish Christian fundamentalism? Maybe it is time to apply to Poland the same criteria as to Turkey. Maybe, today's Turkey is more European than today's Poland.

~~On September 16 2007, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner warned the world that it should prepare for war over Iran's nuclear program: "We have to prepare for the worst, and the worst is war." This statement, predictably, caused great uproar, with criticism focused on what Sir John Holmes, head of the UN refugee agency, called the "Iraq taint": after the scandal with the Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction as the excuse for the invasion, evoking such a threat forever lost its credibility - why should we believe the US and its allies now, when we were already so brutally deceived?~~

~~There is, however, another aspect of Kouchner's warning which is much more worrying. When the newly elected President Sarkozy nominated Kouchner, the great humanitarian and politically close to Socialists, as the head of Quai d'Orsay, even some of Sarkozy's critics hailed this as a pleasant surprise. Now the meaning of this nomination is clear: the return in force of the ideology of "militaristic humanism" or even "militaristic pacifism." The problem with this label is not that it is an oxymorom reminding us of "Peace is war" slogans from Orwell's 1984: the simplistic pacifist position "more bombs and killing never brings piece" is a fake, one often has to fight for peace. The true problem is also not that, as was the case,~~

socialization was the historical condition of the rise of psychoanalysis.)

We encounter here again a coincidence of the opposites: in our predominant ideology, radical historicism coincides with ruthlessly measuring all the past with our own standards. It is easy to imagine the same person who, on the one hand, warns against imposing on the other cultures our Eurocentric values, and, on the other hand, advocating that classics like Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer - Huck Finn novels should be removed from school libraries because they are racially insensitive in their portrayal of Blacks and Native Americans...

Years ago, J. Habermas made a perspicuous critical observation about those who see as the predominant feature of our era a drift towards new forms of "totalitarian" bio-power (rise of torture, ethnic slaughters, police control, mass extermination in concentration camps, etc.): it is not only that there is more torture and killing in reality; in most of the cases, we simply perceive more of it because of the media coverage and, above all, because our normative standards are higher. Can we even imagine a World War II in which the Allies would have been measured by today's standards? We are now learning that there were serious tensions among the British and the US headquarters concerning the (predominantly British) tactics of ruthlessly bombing German civilian centers which were of no military value (Dresden, Hamburg...); even in the UK itself, many officers, priests and intellectuals were asking the question if, by doing this, the UK is not starting to resemble the Nazis. The whole debate was totally hushed up and never reached the public. On the US side, recall the ignominious dispossession and internment of the entire

Japanese ethnic population: while today, there are even Hollywood films condemning this act, nobody, including the Left, protested in 1942. (Or, in the opposite direction, what if Colombia, Afghanistan, and other opium producing nations were to apply to the US the same logic as the British empire and other Western powers did in the 1840s against China as a pretext for the Opium War? China was attacked for refusing to allow free import of opium, since opium was catastrophic for the health of the thousands of ordinary Chinese: those who reject free trade are barbarians who should be forced to accept civilization... Imagine, then, Colombia and others issuing the same ultimatum addressed at the USA!

The same goes not only for the historical dimension, but also for different countries today: the very fact that Abu Ghraib tortures turned into a public scandal which put the US administration in a defensive position was in itself a positive sign - in a really "totalitarian" regime, the case would simply be hushed up. (In the same way, let us not forget that the very fact that the US forces did not find weapons of mass destruction is a positive sign: a truly "totalitarian" power would have done what cops usually do - plant drugs and then "discover" the evidence of crime...) The widespread protests of the US public, especially students, against the US engagement in Vietnam was a key factor in causing the US withdrawal - however, is the very fact of such a protest in the middle of a war not in itself a proof of high US ethical and freedom standards? Imagine a similar movement, say, in England when it joined the World War I: Bertrand Russell was interned for his pacifism, and for years he had to submit the manuscripts of his books to a state censor. (He mentions this fact in the

foreword to the later new edition of his popular *History of Western Philosophy*, ironically admitting that the censor's remarks were often insightful and helped him to make the manuscript better.) When Leftists today complain about the violations of human rights in Guantanamo, the obvious counter-question is: do we all not know that there must be dozens of much worse places in China, Russia, in African and Arab countries? The standard Rightist-liberal complaint that the critics of the US "apply different standards", judging the US much harsher than other countries, misses the point, which is that the critics tend to judge each country by its own standards.

~~The "regulative idea" that underlies today's global liberal justice is not only to bring out all past (acts which appear from today's standards as) collective crimes; it also involves the Politically Correct utopia of "restituting" past collective violence by payment or legal regulations. Here is the Associated Press item from July 26 2002:~~

~~*Obesity Cited in Fast Food Suit.* A man sued four leading fast food chains, claiming he became obese and suffered from other serious health problems from eating their fatty cuisine. Caesar Barber, 56, filed a lawsuit Wednesday in Bronx Supreme Court, naming McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken. "They said '100 percent beef.' I thought that meant it was good for you," Barber told *Newsday*. "I thought the food was OK. Those people in the advertisements don't really tell you what's in the food. It's all fat, fat and more fat. Now I'm obese." Barber, who weighs 272 pounds, had heart attacks in 1996 and 1999 and has diabetes, high blood pressure and high~~

arduous negotiations, representatives of the working class and of the global capital should reach an agreement on how much the working class should get as compensation for the surplus-value appropriated by capitalists in the course of history? So, if there seems to be a price for everything, why should we not go to the very end and demand from God Himself a payment for botching up the job of creation and thus causing our misery? And what if, perhaps, He already paid this price by sacrificing his only son, Christ? It is a sign of our times that this option was already considered in a work of fiction: in *The Man Who Sued God*, a new Australian comedy from 2002, Billy Connolly plays the owner of a seaside caravan park whose boat is destroyed in a freak storm; his insurance people tell him it's an act of God and refuse to pay up. Enter a sharp-witted lawyer (Judy Davis) who comes up with a clever argument: If God destroyed his boat, why not sue God in the form of his representatives here on earth - the churches... This is the true utopia, the idea that a legal order can pay back for its founding crime, thereby retroactively cleansing itself of its guilt and regain its innocence. What is at the end of this road is the ecological utopia of humanity in its entirety repaying its debt to Nature for all its past exploitation.

There is a problem with this liberal vision of which every good anthropologist, psychoanalyst, or even perspicuous social critic like Francis Fukuyama, is aware: it cannot stand on its own, it is parasitic upon some preceding form of what is usually referred to as "socialization" which it is simultaneously undermining, thereby cutting off the branch on which it is sitting. On the market - and, more generally, in the social exchange

based on the market - individuals encounter each other as free rational subjects, but such subjects are the result of a complex previous process which concerns symbolic debt, authority, and, above all, trust (into the big Other which regulates exchanges). In other words, the domain of exchanges is never purely symmetrical: it is an a priori condition for each of the participants to give something without return so that he can participate in the game of give-and-take. For a market exchange to take place, there has to be subject here who participate in the basic symbolic pact and display the basic *trust* in the Word. Of course, market is the domain of egotist cheating and lying; however, as Jacques Lacan taught us, in order for a lie to function, it has to present itself and be taken as truth, i.e., the dimension of Truth has to be already established.

Kant missed the NECESSITY of unwritten, disavowed, but necessary rules for every legal edifice or set of social rules - it is only such rules that provide the "substance" on which laws can thrive, i.e., properly function. (One can again imagine, along these lines, yet another version of the Kantian secret clause enjoining the states to always take into account the unwritten rules, without publicly admitting it.) In a scene from *Break Up*, the nervous Vince Vaughn angrily reproaches Jennifer Anniston: "You wanted me to wash the dishes, and I'll wash the dishes - what's the problem?" She replies: "I don't want you to wash the dishes - I want you to want to wash the dishes!" This is the minimal reflexivity of desire, its "terrorist" demand: I want you not only to do what I want, but to do it as if you really want to do it - I want to regulate not only what you do, but also your desires. The worst thing you can do, even

worse than not doing what I want you to do, is to do what I want you to do without wanting to do it... And this brings us to civility: an act of civility is precisely to feign that I want to do what the other asks me to do, so that my complying with the other's wish does not exert pressure on him/her. The movie *Borat* is at its most subversive not when the hero is simply rude and offensive (for our Western eyes and ears, at least), but, on the contrary, when he desperately tries to be polite. During a dinner in an upper-class house, he asks where is the toilet, goes there and then returns with his shit carefully wrapped in a plastic bag, asking the landlady in a hushed-down voice where he should put it. This is a model metaphor of a truly subversive political gesture: bringing those in power a bag of shit and politely asking them how to get rid of it.

Marcel Mauss, in his *Essay sur le don*,⁴ first described the paradoxical logic of *potlatch*, of the reciprocal exchange of gifts. A true gift is by definition an act of generosity, given without expecting something in return, while exchange is by definition reciprocal - I give something, expecting something else in exchange. The mystery here is: if the secret core of *potlatch* is reciprocity of exchange, why is this reciprocity not asserted directly, why does it assume the "mystified" form of two consecutive acts each of which is staged as a free voluntary display of generosity? Marshall Sahlins proposed a salient solution: the reciprocity of exchange is thoroughly ambiguous - at its most fundamental, it is destructive of social link, it is the logic of revenge,

⁴ See Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don," *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris: PUF 1973.

tit-for-tat.⁵ If, upon receiving a gift, I immediately return it to the giver, this direct circulation would amount to an extremely aggressive gesture of humiliation, it would signal that I *refused* the other's gift - recall those embarrassing moments when old people forget and gave us next year the same present back... To cover up this aspect of exchange, to make it benevolent and pacifying, one has to *feign* that the gift of each of us is free and stands on its own. This brings us to potlatch as the "pre-economy of economy," its zero-level, i.e., exchange as the reciprocal relation of two non-productive expenditures. If gift belongs to Master and exchange to Slave, potlatch is the paradoxical exchange between Masters. Potlatch is thus simultaneously the zero-level of civility, the paradoxical point at which restrained civility and obscene consumption overlap, the point at which it is polite to behave impolitely.

The key feature that opposes potlatch to direct market exchange is thus the temporal dimension. In the market exchange, the two complementary acts occur simultaneously (I pay and I get what I paid for), so that the act of exchange does not lead to a permanent social bond, but just to a momentary exchange between atomized individuals who, immediately afterwards, return to their solitude. In potlatch, on the contrary, the time elapsed between me giving a gift and the other side returning it to me creates a social link which lasts (for a time, at least): we are all linked together with bonds of debt. From this standpoint, money can be defined as the means which enable

⁵ See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter 1972.

us to have contacts with others without entering in proper relations with them. (Is the function of the masochist practices of bonding not (also) to supplement this lack of social bond proper, so that, in it, the foreclosed returns in the real - the suspended symbolic bond returns as literal bodily bonding?)

This atomized society where we have contacts with others without entering in proper relations with them, is the presupposition of liberalism. The problem of organizing a state thus cannot be solved "even for a race of devils," as Kant put it - that it can be is the key moment of the liberal utopia. ~~One should link this Kant's reference to a race of devils to another detail of his ethical thought.~~ According to Kant, if one finds oneself alone on the sea with another survivor of a sunken ship near a floating piece of wood which can keep only one person afloat, moral considerations are no longer valid - there is no moral law preventing me from fighting to death with the other survivor for the place on the raft; I can engage in it with moral impunity. It is here that, perhaps, one encounters the limit of Kantian ethics: what about someone who would willingly sacrifice himself in order to give the other person a chance to survive - and, furthermore, is ready to do it for no pathological reasons? Since there is no moral law commanding me to do this, does this mean that such an act has no ethical status proper? Does this strange exception not demonstrate that ruthless egotism, the care for personal survival and gain, is the silent "pathological" presupposition of Kantian ethics - namely, that the Kantian ethical edifice can only maintain itself ~~if we silently presuppose the "pathological" image of man.~~

way it is, without moralistic prejudices, as a mechanism regulated by laws (of passions) like any other natural mechanism. It is only in this modern universe that society appears as an object of a possible experiment, as a chaotic field on which one can (and should) apply a value-free Theory or Science given in advance (a political "geometry of passions," economy, racist science). Only this modern position of a value-free scientist approaching society in the same way as a natural scientist approaches nature, is ideology proper, not the spontaneous attitude of the meaningful experience of life dismissed by the scientist as a set of superstitious prejudices - it is ideology because it imitates the form of natural sciences without really being one. "Ideology" in a strict sense is thus always reflexive, redoubled in itself: it is a name for neutral knowledge which opposes itself to common "ideology." (Even in Stalinist Marxism, which - in total opposition to Marx - uses the term "ideology" in a positive sense, ideology is opposed to science: first, Marxists analyse society in a neutral scientific way; then, in order to mobilize the masses, they translate their insights into "ideology." All one has to add here is that this "Marxist science" opposed to ideology is ideology at its purest.) There is thus a duality inscribed into the very notion of ideology: (1) spontaneous self-apprehension of individuals with all their prejudices; (2) neutral, "value-free" knowledge to be applied onto society to engineer its development - this latter is ideology because it presupposes that ideas can rule the world: one can master society by way of applying to it a theoretical project.

What is missing here is what, following Marx, one can call the "base" of freedom. The properly Marxist notion of

"base" should not be understood as a foundation which determines and thus constrains the scope of our freedom ("we think we are free, but we are really determined by our base"); one should rather conceive it as the very base (frame, terrain, space) OF and FOR our freedom. "Base" is a social substance which sustains our freedom - in this sense, the rules of civility do not constrain our freedom, but provide the space within which our freedom can only thrive; the legal order enforced by state apparatuses is the base for our free market exchanges; the grammatical rules are the indispensable base for our free thought (in order to "think freely," we have to practice these rules blindly); habits as our "second nature" is the base for culture; the collective of believers is the base, the only terrain, within which a Christian subject can be free; etc. ~~This is also how one should understand the infamous Marxist plea for "concrete, real freedom" as opposed to the bourgeois "abstract, merely formal freedom": this "concrete freedom" does not constrain the possible content ("you can only be truly free if you support our, Communist, side"); the question is, rather, what "base" should be secured for freedom. For example, although workers in capitalism are formally free, there is no "base" that would allow them to actualize their freedom as producers; although there is a "formal" freedom of speech, organization, etc., the base of this freedom is constrained.~~

In a perspicuous short essay on civility, Robert Pippin⁶ elaborated the enigmatic in-between-status of this notion which designates all the acts that display the basic

⁶ See Robert Pippin, "The Ethical Status of Civility," in *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 223-238.

subjective attitude of respect for others as free and autonomous agents, equal to us, the benevolent attitude of making the step over the strict utilitarian or "rational" calculation of costs and benefits in relations to others, of trusting them, trying not to humiliate them, etc. Although, measured by the degree of its obligatory character, civility is more than kindness or generosity (one cannot oblige people to be generous), it is distinctly less than a moral or legal obligation. This is what is wrong in Politically Correct attempts to moralize or even directly penalize modes of behaviour which basically pertain to civility (like hurting others with vulgar obscenities of speech, etc.): they potentially undermine the precious "middle ground" of civility. In more Hegelian terms, what gets lost in the penalization of un-civility is "ethical substance" as such: in contrast to laws and explicit normative regulations, civility is by definition "substantial," something experienced as always-already given, never imposed/instituted as such. Pippin is right to link the crucial role of civility in modern societies to the rise of the autonomous free individual - not only in the sense that civility is a practice of treating others as equal, free and autonomous subjects, but in a much more refined way: the fragile web of civility is the "social substance" of free independent individuals, it is their very mode of (inter)dependence. If this substance disintegrates, the very social space of individual freedom is foreclosed.

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Handwritten notes and a signature. A large, loopy scribble is drawn over the text. Below it, a rectangular box contains the signature 'A. P.'. To the right of the box, there are several horizontal lines and a small scribble.

purest coincides with (or, more precisely, appears as) its opposite (as non-ideology). And, mutatis mutandis, the same goes for violence: social-symbolic violence at its purest appears at its opposite, as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air that we breathe.

This notion of civility is at the very heart of the impasses of multiculturalism. A couple of years ago, there was a debate in Germany about *Leitkultur* (the dominant culture): against abstract multiculturalism, conservatives insisted that every state is based on a predominant cultural space which the members of other cultures who live in the same space should respect. Although liberal Leftists attacked this notion as covert racism, one should admit that, if nothing else, it offers an adequate description of facts. Respect of individual freedoms and rights, even if at the expense of group rights, full emancipation of women, freedom of religion (inclusive atheism) and sexual orientation, freedom to publicly attack anyone and anything, are central constituents of the Western liberal *Leitkultur*. This should be the answer to those Muslims in Western countries who protest against their treatment, while accepting it as normal that, say, in Saudi Arabia, it is prohibited to pray publicly in other religions than Islam. They should accept that the same *Leitkultur* which allows their religious freedom in the West, demands of them to respect all other freedoms. To put it succinctly: freedom of Muslims is part and parcel of the freedom of Salman Rushdie to write what he wants, you cannot get just that part of Western freedoms which fits you. The answer to the standard critical argument that Western multiculturalism is not truly neutral, that it privileges specific values, one should shamelessly assume this

paradox: universal openness itself is rooted in Western modernity.

And, to avoid any misunderstanding, the same applies to Christianity itself. On May 2 2007, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican's official newspaper, accused Andrea Rivera, an Italian comedian, of "terrorism" for criticizing the Pope. As a presenter of a televised May Day rock concert, Rivera attacked Pope's position on evolution: "The Pope says he doesn't believe in evolution. I agree, in fact the Church has never evolved." He also criticized the Church for refusing to give a Catholic funeral to Piergiorgio Welby, a victim of muscular dystrophy who campaigned for euthanasia and died in December 2006 after a doctor agreed to unplug his respirator: "I can't stand the fact that the Vatican refused a funeral for Welby but that wasn't the case for Pinochet or Franco." Here is Vatican's reaction: "This, too, is terrorism. It's terrorism to launch attacks on the Church. It's terrorism to stoke blind and irrational rage against someone who always speaks in the name of love, love for life and love for man." It is the underlying equation of intellectual critique with physical terrorist attacks which brutally violates the Western European *Leitkultur*, which insists on the universal sphere of the "public use of reason," where one can criticize and question everything - in the eyes of our shared *Leitkultur*, Rivera's statements are totally acceptable.

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dismissal of Rivera's simple and reasonable objections as expressions of "blind and irrational rage." Freedom of speech functions when all parties follow the same unwritten rules of civility telling us what kind of attacks are improper, although they are not legally prohibited; civility tells us which features of a specific ethnic or religious "way of life" are acceptable and which are not acceptable. If all sides do not share or respect the same civility, then multiculturalism turns into legally regulated mutual ignorance or hatred.

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How, then, does the public political space function in such a universe? Recall the psychoanalytic distinction between *acting out* and *passage a l'acte*: acting out is a spectacle addressing a figure of big Other, leaving the big Other undisturbed at its place, while *passage a l'acte* is a violent explosion destroying the very symbolic link. Is this not our predicament today? The big demonstrations against the US attack on Iraq offer an exemplary case of a strange symbiotic relationship, parasitism even, between power and protesters. Their paradoxical outcome was that both sides were satisfied. The protesters saved their beautiful soul: they made it clear that they do not agree

with the Iraq policy of the government. Those in power could calmly accept it, even profiting from it: not only did the protests not in any way prevent the already-made decision to attack Iraq; paradoxically, they even provided an additional legitimization of the attack best rendered by none other than George Bush, whose reaction to mass demonstrations protesting his visit to London was: "You see, this is what we are fighting for: that what people are doing here - protesting against their government policy - will be possible also in Iraq!"

The celebration of this pan-European movement against the Iraq war by people like Habermas was thus perhaps a little bit misplaced and too quick: the whole affair was rather a supreme case of a fully co-opted acting out - and our tragedy is that the only alternative appear to be violent outbursts like the French suburb car burnings two years ago - *l'action directe*, as one of the post-1968 Leftist terrorist organizations called itself. What is needed is the act proper: a symbolic intervention which undermines the big Other (the hegemonic social link), re-arranging its coordinates.

--- Nowhere is the predominance of the liberal "axis of Good" Market - Human Rights more palpable than in the case of the European Union, where, in spite of all the talk about the shared European cultural tradition, the process of building a European unity always get down to two things: the Common Market and the common network of Legal Regulations. It is deeply symptomatic that those who want to define Europe by a more specific civilizatory criteria are as a rule conservatives who insist on European values and wanted to include Christianity into the failed European

constitution. Perhaps, it is time to change this and meet the conservatives at their own terrain.

The case of Poland is exemplary here. A scandal ripped the country in March 2007, the so-called "Oleksy-gate": a tape of a private conversation was rendered public on which Josef Oleksy - the former prime minister and one of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD, ex-Communists) leading figures - made disparaging remarks about the SLD politicians, characterizing them as "a bunch of losers and swindlers," cynically boasting that the SLD really introduced capitalism into Poland, that the SLD leaders do not care about Poland, but just about their own survival and wealth, etc. The truly shocking feature of these tapes is a certain coincidence: Oleksy used exactly the same words as the Rightist anti-Communist opponents of the SLD who refused to admit its legitimacy, claiming that it is a party without a proper program, just a network of ex-nomenklatura swindlers minding their own business interests - this harsh external characterization was now confirmed as the inner cynical self-designation of the SLD itself... a sure sign that the first task of the new Left in post-Communist states is to reject all links with the ex-Communist "Left" parties which, as a rule, are the parties of the big capital.

The counterpart to this scandal is the unheard-of mobilization of an ideological dream: Poland has the distinction of the first Western country in which the anti-modernist backlash has won, effectively emerging as a hegemonic force. Calls for the total ban on abortion, the anti-Communist "lustration," the exclusion of Darwinism from primary and secondary education, up to the bizarre idea to abolish the post of the President of the Republic

and proclaim Jesus Christ the eternal King of Poland, are coming together into an all-encompassing proposal to enact a clear break and constitute a new Polish Republic unambiguously based on anti-modernist Christian values. The lesson is thus clear: the fundamentalist populism is filling in the void of the absence of a Leftist dream. Donald Rumsfeld's infamous statement about the Old and the New Europe is acquiring a new unexpected actuality: the emerging contours of the "new" Europe of the majority of post-Communist countries (Poland, Baltic countries, Rumania, Hungary...), with their Christian populist fundamentalism, belated anti-Communism, xenophobia and homophobia ~~etc.~~

So, again, which Europe do we want? In his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, the great conservative T.S.Eliot remarked that there are moments when the only choice is the one between sectarianism and non-belief, when the only way to keep a religion alive is to perform a sectarian split from its main corpse. This is our only chance today: only by means of a "sectarian split" from the standard European legacy, by cutting ourselves off the decaying corpse of the old Europe, can we keep ~~the renewed~~ European legacy alive. The task is difficult, it compels us to take a great risk of stepping into the unknown - yet its only alternative is slow decay, the gradual transformation of Europe into what Greece was for the mature Roman Empire, a destination for nostalgic cultural tourism with no effective relevance.

The conflict about Europe is usually portrayed as the one between Eurocentric Christian hardliners and liberal multiculturalists who want to open the doors of the European Union much more widely, to Turkey and beyond. What

if this conflict is a wrong one? What if it remains a conflict of two utopias, the liberal and the fundamentalist? What if cases like Poland should compel us to *narrow* the entry, to re-define Europe in such a way that it would exclude the Polish Christian fundamentalism? Maybe it is time to apply to Poland the same criteria as to Turkey. Maybe, today's Turkey is more European than today's Poland.

~~On September 16 2007, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner warned the world that it should prepare for war over Iran's nuclear program: "We have to prepare for the worst, and the worst is war." This statement, predictably, caused great uproar, with criticism focused on what Sir John Holmes, head of the UN refugee agency, called the "Iraq taint": after the scandal with the Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction as the excuse for the invasion, evoking such a threat forever lost its credibility - why should we believe the US and its allies now, when we were already so brutally deceived?~~

There is, however, another aspect of Kouchner's warning which is much more worrying. When the newly elected President Sarkozy nominated Kouchner, the great humanitarian and politically close to Socialists, as the head of Quai d'Orsay, even some of Sarkozy's critics hailed this as a pleasant surprise. Now the meaning of this nomination is clear: the return in force of the ideology of "militaristic humanism" or even "militaristic pacifism." The problem with this label is not that it is an oxymorom reminding us of "Peace is war" slogans from Orwell's *1984*: the simplistic pacifist position "more bombs and killing never brings piece" is a fake, one often has to fight for peace. The true problem is also not that, as was the case,