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After Post-Socialism: Social Theory, Utopia, and the Work of Castoriadis in a Global Age

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A widespread feature of contemporary social theoretical commentary has been to note the post-1970s troubles faced by social theory, utopia, Marxism, and socialism, often linked to the proliferating “posts” and “ends of” that have marked discussion in the human sciences over the past three-four decades. Thus, Peter Wagner notes the doubts that have ‘arisen during the closing decades of the twentieth century as to whether the social science’s way of observing, interpreting and explaining the world really brought superior insights into the social life of human beings;’¹ thus, Perry Anderson argues that ‘the utopian itself has been in general suspension since the mid-seventies,’ bringing a ‘remorseless closure of space;’² thus, we find a variety of lamentations and celebrations of the death of Marxism and socialism – as either evidence of a dispiriting conformism, end to contestation, disorientation, and political-intellectual stasis, or a welcome move

beyond the totalitarian imaginary, beyond the abstract, unrealistic schemes pushed by disreputable intellectuals. I want to explore some of these notions, here – first and foremost, by examining post-Marxism as an intellectual formation, and, in particular, the concentrating on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis.

Castoriadis remains a somewhat neglected figure, even though a number of his books have now appeared in English translation,³ and his work has not yet found a place in the canon of political and social theory. This is unfortunate, because Castoriadis is, I believe, an important thinker whose work has central links to more prominent contributors to theoretical debates. Born in Constantinople in 1922, Castoriadis was philosophically literate and politically active by his teenage years. Hunted down in Greece in the early 1940s by both Stalinists and fascists, he left to take up a never-completed doctoral thesis in France, where he worked as an economist for the OECD, then as a psychoanalyst, and finally as an academic in the school for advanced studies in the social sciences. He died in France in 1997.⁴

Perhaps Castoriadis is best known for his tutelage of the now-legendary group Socialism or Barbarism, which split from the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1949, and whose ranks included psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, philosopher Claude Lefort, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Guy Debord, author of *The Society of the Spectacle*. Socialism or Barbarism belongs within that rather neglected political current of what might be labelled “left communism”, a strand of socialism that contested the socialist orthodoxies of both social democracy and Leninism, that interpreted the regimes of “really existing socialism” as forms of capitalism, and that posited the possibility of a different type of socialism, often a directly democratic socialism of workers’ councils.

This left communist strand is of interest today, I shall argue towards the close of this essay, but, for the most part, I am interested in Castoriadis as arguably the earliest representative of that contemporary intellectual formation of “post-Marxism”.⁵ In the following pages, I want, first, to explore the “co-ordinates of unity”⁶ of this intellectual formation, illustrating them primarily with reference to Castoriadis’ work. I then want to turn back to suggest that, today, the post-Marxist, post-socialist contentions found in this work are more problematic than they once might have appeared, troubled by the troubles of global capitalism. I am

suggesting, here, that what we have witnessed in the past decade or so is the fading of both post-Marxist and post-socialist moments, and that, in related fashion, shifts are visible in the realms of debate around social theory and utopia.

Post-Marxism

In order to examine the main features of post-Marxism as an intellectual formation, I'm going to use Tormey & Townshend's⁷ argument that post-Marxism is unified by six central problems posed to Marx and Marxism – the problems of history, of revolutionary subjectivity, of ethics, of positivism, of vanguardism, and of democracy. I'll treat these in turn.

As I have noted, Castoriadis broke fairly quickly from the Marxist orthodoxy of the communist parties and sided with the Trotskyists, but from around the mid-1940s he was already expressing dissatisfaction with some of their analyses, particularly around the understanding of the character of the regime in the USSR.¹ Over time, Castoriadis became more and more critical of more and more of the Marxian tradition, and in 1959 he made a decisive break with Marxism in a lengthy text he circulated within *Socialism or Barbarism*,² "Modern Capitalism and Revolution".⁸ In this text, a major issue is that first post-Marxist problem: the problem of history. This problem entails a critique of the teleological Marxist philosophy of history and of Marxist economic determinism, the notion that all of social life can be understood by reference to the economic base.⁹ Castoriadis' version of this problem is that the late Marx, the Marx of *Capital*, in seeking to discover iron laws of history and develop a strictly scientific analysis of capitalism, treats the value of the commodity labour power as a fixed and objectively determined quantity, as if it

¹Castoriadis contended that the Trotskyist idea that this regime could be understood as a "deformed" or "degenerated workers' state" made little sense. We might as well, Castoriadis quipped, label the social orders in advanced capitalist nations "workers' states in gestation".

²It is interesting to note that Jean-Francois Lyotard, the author of *The Post-Modern Condition* – which argued the case that we had entered the age of incredulity towards meta-narratives, with the Marxist metanarrative as the major object of criticism – strenuously objected to the text and became part of what was rather cruelly labelled the "Paleo-Marxist tendency" within the group, a tendency which sought to defend Marxism against Castoriadis' heresy.

were, say, a lump of coal.¹⁰ In doing this, Castoriadis charges, Marx ends up perversely eliminating the factor of struggle from the story of history.

In this same text, wearing his economist's hat, Castoriadis takes issue with a number of the major emphases in Marxist economic theory. Against Marx, Castoriadis argues that we are not seeing the immiseration of the working class, growing reserve armies of labour, and uncontrollable, escalating crisis tendencies. In fact, post-war in the core countries, we have full employment, rises in average working class earnings, and the control of crisis tendencies through state intervention and planning. Here Castoriadis turns to Weber, arguing that bureaucratisation in four spheres – production, the state, consumption, and working class organisations – has transformed capitalism, making Marx's portrait of mid-nineteenth century British capitalism of little contemporary relevance.¹¹

Castoriadis' criticisms of Marxist economics are linked to that second post-Marxist problem – the problem of revolutionary subjectivity. This problem encompasses issues of agency in progressive social change (who makes revolution?), the character of social struggles (what are the crucial divisions within society?), and political identity (how do people become political animals?). The major key played by post-Marxists here has been to question the Marxist prioritisation of the working class.¹² Thus, one of Castoriadis' points about the changes entailed by the coming of bureaucratic capitalism is that manual workers in the West are increasingly a minority. In addition, with rising wages, full employment, and the transformation of the old labour organisations into cogs in the machine of capitalism, what remains of the working class no longer strives for the radical transformation of society.¹³

Instead of pinning socialist hopes on this shrinking and increasingly moderate industrial working class, Castoriadis turned his attentions and enthusiasms to the new sorts of struggles that were emerging, struggles taking place beyond the factory floor, contestations that were later to be characterised as the “new social movements”. Furthermore, Castoriadis attempts to think again about what, in place of capital versus labour, is the crucial scission within advanced social orders. A first answer here is that the fundamental divide is that between order-givers and order-takers, an argument connected to Castoriadis' Weberian emphasis on bureaucratisation. Subsequently, Castoriadis suggests that even this division was

losing relevance, and he strikes a more existentialist note in arguing that the central basis for contestation in the contemporary period is to be found in the attitude of individuals to the present social system – do they accept it or not?¹⁴

This existentialist note provides something of a segue into the next of those post-Marxist problems, the problem of ethics. This is broadly the notion that Marxism suffers from an “ethical deficit” or from “moral constipation”.¹⁵ That is, Marxism’s tendency to think in terms of objective laws and goals of history, and its often fervent opposition to liberalism and “bourgeois democracy” – for instance, rights talk as merely an expression of atomization and the desire to protect private property, liberal democracy as no more than one modality of the “dictatorship of capital” – means a worrying reluctance to reflect in any independent and serious fashion on questions of the good – these questions being merely ideological or idealist.¹⁶ This problem isn’t raised as loudly by Castoriadis as it is by other post-Marxists, who tend to take a more strongly post-modern line that foregrounds difference and otherness and that warns of the dangers of totalising approaches in theory and politics. Nevertheless, something of this concern is displayed in Castoriadis’ psychoanalytic writings, where he insists on the need for an “ethic of mortality”, an ability to live with the Abyss, in the absence of guarantees, a break with the assumed omnipotence and immortality of the alienated person, from the eternity promised by the ideologies of heteronomous society.¹⁷

This emphasis on the Abyss, the absence of guarantees, that we are more clearly now without sure foundations for knowledge and political action, is connected to the fourth post-Marxist problem – the problem of positivism. The major post-Marxist line of argument here is a post-modern-inflected opposition to the alignment between Marxism and the naive understanding of the operation of the natural sciences (laws, prediction, experimentation, control). This is once again to come back to Castoriadis’ criticisms of Marx’s objectivist view of capitalism, of “theological” laws of history, and it is also linked to his argument that Marxism is deeply implicated in the troubling modern fantasy of “unlimited rational mastery” – the modern will to fully know, order, and control the natural world, the individual, the social order.¹⁸

Faced with this problem, a common post-Marxist response has been to reject Marxist determinism, to emphasise the limitations on what human beings can know and do,¹⁹ and to underscore, to greater or lesser degrees, the *contingency* of social life. And a common theoretical alternative to the conceptual apparatus of historical materialism has been the post-Marxist turn to culture, meaning, discourse, and language. Castoriadis' version of this is his focus on "social imaginary significations".²⁰ Here, Castoriadis underscores the importance of the "magma of social imaginary significations", the "web of meanings", which give the society in question its particular shape – things, language, reality, norms, ways of life and death, anthropological types. A major hope among post-Marxists is that these alternative theoretical languages offer a way to escape the reduction in Marxism of the concrete to the abstract,²¹ to move from the simple conclusion that capitalism is capitalism, and to allow access to the fine-grained differences across various social formations. In Castoriadis, a crucial factor in leaning towards contingency against Marxist determinism is the hitherto neglected role of the imagination. That is, for him, the history of theory has been dominated by a view that being is being determined, and this view neglects that radically new "forms and figures" are constantly appearing, at the social level and at the level of the individual psyche.²² History, he says, is creation.

The fifth post-Marxist problem is the problem of vanguardism, entailing questions about the function of political organizations, the role of intellectuals, and the interpretation of "really existing socialism". Here, we see a number of common emphases among post-Marxists: a distancing from Lenin's organisational strictures in *What is to be Done?*; a post-modern deflation of notions of the privileged and separate place of the intellectual³; and various critiques of "really existing socialism". Castoriadis' responses to these problems are as follows: he rejects Leninist organisational ideas, emphasising the leading role of popular self-organisation; he lends intellectuals an only modest role in progressive social change; and he views the "communist" regimes – marked as they are by planning, socialisation equated with nationalisation, and commodity production – as "total bureaucratic capitalism".²³

³ See, for instance, Foucault's discussion of the shift from universal to specific intellectuals, or Bauman's argument about legislator versus interpreter intellectuals.

In terms of more explicitly utopian questions, the designation of a better, not-yet-existing way of being,²⁴ we have the last of our post-Marxist problems, the problem of democracy. Here, I think we could say that, across post-Marxism, a reconsideration of democracy comes to replace explicit socialist commitments: “radical democracy” in Laclau and Mouffe, and something similar in Heller and Feher; Lefort insisting on the modern democratic mutation, where the place of power becomes empty, as an unsurpassable horizon; “democracy to come” in late Derrida. Castoriadis’ version of this is “autonomy”, those two breaks in human history – in Greek Antiquity, then again in modern times – where we see the unleashing of unlimited, endless questioning of ourselves and our institutions. Castoriadis’ continued self-identification as a “revolutionary” is, I think, the exception that proves the rule of an overall post-Marxist retreat or moderation of emphasis, away from the old Marxian language of the dictatorship of the proletariat and revolution, away from the maximalist critique of rights, liberalism, and representative democracy.

Back to Marxism and Socialism?

Having set out these central post-Marxist contentions, I want now to turn to wrestle with them a little, suggesting a number of crucial problems with post-Marxist and post-socialist emphases today. As a way into this, I think it is worth thinking a little about the context of Castoriadis’ work. I read this as divided into two periods, these periods separated by a short sequence of intensive social contestation. The first period, 1945-1967, in which Castoriadis makes his break from Marxism, is the period of the post-War boom, of what has been called “organized capitalism”,²⁵ of clear American dominance in the world-system.²⁶ It is also the period of great success for what world-systems thinkers call the “antisystemic movements” – communism, social democracy, and national liberation: a period in which the “social democratic consensus” rules in the West; in which nearly a half of the world’s people are embraced by the regimes of “really existing socialism”; in which movements for decolonisation in the “third world” are extraordinarily successful.²⁷

In this period, Castoriadis is clearly struck by the successful expansion of capitalism, by the containment of opposition, and he is very critical of the alternatives offered by these anti-systemic movements. On this last point, a major feature of the sequence of contestation I mentioned – the ‘60s, 1967-1973²⁸ – is widespread disillusionment with these movements: criticisms that they had left certain categories of people out; that they had failed on their promises to transform life for the better; that they had become oppressive and corrupt.²⁹ With the unrest of the ‘60s, Castoriadis’ mood brightens: he is clearly hopeful about the arrival of a new, better kind of socialism. But, of course, the ‘60s terminate in a global economic downturn, the progressive loss of power of these anti-systemic movements (which are not replaced by strong alternatives), neo-liberalism, and a new “disorganized capitalism”. In this period, while carrying out his most important reconstructive theoretical work, Castoriadis becomes relentlessly gloomy. For him, we are heading in the direction of a “closing into heteronomy”: massive de-politicisation and privatisation; the end of the avant-garde and the youth revolt; the demise of radical questioning – importantly, of capital and liberal democracy; the philosophical/theoretical correlate of this in post-modern thought, which, for him, represented a flight from the question of truth, impotent agnosticism, and sterile eclecticism.³⁰

It’s in this second period, especially through the 1980s to the mid-‘90s, that you see post-Marxist and post-socialist notions really getting traction in intellectual life, and these notions get bound into the “globalization talk” that expands particularly after the collapse of “really existing socialism”. My suggestion is, though, that from about the time of Castoriadis’ death in 1997, post-Marxist, post-socialist, and “happy globalization”³¹ assumptions began to look more and more questionable. Here, I want to again follow Tormey & Townshend by posing problems to those post-Marxist problems and re-orientations.

With that first problem of history, Castoriadis’ assumptions about the permanence of full employment, rising wages, and growth were already called into question by the downturn from the mid-1970s, and, after the Asian crisis and contagion from 1997, in the face of the recent global financial crisis, the notion of the end of the contradictions of capitalism seems quite unsustainable. Meanwhile, in terms of those criticisms of Marx’s philosophy of history, Marx, of course, had plenty more

to say than he does in *Capital* and in the 1857 “Preface to the Critique of Political Economy”,³² and, in any case, it has been regularly pointed out that the post-Marxists and post-modernists themselves erect a competing meta-narrative of progress and emancipation, with ours as a break into widening recognition of difference, generalised incredulity towards totalising thought, scepticism about abstract utopian schemes, and so on.³³

In terms of the second problem of revolutionary subjectivity, it seems to me a very short-sighted view of things to imagine that we have said goodbye to the working class. Clearly, in the core countries there has been a shift in the direction of service work, but a number of Marxian cautions are in order. First, much of this service work is rather low-end and routine and does not accord at all with the image often painted by enthusiasts of the “knowledge society” or the “information age” of highly mobile, flexible, networked, empowered knowledge workers.³⁴ Second, it is plausible to suggest that the period of globalisation is marked precisely by the expansion of the proletariat – the steep growth of the world labour force, the “death of the peasantry”, the relocation and growth of productive wage labour in semi-peripheral regions.³⁵ Third, and related, capitalism and the working class have been in a process of dynamic transformation from the start – from the “agricultural capitalism” of the seventeenth century, to the “cotton capitalism” of the British Industrial Revolution, to the “automobile capitalism” of the middle of the twentieth century, and beyond.³⁶

Furthermore, against the thesis of a post-‘60s transformation towards more “culturalist” forms of contestation, Tormey & Townshend note the return of more “materialist” struggles from the end of the 1990s – from major alternative-globalisation mobilisations against the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, to movements focussed on Southern debt relief, to efforts to impose tighter control on global financial movements, to the wave of left-wing populist movements in Latin America. Such “materialist” class concerns are, I think, clearly in play (sometimes in veiled or unpleasant ways) in the newer combinations that gained ground in that decade – political Islam, Right-wing populism, anti-globalisation.³⁷

One expression of the problem of ethics, meanwhile, was a social theoretical “ethical turn” through the ‘80s and ‘90s – its major themes being recognition of

difference, pluralism, concern with totalitarianism – but, more recently, there are lots of signals of deep dissatisfaction with some of what is bound up with this turn.³⁸ For instance, some will say that this turn has entailed the triumph of moralising over properly political thinking.³⁹ A related objection has been the criticism of the rising prominence of human rights discourse. Here, a number of commentators have detected an unfortunate shift from the “Third Worldism” of the ‘60s and ‘70s, where those in the poorer nations are no longer today viewed as potentially assertive agents battling domination and capable of self-emancipation, but are instead portrayed as suffering, pitiable victims who are in desperate need of human rights charity from the West.⁴⁰

On the problem of positivism, Gregor McLennan contends that, from the second part of the 1990s, we have seen a movement away from the predominance of the post-modern mode in social theory.⁴¹ This mode has been important in many ways – for instance, scepticism about “laws” of the social, criticism of the naive positivism that models the human sciences on a fantasy of the operations of the “hard sciences”, and so on. However, for McLennan, the “excessive self scrutiny” and “negativity” that have resulted from post-modern emphases – excessive pluralism, anti-totalisation, desperate avoidance of the various “sins” (essentialism, universalism, determinism, say) of modernist theorising⁴² – has proved corrosive to the essential tasks of social theory. More recently, McLennan contends that a “new positivity” can be detected in social theoretical work, expressed in a more deflationary attitude to theory and in a ‘more substantive and affirmative’ direction in theoretical work, where people are more likely to want to say something about the ‘structure and direction of the world we inhabit and about the values which will guide a better human future.’⁴³ One signal of this positivity, for McLennan – despite some of the major recurring problems found in this enormous literature⁴ – is the replacement of “post-modernism” by “globalization” as the central theme in theoretical work in the social sciences.

⁴ Among these problems, we have, for instance, persistent tendencies to overstate the uniqueness of contemporary globalization, to present globalization as unstoppable, inevitable, and “agentless”, to fail to elaborate on the explanations implied by the myriad pairings between globalization and a host of substantive issues.

With the problem of vanguardism, one signal of the resonance of this problem was a steep growth in the literature on intellectuals from the 1980s, much of which takes up post-modern concerns about the equation power/knowledge.⁴⁴ To be provocative, here, I think we could say that, despite some really good case studies, the level of evaluation of the difficult issues in play within this literature seldom reaches beyond concerns found early within the socialist tradition⁵ about the dangers of intellectuals speaking for, representing, or hoping to lead the subaltern classes. What we find in much of this discussion is an oscillation between two equally inadequate poles: on the one hand, an easy, deceptive anti-intellectualism,⁴⁵ on the other hand, romantic portraits of intellectuals as exilic characters with a vocation for “speaking the truth to power”,⁴⁶ both poles often characterised by an extraordinary obscurity of expression that performatively contradicts the rhetoric about breaking from Marxian elitism. On the related question of “really existing socialism”, I think we should at the very least consider Zizek’s argument about the way in which the spectre of totalitarianism has come to function as a “prohibition on thinking” – the notion that any venture to re-shape the world for the better will inevitably end up with the Gulag.⁴⁷ The quick but important reply to this Cold War prohibition is that socialism is a much richer set of traditions than the equation “socialism = Stalinism” allows.

Last, with respect to that problem of democracy, as I have said, the post-Marxist move has been to elevate the question of democracy above the commitment to socialism, with this democracy often attached to references to, say, “new social movements” or “civil society” and viewed as a different, less dangerous beast in utopian terms (differentiated, plural, self-limiting, and so on).⁴⁸ Once more, I would suggest that, by the close of the 1990s, there were clear signs of dissatisfaction with the often vague, thin, residual quality of these “utopian references”.⁴⁹ Here, I will simply note three possible signals of this shift. First, there has been a fair bit of recent attention to the major problems confronting “really existing liberal democracy”, with a growing critical literature on ours as an age of “post-politics”, “post-democracy”, “media politics”, and so on.⁵⁰ Second, and related, more recently, a number of rather grand and more institutionally-detailed accounts (often of a broadly “cosmopolitical” character) have appeared that seek to address the

⁵Since at least the time of Bakunin’s opposition to the designs of the Marxists.

supposed weakening of state sovereignty, citizenship, and democracy in the face of the challenges of globalisation.⁵¹ Third, within the broad alternative globalisation movement, there have been a host of experiments in a more “participatory” or “high-intensity” democracy, which often appear to recall some of those neglected left communist currents and their alternatives to social democracy and Leninism.⁵² All of this is to suggest that utopia has made something of a comeback since the late ‘90s.⁵³

Concluding Comments

My suggestion, then, is that since the end of the 1990s a shift has occurred away from post-Marxist emphases in social theory and from the idea that ours is a post-socialist condition. I want to conclude by briefly treating these matters in turn. First, on the question of Marxism, Goran Therborn has recently argued that the “Marxist triangle” has been decisively broken.⁵⁴ This triangle, composed of a historical social science, a philosophy of contradictions, and a working class, socialist politics, has irreparably come apart, says Therborn, in the face of extensive social changes. In contrast to this, I think that we are better to follow Jameson in viewing Marxism as entailing ‘the allegiance to a specific complex of problems, whose formulations are always in movement and in historic rearrangement and restructuration, along with their object of study, capitalism.’⁵⁵ This view of things has it that many of Marxism’s concepts and emphases – class, exploitation, the imperative of the endless accumulation of capital, the tiered world-economy, totality, commodification, ideology – remain indispensable for thinking about the world we are in, and, on this score, Marxism has continued to be a productive research programme across sociology, philosophy, literature studies, economics, and history. Conversely, the various post-Marxist efforts to build something like a replacement triangle just demonstrate how hard it is to match the ‘scope and moral force’⁵⁶ of Marxism. This is demonstrated, I think, by the rather modest intellectual gains to be had from post-Marxist attempts at alternative theoretical languages to historical materialism: for instance, Castoriadis’ work in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, which has not been significantly taken up to found a distinctive research programme; or Laclauian critical discourse analysis, which – while often an illuminating “analytical strategy”⁵⁷ on issues of political

identity and what were once called ideological matters – tends, in the end, to converge with the substantive analyses of sophisticated Marxian thinkers. In addition, in many of these post-Marxist efforts to escape from economic determinism, class and economy very often simply disappear from the analysis, or Marxist categories simply get smuggled in through the backdoor.⁵⁸

With respect to the issue of post-socialism, after the end of “happy globalization”, what was once thought by a certain “talented author” to be a “remarkable consensus” around liberal democracy and free markets now looks in real doubt.⁵⁹ But, more positively, the rejuvenation of social scientific interest in utopia, the surprising recent attention given to a number of socialist thinkers and works,⁶ and the vitality of the alternative globalisation movement could all be read as signals that ‘the word “communism” ... is now back in circulation.’⁶⁰

To finally close with closer reference to my own discipline, sociology; as Castoriadis once said, ‘the encounter with Marxism remains immediate and inevitable’ for anyone interested in the ‘question of society,’⁶¹ and, as Fuller has noted, socialism and sociology were ‘born joined at the hip’ and their fates have been, and will probably continue to be, intertwined.⁶²

¹ Peter Wagner, *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 2001), 1

² Perry Anderson, “The River of Time,” *New Left Review* 26 (March-April 2004), 67-77

³ For an introduction to Castoriadis’ work, see Simon Tormey & Jules Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism* (London: Sage, 2006); see also some of the collections of Castoriadis’ writings: Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997a); Cornelius Castoriadis, *The World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997b); and Cornelius Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift, Interviews and Debates, 1974-1997* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2010), for instance.

⁴ See David Ames Curtis, “Introduction,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. Cornelius Castoriadis (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997); David Ames Curtis, “Foreword,” in *Political and Social Writings, Volume 1, 1946-1955*, ed. Cornelius Castoriadis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988a)

⁵ Other thinkers frequently embraced by this “post-Marxist” label include Claude Lefort, Ernesto Laclau and Chantelle Mouffe, Agnes Heller, Zygmunt Bauman, Jacques Derrida, Jurgen Habermas, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. See, for instance, Stuart Sim, ed., *Post-Marxism: A*

⁶For example, the work of Zizek, Badiou, and Hardt and Negri.

Reader (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Stuart Sim, *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History* (London: Routledge, 2000)

⁶ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976)

⁷ Tormey & Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism*

⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings, Volume 2, 1955-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988b)

⁹ Tormey & Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism*

¹⁰ Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Tormey & Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism*

¹³ Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings, Volume 2*; Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings, Volume 3, 1961-1979* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

¹⁵ Lawrence Wilde, ed., *Marxism's Ethical Thinkers* (New York: Palgrave, 2001)

¹⁶ Tormey & Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism*

¹⁷ Castoriadis, *The World in Fragments*. See Zygmunt Bauman's rather similar notion of the post-modern condition as learning to live with ambivalence, as 'modernity without its illusions.' Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993)

¹⁸ Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*. Similar emphases are to be found in Heller, Bauman, and Lyotard.

¹⁹ Peter Beilharz, *Postmodern Socialism: Romanticism, City and State* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994)

²⁰ See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987)

²¹ Ernesto Laclau & Chantelle Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985)

²² Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*; Castoriadis, *The World in Fragments*; Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

²³ See Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*

²⁴ On utopia, see, for instance, Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Syracuse, 1990); Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* [Three Volumes] (Cambridge: MIT, 1986)

²⁵ See, for instance, Scott Lash & John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987)

²⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York: The New Press, 2003)

²⁷ See Immanuel Wallerstein, "New Revolts Against the System," *New Left Review* 18 (July-August 2002), 29-39; Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence Hopkins & Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements* (London: Verso, 1989)

²⁸ See Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the '60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (Spring-Summer, 1984), 178-209

²⁹ Arrighi, Hopkins & Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements*

³⁰ See Castoriadis, *The World in Fragments*; Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*, available at: <http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf>, 2003; Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, available at: <http://wwwnotbored.org/FTPK.pdf>, 2005

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- ³¹ William Outhwaite & Larry Ray, *Social Theory and Postcommunism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005)
- ³² On this issue, see, for instance, Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 2007)
- ³³ Tormey & Townshend, *Key Thinkers From Critical Theory to Post-Marxism*
- ³⁴ See, for instance, Ronaldo Munck, *Globalization and Labour: The New "Great Transformation"* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)
- ³⁵ For a good discussion of this question, see (Munck, *Globalization and Labour*); see also A. K. Ghose, N. Majid, & C. Ernst, *The Global Employment Challenge* (Geneva: ILO, 2008)
- ³⁶ See, for instance, Beverley Silver, *Forces of Labour: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- ³⁷ See, on this score, Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009); Slavoj Žižek, "Why we all Love to Hate Haider," *New Left Review* 2 (March-April, 2000); D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell, eds., *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (London: Palgrave, 2008)
- ³⁸ See Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen & Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000)
- ³⁹ See, for instance, Chantelle Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005)
- ⁴⁰ See, for instance, Kirsten Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); or Alain Badiou, *Ethics* (London: Verso, 2002)
- ⁴¹ See Gregor McLennan, "The New Positivity," in *For Sociology: Legacies and Prospects*, eds. J. Eldridge et al. (Durham: Sociology Press, 2000); Gregor McLennan, "Sustaining Sociology: An Interview With Gregor McLennan," *New Zealand Sociology*, Volume 17:2 (2002), 322-337; Gregor McLennan, *Sociological Cultural Studies: Reflexivity and Positivity in the Human Sciences* (London: Palgrave, 2006)
- ⁴² See Gregor McLennan, "Post-Marxism and the 'Four Sins' of Modernist Theorizing," *New Left Review* 218 (July-August 1996), 53-74.
- ⁴³ McLennan, "The New Positivity," 18; Gregor McLennan, "Recononizing Marx," *Cultural Studies*, Volume 13:4 (1999), 556
- ⁴⁴ For examples of this literature, see Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (Sussex: Harvester, 1980); Russel Jacoby, *The Last Intellectual: American Culture in the Age of the Academy* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity, 1987); Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Charles Lemert, ed., *Intellectuals and Politics: Social Theory in a Changing World* (London: Sage, 1991); Carl Boggs, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993); Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994); J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, eds., *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London:

Routledge, 1997); S. Gupta, *Marxism, History, and Intellectuals: Towards a Reconceptualized Transformative Socialism* (Associated University Presses, 2000); J. Michael, *Anxious Intellectuals: Academic Professionals, Public Intellectuals and Enlightenment Values* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000)

⁴⁵ See, on this point, Spivak's critique of Foucault and Deleuze. Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988)

⁴⁶ See Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001)

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Robust Utopias and Civil Repairs," *International Sociology*, Volume 16:4 (December 2001), 579-591

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See, for instance: Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); (Castells, *The Information Age*); Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Peter Mair, "Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy," *New Left Review* 42 (November-December 2006), 25-51; Danilo Zolo, "The 'Singapore Model': Democracy, Communication, and Globalization," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, eds. Kate Nash & Alan Scott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001)

⁵¹ See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); David Held, *Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Roberto Unger, *What Should the Left Propose?* (London: Verso, 2005)

⁵² See Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon* (London: Verso, 2005)

⁵³ For a discussion of this, see Patrick Hayden & Chamsy el-Ojeili, eds., *Globalization and Utopia: Critical Essays* (London: Palgrave, 2009)

⁵⁴ Goran Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (London: Verso, 2009)

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 372

⁵⁶ Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983)

⁵⁷ Niels Akerström Andersen, *Discursive Analytical Strategies: Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2003)

⁵⁸ See, on this score, Nicos Mouzelis, *Post-Marxist Alternatives: The Construction of Social Orders* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau & Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000)

⁵⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992)

⁶⁰ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), 36

⁶¹ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 9

⁶² Steve Fuller, *The New Sociological Imagination* (London: Sage, 2006), 25

Against overcorrection: Risking the universal

**Response by Kate Schick
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Chamsy el-Ojeili's paper provides a useful and insightful overview of some of the most important trends in post-Marxist thought since the middle of the 20th century. Post-Marxists have sought to move away from the materialism and determinism that pervades Marx's thought in order to provide a place for individual agency and to address forms of oppression not rooted purely in the relations of production. Whilst these developments have been valuable in many ways, el-Ojeili argues that much post-Marxist thought has overcorrected for the weaknesses of Marxism. In particular, it can facilitate a certain kind of political paralysis as fears of promulgating 'totalising thought' make it difficult to mobilise effective political projects on the left.

The tendency towards overcorrection is a weakness of leftist political thought that is attracting increasing attention, particularly in the realm of thinking about ethics, where difference and otherness have corrected for abstract universalism and homogenisation. Benjamin Arditì illustrates this problem with reference to the metaphor of a walking stick that Lenin is said to have used. In order to straighten the walking stick, one needs to bend the handle in the opposite direction; however, there is always a risk that one will apply too much or too little pressure. Arditì argues that corrections applied to Marxism in the name of identity politics have gone too far; an emphasis on particularity has undermined attempts to think about universality:

The radicalization of the critique of grand narratives and the relentless vindication of particularism served to part ways with, say, the class reduction of Marxism, but it also turned the question of difference into something akin to the essentialism of the totality it criticized.⁷

⁷ Benjamin Arditì, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 13.

El-Ojeili makes the same criticism of post-Marxist and post-modern thought when he says that they end up creating an alternative meta-narrative of progress, one characterised by recognition of difference, scepticism of traditional utopias, and rejection of totalising thought.

The emphasis on the particular that is characteristic of much post-Marxist thought has served as a vitally important corrective to the abstract universalism of Marxism and, for that matter, mainstream liberal thought. However, in the remainder of this short response, I argue that engaged politics requires us to take the risk of the universal alongside attention to the particular. To do this, I draw on the thought of Gillian Rose, who is extremely critical of the one-sidedness of both Enlightenment and postmodern thought, with their emphases on the universal and the particular, respectively.

El-Ojeili refers to Gregor McLennan's writing on the paralysis of social theorising that has emerged from attempts to avoid the 'sins of modernist thinking'. In an attempt to overcome essentialism, universalism, functionalism, and determinism, post-Marxist theorists have over-corrected in a way that has undermined the core tasks of social theory, particularly explanation. Rose would heartily agree with this statement. She believes that post-Marxist thinkers have bent the walking stick much too far in their attempt to straighten it, that their thought has become unduly 'one-sided' in its emphasis on particularity over universality.

Against the one-sidedness of post-Marxist thought, Rose argues that we have a responsibility to attend to and negotiate what she calls 'the broken middle' between dualisms: universal and particular, identity and difference, individual and community.⁸ The negotiation of the broken middle stems from Rose's speculative Hegelianism, which maintains that it is impossible to comprehend concepts in isolation; they must always be thought in relation to their other: 'each "thing" is defined by not being another, lives in and only in the absence of another, and so "passes over" from being a discrete object to being a moment in a complex

⁸ Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

movement'.⁹ Speculative thought is attuned to the ways in which individuals are situated not only in relation to one another but also in relation to socio-political structures and historical processes, resisting exclusive particularity and insisting on attention to the universal.

Rose's response to the 'middle' might be seen as an anxious negotiation of the relatedness of opposite terms. This anxiety is inherently political: it involves an embrace of equivocation, ambiguity, and ambivalence *as well as* an insistence on the need to take the risk of political action. Instead of proposing paths that would lead us away from anxiety (be they blueprints for reform or messianic utopianism), Rose calls for a dogged acceptance of uncertainty and equivocation. This uncertainty is not a radical uncertainty that would lead to political paralysis, however; Rose insists always upon the need to 'stake oneself', to take the risk of political action, knowing that there is no foolproof path to justice, but that we must struggle always towards what she terms a 'good enough justice'.¹⁰ She speaks of the need to 'act, *without guarantees*, for the good of all—this is to take *the risk* of the *universal* interest'.¹¹

What might it mean in practice to take the risk of the universal? Here, it is helpful to turn to the thought of Bonnie Honig, who proffers a radical account of democratic agency with speculative political risk at its core. Drawing on Freud's depiction of Moses as the foreign founder of Israel in *Moses and Monotheism*, she sketches a model of agency where democratic subjects are always sceptical of their leaders and institutions. For Honig, radically democratic subjects who engage in political risk are:

subjects who do not expect power to be granted to them by nice authorities with their best interests at heart; subjects who know that if they want power they must take it and that such taking is always illegitimate from the perspective of the order in place at the time; subjects who know that their

⁹ Rowan Williams, 'Logic and Spirit in Hegel', in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 118.

¹⁰ Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 115-116.

¹¹ Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 62, emphasis in original.

efforts to carve out a just and legitimate polity will always be haunted by the violences of their founding; subjects who experience the law as a horizon of promise but also as an alien and impositional thing.¹²

These subjects live in an agonistic relationship with their law, institutions, and leaders. They see glimpses of promise in the law but do not expect it to be perfect or complete or to be wielded wisely by those who adjudicate it. These subjects are also ready to *act*, knowing that any action will have imperfect results and that no system will ever be complete. They do not expect to ‘mend diremption in heaven and on earth’,¹³ nor do they indulge in an endless melancholy. Instead, they ‘nurture some ambivalence regarding their principles, their leaders, and their neighbors and...put that ambivalence to good political use’.¹⁴

El-Ojeili’s paper charts post-Marxists’ disillusionment with more structural conceptions of Marxism in which a utopian revolution was virtually assured and in which social problems would largely disappear once the central issue of the means of production was resolved. Radical social theory moved from there to a much more subject-centred vision in which the goal was to facilitate and celebrate difference and particularity. Many on the left are increasingly uneasy about the potential for this kind of project to deliver real social and political change but are equally anxious that attempts to think in more universal terms will sacrifice the space for particularity and difference that has been won through the identity politics of the second part of the twentieth century. Rose’s thought provides one way to think one’s way out of this dilemma. She urges a refusal of both easy utopian answers and cynical resignation. What she offers instead is a challengingly austere vision, emphasising work and risk in pursuit of the universal good, whilst also acknowledging the need for perpetual anxiety and disquiet in the face of inevitable failure (or at least only partial success) as projects are challenged by the needs of the particular. This is not an exciting vision but it is a mature one and is perhaps all we have.

¹² Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 39.

¹³ Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. xv.

¹⁴ Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner*, p. 118.

Response to Chamsy el-Ojeili: Globalisation and the (Temporary) Death of Grand Social Theories

Response by James H.Liu

I have a confession to make. I didn't understand a lot of Chamsy el-Ojeili's essay on "After Post-Socialism: Social Theory and Utopia in a Global Age". It wasn't for a lack of trying, as I did read through it three times. Probably the empiricist in me resists thinking about what "After post" really means. Psychology has its own "post" hangover; for us it's "post-positivism". For much of its history, psychology has been ruled by an epistemology of logical positivism and its descendants that refuse to acknowledge the validity of concepts that cannot be measured. So you can see I am working at a disadvantage in commenting on this paper. This paper has a lot of complex concepts that social theorists are accustomed to use discursively, but for a psychologist trained in empiricism I struggled with their significance and meaning. And so I will try to relate to this as best as I can, through the big picture of what has happened in global society in the last twenty years, and its significance for social theory.

Francis Fukuyama once famously declared the "End of History"¹ in 1992, at the beginning of the era of peak American hubris after the fall of the Soviet Union. His thesis was not that there would be no more new historical events or figures, but that the grand questions in history about what should be the best and most moral social order for human society were settled. According to Fukuyama, Liberal Democracy is not only the system that provides the greatest prosperity for the most people, but is also best suited to perennial human psychological needs (for recognition in particular). Free market capitalism plus political democracy not only provides the most practical solution to all our troubles, but it is the most psychologically satisfying. It should be noted that Fukuyama is not a psychologist, and his 1992 book produced not the slightest shred of evidence that he had any awareness at all there was a field called psychology. Rather, he derived his universal prescriptions for human society and psychology from Greek analytical and moral philosophers. Unfortunately, as with any "universal" prescriptions taken from such a limited perspective, Fukuyama now seems not just quaintly, but almost presciently naïve after less than two decades. We have now been through two decade long cycles of boom and bust for the global economy driven by Western economic interests, where its financial elites created stock market, building and currency/bubbles that ultimately resulted in the destruction of immense wealth, both at home and abroad. The lack of accountability of Western financial elites to the damage they are responsible for and the inability of its governing elites to enact anything but the most superficial of financial reforms have resulted in a much weakened United States that is now the world's leading debtor nation, dependent on Asia for its fix of capital to remain solvent.

The end of history does not seem so eminent as the end of two centuries of absolute Western dominance. The series of “posts” alluded to in el-Ojeili’s essays are just that; stakes in the ground laid during an era when there seemed no alternatives to Western theories about the good society. While non-Western peoples may still need to go through the histories and canons of Western civilisation, they are by no means reaching the same conclusions. Islamic peoples and cultures, for example, now have both the power and the ideology to make Western people and powers very uncomfortable. I am currently editing a special issue of the *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* on Islamic terrorism in Asia, and the Muslim scholars I am working with have an intimate understanding of the psychology of the Islamic fundamentalists that are struggling to undermine the secular basis of society in their home countries (including such diverse societies as Indonesia and Turkey).

The basis of *jihad*, which has become the key ideological component of Islamic terrorist movements, is scriptural, even though contemporary Islamic scholars want to reinterpret the Koran’s pronouncements on *jihad* to mean inner rather than outward struggle. For Muslim fundamentalists, *Jihad* is a call to arms based on a desire for purity and unity in the struggle against worldly corruption and temporal opponents to God’s Will. When this is fused with situational perceptions of injustice, whether they be the failings of the locally corrupt secular regime, or international injustices perpetrated in the Middle East by the United States or Israel, the call to *jihad* becomes a potent ideological instrument against Liberal Democracy in Islamic societies. While only a small portion of the populations in Turkey or Indonesia support the violent actions called for by terrorist groups, large numbers of people in both countries yearn for the justice of *syaria* law and believe that many of the failings in their lives and societies are because of a failure to make manifest God’s kingdom on earth, as called for by the Koran.

For all its bluster, terrorism is at the end of the day a power of the powerless, and an independent and secular government like Indonesia’s is more than capable of winning the battle against their brand of Islamic terrorists in a way that the Western-dominated governments of Iraq and Afghanistan cannot. However, Westerners still agonise over the results, and Europeans in particular appear to have plenty of fear in their stomachs about the apparent indigestibility of Muslims within their Liberal Democratic or Democratic Socialist projects. Barriers to immigration are emerging all over Europe, from North to South and East to West, giving lie to Fukuyama’s assertion that Liberal Democracy is the best of all forms of governance for all peoples, and that it should act as a psychological magnet drawing all peoples to it as the End of History. But again, barriers to immigration are nothing new, and will not fundamentally alter the world order until climate change brings refugees pouring into wealthier countries by the millions by the middle of the 21st century, with projected sea level rises and the loss of arable farmlands in Africa.

The immediate challenge posed to Western dominance by China is far more serious because it is based in economic fundamentals that cannot be countermanded. Islamic terrorism, after all, was inspired, and to a certain extent funded, by the fundamentalism of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, and Middle Eastern power is in large part fuelled by petroleum rather than the enduring strengths of its indigenous social order. China's rise, by contrast, is based on fundamental inequalities in the capitalist structure of Western economies, where the interests of propertied ruling elites do not coincide with the interests of salaried workers. Stockholders and corporate managers want the most product for the lowest price to capture the largest market share, and they do not care who provides the labour nor where the goods are sold. This is in accord with the liberal theory that Adam Smith outlined in the *Wealth of Nations*. Smith also posits that larger markets offer more room for specialisation, and China is the largest of integrated markets by far (India by contrast is highly pluralistic and segmented, with a Federalist structure that resists large scale integration). With endless resources in terms of peasant labour (China has moved from being 80% rural peasantry to 50% in less than three decades, fuelled by its manufacturing prowess), China can out-compete almost anyone in terms of cheap and efficient labour. It has also developed a substantial internal market and huge amounts of sovereign wealth that allow it to cushion and absorb shocks from the ups and downs of the global economy.

Most disturbing for liberal theorists, China's top-down system of command has been robustly producing economic growth of 9% per annum over the course of three decades, thereby increasing its GNP by orders of magnitude, *without its political elites loosening their grip on the controls of society*. China remains a nation with little in the way of civil society (as indexed by formally constituted non-governmental organisations) and rule by law (in terms of an independent judiciary). According to liberal theorists like Fukuyama, this should not be possible. For Marxists, "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" is an even more bitter pill to swallow when they realise that their hero Mao was the author of agony and death for millions of his co-nationals in his later years, while state-run capitalism is making China now one of the most powerful nations on earth and has brought upwards of 300 million people out of poverty in recent decades.

According to both Marxist and Liberal theory China should have collapsed as the Soviet Union or liberalised like Eastern Europe long ago. More empirically minded social scientists have a different interpretation. After two decades of the most comprehensive cross-cultural study in social science history, Inglehart and Baker concluded that 'A history of Protestant or Islamic or Confucian traditions gives rise to cultural zones with distinctive value systems that persist after controlling for the effects of economic development... We doubt that the forces of modernisation will produce a homogenised world culture in the foreseeable future.'²

China appears to be following in the footsteps of Japan and the four dragons of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong, all of whom are rooted in Confucian traditions and all of whom have embarked on decades long rises to prosperity based on a powerful work

ethic and top-down, hierarchical leadership from “moral and benevolent” authoritarian ruling parties. China is much bigger than any of its predecessors along this path, and it is an open question whether China will eventually open up and become more liberal as it gains in prosperity. The diversity encompassed by China is much greater than Japan or the four dragons, and as we have seen in Western societies, too much diversity, especially in the form of fundamental inequalities (in economic systems, culture, or religion) is difficult for liberalism to handle due to its basic premise that all people are fundamentally equal.

Confucian theory is not based in equality, but in role-based complementarity between two people who are unequal, but bind themselves into a mutually beneficial system of relational obligations.³ As Western forms of capitalism fundamentally produce inequality in favour of the capital holder, Confucian forms of relationalism that have built-in mechanisms for managing inequality become more and more attractive, especially to the lower-powered person, who begs protection from free market capitalism by pledging personal loyalty to a superior. This counter-balances Fukuyama’s psychological need for recognition with an even more basic need for safety (in Maslow’s hierarchy⁴). China’s rise to prominence in Africa, for instance, may be as related to its methods of doing business as its insatiable need for raw material resources. China doesn’t lecture about human rights in Africa – it builds infrastructure – and it remains to be seen which is more beneficial to poor people in Africa.

All this is a very roundabout way of arriving at my main criticisms of post-Marxist theory. I have a problem with all the posts in the literary canon of social theory because they all seem to me to be children of the enlightenment – which was great, but just based in a single cultural tradition. From the perspective of cross-cultural psychology, I see Liberalism and Marxism as twin progeny of the same cultural roots, engaged in a century-long dialectic predicated on Western dominance. As the world is a much more pluralistic place in terms of the division of influence and power, I can’t see that this debate has as much centrality in the 21st century. What is Castoriadis’ treatment of Islamic fundamentalism or Confucian relationalism? Are the language and tools they offer to analyse global society sufficient, or are they similarly from a too narrow base as Fukuyama’s analysis?

For me, much of the debate cited in el-Ojeili’s work seems self-referential, and predicated on premises that can no longer be sustained. Liberalism is a growth model based on the natural rights of the individual, harnessed to a rule by law that favours the propertied classes. Marxism is its dark shadow, picking up the flaws of the liberal model in terms of its inability or unwillingness to manage inequality by promising a utopia it was not equipped to deliver. These are two twins, mutually constituting one another in a dialogue past use-by date. The very notion of Marxism in China is dead as an intellectual project. I asked every post-graduate student I could about what they understood of Marxism when I was in Beijing for sabbatical last year. All of them were party members and not one of them appeared to understand Marxism or care about its premises, even though all of them had taken mandatory courses in the topic throughout their formal education. They were all too busy trying to learn

psychology, publish a paper in an international (English) language journal, and thereby earn a position and make a living.

What maintains the ruling mandate of the Communist Chinese Party is not based in ideology or social theory but a pragmatic blend of socialism and capitalism that produces 9% growth per annum. The strongest element of Communism that remains in China is strict Leninist party discipline among a cadre that care for their self-interests over any ideology. Mao's little red book is sold as a curiosity for foreign tourists now, utterly refuted by two sayings of Deng Xiaoping's that have the most resonance in China today: 'If a cat catches mice, it doesn't matter if it is black or white it is a good cat;' and 'It is glorious to get rich.' Both these are "post-" statements, the first a refutation of Mao's notion of perpetual revolution and class struggle, the second a call for surrender (or marriage?) to capitalism. I have no idea what Castoriadis means when he dismisses Soviet/Mao era economics as 'state based capitalism.' The Soviet/Mao era was characterised by a top-down, centrally-planned command economy. What China has now looks a lot like state-based capitalism, but the distance from Mao and Lenin to China today is massive. So I often don't know what the big words mean in his work other than inaccurate and sweeping generalisations based on social theory rather than empirical observations.

Castoriadis' phrase equating "really existing socialism" as being marked by planning, nationalisation, and commodity production as "total bureaucratic capitalism" was provocative as well, mainly because my experience of China was just the opposite. It is a much more vibrant, less totalitarian society in 2010 than it was in 1984, when I first visited and the imprint of Mao was still strong. My general feeling is that Westerners can't seem to come to grips with the idea of a benevolent authority – a centralised authority that tries to control things, and in the main only manages to do a pretty good job of warding off chaos, and directing people's energies. It is simply not equipped to manage everything, let alone produce a totalitarian society without the consent of the people. Chinese people got tired of totalitarianism in Mao's last years and the reign of the Gang of Four. I'm just not sure how adequate the vocabulary of social theories cited by el-Ojeili is to describe the choices that Chinese people are wrestling with now, because from my perspective everything they are faced with is influenced by a very ancient system of beliefs that nuances all the modernities coming in from the outside.

I agree with el-Ojeili that it is a 'very short-sighted view of things to imagine that we've said goodbye to the working class.' They've just been located out of sight to the developing world and to the margins of developed economies. The working class has been thoroughly outflanked by capitalists and top-down authoritarian governments who have combined to create a global economy where the interests of the working class in the developed and developing world are utterly at odds with one another. They are one source of not-so-cheap labour against another source of cheaper labour, mobilised in a reactionary and futile ways by political elites against a global system of control way beyond their ken. The solidarity of the

working class is and always was a myth that is now over and done. Davos rules, or tries to. All we have left is Facebook, and even this is not global, for Facebook has no constituency in Chinese or Russian, where different scripts other than the English language alphabet prevail.

I don't find much comfort in el-Ojeili's conclusion that Marxism is back. I think it might be back in the small corners of academia where all it has to compete against is an array of effete posts, but that's not saying much in the grand scheme of things. How do they match up against Deng Xiaoping's two posts? Is "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" something that can be dealt with on its own terms, or is it a non-sequitur that makes social theorists so uncomfortable they have to fold it back into familiar discursive shapes? Any analysis of globalisation has to step outside the confines of Western social theory to confront that reality in which the economy of China is growing by 9% per annum and is projected to overtake the United States in volume by 2027, and where the USA and Europe are engaged in an expensive and bleeding "War against Terror" which cannot be won, because it is a war against fear and injustice they themselves are part and parcel of creating.

We are truly at a Spenglerian moment in world history, where the West is in full decline, and there is nothing in any of its social theory that I have read here that offers any ideological or psychological comfort. The barbarians are at the gates, but the question is, are they barbarians at all, or just agents of karma come round to roost? If we can't get past the Western dialectics of *Jihad vs McWorld*,⁵ it's lights out: so onward to a new global holism, one that must be sourced in a dialogue between Western and non-Western traditions, rather than a tired old dialogue between Liberal Democracy and Marxism.

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992)

² Ronald Inglehart & Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Culture Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review*, 65 (2000), 19-51

³ J. H. Liu, M. C. Li, & X. D. Yue, Chinese social identity and intergroup relations: The influence of benevolent authority. In *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, 2nd Edition, ed. M. H. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 579-598

⁴ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in *Twentieth Century Psychology: Recent Developments in Psychology*, ed. Philip Lawrence Harriman (New York: Arno Press, 1946), 22-48

⁵ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995)

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