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Correcting Democratic Distortions: A Critical Analysis of American Democratic Theory and Practice

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Barry University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of the Honors Program

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America has traditionally been linked with democracy. It is customary to view the two as a set of Siamese twins. In particular, the argument has been that the ideas and practices that subtend the American way of life are conducive to promoting a free and just society. This conventional thesis is currently gaining support as the new war on "terrorism" continues. In this case, America is portrayed as defending justice and freedom from the barbaric actions of terrorists who seek to undermine humanity's efforts to establish a peaceful world. Many critics fail to see the validity in such declarations, however. For them at least, American social thought and practice have been antithetical to a democratic order. They cite the production and application of conservative foundationalism—a form of social philosophy—as sources from which true democracy is impeded and perverted. To be sure, the argument that these critics raise is quite controversial as it sets the conflict for freedom within our own institutions and culture. Yet people in many circles agree that totalitarianism is not necessarily located outside our borders. What needs to be recognized, claim critics, is the resident evil that lives among us, disguising itself as democracy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Saint-Exupéry was correct: "Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them." With utmost sincerity and gratitude, thank you Dr. Choi for bringing me out of stubborn adulthood (the place of a fixed, "real" world) and into open childhood (the home of creativity and innovation).

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Introduction

Democracy is a fashionable topic nowadays. Issues of equality, justice, and liberty are considered staple conversation pieces within the American culture. All areas of social life, such as economy, politics, education, and so on, are thought to be supported by healthy debates of and serious considerations for democracy in principle and practice. America is certainly thought to be a world leader in the efforts to democratize social life. And following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, this endeavor appears to be all the more intensive. Ridding the world of terrorists who seek to destroy the American way of life is of primary national and international interest. Today freedom is understood to be threatened by a new foe, one that differs from, as much as it resembles, liberty's previous adversaries of fascism and communism. It seems terrorism stands to undermine all of humanity's efforts to establish a free and just world.

Most of the modern world views totalitarianism as passé. No one seems to want to return to the days of Hitler, Stalin, or the slave owner whereby the few control the many and freedom is defined in terms of the interest of the powerful. Today overt racism, sexism, and other types of oppression fail to produce effective methods of social control and, instead, raise public suspicion. At least as far as so-called democratic societies are concerned, "blatant discrimination or manipulation has a limited audience" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 14).

And so today many feel that this will be a "decisive decade in the history of liberty," when freedom will be either won or lost (Bush, 2002). Certainly America is not an idle watcher during these times. With much of the bloodshed taking place in our homeland, America leads the "war on terror," and she has committed herself to this

objective no matter how long it takes. The security of the nation is of utmost importance to the leaders in Washington. For as President George W. Bush clearly noted in the State of the Union address, America has three main goals: "We will win this war, we'll protect our homeland, and we will revive our economy" (2002).

Indeed, the President's economic budget proposal is indicative of America's vital interests—increasing funding and support for our military and capitalist economy. This budget will be the largest increase in defense spending in two decades: approximately one billon dollars a month have already been spent, and future costs are only expected to incur (2002). These monies will be channeled primarily to investing in more precision weapons and new fighter jets. Although there will be a significant drop in funding for education and health care, this is a necessary course of action if freedom is to prevail. Besides, according to Bush, our advanced military has proven itself worthy of receiving such economic priority:

> In four short months, our Nation has comforted the victims... begun to rebuild New York and the Pentagon... rallied a great coalition... captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists... destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps... saved a people from starvation... and freed a country from brutal oppression (2002).

The current economic recession also poses a threat to national security. America's intensive overseas military campaign is only matched by its resolve for achieving homeland economic stability. Many Americans are now without a job and face long periods without generating a substantial income. It is clearly recognizable then that our economic conditions are below par. This becomes all the more obvious when both Rudolph Giuliani and Bush feel it is necessary to publicly encourage the American people to increase their purchasing habits. Indeed, great efforts are underway to revive

democracy's now fragile "Siamese twin"—capitalism.

Interesting to note about the current war on terrorism is the emphasis on national and international moral obligation. In particular, leaders have considered this to be a war of good versus evil, in which there is no neutral ground. Certainly America appears confident in its position, for Bush declares that "our cause is just..." (2002). Similar sentiments are expressed by Giuliani when he is quoted as saying, "We're right and they're wrong... It's as simple as that" (ACTA, 2001). The attempt has been to align American interests with abstract concepts of "Goodness" and "Justice." In this way, the public can easily discern for themselves who is right and wrong in this war. Indeed, a growing moral divide is crystallizing, and it can be summed up in one phrase: Us versus Them.

This moral schism has affected people both abroad and at home. Dissent on the part of foreign nations and American civilians is viewed as suspect. That is, aberrations from the official position taken by America, and its allies, will constitute a breach of national security. As far as nations are concerned, they are expected to assist the U.S. in its method of enduring freedom or else be considered to "constitute an axis of evil." (Bush, 2002). Although many countries interpret U.S. global capitalism as a form of neo-imperialism, these concerns must not interfere with a nation's alliance with the U.S. during this conflict. If U.S. demands are not heeded and alternative routes are taken, those sovereign nations will, according to Bush, "take that lonely path at their own peril" (ACTA, 2001).

The same resentment shown to non-compliant nations is also felt towards a segment of the citizenry at home. In particular, voices of dissent are quickly labeled as

anti-American and pseudo-terroristic in nature. Just look at the indignation many university students and professors are receiving for speaking out against the war. Recently a report titled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It" was released whereby America was depicted as being under attack from within. Lynne Cheney, Dick Cheney, Anne D. Neal, Jerry L. Martin, and other conservatives[1] rebuked academe for being "the only sector of American society that is distinctly divided in its response" (2001). To be sure, many campus voices do not feel this war is justifiable, for America is viewed as perpetuating terrorism through its own acts of violence. In the words of one MIT professor: "The only way we can put an end to terrorism is to stop participating in it" (2001).

Conservatives worry about sentiments like these which seem to express the type of "moral relativism [that is] a staple of academic life in this country and an apparent symptom of the educational system..." (2001). The primary fear is that all sense of community, restraint, objectivity, and truth will be lost in the face of such moral and intellectual indifference. At least in academe, there is an effort by conservatives to discredit ideas that thrive on deconstruction, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and other theories. Indeed, classes on theory and other scholarly endeavors are traditionally not viewed as political tools, yet this seems to be changing. Conservatives are increasingly interested in what is going on in the classroom, for these ideas may have serious consequences. That is, there is now something at stake inside America's ivory

[1] In this thesis, conservatives are those individuals who proffer a particular social philosophy. Specifically, they adopt a foundational perspective that is characterized by a search for, and eventual application of, absolute truth. Their ideals and practices are understood to be anti-democratic and terroristic for many critics because foundationalism can only be administered with totalitarian methods. The names that will be used to refer to conservatives include the following: traditionalists, foundationalists, and realists.

towers—"the nature of reality" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 12).

A great campaign is thus underway to preserve the status quo. For is not America's current position on war only justifiable if terror is externalized? In other words, the U.S. must first be found innocent of committing terror if it wishes to be called the land of the free. Conservatives certainly believe so, and they are intent on protecting America's patent on freedom. Specifically, energy is being concentrated into putting an end to the "blame America first" trend that is prevalent on college campuses (ATCA, 2001). As was noted previously, not everyone agrees with this war effort, and many have looked at America as being a victim of its own imperialist actions in the world. One university professor clearly expresses this standpoint by asking, "Why should we support the United States, whose hands in history are soaked with blood?" (2001). Conservatives are certainly frightened by such statements, for they threaten America's official moral position.

Fortifying institutions indicates one example of preserving the status quo. More specifically, the manner by which these institutions are traditionally understood and managed has been positively emphasized and advertised. Our market economy receives tremendous amounts of media coverage. But in addition to providing the public with basic updates, cultural messages are attached to economic reports. Indeed, aligning mundane market activities with cultural imperatives has been a favorite on the conservative agenda. But for conservatives this has taken a particular form. As George Gilder points out, it is necessary that capitalism be understood as "not only technically efficient but, and maybe more important, representative of the epitome of morality" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 12). In this way, laissez-faire social relations are conserved and

reproduced, for this type of arrangement is viewed as a necessary component of a well functioning moral society.

In all, conservatives want to remind the public that our system is great because the U.S. is a great democracy. Without a doubt, capitalism is customarily understood to be democracy's economic derivative, and so it is with our political, educational, and legal systems. All of these institutions, both in principle and practice, represent the most proper methods of establishing an open society whereby no *one* benefits, yet *everyone* benefits.

Indeed, those who critique the system and propose alternative methods for organizing social life pose a serious threat. Erich Fromm, John Dewey, Stanley Fish, and other writers are usually noted for this. Specifically, they represent an external terror—for they have deviated from the sacred core of society—that seeks to unravel the existing moral order. As it relates to current affairs, this threat is to be found in the actions of both the airplane hijackers and those who speak out against their own country. For many conservatives, aberrant citizens and foreign terrorists are two sides of the same coin because both propose a similar agenda—to "[threaten] the foundation of Western society" (19).

Protecting the foundation of society is thus viewed as a positive undertaking. Securing and cementing the social system is the only means by which "evils" are defeated and kept from resurfacing. Democracy is thus under attack for the foundations of democratic theory and practice were threatened. Simply put, freedom sustained injury on September 11th because its place of origin—the West—was assaulted. How then, one might ask, could anyone who loves justice be against a war that yearns to "see freedom's

victory"? (Bush, 2002).

This is certainly a valid question, one that deserves an immediate response. For, as was noted earlier, there are a growing number of individuals who have not jumped on the war bandwagon, many of whom perceive America to be a terrorist in its own right. Clearly this seems at odds with what our President declares to the entire world during this time of conflict: "We choose freedom and the dignity of every life" (2002). In light of statements like this something else must be going on beneath the surface that is responsible for raising such dissent on the part of citizens and foreign peoples, including the so-called terrorists. Still the question remains: Why rebel?

In short, there is a rebellion because there is a problem. The problem has to do with democracy, or more correctly, the lack thereof. For many, there exists a fundamental rupture between democracy in principle and practice, one that cannot be tolerated in the land of the "free." Of course this defies exactly what the media and our political leaders are telling us, mainly that America is a manifest example of the democratic project. Nevertheless, a resistance is building that fails to see the validity in such declarations. More specifically, these "rebels"[2] recognize the Western proposal of democracy to be a chimera as it is inconsistent with the basic tenets of equality, liberty, and justice.

[2] The individuals who are understood to be rebels stand in opposition to conservatives, both in theory and practice. While the latter group advocates foundationalism, the former adopts an anti-foundational approach to social theory. Stated clearly, anti-foundationalists abandon the conservative search for an *archē*—an absolute, timeless, ahistorical base of knowledge. These individuals are considered rebels because they resist the traditional ideals and practices that have characterized Western civilization. Moreover, their philosophy is argued to be a source of true democracy as they reject all forms of totalitarian and absolutist measures for organizing social life. The terms that will be used to refer to these rebels are the following: liberals, critics, radicals, postmodernists, deconstructionalists, and post-structuralists. It should be noted that the terms "liberal" and "radical," as used in this paper, do not necessarily refer to individuals in a particular political party or those who are extremists. Instead, these terms are only used to indicate the use of a specific philosophical orientation—anti-foundationalism. Therefore, certain individuals who claim to be liberal, such as some democrats, may not be within this group.

To be sure, there is now an attempt to relocate terror—that is, to reconceptualize its origins. And, at least for these "rebels," terror resides in conservative (foundational) ideologies that transform into undemocratic practices. However, to truly appreciate this perspective one must investigate the conservative tradition and its philosophical premises and social consequences. In addition, this particular analysis must exist within the context of democracy, for it is only then that one can witness the degree to which these two concepts contradict or compliment each other.

Therefore, the major arguments made in this thesis will be as follows. In section One, a historical overview of American democracy and social philosophy will be discussed. This will begin with a look at the democratic legacy and promise left to us by our founding fathers. In particular, the type of society that these men envisioned for themselves and for future generations will be explored. An epistemological analysis will follow whereby America's penchant for conservative (foundational) theory and practice will be exposed. The three main topics that will be investigated are the traditional Western views on truth, social order, and morality. This last analysis will then be used to show the theoretical and political battlefield that exists between foundationalists and anti-foundationalists. This conflict is usually taken for granted or distorted at the expense of promoting real social progress.

Section Two will emphasize America's *lived* "democracy." In other words, the social consequences of foundational thinking and practice will be examined. Three social institutions will be used to give us a glimpse at the workings of everyday "democracy" for the everyday person. These institutions are economy, politics, and education. This will be followed by a presentation of the conservative platform in regards to our current

institutional conditions. Simply put, the manner by which conservatives justify America's gross inequalities within different aspects of social life will be delineated. Finally, a position of dissent will be juxtaposed to the conservative perspective. In particular, our "rebels" will voice their concerns regarding America's democratic shortcomings. Their argument is grounded on the understanding that foundational ideologies are *always* inconsistent with true democratic arrangements. As a result, the anti-foundational approach will be presented.

The thrust of section Three will be to provide an alternative view of traditional formations and social philosophy. Conservative ideologies are now under attack from below: an epistemological assault is the new strategy. Failing to see the justification in foundational theory, certain individuals proffer alternative perspectives. Postmodernism is one of these new alternatives. This theory provides not only theoretical validity, but also the ability for practical application. Thus, an analysis of anti-foundational theory will proceed whereby three main topics are discussed: reality, truth, and social order. Indeed, this will be in contrast to our understanding of conservative theory. This will be followed by an investigation of the traditional critiques levied on postmodernism. The dangers of relativism, nihilism, and amorality will be covered as they are thought to result from this type of theory. Lastly, some future recommendations will be offered to promote a more democratic society.

Section Four will end this thesis by posing a question: Who really is fascist? This section attempts to present the dangers that conservative ideologies pose for the democratic project. In particular, the contradictions between foundational theory and the concept of freedom will be discussed. This will be followed by a more specific analysis

of how intolerance and social control has been at the heart of conservative politics. And finally, the notion of symbolic violence will be used to redefine the nature of terrorism—that is, conservatism (foundationalism) will be identified as totalitarian.

Historical Overview of Democracy and Western Social Philosophy

America's traditional democratic legacy and promise

What is American democracy? A complete answer to this question is impossible because democracy will never reach a completed state. There will never be a finished project that can be studied, but only an analysis of its varied manifestations can occur. Our founding fathers did not consider democracy to be a static system in which its fullness is captured within immutable legal documents. Laws certainly represent one method of establishing a self-governing society, but they do not contain "democracy" itself. This is because democracy is not a thing that can be possessed. Instead, it is a life process whereby laws, institutions, attitudes, and other malleable means are used to reach an ultimate end—humanity's freedom.

To understand more clearly this perspective of democracy, its supporting system of thought must be revealed. For the purposes of this thesis, the ideas of Thomas Jefferson will be used to express the fundamental ideals that underpinned the early part of our democratic tradition. This particular founding father has been chosen because, as Dewey states, "he was the first modern to state in human terms the principles of democracy" (1989: 119). Unlike other thinkers, Jefferson found it necessary to link theory with everyday experience. It was in this way that he "kept his democratic doctrine within human bounds" (119).

Jefferson's philosophy is thoroughly a moral one. That is, he postulated the state in which humans *ought* to live from a belief in their inherent constitution. For Jefferson, human nature is based on one basic principle: "Nothing is unchangeable but [the] inherent and unalienable rights of man"[3] (119). The Declaration of Independence is certainly a classic expression of this belief. Following its preamble, the document reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness..." (Curti and Todd, 1990: 130). These words, and the ones that follow, were to be the basis of a new theory of government and of human beings.

Clearly, the language that Jefferson used to establish the foundation of free institutions is outmoded. His words are still spoken today, but they do not translate into our modern way of thinking. As Dewey notes, "today we are wary of anything purporting to be self-evident truths; we are not given to politics with the plans of the Creator; the doctrine of natural rights which governed his style of expression has been weakened by historic and philosophic criticism" (1989: 120). We must keep in mind, however, that Jefferson was influenced by a host of ideas that guided his theoretical framework, such as the belief in natural law. In particular, people recognized the

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[3]To be sure, Thomas Jefferson used language that was very exclusionary to women. For the purposes of this thesis, his words will not be altered, not so that his prejudice is continued, but to portray his views. It is ironic that Jefferson was an outspoken proponent of freedom, yet his words seem to say otherwise. Then again, this paper does not advocate Jeffersonianism; it simply attempts to explain the ideas and intentions behind early American democratic theory—even if they were prejudiced. Similarly, other quoted scholars in this thesis, such as Erich Fromm, John Dewey, and Stanley Fish, also use language that fails to treat all genders equally. Their language will also be preserved, yet it must be made clear that these writers, maybe unlike Jefferson, never wanted to favor one gender over another. In fact, when one looks at their entire body of work, one can see that they sought to improve the conditions of *all* humans so that people may fashion an egalitarian society. It is unfortunate, however, that they could not escape the type of language that for so long, and still till this day, oppresses many people, in particular women.

existence of universal laws within nature (and within humans) that are intricately united with the Creator's plans. Yet the peculiarities of Jefferson's philosophy are not problematic for analysis if one were to change the word "natural" to "moral." That is, to truly understand his fundamental beliefs it is helpful to "forget all special associations with the word *Nature* and speak instead of ideal aims and values to be realized—aims, which although ideal, are not located in the clouds but are backed by something deep and indestructible in the needs and demands of humankind" (120).

At this junction, several themes about American democracy will be linked directly with Jefferson. First, he wrote that the *rights* of the human race, not the means for reaching this ideal, are unchangeable. It was never the institutions through which inherent moral rights are realized that are to continue and not change. On the contrary, it was that an open system should exist whereby people's changing needs are met by using flexible and accommodating societal mechanisms. It was never Jefferson's intention that the social system remain forever static throughout various generations. After all, he himself said:

> I know that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind... As new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must change also and keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regime of their barbarous ancestors (120).

Jefferson's last words, however, might be misunderstood to mean that change should *only* occur with regards to the earlier, "barbarous" governments he fought against. With this interpretation the system which our founding fathers established is never in need of serious revision; at most, only fine-tuning is necessary. Yet Jefferson continues

by saying:

> Each generation has a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes the most promotive of its own happiness... The idea that institutions established for the use of a nation cannot be touched or modified, even to make them answer their end... may perhaps be a salutary provision against the abuses of a monarch, but is most absurd against the nation itself... A generation holds all the rights and powers their predecessors once held and may change their laws and institutions to suit themselves (120-121).

Nevertheless, we are all guilty of dismissing his words so long as we place an unnecessary amount of stock into existing institutions and other social mechanisms. A clear example of this is noted by Dewey: "the most flagrant violation of Jefferson's democratic point of view is found in the idolatry of the Constitution..." (121). The meaning of idolatry, as Fromm points out, is not that people worship many gods as opposed to only one. It is that individuals worship that which they have created, for an idol is of human making. In Fromm's words, "idolatry is always the worship of something into which man has put his own creative powers, and to which he submits, instead of experiencing himself in his creative act" (1994b: 45). To idolize the Constitution or any other mechanism is to run away from the democratic process and the aims our founding fathers set out for us. For it is the right and duty of every free citizen to question and to assume *agency* over established institutions so as to promote a more egalitarian society. It would surely help us to remember that Jefferson viewed the American state to be only an *experiment*, as something that invites change and progress (Dewey, 1989: 121).

The next point to be discussed relates to the issue of power, specifically that of the state and the federal levels. It is clear where Jefferson stood on this topic as it was

evident in his fear of possible governmental infringements on personal freedoms. This certainly was the reason for the resistance against Great Britain, and it was also the cause of his anti-Hamiltonism campaign. However, to conclude one's analysis by only reviewing Jefferson's opinion regarding state versus federal rights is to overlook an important point. More specifically, while Jefferson advocated state power as a practical plan to ward off external domination, his philosophical ideas were oriented primarily towards creating self-governing communities. The town-meeting stands as an example. For in this type of organization people are part of a small enough group where everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in the production of policies and in dealing with different aspects of social life. This kind of plan, however, never did win widespread recognition as it was considered unrelated to the more urgent problems of the day.

Without concerning ourselves much with partisan debates over the right of power, a specific problem presents itself for modern democracy—a lack of self-governance. It appears today that social life is governed more and more by impersonal forces. Discussions about economy, politics, law, and so on seem to occur at some abstract level, which is categorically separated from the everyday actions of citizens. It is customary to view personal encounters with the economy as counter-productive to a smooth-functioning market system. It seems that the individual occupies an ancillary position when dealing with issues of the day. That is to say, the individual fails to play an integral part in the creation of society due to the presence of external, self-regulating forces, such as the market. Yet these were certainly not the conditions under which our founding fathers lived, nor could they have been, considering their specific needs for establishing a republic.

Early democratic theory was fairly simple in its principles because the conditions under which it was created were also simple. During this time, the theory assumed that there was a general desire for release from the external sources of oppression that curtailed personal freedom. Intricately united with this assumption was the belief that the primary adversary to realizing liberty was in the unlimited extension of power by government officials. It was thus believed that an assurance against such threats was enough to secure a democratic system. Dewey notes this by saying that "according to [this] earlier idea [regarding democracy], about all that was needed was to keep alive a desire for freedom, which is inherent in the very constitution of individuals, and jealousy to watch the actions of governmental officials... Given these basic conditions, the means required for perpetuation of self-government were simple" (49).

That the conditions necessary to maintain a democratic government are more complex today than they were for the framers is beyond question. Over two centuries ago, all that was needed to sustain liberty was the maintenance of several *personal* responsibilities, such as keeping officials in check, having frequent elections, providing general suffrage, allowing for majority rule, and keeping government units small enough so that citizens could be aware of what their representatives were doing (49). Establishing these measures, along with dissolving any remnants of past government systems, such as feudalism, was considered a satisfactory guarantee for maintaining freedom.

Society is now faced with an increasing number of impersonal, complex forces which determine the course of events. In modern language, the machine (an impersonal mechanism) has taken the place of hand craftsmanship (a personal activity). Where once

face-to-face interaction was considered vital for the maintenance of a democratic polity, impersonal relations dominate social life. Some examples of this can be mentioned. For one, early community life has been replaced by crowded cities where people do not even know their neighbors or co-workers. This translates into a political scene whereby people vote for a large number of candidates whose names they do not recognize and whose platforms are contained in a three-minute television advertisement. Even in the economic realm individuals have lost a sense of personal responsibility to their neighbor. For in a corporation, there can be an unlimited number of shareholders who enjoy limited liability for their activities (Boone and Kurtz, 1999: 183). To be sure, everyday citizens do not even comprehend the mechanisms at play in their lives, namely economy, politics, law, and so on. These realities exist as abstract entities that are so complex and foreign to the mind that only experts are capable of discerning their meaning.

The point of this small analysis is to show how social life is now governed more by impersonal forces than by personal agency. This is important to note because the conditions for establishing a democracy in America have changed from that of our founding fathers'. While Jefferson did concern himself with establishing local agencies of power to combat the growing influence of the federal government, the situation was never that the everyday person could not comprehend, at least at some informed level, the goings on of the community. Yet now, we rarely know what occurs at the local levels of government, never mind the policies being passed in Congress. Today, democracy is no longer a personal activity to be engaged in. This is because the locus of social control is external to the individual. Dewey makes note of this by saying that

> the situation has been transformed since the day when the problem of freedom and democracy presented itself as

> essentially a *personal* problem capable of being decided by strictly personal choice and action... [but] individuals at present find themselves in the grip of immense forces whose workings and consequences they have no power of affecting (1989: 49, 122).

This scenario would have surely worried Jefferson. It was his belief that all citizens should play an active, knowledgeable role in the creation of social life. The American democratic project was unique in this way for Jefferson because it did something no other system dared to do: to allow individuals to run their own affairs in the absence of external coercion. In his own words: "the event of our experiment is to show whether man can be trusted with self-government" (Jefferson, 2002). But having impersonal forces determining the nature of society would undermine such a proposal because people would no longer be the sole proprietors of their lives. Simply put, current social conditions are inconsistent with Jeffersonian principles because personal agency is cast aside. This notion of externalizing power will be discussed more thoroughly in the section about conservative ideologies. For now, however, it is sufficient to recognize that a disenfranchised polity is counter to Jefferson's ideals for a democratic society.

The final point that will be made in reference to Jefferson is that of property. It is commonly known that Jefferson was an advocate of the protection of an individual's right to private property. In fact, his notion of "pursuit of happiness" is many times thought to be synonymous with ownership, whereby life, liberty, and property (happiness) are the foundations to a free society. However, this might be a superficial understanding of Jefferson's economic principles. For it appears on this very issue that he stood in opposition to many past and contemporary thinkers. Specifically in regards to land, he believed that future generations should not be bound to the decisions made by

their ancestors. This is because "Jefferson held that property rights are created by the 'social pact' instead of representing inherent individual moral claims which government is morally bound to maintain" (Dewey, 1989: 123).

One's right to pursue happiness, for Jefferson, is devoid of any *necessary* association to property. For him, pursuing one's happiness meant nothing other than engaging in personal agency whereby

> every human being [chooses] his own career and [acts] upon his own choice and judgment free from restraints and constraints imposed by the arbitrary will of other human beings—whether these others are officials of government... or are persons whose command of capital and control of opportunities for engaging in useful work limits the ability of others to "pursue happiness" (123).

Indeed, Jefferson's philosophy is set up so that equality of rights *always* has precedence over property rights, especially when the latter undermines the principles of the former by allowing for undue favoritism. And though he did fear unfounded assaults on a people's form of economic relations, "it is sheer perversion to hold that there is anything in Jeffersonian democracy that forbids political action to bring about equalization of economic conditions in order that the equal rights of all to free choice and free action be maintained" (124).

The purpose of discussing Jefferson's ideas in some detail is not to promote Jeffersonianism per se, but rather to emphasize that the American democratic tradition is based on ideals to realize, not rubrics to follow. In this sense, the American experiment is a moral endeavor which is inextricably united with the human element. As Dewey notes, "it is moral because [our principles are] based on faith in the ability of [human beings] to achieve freedom for [themselves] accompanied with respect and regard for

other persons and with social stability built on cohesion instead of coercion" (124).

Up to now it seems that I have done nothing other than point out the American legacy of democracy. That is to say, I have simply mentioned what is a long held belief: that America was founded on the *principles* of freedom and equality. But what is the reason for exposing this apparently obvious position? The point is to discover whether America's traditional philosophical orientation—and later, the practical application of such ideas—is actually consistent with democratic principles. Simply put, is America staying true to its claim, namely that it is both in theory and practice a birth child of democracy? This may be a valid question because, despite our kind analysis of our founding fathers' ideas, some critics are wary of quickly linking America to democracy. Their main argument is that traditional American (Western) social philosophy is inconsistent with the tenets of democracy. That is to say, conservative theory, even Jeffersonian ideals, is theoretically inconsistent with freedom. It is thus at this juncture that our next discussion will begin. In particular, the conservative (foundational) ideology, which has historically been embedded in America's philosophical tradition, will be explored for its theoretical assumptions and social consequences.

Conservative Ideology: Foundational Theory and Practice

The conservative ideology is prevalent in our society. It is most commonly associated with the political arena. Indeed, conservatives are adamant in pushing forth ideals that oppose the liberal agenda. Liberal policies and projects are often scorned by the "Right" as dangerous. Not surprisingly, liberals have become very public in an attempt to guard their position. But despite ongoing debates, a particular analysis has been neglected. The philosophical framework that supports conservatism has, until now,

been avoided. This is because people have placed these discussions in the political rather than the philosophical realm.

As a result, important conservative themes have been obscured and distorted. This is at the expense of creating a clear understanding of conservatism's specific assumptions and historical background. Thus to truly appreciate this position, we must grasp, according to Karl Mannheim, "the 'general philosophical and emotional complex' that constitutes conservatism" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 29). In this way, comprehension of this topic is facilitated. For without this investigation several important points might be overlooked. Most likely, someone uninformed may fail to see how, for instance, supporting current capitalist relations is a threat to establishing a democratic economy.

Mannheim shows us that conservatives are held together by a common thread. Specifically, they assert "a particular philosophy of knowledge and order" (30). Liberal philosophy is also shown to threaten the theory that underpins conservative ideology once its unique perspective is recognized. Consequently, the barrage of attacks levied against liberals begins to make sense when placed in this context. Disjointed responses to anti-conservative forces now become coherent as they are understood in terms of their theoretical backdrop.

Moreover, following this investigation, the reasons why liberals have traditionally had difficulty in public forums may become apparent. For this also is connected to our discussion of conservative philosophy. Liberals seem to always be at a disadvantage because they are viewed as politicizing all social matters. As a result, their proposals are suspect due to the biased motives that lie behind them. Conservatives, on the other hand, seem to revel in unbiased, neutral claims that foster fairness and the common good.

Indeed, a picture has been painted whereby liberals are viewed as seeking only certain interests, as opposed to the well-being of the commonweal.

This tactic is well noted by H. Stuart Hughes. In particular, he explains that conservatives have intentionally "[turned away] from ideological and political involvement" (30). His contention may not make sense at first glance. After all, conservatives are often seen participating in everything from political debates to presidential campaigns. Yet liberals might want to examine Hughes' ideas further if they wish to compete with their opponents. Hughes means to say that conservatives are not ostensibly political due to the philosophy they proffer. Simply put, conservative claims of objectivity and disinterested research have masked their political agenda. Liberals, therefore, have been easily demonized, for their biased platforms are readily visible.

In all, conservatives have camouflaged their political agenda by aligning themselves with apolitical ideals and morals. This has largely benefited them in the public arena. More specifically, their apparent objective stance allows certain political viewpoints to be promoted easily. This is because, at least traditionally, objectivity is viewed in good faith and usually garners votes. As one author notes, "the American public has been convinced, with relatively little effort, that conservatives are prudent and pragmatic, while liberals are radicals who show minimal regard for tradition, common sense, or conventional social mores" (31).

The neutral proposals advocated by conservatives can be quite attractive. To be sure, the allure of absolute truth is very powerful and is capable of swaying public opinion. Nevertheless, some critics fail to see the glamour in conservatism. This is because they are unconvinced by conservative claims that absolute objectivity is

achievable. The question has been raised as to whether value-free descriptions about anything can be asserted. Indeed, can a person jettison those factors that seem to skew neutrality, such as one's social class and cultural background? These critics, in general, do not believe that "a pure picture of reality can ever be achieved" (32).

The conservative program, according to Habermas, is successful because it presents itself as a non-ideology. In this way, the use of power is not thought to be part of conservative strategy. To be sure, power is disguised when certain policies and social mandates "are envisioned to be logical and necessary, when their legitimacy... is understood to be based on a 'universalistic structure and appeal to generalizable interests'" (32). But it is such absolute claims made by conservatives that make their project ideological. Accordingly, conservatism is an ideology because it "[represents] a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, and outside of time" (32).

Habermas suggests, therefore, that the critique of conservatism should take a particular form. Specifically, in order to make headway "the philosophical underpinnings of an ideology should be attacked" (33). This type of investigation allows a reader to both unravel the assumptions that guide a particular viewpoint and to then question their validity. Thus, the following discussion will examine the epistemological framework of conservative theory.

Truth

Every philosophy assumes a point of view as to the nature of knowledge. That is, every theory contains an epistemology. This in turn guides the manner in which social reality is conceptualized. For depending on the determinations of valid knowledge, truth

takes a particular form. And, at least historically, Western philosophy has dedicated itself to discovering the ultimate truth. Conservatives are also located within this tradition as they proffer a specific version of truth. In their case, knowledge is derived from what is "the immediate, the actual, [and] the *concrete*" (34). Conservatives desire a source of information that is independent from speculation and capable of supplying society with a dependable foundation. After all, when ambiguity is allowed to invade social life, chaos is supposedly not far behind. It is of conservative mentality to think that "any hint of relativism may likely lead to anarchy" (34).

For conservatives then, truth has primarily a dualistic thrust. Reminiscent of Descartes, truth is secured once a clear distinction is made between objectivity and subjectivity. All viable knowledge *must* exist sequestered from human contingencies. For the politics of everyday life are too value-laden, historical, and ideological to promote sound information. As Plato would believe, human knowledge is disadvantaged as it is tainted and corrupted by opinion, or *doxa* (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 9). It is only when idiosyncrasies are absent that sound knowledge is recognizable. This perspective, therefore, demands that the validity of a statement be grounded on an absolute, external referent. Something more ethereal than mundane considerations must be found to locate facts. Once discovered, this information can act as the base to anchor all social arrangements. Conservatives are adamant in succeeding in this endeavor, for the fear is that "without a universal basis for reality, an abstract universal, truth will remain esoteric" (Murphy, 1989: 1).

Interpretation is thus viewed as offensive to truth. In this sense, "conservatives have rejected the idea that reality and interpretation are intertwined" (Choi and Murphy,

1992: 35). Such a position is fraudulent, conservatives believe, because absolutes are thought to reside on a higher plane of existence than other claims. To use Durkheimian imagery, truth is "sacred" while interpretation is "profane." Traditionally, at least, interpretation is thought to prejudice any statement by allowing human interests to surface. Objective knowledge is commonly believed to be devoid of bias. Facts, therefore, emerge separate from values once this proposal is taken seriously. For reliable data cannot be contaminated with values which slant research findings. Although personal morals are despised by conservatives, they do not abandon the search for universal standards. More specifically, now pure facts will guide social life as "all other views will pale by comparison" (35).

However, a question must be presented to conservatives: How can humans reach this transcendent base of knowledge? William Harbour offers us advice by saying that the "human mind can, through some form of ethical intuition or moral reasoning, come to know certain moral truths about man's natural obligations within the universal order of things" (35). What Harbour means is that interpretation can be pushed aside so as to make a clear path to real information. In modern terminology, a researcher must use particular methodological techniques to encounter facts. Once certain techniques are mastered, they should be used during research, for they are thought to insure the production of valid data. Of course, this is all under the assumption that the use of techniques is devoid of interpretation and bias. Nevertheless, if this is taken to be the case, then "the more technological research becomes, the less likely it is that human error will influence a project's findings" (Murphy, 1989: 38).

In short, conservatives follow Aristotle's definition of truth as *adaequatio rei et*

intellectus. This means that a statement is considered valid only if it accurately mirrors reality (1). In many circles this is recognized as the "representational thesis" or "copy theory" of knowledge (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 36). The idea is that impersonal information contains truth, while human action obscures this infallible source. Reality, as it were, is located outside the individual where it is safe from personal foibles. As was noted earlier, methodological rigor is supposed to facilitate the process of fact finding. The trend has thus been to engage in "disinterested research" as it is thought to be "purged of propositions, assumptions, and other judgments about reality" (38). Important to note is that any attack on objectivity and universals is sacrilegious for conservatives, "for there would be no final arbiter to assess the worth of information" (36). Conservatives fear that *au courant* scholars have now undermined all attempts of securing objectivity and real reality.

Social order

Conservatives are obsessed with social order. That is, they fear, much like Thomas Hobbes, that the "war of all against all" is immanent. Chaos is believed to reside just outside society's boundaries. The destruction of civilization will surely take place so long as relativism is allowed to invade social life. In response, conservatives have devoted themselves to protecting the integrity of society. Yet their rendition of social order follows the traditional philosophical theme promulgated by a host of classical and modern thinkers. In particular, conservatives "view order as emanating from an inviolable source" (Murphy, 1989: 57). Human action, with its penchant for bias, is considered incapable of securing a solid base to society. Instead, an unadulterated universal standard is required to unite citizens, especially those with disparate views.

Conservatives believe that "without a common culture... a society could not survive" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 41). Social mores must, therefore, be defended if the "outbreak of barbarism" is to be avoided (41).

Foundationalism is characteristic of conservative philosophy. What this means is that conservatives have had a fondness for pursuing *a priori*, ahistorical grounds to insure the stability of social order. Situational foundations are incapable of this feat primarily because they are prone to change, a state customarily understood to promote chaos. As Fish notes, the goal has always been to "[anchor] the universe and thought from a point above history and culture" (1989: 30). Accordingly, conservatives have conceptualized order as being centered. That is, order is thought to coalesce around an absolute referent. Legitimate norms are usually viewed as the core to social solidarity.

Harbour recognizes this when he says that "the source of moral and political authority, for conservatives, lies outside of the wills of individual men" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 41). The idea is to promote social norms that all citizens are compelled to follow. Proper norms, therefore, constitute a reality *sui generis* (Durkheim, 1982: 54-55). For conservatives, norms represent superior forms of knowing and behaving because they are "autonomous, inherently legitimate, and only under the most perverse conditions is their integrity in doubt" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 41). The ontological realism that subtends conservative theory should be noted. In particular, there is the claim that "society has its own existence, removed categorically from the realm occupied by individuals" (Murphy, 1989: 58). Society, in other words, is greater than the sum of its parts. Social order emerges from a source that is disassociated from human action.

A new form of dualism is being invoked with such assumptions. A schism

between the individual and the social is essential, for now "[social order] is protected from the deleterious consequences of cognition" (2). Extricating human exigencies, for conservatives, allows society to coordinate and command its citizens. This is because an all-encompassing standard is on hand that is universal, value-free, and invulnerable to criticism. A norm is thus an unbiased mechanism through which social integration is promoted. The end conclusion of this, according to John Murphy, is "reality, therefore, is not subject to definition, but represents a comprehensive system that is able to control individuals" (57).

Morality

What is touted to be conservative morality ultimately constitutes an assimilationist perspective. The goal has been to develop a synoptic vision whereby social mores are legitimized and reproduced. Enduring standards, which are inherently justified, will now give purpose and meaning to social life. Conservatives desire an all-encompassing anchor so that "the total integration of outlooks" can begin (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 81). By locating an unadulterated perspective on reality, disparate viewpoints may be reconciled and complete harmony can be achieved (81).

Morality arrives alongside pure vision, or *theoria*. This transcendent realm of certainty promotes morality "in that norms of behavior accompany the institution of reality" (3). Norms, which constitute a reality *sui generis*, should be embedded in social arrangements so that human behavior is properly guided. Once social mores acquire an autonomous existence, they can demand allegiance. Indeed, Edmund Burke recognizes this by saying that "all citizens have obligations that are 'not a matter of choice'" (41). In line with realism, conservatives contend that what is real is also moral. For once an

asocial rendition of morality is promulgated, distinguishing what is right from wrong is simple.

Individuals should, therefore, be content to assimilate into society. In particular, persons must jettison all the characteristics that are oppositional to this ultimate reality. Society is often touted to be the indisputable representative of truth. As one author notes, "social mores are not a topic for debate, for these rules serve to differentiate reason from madness" (Murphy, 1989: 59). Abstract norms gathered from inquiry will thus serve as the basis for all social organization. As would be expected, those who fail to adopt this esteemed model are labeled aberrant and inferior. After all, if proper behavior is recognizable, are we not all obliged to abide by it?

Morality is thought to spring forth from *theoria*. This is because normative behavior represents the embodiment of absolute truth. With an infallible moral system as a reference, human actions can be properly gauged. Furthermore, the individual must purge those elements that are inconsistent with the ideals of society. In other words, persons must accept the mandates of truth. Assimilating into social life, as defined by conservatives, represents the most efficient means of achieving morality.

In short, conservative morality is based on an ethics of intermediaries. An absolute reference point, which exists outside of the human element, must be consulted to determine the nature of virtue. The mediator may take various identities, such as God, the state, or norms. Nevertheless, despite the differences in content, the form remains the same. That is to say, a universal must be present to sustain the proper union between individuals. Important to note is that the persons involved play only a passive role as moral agents. For they are simply required to *follow* the rules given by this transcendent

arbiter of truth. Morals, therefore, are not created by individuals during the process of interaction. Rather, goodness is contained in a non-contingent standard which rests above human affairs. It is in this light that Paul de Man succinctly sums up the conservative program as being constantly in search for "the One, the Good, and the True" (1).

The epistemological and political battlefield

As was mentioned earlier, however, the conservative front is under attack. In particular, foundationalism has lost credibility in several circles. New movements in philosophy, science, the arts, and the cultural sciences indicate a declining interest in the dualistic program. The traditional schism between the knower and what is known is no longer acceptable for many theorists. Supposedly, creating this distinction allowed attainment of absolute truth; however, this poses a serious problem both in theory and practice. For, as Murphy notes, "if experience is unrelated to the acquisition of knowledge, how can anything be known?" (19). Traditional Western philosophy is paradoxical for these theorists because no phenomenon is unmediated by the human element. This threatens conservative theory which claims that disinterested research is necessary and possible. Nevertheless, these rogue scholars note that "dualistically conceived truth may be uncontaminated by opinion, yet this unadulterated truth can never be grasped" (19).

Conservatives have certainly responded to this assault. Sanford Pinsker points out that "an offensive has been launched by ruthless right-wing critics to control literary theory in America" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 11). A war is thus underway to protect the conservative ideology which is now shaken. The plan has been to focus on those who

defy conservative mores and who seek to unravel the fabric of Western social thought. As one author indicates, "through various symbolic means, the attempt is underway to discredit those who do not genuflect before traditional texts, performance or evaluation standards, or cultural practices" (11).

It seems conservatives simply distrust liberal proposals. Their claim is that democratic principles are undermined when conventional norms are abandoned. Apparently we are paying for the cultural revolution which took place during the 1960's, say conservatives. For before that time, the public was required to take surveys of Western culture and its accompanying value system. Now, however, these surveys have been replaced by "a smorgasbord of often narrow and trendy classes and incoherent requirements that do not convey the great heritage of [Western civilization]... even though it gave us the ideals of democracy, human rights, individual liberty, and mutual tolerance" (ACTA, 2001). Conservatives desperately want to revive America's dominant ideology of the early twentieth century that called out for "community and restraint" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 12). Indeed, President Bush gives credence to this statement by saying, "For too long our culture has said, 'If it feels good, do it.' Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: 'Let's roll'" (Bush, 2002).

There is, however, one area in which liberals do agree with conservatives, although not for the same reasons. Specifically, universities should "[ensure] that students understand the unique contributions of America and Western civilization" (ACTA, 2001). But for liberals this means that the truth be told about America's inability to live up to its democratic promise. For them, at least, traditional rhetoric about freedom and equality has obscured America's weak democratic praxis. Indeed, many are

confused as to how the wealthiest country in the world suffers from malnourished babies, poverty, homelessness, joblessness, and other third world phenomena. On a similar note, how is it that a professed democratic system is unable to count on most of its citizenry to perform the basic duty of voting? These and other questions are being raised so as to address the shortcomings of American democracy.

Conservatives, however, have applauded traditional social practices. In particular, social institutions are respected because they represent the embodied ideals of democratic theory. Although individuals may experience tough times, such as in a recession, this should not be viewed as indicative of institutional shortcomings, claim conservatives. Rather, people should recognize that "apparent social disruption can be explained away as momentary manifestations of more fundamental changes that are positive" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 14). Temporary suffering is simply a necessary step towards long-term well-being and growth. For a culture that believes this, the phrase "No pain, no gain" makes perfect sense and provides justification for personal hardships.

Yet many critics fail to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The promise of economic and social prosperity for all does not seem to be on the horizon, for current social conditions appear to discredit conservative optimism for widespread social improvement. In particular, the gross inequalities in the different social arenas are of concern to liberals as they indicate our nation's democratic failures. It is, therefore, at this juncture that our next section will begin. Specifically, an investigation of three social institutions will take place. This will provide a glimpse as to how everyday "democracy" is actually experienced by the majority of Americans. Ultimately, the question should be asked as to whether current institutional practices are consistent with the democratic

ideals of equality and freedom. For as many would claim, there appears to be a fundamental rupture between our professed principles and actual praxis.

Lived "Democracy": Social Consequences of Foundational Thinking and Practice

The unfreedom of American democracy

In his book, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, Jeffrey Reiman analyzes the American criminal justice system in terms of the Pyrrhic defeat theory. A Pyrrhic victory is a military victory won at such a cost of troops and wealth that it amounts to a defeat. Using this model, he argues that the failure of the criminal justice system to actually reduce crime benefits the rich and the powerful. By creating an image of crime as being mainly the work of the poor, the system dismisses the criminal activities of the rich and powerful. With this image the real threat to our society is viewed as coming from below on the economic ladder, rather than from the higher rungs of our class structure. According to Reiman, "this image sanctifies the status quo with its disparities of wealth, privilege, and opportunity and thus serves the interests of the rich and powerful in America—the very ones who could change criminal justice policy if they were really unhappy with it" (2001: 4). In this light Reiman argues, at least from the standpoint of the elites, that "nothing succeeds like failure" (5).

Consistent with Reiman's analysis of the criminal justice system, other social institutions also fail to encourage an egalitarian society to the benefit of the elite. This has occurred because the powerful have used foundational philosophy as a means of securing their interests. In fact, the activities of the advantaged are often viewed as justified and non-oppressive. This is accomplished primarily by portraying institutions as

constituting objective and fair mechanisms for establishing a democratic social order. This allows any inequalities experienced by a segment of the citizenry to be understood as the result of personal failures, not institutional shortcomings. The elite, therefore, garner success in an ostensibly legitimate fashion. Nevertheless, many critics point out that conservative rhetoric about objectivity and neutrality is simply used to mask the biased agenda of a select few. As Reiman argues:

> [conservatives broadcast] a potent *ideological* message to the American people, a message that benefits and protects the powerful and privileged in our society by legitimizing the present social order with its disparities of wealth and privilege and by diverting public discontent and opposition away from the rich and powerful and onto the poor and powerless (5).

Our investigation of three social institutions will follow a theme similar to that of Reiman's. That is, our economic, political, and educational systems should be viewed as being geared towards inhibiting rather than promoting democracy. To be sure, many critics now contend that "on the whole, most of the [systems'] practices make more sense if we look at them as ingredients in an attempt to maintain rather than reduce [inequality and injustice]" (4). It is helpful to our discussion to quickly examine the gross inequalities and elitist nature of these institutions. For once this is accomplished, America can be exposed for its various forms of stratification and repression.

Economy

Francis Fukuyama expresses a commonly held belief regarding the relationship between democracy and capitalism:

> All truly liberal societies are in principle dedicated to the elimination of conventional sources of inequality. In addition, the dynamism of capitalist economies tends to break down many conventional and cultural barriers to

> equality through its continually changing demand for labor. A century of Marxist thought has accustomed us to think of capitalist societies as highly inegalitarian, but the truth is that they are far more egalitarian in their social effects than the agricultural societies they replaced. Capitalism is a dynamic force which constantly attacks purely conventional social relationships, replacing inherited privilege with new stratifications based on skill and education. (1992: 290).

To be fair, Fukuyama's analysis of "capitalist democracies" is very sophisticated and deserves attention. However, his assumption that capitalism stratifies society based on merit and hard work ignores an important component of social life—power. That is to say, the owners of capital are afforded opportunities and advantages that do not reach other segments of society. Fukuyama fails to see this because he considers the free market system to be inherently equitable. Characteristic of foundational thinking, capitalism is viewed as an ultimate reality, or rather, as an entity that "escapes economy altogether" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 16). In other words, the market is disassociated from personal contingencies and influences; it is not context-bound. Power, in this sense, is incapable of biasing social relationships because the economic mechanism itself is value-free. The activities of the owners of capital are understood to be devoid of the personal use of power and only indicate reactions to neutral market signals. This view must be promoted today because "the obvious exercise of power... [is] no longer deemed to be practical or effective" for organizing a free society (14).

This type of analysis externalizes the economy. Jean-François Lyotard gives meaning to this statement when he says that the market is understood to be "guided by a 'grand narrative' that transcends local boundaries" (16). The market represents an all-encompassing system that is capable of coordinating disparate individual needs. By

treating the market as an autonomous entity, people may be coaxed into believing that they have no control over the economy. Moreover, oppression is disguised in the form of legitimate, necessary, and logical market relations. Many critics, however, recognize human action to be at the heart of all social phenomena, including the economy. They understand occurrences at the marketplace to reflect the interests of particular individuals or groups, instead of the dictums of a universal *homo economicus*. Indeed, as one author notes, "The question [becomes], whose aims and ambitions are most represented at the marketplace?" (17). Conservatives fail to see the validity in such statements, for they consider the market mechanism to be value-neutral, and thus, devoid of interests.

Nevertheless, despite theoretical arguments as to the biased nature of the economy, there is increasing evidence discrediting conservative claims of any equal or fair treatment within the economic system. In particular, the traditional belief of America representing a meritocracy where people simply have to work hard to "make it" is just not viable. This romantic vision obscures the rampant inequality that exists within this country. Specifically, America's economic pie is sliced in such a way that wealth and income are disproportionately channeled into the hands of a few. Furthermore, minority groups are particularly disadvantaged in terms of sharing the financial resources that are on hand. Although conservatives fail to acknowledge its presence, there is a reality of gross economic inequality within the land of the free.

The two major indicators of economic standing are income and wealth. Income refers to the amount of money an individual or family earns from occupational wages, salaries, and investments. Wealth is the sum value of money and other assets that an individual or family owns, minus outstanding debts. The gap between the rich and the

poor refers to income inequality. The U.S. is recognized as having the most unequal distribution of wealth of all industrialized nations. This economic gap is also growing faster than that of any other first world country. Although there is greater disparity between the rich and the poor in terms of wealth, income inequality will be discussed first.

The majority of citizens depend on income as their primary source of economic stability. Despite this, it appears that the poorer segment of society is losing this important financial crutch. Between 1977 and 1999, the average after-tax income of the richest 1 percent of the population doubled; it rose 115 percent after accounting for inflation. During this time, the average after-tax income of the middle-class rose 8 percent, while the average income of the poorest 20 percent *fell* by 9 percent (Eitzen and Leedham, 2001: 54). For the year 1999, the top 1 percent of income earners (2.7 million Americans) were estimated to collect as much after-tax income as the 100 million Americans with the lowest income (54). This is larger than in 1977, when the top 1 percent received as much as the 49 million Americans with the lowest income.

Data from the U.S. Census indicate increasing disparities in income distribution. In 1997, the top 20 percent of the population received 47.2 percent of all U.S. income. The bottom 20 percent, on the other hand, collected only 4.2 percent of all income (Scott and Schwartz, 2000: 242). Not surprisingly, one's occupational position is a good indicator of earned income. What might be astonishing, however, is the level of disparity in income between job types. During 1998, the chief executive officers (CEOs) of the largest 365 corporations were paid 419 times that of the average blue-collar worker—about $10.6 million compared to $29,000 (Eitzen and Leedham, 2001: 54). Interesting to

note is that if minimum wage increased in relation to the raise in pay for CEOs between 1990 and 1998, it would be $22.08, rather than $5.15 an hour. Accordingly, the average production worker would make $110,000 a year, instead of the $29,000 she or he makes now (54). Indeed, accumulation of capital increases as one goes up the income ladder, for the top 5 percent have grown richer than any other group (Schwartz and Scott, 2000: 242).

Wealth is another index of economic inequality. The U.S. has tremendous wealth, but it is mainly concentrated in the hands of a few. As opposed to income, wealth is obtained from ownership in bonds, stocks, and capital goods. There are many Americans who do possess wealth, most often in the form of house equity or in pension investments. And now more individuals own stocks. In spite of this, 60 percent of all corporate stock in the U.S. belongs to the top 1 percent of families (244). Between 1983 and 1989 the country's net worth rose from $13.5 trillion to $20.2 trillion, and over half ($3.9 trillion) went to the top one-half of 1 percent of Americans (Neubeck and Neubeck, 1997: 199). This means that the top 20 percent enjoy 80 percent of all U.S. assets (200).

It is certainly no cliché to say the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. After all, between 1997 and 1998, the average net worth of the 200 richest people increased by one fourth. Bill Gates, for example, saw his net worth increase by $400 million *a week* from 1996 to 1997 (Scott and Schwartz, 2000: 244). In stark contrast, the wealth of the bottom 40 percent of the population actually decreased while Gates continued to enjoy another 40 percent increase of his wealth during the next two years (244). Moreover, there is an immense gap in wealth between racial and ethnic groups. Although many minorities have increased their net worth, it is still the case where "for every one dollar of

median net worth held by a white household, Latina/o households have about eleven cents and African American households have a little over eight cents" (245). To be sure, given the absurd inequalities in wealth, "the average U.S. household falls short of any real affluence" (Neubeck and Neubeck, 1997: 200).

Gross inequalities pervade our society. The U.S. encounters social problems that no other first world nation faces. There are approximately 38 million Americans who live in poverty, despite the U.S. being the wealthiest nation in the world (213). And although the U.S. claims to be concerned with the well-being of its children, this appears to be yet another fallacy. For 20.4 percent of American children live in poverty, as opposed to 9.3 percent of Canadian children (Eitzen and Leedham, 2001: 14). Moreover, the U.S. has the highest infant mortality rate out of the 19 major industrial nations (10 deaths per 1,000 live births) (14). Evidence clearly shows our capitalist economy to be incapable of producing and distributing financial resources fairly.

Politics

Some critics have raised an interesting question to conservatives: Is the American political system actually democratic? I say interesting because our system of representation is no doubt touted to be the most democratic form of governance. For many, traditional American political theory and practice are the foundations to establishing an open society. Yet Benjamin Barber argues that American politics is afflicted with a serious problem. As he notes, our penchant for strong leaders threatens a necessary component of any healthy democracy—civic vigor. In general, it has been the case where "democracy in the West has settled for strong leaders and correspondingly weak citizens..." (Barber, 1993: 162).

Barber's main point is that our representative system has created a disembodied polity. That is, the emphasis on strong leadership has distanced the citizenry from participating in self-government. The primary issue here is whether the citizenry assumes agency over its own affairs. For although our government is based on a people of power, our Hobbesian tradition demands that we exonerate an external agent of authority. After all, according to Hobbes, humans are incapable of regulating themselves. It is only through an autonomous entity, the state, that social order will be maintained. American political theory is thus burdened by an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, it claims that "[it is] the people, to whom all authority belongs" (Jefferson, 2002). However, conservatives also understand "political authority... to [lie] outside the will of individual men" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 41).

No wonder conservatives admire our representative institutions, for these systems appear capable of reconciling this inherent contradiction. Specifically, by allowing citizens to vote for their leaders, an ostensible balance between personal power and external authority is preserved. The people elect their representatives, but it is these few elite that control society. Conservative theory, therefore, is pessimistic. While people hold the right to power, they lack the ability to exercise it properly. Again, the individual is not believed to be inherently oriented towards the common good. Thus order is constantly threatened by the capricious nature of human beings. For conservatives, order is only preserved when a "transcendent norm is present to adjucate all claims and ensure social integration" (42). Conservatives are Platonic in this sense. For similar to the philosopher kings who were able to encounter truth, political leaders represent administrators of "the 'impartial principles' of legal order" (42).

The promotion of leadership oriented democracy is at the heart of our two party system. Republicans want to liquidate government, and place the power in private hands, namely corporate heads. Democrats, on the other hand, promise to relieve the public of hardships by taking on the responsibility of creating public welfare programs. Although both groups appear different, they are in fact two sides of the same coin. That is, the source of power to handle social issues is external to the everyday person. Case in point, during times of crisis the American people rarely look to themselves to resolve local or national problems; they instead engage in a search to find new and more "capable" leaders. The civic resourcefulness of the community remains untapped at the expense of nurturing self-government. As a consequence, our nation has bred a "politically lazy people," whose journey to develop democracy is based on a quest for leaders (Barber, 1993: 163). According to Barber, the current political scene leads to a state in which "democracy means simply to enlist, to choose, to elect, and to reward (or punish) representatives—and, of course, to keep them accountable via future elections" (163).

However, it is not just that citizens desire to relinquish their power. People's ability to develop their self-governing skills is curbed by the very nature of strong leadership. Effective leaders can all too often produce ineffective citizens. Overly responsible leadership fails to cultivate strong citizenship and, instead, creates passive followers. Elected officials, with their aura of expertise, relieve the everyday person from the reality of public responsibilities and leave most individuals with feelings of social incompetence. But it is civic incompetence that leads to a weak polity and, thus, a frail democracy. For as one author notes, "incompetence is what makes otherwise enfranchised citizens powerless in a democracy" (163).

Public responsibilities are thus separated from the private affairs of citizens. Elected officials are given the sole responsibility of handling widespread issues, such as the distribution of goods, foreign policy, legislation, and so on. With community duties being met by public officials, citizens are left to simply pursue personal interests. A distinction between the public and the private realm is engendered with this scheme. To be sure, our political system has "ascribed to the public at large only functions of private interest interaction, leaving it to representatives to force from these private interests such minimal common ends as a pluralistic democracy may be said to possess" (163-164).

The most common argument for supporting this type of organization is based on the idea that the citizenry is not knowledgeable enough to handle serious world issues. Thus, only educated leaders in the form of defense specialists, expert economists, foreign policy authorities, and professional bureaucrats are capable of making good political judgments. As a result, citizens are shut out from participating in and understanding public matters. Again, modern day philosopher kings are necessary to decide what is best for society. Barber remarks, however, "to call an issue technical is to excuse the general public from responsibility for it, even though almost all public policy rests on issues of a technical nature, even though their technicality is well within the grasp of intelligent lay politicians and bureaucrats and thus, presumably of intelligent lay citizens" (164).

His point is that good judgments on crucial political issues can be made by everyday citizens, despite what critics say. This is because, for Barber, *all* "judgments about complex matters [are made] on the basis of general value propositions" (164). In other words, every decision made by individuals, whether from experts or not, emerges from an application of general value systems to particular cases. Technical expertise,

therefore, does not represent a higher form of knowledge, for it is simply based on a set of specific assumptions about reality. Although advocates of strong leadership believe only experts, with their ability to encounter objective truth, can properly organize social life, decisions made by political authorities are not inherently superior. This is because, according to Fish, "all preferences are principled" (1989: 11). What Fish means is that all decisions are grounded on a *limited* and *contestable* articulation of the world. As a result, no form of advice enjoys universal privilege since all human knowledge is recognized to be limited in scope. Thus, citizens are no less capable of making good judgments since their preferences are equal in value to that of a specialist, at least theoretically speaking.

Relying on an external agent of authority, namely strong leaders, to regulate public life is not inherently indicative of democratic organizing. Yet we are accustomed to viewing the exchange of the people's sovereign power for an empowered foreign authority (our representative) as a sign that democracy is at work. However, as Barber notes, "the trouble with representative institutions is that they often turn the act of sovereign authorization into an act of civil deauthorization... They do no authorize but transfer authority, depriving the authorizing people of... its right to rule" (1993: 164). Citizens become alienated from the process of self-government as their only role is as electors who passively watch what their representatives do, instead of the citizens themselves actively participating in civic life. Indeed, this easily leads to a situation where "democracy becomes a system that defines how elites are chosen... [whereby an] elective oligarchy [exists], in which the subjugated public from time to time selects the elites who otherwise govern it" (164). For many critics then, the American representative

system is actually a threat to democracy as it encourages a disembodied, invisible polity.

Education

In *The Great School Legend*, Colin Greer examines the belief that mass public education was created to democratize America. Of course, the idea is that with the aid of a nationwide system, the values and ideals of freedom, equality, and justice could be taught to all citizens. Greer's conclusion, however, was not that education promotes democracy but, instead, fosters inequality and oppression. Specifically, the purpose of education was "to function as a mechanism of social control that [protects] the political and economic interests of the governing class" (Neubeck and Neubeck, 1997: 234). Traditional schooling, for Greer, worked like a factory which sustained the privileges of those in power by producing a passive, uncritical labor force. Although over the years efforts have been made to democratize the system, evidence suggests that education continues "to foster political acquiescence, to nurture a compliant labor force, and to conserve existing economic inequality" (235).

Sociologists generally agree that two different types of lessons take place in the classroom. The first kind consists of teaching basic reading, writing, arithmetic, art, and so on. The second kind of lesson is recognized as the *hidden curriculum*. Charles E. Silberman, in his *Crisis in the Classroom*, explains that schools have an agenda that is often overlooked. In particular, he believes that education promotes docility in its students. As one author notes, "outburts of spontaneity, originality, and nonconformity are commonly discouraged, while passivity and adherence to routine are stressed" (236).

One explanation for this is found in the bureaucratic nature of schools. Although schools differ from place to place, they are usually organized bureaucratically. That is,

they are run on rigid structures and hierarchies that delimit authority and power schemes. For instance, children are subordinate to the authority of teachers and administrators, who are themselves under the supervision of the members of the board of education. Students are asked to abide by the rules and policies provided by the school. Moreover, school authorities administer rewards or punishments depending on a student's adherence to these regulations. Over time, children learn not to question authority and to behave in ways that fit well within highly structured settings that promote rationality and predictability. For Rosabeth Kanter, schools provide a set of activities that help produce what is known as the "organization child." What Kanter means by this term is that a type of personality is fostered whereby children become "comfortable when those in authority provide supervision, guidance, and roles to be fulfilled" (238). In this way, Kanter recognizes that schools create people who mirror and reinforce the bureaucratic nature of U.S. society.

Another critical assessment of the educational system is offered by the famous Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. He showed how schools harm the creative capacity of students through what he calls the "banking method" of teaching. This is mainly, as Neubeck indicates, "a top-down teaching approach in which the teacher is the sole authority in the class-room; his or her job is to make 'deposits' of information in students' minds" (236). Students are considered to be "receptacles" that teachers must fill with knowledge. Furthermore, it is thought that the more passive the student the easier it is for the mind to receive information. A teacher's purpose is simply to mirror reality and then have the pupils copy this image. To be sure, this resembles the way in which a computer acquires and handles information. In this case, diskettes (children)

copy knowledge from the hard drive (teachers). Students are thus turned into robots that carry out the commands of their programmers. This method, however, is more akin to producing technicians than innovators say many critics. For, as one writer notes, "as anyone who is familiar with computers knows, they are seldom creative!" (Choi, 1999: 8).

The observations made by Freire are consistent with those of Fromm, who was immensely critical of what he referred to as the "having mode" of existence. In this case, one's relatedness to the world is based on owning and possessing everything, everyone, and also oneself. People encounter reality passively as it is understood to be a fixed, describable *thing*. Similar to the banking method, individuals must hold onto (or have) reality in order to understand its meaning. Indeed, to let reality escape our grasp would be to invite madness and chaos. Accordingly, Fromm points out that "students in the having mode have but one aim: to hold onto what they 'learned,' either by entrusting it firmly to their memories or by carefully guarding their notes" (1976: 29). Students simply compartmentalize the words they hear for storage so that they can be retrieved during an examination. The information, however, remains estranged from the student's life process as it exists only as an accumulation of statements which are now owned. This is in contrast to making the information part of their way of thinking and experience, part of their being.

The mode of being, therefore, is characterized by the notions of process, movement, activity, and productivity. In this orientation, "instead of being passive receptacles of words and ideas, [students] listen, they *hear*, and most important, they *receive* and they *respond* in an active, productive way... Their listening is an alive

process" (29). Freire believes real learning exists only when students actively participate in the learning process, where no restrictions are placed on creativity. Indeed, students in the being mode of learning are not intimated by Reality as they feel free to entertain a myriad of thoughts and experiences.

Yet in our society, where the pursuits of property and profit are paramount, people rarely get to experience the being mode. In fact, people are accustomed to believing that the having mode is a natural way of living; indeed, for some it seems like an inevitable mode of existence. It is not a surprise, therefore, to many critics that education has become a commodity in our capitalist society. After all, a commodity is a perfect reflection of a having oriented culture whose desire to own things occurs through the activity of buying and selling. Education now represents nothing more than capital to be invested. A person's worth is weighed in terms of his grades and the type of degree one receives. As one professor notes, students are comparable to the goods which are bought and sold at the marketplace. Like an expensive computer which has a fast CPU, a valuable student is one that gets "A's" and has a Masters degree or higher. On the other hand, a cheap computer that runs at a slower pace is more like a "C" student with a high school diploma. Of course, the person with good grades and a high level of education stands for a more expensive commodity to be invested in by employers. Indeed, education is customarily understood and managed within the logic of the marketplace.

In this perspective, ideas such as liberty, equality, and democracy are unrelated to one's education. The reason for this, according to one teacher, is that "freedom cannot be defined neatly as an information 'bit' that can be stored in a memory bank" (Choi, 1999: 9). Freedom, instead, indicates a process whereby individuals critically assess their

social existence. To perform this task, however, persons must do more than manipulate a set of pre-established techniques and methodologies. Specifically, critical thinking must occur within one's conceptualizational skills. Yet due to the use of the banking method, students cannot analyze their reality holistically as they lack the theoretical considerations necessary for this job. This is because understanding the theories that subtend all human endeavors is considered too abstract and, thus, unrelated to daily affairs.. As a result, trying to master particular techniques is viewed as a more practical and helpful method for comprehending and improving everyday life. But this produces a more technocratic society, not necessarily a more *human* one. If people are believed to be creative beings, this unique capacity is surely undermined by a system that continually emphasizes technical pursuits.

After years of studying the American educational system and advocating the use of "critical pedagogy," Jonathan Kozol regretfully concludes the following:

> U.S. education is by no means an inept, distorted misconstruction. It is an ice-cold and superb machine. It does the job: not mine, not yours perhaps, but that for which it was originally conceived. It is only if we try to lie and tell ourselves that the true purpose of a school is to inspire ethics, to provoke irreverence or to stimulate a sense of outrage at injustice and despair, that we are able to evade the fact that public school is a spectacular device, flawed beyond question but effective beyond dreams. The problem is not that public schools do *not* work well, but that they *do* (1975: 1).

Justified inequality: The non-politics of conservative high culture

Conservatives argue, however, that attacks on American institutional practices are a "crime against democracy and decency" (ACTA, 2001). The current assault on Western culture by universities is a threat to the norms and standards that have supported

an open and lawful society. Introducing students to alternative views of American history is simply too dangerous for conservatives. This is because "if students are exposed to a wide range of [ideas] the West may no longer serve as the ahistorical point of reference against which all other cultures can be judged" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 46). Destroying the universal and superior position that the Western tradition has enjoyed would lead to cultural relativism. If Western "high culture" is undermined, then the standards and values that have historically fostered progress will be annihilated. In this scenario, conservatives fear that "there will be no beacon for the rest of the world to follow" (46).

But why should the West be given such importance? Although conservatives respond to this query by saying that we should protect the West because "it is ours, it is good, and it is under attack," these kinds of statements obscure an underlying belief (47). Specifically, the West should be idolized as it represents the epitome of human development. More to the point, it is the untainted, apolitical values of Western culture that are so priceless and, thus, irreplaceable. Consistent with William Bennett, conservatives assert that Western society is indicative of "a common culture rooted in civilization's lasting vision, its highest shared ideals and aspirations... [the West is accordingly] the repository of these 'ideals and aspirations'" (47).

Conservatives are adamant in maintaining institutional practices for this reason. For these social mechanisms impart the truthful and objective norms that subtend Western culture. It is believed that if these systems are managed correctly, people will acquire a common stock of knowledge that exists superior to all other claims and that will help individuals understand one another. Typically, human behavior enacted outside of

an institution is believed to be erratic and chaotic. As a result, Anthony Giddens notes that institutions represent "patterns of social activity reproduced across time and space" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 87). An institution, in other words, is a reality *sui generis*—that is, it is universal, non-contextual, and apolitical. These systems are, therefore, not corrupted by the biased position of special interest.

The status quo is justified and reinforced by the very nature of institutions. Stated clearly, these organizations meet the *necessary* and *vital* needs of humans and society. Social life will unravel into chaos if humans are left to their own devices. Institutions are in this case elevated above unstable human exigencies. These mechanisms sustain everyday existence by controlling human action and fulfilling functional imperatives. Individuals learn to coordinate their activities in a coherent manner as their lives are given meaning and purpose. Bureaucratic mandates provide the directives and goals that all persons must follow and orient themselves to.

Similar to how society is externalized and envisioned to be a reality *sui generis*, an institution receives an autonomous existence with this type of dualism. The presence of a comprehensive and total system is given the patina of being infinite and infallible. In other words, when an organization is viewed as a "well-oiled machine, the image is conveyed that the human element is incidental in the operation of this institution" (88). With the aid of dualism, an institution is catapulted outside of mundane affairs and granted the power to avoid political interference. To be sure, the thrust of an institution is that it "[introduces] rationality and certainty into a world plagued by chronic strife and passionate outbursts" (88). Institutions are usually thought to be reliable while humans are not. The problem is located within the individual, and the solution is in the operations

of a formalized machine.

Important to note at this juncture is that events begin to be placed on what Hegel referred to as the "itinerary of the Spirit" (Murphy, 1989: 20). What this means is that the destiny of society does not emerge from the actions of citizens but rather owes its movement to the natural course of time. The adoption of dualism allows for a grand narrative, or universal, to be used to explain the origin and chart the trajectory of society. Specifically, traditional politics are now justified by the presence of *History*. This is because "Natural History—historical descriptions based on divine or natural laws—disrespects the inclinations that motivate persons" (20). Leaders are protected from serious objection because their decisions are thought to occur within the natural unfolding of history. Corporate heads similarly gain support as "the advent of a particular philosophy, such as capitalism, [begins to be] associated with evolutionary development" (20). As a result, inequalities and injustices are dismissed as they are neutralized by conservative objectivism and naturalism.

Western practices become exalted to a superior status as they are thought to reside at the cusp of evolutionary development. This culture should, therefore, "serve as a model for all persons and societies, declare conservatives" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 47). It is assumed that a natural hierarchy exists between Western and non-Western values. Specifically, the West is described as inherently important and indicative of superiority. What has irked conservatives is that *au currant* scholars, such as Dewey and even Nietzsche, have destroyed all criteria for measuring progress by undermining the West's proud intellectual tradition. Accordingly, the public is being "infected with 'value relativism'" (46). Iconoclastic theories such as postmodernism are to be blamed for the

de-valuing of America. Conservatives certainly believe that "on the side of [the West] is democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human life; on the other is tyranny, arbitrary executions, and mass murder" (ATCA, 2001).

Voices of dissent—a language of power and social change

Critics fail to agree with conservatives on this point, however. While the latter group believes that a democratic order already exists, the former does not. Stated clearly, liberals *problematize* democracy. They emphasize the difficulties and obstacles to establishing democratic freedom. This emphasis is "due to the belief that many weaknesses [in our institutions] are connected with the failure to see the immensity of the task involved in setting mankind upon the democratic road" (Dewey, 1989: 131). This is certainly a controversial thesis because it sets the conflict within our own institutions and attitudes—that is, within our own culture.

Indeed, the traditional belief is that all areas of social life, such as economy, politics, education, and so on, are based on democratic principles and practices. The events disclosed so far, and those that will be uncovered later, seek to expose the fallacy in such declarations. A resistance is now building that recognizes the United States' proposal of democracy to be a chimera as it is inconsistent with the basic tenets of equality, liberty, and justice. Specifically, American democracy is being undermined because "authoritarian methods now offer themselves to us in new guises" (133). Our institutions are an example of such absolutism as their existence is touted to be infinite and infallible. Yet it must be made clear that oppression results when select systems are thought to exist *in toto* and are thus capable of robbing others of their integrity. In this light, many critics recognize our institutional "absolutism to be illegitimate, and a

harbinger of terrorism" (Murphy, 1989: 144).

Realizing this problem, however, is not an indication of the inherent impossibility to create a democratic order. Some have interpreted it this way and have concluded the following: "A [true] Democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of Government" (Tyler, 1993: 12). Despite these types of arguments, Dewey notes that the only honest conclusion that should be drawn from our current problem is that "democratic ends demand democratic methods for their realization" (1989: 133). What he means is that our failure to establish an open society results exclusively from a lack of democratic praxis, or activity. To serve the world as a democracy, America must therefore promote a dynamic polity that is oriented towards multiculturalism, tolerance, and experimental methods of organization.

This is only possible if a space is created for democratic action to take root and grow. In our current situation ideas such as liberty, equality, and justice are unrelated to institutional practices. This is because freedom cannot be easily defined as a set of bureaucratic regulations and formulae. Instead, freedom is an active process whereby individuals engage in an analysis of their social world. To successfully do this job, however, persons must do more than manipulate a set of pre-established techniques and rubrics. Specifically, they must be critical thinkers who have conceptualizational skills. Without this ability individuals cannot make sense of their social existence as they lack the theoretical considerations necessary for this job. Our scenario can surely lead to a more technocratic society but not necessarily a more democratic one. If democracy is believed to be an "unceasing *creation* of an ever-present new road upon which we can walk together," then our unique ability to engage in such an activity is surely undermined

by a system that continually emphasizes technical pursuits as opposed to human ends (134).

To be sure, our President is correct when he says that this *will* be a "decisive decade in the history of liberty," when freedom will be either won or lost (Bush, 2002). This has a distinctly different meaning for critics than it does for President Bush, however. For them at least, traditional rhetoric about freedom and equality has obscured America's weak democratic praxis. The real danger to liberty therefore lies from within. For as Dewey states, "The serious threat to our democracy is not the existence of foreign totalitarian states... It is the existence within our own personal attitudes... The battlefield is accordingly here—within ourselves and our institutions" (1989: 44).

It is at this juncture, therefore, that the theoretical position of anti-foundationalism will be explored. Specifically, postmodern theory will be used to revisit democratic principles and practices. Because this philosophy attempts to reconceptualize social reality and truth, it advances an alternative way of envisioning a social order. Thus, similar to our discussion of conservative ideology, this approach will be analyzed in terms of its philosophical ideas and social consequences. Ultimately, the argument is that if liberty is to survive, the means for establishing a democratic order must be rethought. Hopefully our discussion of postmodernism will help us in this task.

The Postmodern Alternative to Traditional Formations and Social Philosophy

Combating conservative ideologies—an epistemological assault

Conservatives believe in realism, objectivism, and naturalism. It is through these absolute means that a stable foundation to truth and order is assured. As was mentioned

in the section on ideology, conservatives have faith in the existence of a transcendent source of information. Somewhere there is a perspectiveless *a priori* knowledge base that can be used to orient the human race to correct living, so the story goes. It is no wonder why scholars such as Fish have caused such controversy. For these critics contend that a pristine reality is unavailable for the human element to encounter. In short, Western philosophy's endeavor to find *theoria* is passé and should be abandoned. This is because "questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity can neither be posed nor answered in reference to some extra-contextual, ahistorical, non-situational reality" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 55). As Fish would say, the search for an absolute anchor to secure truth and society is futile.

What conservatives fear is exactly what Paul de Man suggests—that there be a resistance to theory (*theoria*). This statement is troublesome to foundationalists because absolutes have been used to sustain and justify a host of decisions. The idea is that an ultimate arbiter is necessary to determine the nature of morality and truth. A universal perspective must be ascertained to determine correct action and guide social life. Again, transcendent norms must be available to counteract the capricious, erroneous behavior of humans. Chaos would emerge in their absence as reason could be determined more by the skillfulness of a rhetorician rather than the content of the information. Anti-foundationalism should be viewed as dangerous, claim conservatives, since "all that could be practiced is sophistry" (56).

Ultimately, liberals are chided for placing rhetoric ahead of philosophy (56). This is due to their rejection of dualism. For them at least, the historical bifurcation of reality and interpretation is fatuous. Instead, all knowledge is defiled by language.

Interpretation taints everything. Conservatives find this problematic because, as Dinesh D'Souza notes, "nothing escapes unscathed" (56). The certainty about reality that conservatives so desire is negated by postmodernism since all phenomena are engendered from linguistic practices. Reminiscent of Wittgenstein, liberals contend that knowledge is nothing more than a discursive formation. That is, reality represents "language games" which are based on a set of assumptions that are themselves linguistically constituted. According to one author, "this is the reason why conservatives are constantly saying that [liberals] merely engage in rhetoric and do not dutifully respect the schemes adopted to avoid chaos" (56).

Postmodernists question the validity of the conservative ideology. Specifically, universals are viewed suspiciously. For as Lyotard points out, at the heart of postmodernism is "incredulity toward metanarratives" (55). A reality *sui generis* is no longer viable and legitimate according to these critics. Moreover, traditional Western philosophy is understood to be inconsistent with democratic ideals as the former adopts totalitarian-absolutist methods for organizing social life, while the latter advocates diversity and tolerance. For many liberals, then, traditional social theory is repressive because it objectifies human existence instead of exposing its socially constructed character. To avoid this scenario the "[conventional] aspects of social life must be rethought and given a more human face than in the past" (57).

Reality and language

Dualism is undermined by postmodernism. The search for an inviolable foundation is abandoned. What is instead emphasized is the symbolic nature of reality. This should not be a surprise considering the importance postmodernists place on

language. For this reason, the epistemological move taken by these theorists is often referred to as the "linguistic turn." Much like the revolutionary work of Kant, this postmodern maneuver is important because it impacts the way in which reality, truth, and social order are understood. In this case, the human element is regarded as central to the construction of social reality.

The central theme is that interpretation is unavoidable. Language is at the heart of all knowledge. A pure reality is untenable because everything is mediated by linguistic formations. Jacques Derrida reaffirms this thesis when he says that "nothing exists outside the text" (57). Language is ubiquitous and, therefore, cannot be precluded. Reality is a linguistic invention instead of an *a priori* entity. Through language use, persons organize and give meaning to their reality. Language is inextricably connected to what is known. This is an important point because unlike other theories of language postmodernists do not consider speech to be referential in nature. That is, language is not indexical nor does it represent a conduit for explaining reality.

The referential view of language claims that speech simply "points to" or "indicates" an already existing world. The goal of language is to highlight and describe a set of determinate objects or phenomena and to transmit this information to individuals. This standpoint retains dualism as an objective reality is still thought to exist. In this case, the creative capacity of language dissipates in the presence of reality. This type of literary theory assumes that "what is possible... is a literal reading of reality" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 30). Language is merely a mechanism for conveying reality; it is not a means of constructing it.

Postmodernists, on the other hand, argue that speech *creates* and *manufactures*

the world. No reality *sui generis* is recapitulated through language use because there is "nothing real about reality" (30). What this means is that reality is never captured as such, it is only approached through the nuances of speech. As Roland Barthes declares, there is no "other side" to language—that is, there is no absolute reality that can be encountered. Reality and language are eternally unified and never independent from each other.

Contrary to conservative claims, there is no such thing as a neutral device. This is because language is inherently tainted by interests. Moreover, these predilections touch all facets of reality. For Fish notes that "the language system is not characterized apart from the realm of value and intention" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 60). Nothing is encountered objectively, but rather, what an individual sees is tied to and a product of "his verbal and mental categories" (60). Postmodernists, therefore, understand language to have a pragmatic thrust in that speech is intentional and productive. Reality is simply a linguistic habit whose fate is "tied to the exercise of interpretation" (60). As a result, the world is never totalized or finite as a language game is dense, excessive, and always vulnerable to revision. As Derrida points out, "the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*" (Murphy, 1989: 41). In short, reality has a human face as it is created within the domain of interpretive action.

Truth

With language being at the heart of all knowledge, the traditional rendition of truth must be rethought. This is because the "correspondence theory" customarily used by realists is jettisoned by postmodernists. Those who yield to this view, however,

believe that an untrammeled external referent must be captured by the mind to determine valid knowledge. Simply put, something is true when it accurately reflects reality. Decisions can be confirmed by consulting an objective standard—reality. Indeed, empiricists follow this doctrine as the thrust of their project is observation. In this case, the query "Is it true?" is answered by looking at the world or at the nature of things. Initially this appears to be a very useful proposal in resolving arguments. For with the aid of an objective referent, "truth could be distinguished authoritatively from illusion" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 62). However, a closer investigation reveals how this theory soon becomes problematic.

Most problematic is the assumption that truth can be determined by a base of knowledge that is unscathed by interpretation. According to correspondence theory, certainty is acquired when a statement reflects objective conditions. A transcendental standard is invoked over which persons have no significant influence. Without being occluded by the human element, truth can be measured properly. The idea is that to provide an absolute foundation to ground knowledge, interpretation must be curtailed. This is because, according to conservatives, if interpretation is unrestricted, the act of validation becomes difficult.

Yet despite the concerns of conservatives, the question remains: "Is the standard for verifying judgments 'situated in some kind of heaven of representations'?" (62). Postmodernists, of course, respond by saying no. This is because no person could access this pristine information. Indeed, this referent would be infallible and infinite, yet individuals are imperfect and finite. Reconciling these two conditions is arguably impossible as they are inherently oppositional. To resolve this conflict persons must

engage in an unfeasible task—they would have to "overcome their situatedness" (62).

In adopting the postmodern view of language, however, any hopes for attaining an *archē*, or absolute foundation is undermined. Because persons are thoroughly linguistic, interpretation can never be momentarily held in abeyance to uncover truth. With knowledge and interpretation intertwined, encountering an objective position is impossible. For according to Lyotard, "truth doesn't speak, *stricto sensu*; it works" (Murphy, 1989: 41). What he means is that truth is not divorced from everyday action; instead, it is determined by how persons decide to linguistically construct their reality. Barthes, therefore, declares that "evident truths are only choices" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 62). The point postmodernists make is that separated from its practical use in everyday life, truth is meaningless (Murphy, 1989: 41).

Contrary to what realists claim, truth does not reside in some ethereal plane which is categorically separate from human influence. Truth, instead, is a personal product that lives within interpretive acts. Likewise, knowledge can never be purified from values. No unquestionable "authoritative marks" exist to settle disputes and disparate view points (63). There is no clean referent to emulate; there is nothing necessary about truth. Fish indicates this when he says that truth does not have an inherent, universal force propelling it since its origin "[flows] from local and historically limited modes of thought and action" (1989: 13). What this means is that all knowledge is embodied within a perspective; no more *general* or *higher* principle is ever articulated. It should be made clear that truth may appear stable; however, this state emerges from a continual agreement by persons to adopt a particular set of linguistic assumptions.

This does not mean that truth can never be found. All that postmodernists note is

that presuppositions subtend all human endeavors. Truth, therefore, likes to hide as it is "buried within interpretation" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 64). Then how does one come to know if a statement is true? Heidegger assists us in answering this question by defining truth as *aletheia*. In this case, truth is not grounded on correspondence but emerges through the acceptance of specific interpretations. "A statement is true when it illuminates the rules of speech that sustain a particular community," explains Murphy (1989: 42). To uncover truth the parameters that delimit social reality must be exposed. In short, the assumptions that guide a community's theoretical framework should be understood so as to gain clarity. The conclusion is that truth is local rather than universal. Knowledge only makes sense within the practical goals envisioned by its interpretive subjects. As a result, postmodernists declare that "truth is thus meaningful, yet something appreciably different from dogma" (42).

Social order

Traditional social imagery is critiqued by postmodernists. A host of classical and modern thinkers have conceived order dualistically due to their emphasis on realism. Durkheim provides the clearest example of this when he says that society constitutes a "reality *sui generis*" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 71). Society always has an existence that is independent from and superior to the individual. The realm of the social is categorically separate from the dwelling place of individuals. In Durkheim's own words, "society [is] always considered being qualitatively different from the individual beings that comprise it" (71). Order, in other words, has been depicted in a realistic manner.

Similar to the discussion of reality and truth, realists contend that order must not be based on subjectivity. This is because an interpretive base to society would be

unreliable. Uncompromising standards must anchor society so as to avoid the threat of relativism and chaos. As a result, Western theorists have "exhibited a propensity for conceptualizing order as 'centered'" (Murphy, 1989: 57). Order, simply put, is structured around a single, inviolable core. This absolute referent is then used to legitimize and empower norms. When human interaction is aligned with society's mandates order is ensured. The goal, as Herbert Marcuse states, is to make society invulnerable to the passions and errors of individuals by invoking an extra contextual foundation. If society is not accorded the status necessary to demand allegiance from its citizens, realists believe a state of anomie will threaten social solidarity. The fear is that as the proliferation of interpretation undermines the promise of an unquestionable referent, "order will be fragile and vulnerable to any sort of assault" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 71).

The conservative project has thus entailed the production of an objectified order. Through various means, order is made to appear autonomous, external, and real. As an entity in and of itself, society is afforded the status to ward off any threats that interpretation may bring. The idea is generally that an untrammeled reality is immune to the adverse effects of personal idiosyncrasies and misunderstandings. In Durkheimian terms, order can be guaranteed as long as "society represents truth that is irrepressible" (Murphy, 1989: 58). That is, with the aid of an indisputable point of reference, conflicts may finally be resolved and social equilibrium will be reached. Hobbes' notion of social reality as a grand intimidator is advocated by realists. Their hope is to reconcile all contradictions and to portray a synoptic vision that can coordinate multiple viewpoints.

The conclusion of conservative theory is that "individuals are not responsible for their destiny" as social life is defined by a grand narrative (58). Society is viewed as a

"unicity," or a "unified totality," claims Lyotard (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 72). In this case, order is considered to be a closed system that sustains its own existence through the maintenance and regulation of its components. It should be noted that human action and social order are not identical, nor are they unified with ontological realism. This is because society becomes an abstraction that determines the parameters of reality. Individuals are secondary as the focus of attention is now to the social whole. Individuals exist and act, yet personal choice is denied with the presence of a collective force. Society, in this case, becomes nothing more than an agent of social control. For as Murphy suggests, "self-denial becomes a prerequisite for order, as individuals are rendered subservient to an idealized version of society" (1989: 58).

Postmodernists charge, however, that traditional renditions of order are very repressive and problematic. Specifically, the conservative approach implies that "order and freedom are incompatible" (59). What postmodernists mean is that order envisioned this way becomes inhospitable as the system's needs are satisfied, irrespective of the desires of individuals (59-60). Moral order is depersonalized because the existence of an external reality is highlighted, while the social concerns of the citizenry become a secondary consideration.

Following the linguistic turn taken by postmodernists, the dualism that supports conservative social order is undermined. Specifically, neither a reality *sui generis* nor an ultimate reality, as Talcott Parsons argued, can be accessed because language is unavoidable. The "sentimental subjectivism" that Durkheim wanted to free society from is forever present because interpretation touches all facets of reality (58). Indeed, even the ethereal foundations proffered by realists are the result of discursive formations. This

is to say that "order must be viewed to emerge from interpretation rather than as a means to stifle controversy about the nature of reality" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 72). It should not be surprising that conservatives avoid this perspective as the only thing that justifies order is layers of interpretation. Traditionalists fear this conclusion, for order would be temporary.

Despite the desire to ground society on an absolute foundation, the presence of interpretation cannot be curtailed. Once this is acknowledge, order can only be understood to be based on language. The structure of order emerges not from an inviolable source, but rather comes about from the integration of interpretations. Order represents the use of (a) particular language game(s). As one author notes, "the social bond is a 'fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games'" (72). No longer is order external to the individual since the legitimacy of ontological realism depends on a defunct philosophical position, namely dualism. Social solidarity is an embodied reality as it is constructed within the domain of, according to Martin Buber, the "in between" (Murphy, 1989: 64). Order is co-extensive and linguistically invented with the ability of individuals to correctly interpret and anticipate another's language game. As a result, Fish explains that "institutions are no more than the (temporary) effects of speech-act agreements, and they are as fragile as the decision, always capable of being revoked, to abide by them" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 72).

The centeredness of order depicted by realists is also problematic. Specifically, with knowledge tied to experience, how can an absolute core to society be given credence? Yet traditionalists, such as Parsons, claimed that a higher order of principles is

necessary to regulate the social system. In other words, to coordinate and constrain the disjointed views and actions of individuals, an infallible and stable command center is needed to preserve the integrity of society. But as Fish declares, such an all-encompassing principle can never be reached because "there are no higher or more general constraints, only constraints that are *different*..." (1989: 13). No objective referent exists to uncompromisingly reconcile differences in interpretation. Disparate viewpoints must now be integrated by using new social imagery, one that does not sever order form the human presence.

In taking up this task, Derrida concludes that once an ultimate center is abandoned "everything, including order, exists at the margin" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 73). Similarly, Jean Gebser understands that the "center" is now everywhere (73). What they mean is that order should be thought to exist without an absolute core; a metaphysical entity, such as Durkheim's "society" or Hobbes' "collective force," is no longer legitimate given the breakdown of dualism. Order must be understood to be sustained without the aid of a grand narrative or else the human element becomes obscured and forgotten. Reminiscent of Michel Foucault, one author notes that "there is no essence to order, only practices; there is no government only the *vox populi* (73).

In sum, postmodern social imagery attempts to preserve differences. Postmodernists' goal is to acknowledge that order is thoroughly discursive, and thus, inherently indeterminate. Recognizing that social reality is a language game played by interpretive agents, the integrity of each linguistic formation must be preserved. This is because no form of interpretation is *inherently* superior or inferior to any other. A particular game may receive favor and be highlighted, while others fade to the

background. Yet a game's status is sustained by the agreement of subjects to promote one type of reality instead of another. Thus, new social imagery must be used "to join differences in such a way that the integrity of none is destroyed" (74). These decentered, non-dualistic models are the quilt, rhizome, and *systase* (74). Each of these organizations is characterized by its ability to guarantee the survival of all differences. They accomplish this by promoting an open and flat system rather than a total and hierarchical state. In short, postmodern social order is based on the idea that, as Lyotard declares, the "social universe is formed by a plurality of language games without any one of them being able to claim that it can say all to the others" (Murphy, 1989: 68). It is for this reason that Lyotard "calls persons terrorists who attempt to invent absolutes and impose these abstractions to undermine pluralism" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 74).

Postmodern dangers: Relativism, Nihilism, and Amorality?

Conservatives do not like postmodernism. They fear that this perspective is dangerous. This reaction should not be a surprise given traditionalists' fondness for absolutes. After all, with language being everywhere an undefiled *archē* is denied by postmodernists. A complete and pure vision of society is impossible since all perspectives are limited. That is, because the base to reality is localized by language, an all-encompassing foundation is unattainable. There are no structural imperatives that determine the ultimate purpose of society and individuals. Order does not have a final destiny. Instead, "an order is left behind that is meaningful, yet devoid of dogmatism... Humans are thus 'fateless'... for fate exists in an ahistorical context" (Murphy, 1989: 68).

Conservatives worry about statements such as these because without a reality *sui*

generis they believe no norms will have the power to hold society together. In Durkheimian terms, a state of anomie will erupt. The idea is that if all interpretations are inherently equal, then a host of norms will proliferate and demand recognition. For traditionalists this brings about chaos as "culture will be fragmented, driven apart, and eventually destroyed" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 81). A postmodern world, according to foundationalists, is one plagued by relativism, nihilism and amorality. Plato would call this a world of shadows and deceit since nothing could ultimately be known; no *telos* or grand purpose is recognizable. In short, conservatives contend that once the linguistic turn thesis is taken seriously, the issue of "whose standards should be followed?" can never be resolved.

Yet postmodernists point out that a linguistically constituted reality is not inherently incapable of sustaining an order. That is to say, conservatives are simply incorrect when they claim that postmodernism collapses under its own demands. An order without a super norm is not automatically disruptive. For as one author notes, "society may not be plunged into the dark night of barbarianism, simply because a few of conservatism's most prized axioms are violated... Conservatism, in other words, does not necessarily offer the last word on preserving knowledge and order... Such a view, in fact, would be quite presumptuous and dogmatic" (82).

Relativism is not a natural outcome of postmodernism. To be sure, it is the reality of indeterminacy, or rather, the indeterminacy of reality that presents a problem for conservatives. An "anything goes" policy is likely to follow this paradigm, claim foundationalists. But do postmodernists promote this state of affairs simply because they abandon all absolutes? The answer is no. In fact, they are trying to undo the insensitivity

that people experience once an external reality is projected. What postmodernists actually desire is a "rigorous truth-telling about the nature of language... and of major texts [even] the Western tradition" (93). To accomplish this task *a priori* norms must be cast aside so that the interpretive world can be encountered. The reading of texts, however, does not indicate the coming of relativism—that is, accuracy is not jettisoned just because interpretation is involved in fact-finding. Fish gives reason for this when he says that "an infinite plurality of meanings would be a fear only if a sentence existed in a state in which they were not already embedded in, and had come into view as a function of, some situation or another" (93). In other words, there are contextual guidelines to be followed if a correct reading of a text is the goal. These guidelines include exposing and understanding the assumptions that underpin a particular language game.

Postmodernists, such as Fish, are not relativists; instead, they are relationalists. They recognize that reality consists of a myriad of norms that exist next to one another. Norms are not obsolete. They simply reside within localized regions. In this case, order is preserved because "a host of regions exist... with each one having its own normative structure" (94). A norm, however, is not some universal imperative; a normal context simply indicates a special context an individual happens to be in, claim postmodernists. Chaos is not inevitable because language is always within an interpretive framework that already assumes constraints. Indeed, Fish announces that postmodernism and relativism are not identical by saying:

> Constraints, you will recall, are what is supposedly required to prevent a self composed of desire from going its own (unprincipled) way; but if desires (or preferences) cannot have shape independently of some normative vision, the self that is composed of desire is, ipso facto, composed of constraints, and no *additional* constraints are needed to

> give it a direction it already has. This is perhaps the most surprising and counterintuitive consequence of the denial of independent [*a priori*] constraints (which is one and the same with the denial of literal meaning): rather than leaving us in a world where the brakes are off, it situates us in a world where the brakes—in the form of the imperatives, urgencies, and prohibitions that come along with any point of view (and being in a point of view is not something one can avoid)—are always and already on (1989: 12).

Postmodernism is also believed to be nihilistic as it rejects traditional values and beliefs. As with relativism, nihilism is thought to occur because an absolute signifier is non-existent for liberals. A state of emptiness and meaninglessness is the product of postmodernism because "the world has lost any compelling foundation for shared meaning" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 87). Without a *telos*, conservatives claim that persons' actions are based on nothing; life is valueless and purposeless. Yet this is simply not the case. Postmodernism is not nihilistic, nor does it result in the destruction of all values and standards for judging behavior. All this theory asserts is that "values are no longer thought to have 'cosmic support'... values are in the service of *praxis* rather than the other way around, as conservatives believe" (89). Individuals still behave based on value systems, but these structures do not have an ahistorical origin. In other words, in a postmodern world persons do not act on the basis of nothing. Individuals are purposeful, yet live without having a predestined Purpose.

Actually, Fish contends that "nihilism is impossible" (89). At no time is action unguided by values. This argument is most clearly expressed by Fish's now infamous statement that "all preferences are principled" (1989: 11). What he means is that all actions are informed by some sort of values. A completely directionless and disorganized state is unrealistic since everyone speaks from a perspective, which is itself context-

bound. There is no such thing as real chaos, therefore, only different types of orders. There might be a form of organization that is disliked by a community as it appears disorganized and chaotic. But one's distaste for a mode of organization is not indicative of pure disorganization. While some behaviors may appear bizarre, all actions are intelligible and possible since they are guided by some articulation of the world. Behaviors of all kinds are principled and organized in some manner. Nothing is inherently irrational, but rather represents one existential modality. Certain ideas may contradict the established mode of order, but as one author notes, "nothing exists without some sort of rationale" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 90).

Lastly, morality is not defunct as a result of postmodernism. The disappearance of an ultimate standard does not automatically mean that all constraints are lost. Prohibitions may not come from the metaphysical base that conservatives would like, but rules are still enforceable and justifiable. Jung Choi makes sense of this when he says:

> Constraints, in the form of value orientations, are part of any action. Each action, in short, is constrained by the way in which it is defined. Every linguistic act has parameters and thus is constrained. Moreover, anyone who works within a specific genre of interpretation is expected to behave in a specific manner. Hence in any situation persons are not free to do whatever they desire, without reprisals (90).

Amorality is avoided despite the lack of a universal standard of judgment. Fish gives the example of a judge to illustrate this point. Although a judge has great leverage and autonomy in the courtroom, his actions are still constrained by the expectations, definitions, and goals that characterize a judge's role. Despite any personal preferences, the judge must abide by the standards that define his profession. To deviate from these expectations would jeopardize the outcome of the trial and the reputation of the judge.

Conservatives, however, want more from Fish. Specifically, they desire a more stable and timeless standard to judge behavior besides the rules set out by a particular community. Simply put, conservatives do not believe that the mere commitment to certain values is enough to limit action. The desires of a community are thought to be incapable of successfully determining what is right and wrong. Only an absolute reality, with truth on its side, can make such judgments, claim conservatives. Yet, as was mentioned, no form of knowledge can exist sequestered from interpretation. Even if the rules to a moral life existed, this information could not be accessed by individuals. This is of course because as interpretive agents, individuals would taint this pristine knowledge base.

But this does not mean that morality is an illusion. Instead, virtue should be understood to emerge from the mundaneness of language. In recognizing that all discursive formations are inherently equal, the initial preservation of each game should occur. That is, no particular articulation of the world should automatically enjoy a lofty status as this would undermine the integrity of other possible realities. Indeed, postmodernists do have an ethical system, although this system is not grounded on some abstract dictum. What constitutes immorality, for postmodernists, is the presence of a specific outlook that automatically inferiorizes the existence of another. Morality is shown by respecting another community's conception of reality.

Murphy clearly explains how morality is understood by postmodernists:

> Postmodernists argue for an ethic based on interpersonal respect. Because language games are finite, no game can legitimately dominate others. In fact, according to postmodernism, repression results from the belief that select games are infinite, and thus can rob others of their integrity. Franz Fanon, for example, explains that this is

> exactly how colonization is enforced. Specifically, the linguistic or cultural game of those who are oppressed is disallowed. In this way social control is maintained. What can justify this sort of "symbolic violence"? With all forms of knowledge originating from interpretation, domination such as this is not legitimate. Persons instead must be approached as "I" and "Thou." Because others are not ancillary to a person's actions, and there simply to be manipulated, their desires must be considered when the impact of behavior is evaluated. Persons always act in the face of real persons, who must be recognized (1989: 73-74).

Future Recommendations: Democracy as a Way of Life

Postmodern theory is not simply a unique form of social analysis and criticism, it is also a different way to approach the act of living. To use Weberian imagery, life is *re*-enchanted by postmodernists as everything represents a linguistic habit. Social reality, in this case, is a creative act since it is based on (an) interpretive framework(s). Persons are animated and empowered in a postmodern world because there is no metaphysical agent that commands and delimits social existence. Life is not a reflection of reality; but rather, reality is a product of existence. That is, persons' use of language shapes social reality. Reality is the product of speech building on speech. Jackson Pollock's statement "I am nature" parallels this theme (33). Pollock's sentence is not referring to the adoption of hylozoism, but rather is demonstrating that imagination is not a surrogate for reality.

Accordingly, life itself is a form of art as existence is not encountered but made by persons. As Fromm notes, "in the art of living, man is both the artist and the object of his art; he is the sculptor and the marble; the physician and the patient" (1947: 18). This point is often overlooked because since everyone "lives" in some way, everyone considers themselves to be an expert in living. Traditionally, art refers to the engagement of a specialized performance, such as medicine, computer science, painting, or sculpting.

In the art of living, the object of interest "is not this or that specialized performance, but the performance of living..." (17).

This is important for postmodernists because social life is a reflection of everyday praxis, and not just the articulation of an external reality. In other words, what these critics announce is that "human beings do not simply speak, but live within language" (Murphy, 1989: 33). Existence is a game played within the nuances of speech. Without persons being able to catapult themselves outside of language, postmodernists declare that "speech annihilates the distance that is thought typically to be inserted between persons and the world" (33). This means that history does not unfold according to the mandates of an ultimate *telos*, but rather, is the outcome of a battle between competing discursive formations. Destiny simply refers to the carrying out of a particular language game, one that was chosen from a myriad of linguistic modes.

What should be recognized is that now there is no universal finality to history. There is no end to history, as Fukuyama believes, since interpretation is never finalized. There can always be a new discursive framework that can be introduced. This goes counter to the conservative (Western) thesis that claims that "history... [moves] inevitably 'toward the better'" (Lyotard, 1992: 51). Democracy, in this case, is the result of evolutionary development. With the dawning of modern civilization, persons simply become aware of a universal Idea to realize—freedom. A clear example of this is found in the Declaration of Independence. In particular, the Idea of the rights of humankind was used by Jefferson to announce the freedom of the colonies. Lyotard accordingly notes that it is the value of a universal that "gives modernity its characteristic mode: the *project*, that is, the will directed toward a goal" (50).

Postmodernists not only criticize the Western understanding of history, they lament and fear it. For once a universal is enacted—even the concept of freedom—totalitarianism is sure to ensue. As a result, Lyotard recommends that "we ought to distinguish between the totalitarianism that turns its back on modern legitimization through the Idea of freedom and the totalitarianism that, on the contrary, issues from that Idea" (51). What he means is that the origin of terror can be both from those who oppose liberty and those who invoke its name. The former case is the most obvious form of domination, whereby an ostensibly fascist state attempts to control a group of people. The latter, however, is not as visible because it hides behind the name of freedom. In this case, oppression is present as "sovereignty belongs not to the people but to the Idea of a free community" (51). An insidious form of social control and domination is invoked here: through deceptive gimmickry, fascism begins to pose as democracy. With this scenario, postmodernists believe that "the stage is set for authoritarianism to be embraced..." (Murphy, 1989: 146).

How can this perverted version of democracy be avoided? Given the nature of totalitarianism, postmodernists suggest that all social models that use universals to gain legitimacy must be avoided. That is, no metaphysical props can be used to sustain social life, if a democratic order is the goal. Social control can only be curtailed if the personal autonomy necessary for democratic behavior is preserved. It is at this juncture, therefore, that some general recommendations will be offered to promote a more democratic society. The topics that will be covered represent only general steps or orientations that should be considered when developing self-governing persons, groups, or communities.

Talking directly to power

What is power? Fromm points out two different kinds of power. One is based on domination and control in the form of *power over*. This type of power occurs when "man's relatedness to the world is perverted into a desire to dominate, to exert power over others as though they were things" (Fromm, 1947: 88). The other kind is referred to as *power of*, which indicates a state of productiveness. What this means is that individuals realize the potentialities characteristic of them—people recognize and apply the powers of creation within themselves. These two terms relate to one another as the use of one necessarily negates the other. That is, the power to dominate results in the destruction of the power to be productive. It is in fact the use of *power over* that cripples and perverts individuals' *power of*. For as Fromm points out, "domination springs forth from impotence and in turn reinforces it, for if an individual can force somebody else to serve him, his own need to be productive is increasingly paralyzed" (88).

This is important to consider because notions of power do not simply remain as ideas; they are injected into positions of authority. And it is here where power can actually be used to dominate others. Accordingly, Fromm cites the difference between authoritarian and humanistic ethical systems. In authoritarian ethics an absolute, external authority determines what laws and norms people must follow. An authority figure states what is good for humanity. On the contrary, in humanistic ethics "man himself is both the norm giver and the subject of the norms, their formal source or regulative agency and their subject matter" (9). The primary issue is not whether there is authority or not, but rather the type of authority that is used. In this case, is authoritarian or humanistic (democratic) authority employed?

The source of authoritarian authority is founded on a power over people. This

kind of power can be either physical or mental. Nonetheless it is couched in fear, intimidation, and exploitation. Sometimes it can appear to be reasonable or rational. All criticism to this version of authority is both not required and forbidden. Democratic authority, on the other hand, is based on competence and trust. In this sense, people confer power to an individual so long as authorities can perform a helpful task. There is no need to show feverish awe or admiration as this form of authority permits and requires constant scrutiny and critical analysis. Moreover, these roles are only temporary, their longevity depending upon the quality of performance. Fromm clearly shows how these two modes of authority differ:

> [democratic] authority is based upon the equality of both authority and subject, which differ only with respect to the degree of knowledge of skill in a particular field. [Authoritarian] authority is by its very nature based upon inequality, implying difference in value. In the use of the term "authoritarian ethics" reference is made to irrational authority, following the current use of "authoritarian" as synonymous with totalitarian and antidemocratic systems (9-10).

Consistent with realism, authoritarian ethics is based on metaphysics. That is, a universal knowledge base is required to determine what individuals should and should not do. External absolutes provide the legitimacy for such determinations. The human element, in this scenario, is ancillary to ethics as the source of virtue lies outside the will of individuals. As one author notes, "authoritarian ethics denies man's capacity to know what is good and bad; the norm giver is always an authority transcending the individual" (10). Power rests in the hands of an absolute figure, not in its subjects. Weakness and dependence become characteristic of citizens as decisions are made by an awe-inspiring, magical figure head. These decisions are regarded to be unquestionable since their origin

is transcendent. Accordingly, as Murphy points out, "leaders may claim to have received a divine mandate, while plebeians are consigned permanently to their lowly status" (1989: 20). Questions of good and bad are answered on the basis of the needs and interests of the authority, not of the subjects. Exploitation is characteristic of this mode of authority, although subjects may regard themselves as benefiting from certain material or mental rewards.

More in line with postmodernism, democratic authority locates power within the polity. All individuals are equally recognized for their creative and productive abilities. As a result, humanistic ethics is grounded on the idea that "only man himself can determine the criterion for virtue and sin, and not an authority transcending him" (Fromm, 1947: 12-13). In postmodern fashion, a humanistic authority fails to see the validity in and need for a transcendent norm or universal reality. There is no *archē* to base an ethical system. Even God cannot be employed to determine what is good and bad for humanity because our knowledge of this ethereal entity is questionable. This is because with knowledge being entirely interpretive, reality is both created and suppressed. Knowledge is both available yet questionable. According to Derrida, in linguistic existence truth is therefore a project "under erasure" (Murphy, 1989: 22). Murphy explains this by saying that "if Derrida writes that 'God exists,' he conveys the idea that by 'putting the existence of God under erasure,' he has 'both affirmed it and called it into question'" (22).

In short, the distinction between authoritarian and democratic authority must be made when considering the construction of egalitarian systems. As interpretive agents, a humanistic (democratic) ethics recognizes that humans truly are the measure of all things.

There are no higher norms to follow since it is within human existence that value judgments are made. Virtue is meaningful to people only when it is in reference to them, when it is rooted in the human race. In contrast, under the authoritarian paradigm "it has been argued that it is in the very nature of ethical behavior to be related to something transcending man" (Fromm, 1947: 13). Indeed it should be recognized that this form of authority is antagonistic to democracy since one's relatedness to the world and to one's fellow human beings is based on submission to an external agent. In a democracy, power is located within; it is based on the productive capacity of all human beings. Accordingly, in a humanistic ethic all endeavors are composed by the human element, nothing transcendent is enacted or encountered. Fromm makes note of this when he says that "love is not a higher power which descends upon man nor a duty which is imposed upon him; it is his own power by which he relates himself to the world and makes it truly his" (14).

Abandoning essentialism

Consistent with our discussion about authoritarianism, thinkers within this tradition have assumed the existence of a fixed and unchangeable human nature—that is, all persons are thought to possess an essential core that identifies them across time, space, and culture. Moreover, this basic trait is used to justify a person's position in society. This is because one's essence is afforded a value—superior or inferior. Many times biological, psychological, and even cultural explanations are the centerpiece for determining the worth of these basic characteristics. Everyone sits on a single hierarchical continuum that divides persons according to the quality of their essence.

Essentialism is a foundational idea. Similar to how realists view society and

reality to be founded on a universal principle, individuals also contain an underlying natural law, in this case human nature. Dualism is likewise invoked as certain individuals are considered to be inherently superior to others, due to their respective essence. Order is thought to emerge from the recognition of one's proper identity. Specifically, society is maintained when people engage in roles that suit the essence given to them at birth. In Platonic terms, "chaos erupts when there is a misalignment between a person's roles and their natural abilities" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 38). A state of disequilibrium occurs when person's behavior is contradictory to their natural traits. Accordingly, the only way to avoid social disruption is for persons "to understand their true identity" (38).

For Plato, a just society is one governed by those who are inherently capable of ruling. In the past, philosopher kings enjoyed the mental ability to organize social life Today, those who succeed at the market place will lead the public into an ever more efficient and rational social order. Essentialists actually fear the presence of true democracy. This is because they believe that if authority is distributed to all people government will collapse. Lay persons are thought to lack the inherent propensity and capability to pursue justice, virtue, and truth—all necessary components of a stable and just society. For essentialists, a corrupt assembly is skirted only when people "identify and properly align personal identity, natural ability, and social position" (38). Neutral devices, such as the market, are used to perform this task. In this sense, social stratification simply mirrors a natural underlying order, one based on the inherent inequalities among individuals. In modern day parlance, Richard Lewontin explains the essentialist position:

> Different races are thought to be genetically different in how aggressive or creative or musical they are....

> [Therefore] when we know what our DNA looks like, we will know why some of us are rich and some poor, some healthy and some sick, some powerful and some weak. We will also know why some societies are powerful and rich and others are weak and poor, why one nation, one sex, one race dominates others (44).

The dualism employed by Descartes to separate pure from impure knowledge is also used to marginalize different people. Particular traits are considered superior *a priori* to other characteristics. Traditionally, whiteness has been linked to the former status while other identities to the latter. Once this social hierarchy is established and associated with natural order, justification is available for oppression and colonization. This is because domination has customarily been allowed when it appears to have emerged from some unbiased, legitimate source. In this sense, Richard Dyer notes that "white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (Rothenberg, 2002: 61). To avoid this scenario, postmodernists claim that identity must be reconceptualized in a new way.

Following the postmodern destruction of dualism, the essentialist position is fatuous. There is no natural or essential base to identity; identities are never finalized or totalized. As Wittgenstein argues, there is nothing that does not emerge from a person's or group's cultural practices. In postmodern terminology, no phenomenon exists separate from the realm of language. Even the notion of identity is a product of linguistic practices, not of some core essence. As one author notes, "because language is understood to underpin all forms of knowledge, there is no place for a human essence to reside" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 46).

All forms of absolutes or *a priori* designations are abandoned since language games cannot sustain a universal. Rather than being definite, identity is extended in a

multitude of directions because language has an infinite number of signifiers. Given the ubiquity of language, identity is never fixed or unchangeable because it is always under the influence of interpretation. Barthes thus concludes that the author is "indefinite" because the "I is linguistic" (Murphy, 1989: 116). As he notes, the "I is nothing other than saying I" (116). Instead of representing some deep core motive or characteristic, the self is thoroughly invented. The self is decentered as the creative nature of language can propel the self in a number of different directions. To paraphrase Sartre, "identity has no destiny" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 47). Once the self is linked to discourse, individuals are free to construct a host of identities.

This critique is important because social relations based on abstract essences may have to be reconsidered. That is, viewing identity to be a linguistic practice renders social hierarchies passé. There is no inherent justification to afford one group the status of superior and another inferior. The natural hierarchy that Plato and other modern thinkers propose is invalid since identities are created. Foucault's statement that both God and Man are dead is crucial at this juncture. What he means is not that God and Man do not exist, instead he is "rejecting normative ideals that are presumed to exist *sui generis*" (47). Identities and norms that are in place are never absolute or unchangeable since their origin is linguistic. In other words, no norm has the legitimacy to dictate the parameters of identity forever.

The assumption to view human nature as fixed and determinable, according to Fromm, is based on the interest of people. In particular, by advocating a version of human nature certain social institutions can be deemed important and essential for the survival of society. For as Fromm argues, "this assumption served to prove that their

[authoritarian] ethical systems and social institutions were necessary and unchangeable, being built upon the alleged nature of man" (1947: 21). Indeed, it can be cited that the "ruling motive" in humankind has changed over time and through different contexts, constantly aligning itself to the goals and desires set out by persons. Dewey makes note of this when he says

> It is significant that human nature was taken to be strongly moved by an inherent love of freedom at the time when there was a struggle for representative government, that the motive of self-interest appeared when conditions in England enlarged the role of money, because of new methods of industrial production; that the growth of organized philanthropic activities brought sympathy into the psychological picture, and that events today are readily converted into love of power as the mainspring of human action (1989: 21).

The argument has been that essentialist renditions of identity and human nature fail to promote democratic arrangements. Specifically, the adoption of a philosophy that assumes a natural hierarchy among individuals is inherently antagonistic to the notion of multiculturalism. Under the essentialist paradigm, persons with particular traits are superior to individuals who lack these star qualities. However, using a dualistically oriented program to handle social issues is problematic in a democracy. This is because these issues are often discussed within the perspective of assimilation. In this case, persons are required to jettison those characteristics that deviate from the normative identity. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, explains that this type of philosophical reasoning is at the heart of colonization and marginalization. For once certain identities are labeled to be *a priori* superior and inferior, there is justification for repression. Accordingly, one author notes that "the dualistic project [of essentialism] must be rejected if persons are to form egalitarian relationships" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 46).

Thwarting alienation

There is one more topic that is pertinent to our discussion of democracy. It involves an idea that fails to be part of our everyday language, although it is common within Marxist and existentialist circles. For many, it constitutes a "disease" that plagues modern society and produces a sense of malaise in individuals—that is, a feeling of distress in a world that is becoming more atomized and confusing. This condition, which seems to increase as humanity increasingly develops, is *alienation*.

What is alienation? Alienation is the negation of productivity. The concept of "productivity" has nothing to do with the actual production of things or with being busy—or, in modern day parlance, with "multitasking." Being productive means that individuals experience themselves as *the* acting agents in their world (the world is comprised of nature, other human beings, and oneself). Alienation occurs when the world is experienced as something *separate* and *above* oneself. In this case, one's relatedness to the world is characterized by a sense of passivity, receptivity, and with the subject (humans) separated from the object (the world).

In the West, the idea of alienation was first introduced by the concept of idolatry in the Old Testament. The central meaning of idolatry has been perverted over the years to mean that people are idolaters when they worship more than one god. As Fromm points out, what the old prophets meant by idolatry "is not that man worships many gods instead of only one... It is that idols are the work of man's own hands—they are things, and man bows down and worships things; worships that which he has created himself" (1994b: 44). In this sense, individuals no longer recognize themselves as the creative agents since they transfer all their powers into the idol. As Marx would say, people have

estranged themselves from their "species being"—their potential for creative and purposeful activity through work. The wealth of humanity's potentialities is lost since these powers now belong to the idol. In this state, individuals feel most alive and most in touch with their humanity "in the indirect way of submission to the life frozen in the idols" (44).

For Marx and the prophets, an alienated or idolatrous life is characterized by deadness and emptiness. This is because idols are dead and empty things: "Eyes they have and they do not see, ears they have and they do not hear" (44). It is in a state of alienation that humanity becomes poor and dependent as it transfers more of its own power into the idol. People only feel powerful when they are associated with their idol—a godlike figure, the state, the company, the church, a person, or possessions. Idolatry does not necessarily have to take a religious form because idolatry is always "the worship of something into which man has put his own creative powers, and to which he now submits, instead of experiencing himself as his creative act" (44). For Marx, humans are alienated when they no longer perceive themselves to be the center of their activity. When the idol is great and powerful humanity is small and weak. When the human race *has* much it *is* little since all of its powers have been transferred into a thing. For according to Marx, "the less you *are*, the less you express your life, the more you *have*, the greater is your *alienated* life—and the greater is the saving of your alienated being" (Fromm, 1994a: 25).

Modern individuals are defined in terms of the *things* they create. That is to say, although people are nothing (given the transference of their powers), they feel big when they consider themselves to be at one with the big company or the big state. What is true

for people is what is outside of them. Reality is a thing outside, and a true person is simply a shadow of this reality. Today, individuals are only real so far as they are able to connect with some objective reality outside themselves—through property, social roles, and a persona. In modern society, people are dead if they do not constitute themselves via external things. Fromm explains this when he says that the modern individual

> is empty, dead, depressed, but in order to compensate for the state of depression and inner deadness, he chooses an idol, be it the state, a party, an idea, the church, or God. He makes this idol into the absolute, and submits to it in an absolute way. In doing so his life attains meaning, and he finds excitement in the submission to the chosen idol. His excitement, however, does not stem from joy in productive relatedness; it is intense, yet cold excitement built upon inner deadness or, if one would want to put it symbolically, it is "burning ice" (1994b: 45).

An alienated polity is certainly problematic for a democracy. Primarily, a democratic order is characterized by a people of power who will their destiny and create a society that suits the needs of humankind. Yet modern individuals find themselves devoid of their creative capacity, of their power. As was mentioned, this is because agency is transferred from the individual and into an external reality or entity—namely things. Although humanity has reached a level of great material and intellectual achievement (i.e., surplus of food, medical discoveries, nuclear technology), it is still weak. These things are a product of individuals, yet they control them—*us*. In our ostensibly democratic society "we believe that we control, yet we are being controlled—not by a tyrant, but by things, by circumstances" (Fromm, 1994a: 26). In our consumer culture people believe they are active because they choose this or that product, yet that is an invalid statement. For the choice has already been made for us—we must *already* buy, we must *already* elect, we must *already* submit because if we do not we feel like

nothing. Indeed, Fromm is correct when he announces that while in the nineteenth century one could say that "God is dead," today's adage is "Man is dead, long live the thing!" (27).

To avoid the dehumanizing effect of alienation, postmodernists adopt Nietzsche's concept of "will to power." What this means is that to live a non-estranged life humanity must will to power, or "*discharge* [its] strength" (Nietzsche, 1966: 21). In other words, people must recognize themselves to be the creative agents in their world, that through willful action they fashion a world to live in. In a non-alienated life, individuals experience themselves as the subject of their activity. Consequently, we must surpass the modern definition of "activity" as only *behavior* and recognize the subject behind the behavior. The issue of whether we develop a democratic order will depend on our strength to *be* and not to *have*. It will depend on whether we either escape from freedom by submitting to idols, or choose to live in freedom by recognizing that we are responsible for what humanity is. To borrow from Nietzsche, the existence or non-existence of democracy comes down to this. "it is only a matter of *strong* and *weak* wills" (29).

Now Tell Me, Who Is Fascist?

Politicizing politics

Conservatives have been skillful in charging liberals as being political. As Fish notes, those who oppose the liberal project have created the illusion that the issue of politics is all on one side (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 138). What this means is that conservatives do not appear ostensibly political or biased. Their claims were taken from

a reservoir of objective knowledge. What conservatives announce is depicted as common sense and fair. To be sure, many anti-liberal forces consider themselves to be "moderates" as they adhere to neutral and balanced ideals. Yet, as was shown in the section of ideology, conservatives are far from apolitical. Though they claim to revel in pure abstractions, this is not the case. For as Fish says, just because one believes something is possible does not mean that it is. Given that language is ubiquitous, conservatives are denied the possibility of encountering the objective truth they desperately want. Nevertheless, the American public has been fooled to believe that conservatives are in fact dealing with commonly accepted notions. But this has produced more of a manipulated public, not an enlightened one. Consequently, those who question the status quo of knowledge and order are "dismissed as irrational, irresponsible, or worse" (137).

The primary strategy adopted by conservatives is to make their platform appear as non-ideological as possible. That is, they want to avoid an overtly political/philosophical stance. Sure, they proffer particular morals and values; however, these ideals are announced to be a reflection of objective standards and not personal (group) interest. Their proposals for society (i.e., the norms to be followed) are viewed as value-free descriptions of reality. The conservative position has been able to accomplish this "by linking [itself] to science, truth, disinterested research, and other allegedly neutral or apolitical facets of life" (138). This has been a favorable maneuver on their part as attacking these objective standards, as liberal have done, usually undermines public support. Indeed, the search for truth and the field of science has traditionally been associated with the development of a fair and just society.

What is incredible about the liberal critique of conservatism is the manner in which they are depicted. Specifically, "those who challenge certain theoretical issues basic to conservatism are treated as if they are guilty of treason" (138). Because liberals are recognized for the destruction of absolute truth, they are also linked to the annihilation of reason, culture, and democracy. For conservatives then, American students are being misguided by radical professors who are either ignorant or evil. Anyone who opposes the conservative position is simply not acknowledging the pure stock of knowledge that is available to human beings. In this case, science and other value-free instruments are central to the argument that such an infallible base exists. This has surely strengthened the conservative front as the virtue of objectivity is shown to be rejected by the self-interest politics of liberals.

But what liberals want is not the destruction of society and order, but that accountability be taken for social actions. Their goal is to raise public awareness of the assumptions that guide everyday life. And though for liberals it means recognizing the socially constructed character of society, this critical activity does not destroy culture. Understanding culture to be based on personal goals and desires, not the dictums of some ethereal universal, does not automatically annihilate society. Nevertheless, conservatives view liberal critiques on institutions to be the same as the abandonment of norms. That is, once social organizations are found to be disassociated from an infallible ground, "the fate of society is doomed" (139). Ultimately, a core set of values that are irrefutable must be present to protect civilization, declare conservatives. This kind of fundamentalism, according to one author, leads to only one conclusion: "too much discussion is dangerous" (139).

Yet a truly democratic society is based on the complete opposite. That is, what characterizes an open order is the very act of discussion, critique, and persuasion. As Fish notes, a democratic society is based on the idea that "one party attempts to alter the beliefs of another by putting forward arguments that are weighty only in relation to still other beliefs" (139). Order is assumed to emerge from the willful actions of individuals and not from a set of *a priori* mandates that guide institutional arrangements. In a democracy, oppression is avoided by allowing all ideas a fair chance to survive in a debate. It is the nature of a democratic people to respect all differences and to allow a variety of interests to be expressed. Conservative dogmatism is therefore antagonistic to democracy as it inherently disrespects and stifles oppositional viewpoints.

What liberals charge is that conservative philosophy is simply totalitarian. Their affinity for restrictions, prescriptions, and norms that are associated with a reality *sui generis* is dangerous according to critics. This is because a hegemonic, hierarchical society is being fashioned on the claims of a few. Contrary to what Alan Bloom states, social reality is not innocent as it is constructed under a biased epistemological framework. As a result, issues of class, race, gender, and other social designations are not closed to discussion since they all originate from a fallible base, language. Institutions are no longer viewed as unadulterated mechanisms for organizing social life. Rather, they are understood to emerge from competing values, politics, and economic interests. Indeed, the reason that conservatism and democracy are contradictory is because the latter program contends that all proposals are open to critique. As has been shown, conservatives fail to acknowledge this as they believe their doctrine is indubitable and thus conclusive. Liberals, on the other hand, posit a counter-hegemonic position.

They question the foundation of traditional Western practices. Yet liberals are chided by conservatives for this, and are labeled terroristic and anti-democratic. However, despite conservative complaints about the disrespect for norms in the liberal platform, one author asks: "is challenging certain long-held perspectives, pedagogical practices, stereotypes, or discriminatory language totalitarian?" (140). Liberals certainly do not think so, for they believe that democracy is preserved when discussions of all kind are allowed.

Intolerance and social control

What seems to be a modest proposal has left conservatives uneasy. The idea that unabridged discussions that respect differences should be injected into every facet of social life is worrisome for conservatives. Primarily, expanding the preconceived notions of Western history to include alternative viewpoints is too risky. Such an activity is thought to be subversive as the public may begin to identify with other cultures instead of the West. Accordingly, in academia, conservatives fear that "to say that it is more important now [to study Islam] implies that the events of Sept. 11 were our fault, that it was our failure... that led to so many deaths and so much destruction" (ACTA, 2001). Many students, however, are denouncing Western societies because of their history of sexism, racism, and totalitarianism. At minimum, some individuals have realized that Western culture has a "seamy side" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 143).

Ultimately, conservatives contend that to "blame America first" means the same as destroying civilization, particularly Western. Yet how is this true? For all liberals want is to have the public learn all possible sides to a story. This surely is not detrimental to the survival of society. In fact, some would say that such an approach is at the heart of a sound education and to the democratization of culture since individuals now become

knowledgeable in the complexities of their world. Nevertheless, as one author notes, "conservatives are certainly defensive about allowing a situation to exist where criticism of the West is likely to erupt" (143). Again, their contention is that a critique of the West is identical to the affirmation of a barbarous, tyrannical state.

For conservatives then, notions of tolerance and multiculturalism have a particular meaning. In this case, "global awareness is all right, as long as Western dominance remains intact" (143). Cross-cultural awareness has its place in education if Western culture is affirmed. Multiculturalism is good for society only so far as the West's foundation remains undisturbed. Marcuse recognizes this type of tolerance to be a form of "repressive tolerance" (143). That is, tolerance is advocated until the ideals of Western society are questioned. An insidious form of social control is employed by conservatives, in this sense, as "an open mind is fine, unless widely accepted dogmas are threatened" (143).

Given the Western penchant for foundationalism, liberals are cited for destroying so-called common knowledge (149). Their emphasis on multiculturalism and interpretation threatens a uniform body of knowledge that conservatives think is necessary for the operation of society. As a result, liberals are viewed as undermining any hopes for a *sensus communis*. Social ties are impossible, claim conservatives, since there are no universal norms to link persons together. Without a set of common rules, negotiations, discussions, and other social activities become difficult to manage. In short, democracy becomes impossible once the liberal project is inaugurated.

Anti-traditionalists do abandon universal, a priori standards for organizing society. This is because these abstractions are disconnected from everyday life, the real

place from which knowledge is produced. Recognizing that everything is mediated by language, knowledge becomes entirely discursive. That is, information has a human face as it emerges from interpretation. Claims of absolute truth, for these critics, are thus speculative. Moreover, the presence of a reality *sui generis* is not necessarily helpful when creating an open society. Because knowledge is not indexical, but rather socially created, advocating an abstraction may actually distort reality. The existential nature of knowledge, in this case, can be obscured once absolute truth is favored.

Although liberals denounce the conventional view of common knowledge as being universal, they do not necessarily doubt the notion of shared knowledge. All liberals ask is how does common knowledge come to be regarded as "common"? For instance, why is capitalism regarded as a superior form of organizing society? While conservatives claim that it is the outcome of economic evolution that particular systems become dominant, critics fail to believe that certain paradigms naturally gain credibility. Instead, they contend that the advancement of a mode of knowledge is a reflection of social action. That is, through a myriad of activities, such as advertising, education, and socialization, some knowledge becomes important while other kinds lose value. There is no ultimate *telos* that is granting capitalism its dominance; instead, its prominence is a reflection of a host of social practices.

Contrary to what conservatives think, liberals do not want to destroy knowledge, they just want to understand its history. The social context from which knowledge is produced is emphasized by liberals. Foucault's notion of "eventalization" is important at this juncture. In this case, liberals seek to "[rediscover] the connection, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on which at a given moment

establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary" (150). The process whereby locally produced knowledge becomes reified is the central issue for critics of conservatism. But what is the point in emphasizing the socially created nature of knowledge? The point is to show that the heritage of any system of thought and practice, such as capitalism, was not inevitable or natural. For as one author indicates, "persons are not necessarily automatically dazzled by [capitalism], but, through a long and involved program of socialization, [capitalism] is made very appealing" (150). And though some issues may be resolved by capitalism, this does not necessarily mean that it is applicable to every, or any, aspect of social life. Yet most persons are made to believe that to advance the human race capitalism must also be promoted.

Determining how a certain type of knowledge gains acceptance is essential in a democracy. For as Choi notes, "if a specific stock of information comes to be viewed as existing *sui generis*, discussions can easily be truncated" (151). Once a perspective is considered necessary and absolute, all other views are discarded automatically. After all, how can something temporary and local ever match up with a constant and universal variable. But if knowledge is considered to be thoroughly linguistic, "no ultimate justification exists for steering a discussion in one way or another" (151).

In this sense, the liberal project seems to be more compatible with democracy than conservatism because liberals fail to adopt a "one standard fits all policy." By not identifying a particular type of knowledge as being the unquestionable source of truth, liberals allow for a myriad of different opinions and beliefs to compete for survival. There is no need to stifle any discussion just because some think that order, truth, and reality are being threatened. On the contrary, these social dimensions are enhanced, for

liberals, with the promotion of an open dialogue. Conservatives seem to believe, however, that too much debate would undermine the integrity of a democratic order. Then my question to conservatives is this: under what conditions would a democracy be unfavorable? That is to say, can there ever be too much democracy? Apparently conservatives seem to think so, for they believe that "democracy should be extended only so far" (151).

Symbolic violence—the new face of terror

The new form of social control is symbolic violence. This mode is much more insidious than other forms of domination. In this method, discrimination and oppression are neutralized by a set of "objective" signifiers. Symbols that inferiorize particular individuals and groups gain legitimacy because they are touted to be apolitical, ahistorical, and unbiased. The promotion of specific norms is not regarded as totalitarian since authority practiced within symbolic control "operates within a space that is allegedly pristine" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 103). That is to say, those who wield power are not ostensibly forceful because theirs is the "force of the universal" (103). Obtrusive acts on behalf of the powerful are viewed as innocent and non-violent once they are linked to normativity and absolute truth. The reasoning is such: because truth is thought to set people free, it cannot also be violent. Yet critics suggest that once certain norms are considered a priori normal and thus necessary, the stage is set for domination.

Reminiscent of Plato's ideal forms, this process of oppression is predicated on the existence of ideal norms. A set of objective, neutral standards are recognized as the only legitimate means for organizing social life. A civil society is one that most closely follows the rules of the ethereal guideline to proper living. Important to note here is that

not all individuals mirror theses norms in the same degree. Some persons or groups may reflect these norms more closely than others. A hierarchy, therefore, can be constructed that does not seem arbitrary. That is, determinations of superiority and inferiority can be made objectively by examining who measures up to these ideals the closest. Deviations from the normative standard will constitute different levels of inferiority.

The dualism that has supported Western philosophy is at the heart of symbolic violence. What is necessary for this mode of oppression to survive is the separation of truth from opinion. True knowledge must be sequestered from interpretation if a particular standard is to claim absolute validity. For a world-view to gain unquestionable credence, it must be presented to escape language. Indeed, as one author notes, "based on the assumption that *doxa* can be severed from true knowledge, a unique linguistic form that is thought to be immune to the exigencies of experience is identified" (104). Given the possibility for tapping the resources of an unadulterated reality, social axioms can be derived and applied universally. Moreover, those who advance these dictums in society are not considered to be biased or prejudiced; instead, they are simply the messengers of truth. To refer to Plato again, these individuals would be modern day philosopher kings.

Because symbolic violence is exercised in a sanitary and ostensibly legitimate fashion, people begin to, as Pierre Bourdieu declared, become "accomplices in their repression" (103). Once certain values are exalted to a realm that transcends the mundane, persons will likely strive to match these ideals. This is an important point because symbolic violence bypasses a problem usually associated with social control. Specifically, individuals volunteer to be constrained. At least traditionally, people had to

be controlled forcefully against their will. But once norms are reified individuals adopt these standards willingly. For as one author notes, "because these norms are ideal and considered to be indicative of perfection, conforming to them is believed to be logical" (104). People do not feel coerced to assimilate into the normative structure; instead, they are happy to do so. The recognition of certain symbols as objective criteria for categorizing persons and cultures as inferior or superior is neutralized. The patina of truth gives credence to such activity. Overt imposition is disguised under a veil of non-politics and thus appears visibly compatible with freedom. It is the nature of symbolic violence that the abused feel liberated, despite their injuries.

But as was mentioned earlier, these idealized structures are simply fatuous; they do not exist. Because everything is scathed by language, a pure referent cannot be articulated that would justify any Platonic ideals. This is to mean, given the expansiveness of interpretation, "only putative idealities exist" (104). All norms are temporary and always vulnerable to critique because they were born from a linguistic act. Any ideal that is advanced is supported by nothing other than a linguistic commitment. Persons must will a norm to be through iteration. Norms are pragmatic in that they are intentional and purposed. They are, as Fish says, principled. If this is the case, then one might be inclined to ask: who creates these standards, and why might they be important? Indeed, if traditionally idealized norms are not universal, why must they be imposed? As one author notes, "this issue is especially germane in a democracy, where particularities are not supposed to be enforced as generalities" (105). Yet the conservative position demands that a fixed standard be present to coordinate social differences. For as E. D. Hirsch states, what is needed is a standard that is "normative for all textual

interpretation... [that is] self-identical and changeless" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 48)

This is certainly contradictory to democracy. The problem is that while conservatives want to retain a level of social control, this idea is antithetical to a democracy. This is because the traditional definition of control implies differences in power. As Weber explains, power is the ability "to make others alter their behavior" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 97). In other words, a particular group has the capacity to make others do something they do not want to do. Under the conservative paradigm, people are wielded, not personally willed. With an external standard being the emphasis, people no longer forge a life for themselves; they simply abide by a set of prescribed rules that are "not a matter of choice" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 41). But according to one author:

> Clearly this idea is anathema to democracy. Coercion, in short, is undemocratic. A truly democratic order is supposed to be based on legitimacy—self-imposed strictures—rather than threat or intimidation. As opposed to authority, order is predicated on the rule of law. The right to govern, therefore, is disseminated throughout society and is not the sole property of one group or another. As described by Lefort, in a democracy "power stems from the people; on the other hand, it is the power of nobody" (Choi and Murphy, 1997: 97).

For many critics then, conservatism is simply another form of terrorism as it attempts to totalize and annihilate difference. Its attempts of providing a synoptic vision of reality culminate in the silencing of alternative voices. Because conservatism appears to be grounded on neutral claims, conservative proposals for society do not appear racist or politically beneficial to a particular group. People do not feel assaulted with the prospect of a comprehensive social order as it derives legitimacy from an objective and thus rational source. Indeed, conservatism is an insidious form of terror because it does

not gain strength from brute force. On the contrary, it receives its power from the subjugated, from the oppressed. As was mentioned, this occurs because once persons are confronted with foundational demands that seem rational, they will conform to them. As Choi notes, "[people] are intimidated by these exalted demands to the extent that they are incapable of responding and relent to this authority" (28). Foucault mentions that under the guise of rationality, these practices do not appear barbaric. In fact, it is anything that deviates from foundational thought that is uncivil and primitive. Nevertheless, the exercise of this kind of power is not inevitable or impenetrable. For as postmodernists announce, "foundational symbols may be made to appear inviolable, but their source easily betrays these efforts... In short, the one act that the power of symbolism cannot halt is the proliferation of interpretation" (30). What postmodernist claim is this: the arena of domination will crumble in the face of rhetoric!

Conclusion

One of the goals of this thesis was to democratize democracy a little. The attempt was made to expose those conditions which are detrimental to establishing an open order. Foundational theory and practice was shown to be at the heart of unfreedom as it is based on totalitarian principles. In particular, conservatism must totalize reality because it believes in an absolute picture of the universe. Any aberrations from this normative vision are viewed as suspect and annihilated. Though conservatives preach tolerance and equality, their project demands that differences be sacrificed for the sake of order, truth, and reality. Society is dehumanized as social life revolves around a set of abstract norms and values that have little to do with individuals' everyday experiences. Persons are in

fact told to repress their emotions because this existential component interrupts reason and thus a smooth-functioning society.

Conservatives find it easy to say they are democratic, but their claims are not so easily proven correct. One would think that conservatives, given their ostensible dislike for totalitarianism, would embrace the pluralistic perspective of liberals. Still, they turn away from such a proposal and regard it as dangerous. What conservatives prefer is a repressed form of pluralism. That is, "pluralism is all right as long as certain paintings, books, knowledge bases, and so forth are viewed as superior to all others" (Choi and Murphy, 1992: 154). They justify their claims by pointing to the chaos that would ensue if true multiculturalism is employed.

But these kinds of critiques play off some of the public's most common fears and embedded notions about alternative views. Instead of examining the liberal project for its philosophical underpinnings, conservatives have preferred to use fear tactics and talk about the destruction of culture and civilization. This, however, is more of an attempt to curb discussions that would otherwise undermine conservative dogma than to promote the well-being of society. Indeed, as one author points out, "the new conservatives are adept at recognizing dogmatism, precisely because they are well versed in using dogmatic ploys to silence their opponents" (154-155). In this case, liberal voices have been undermined by those who make claims of objectivity and truth. This is because conservatives know that anyone who visibly denounces absolute truth will not be accepted by the public. What conservatives have done is to "proclaim that [anti-foundationalism] is anathema to truth and simply allow the public's imagination to run wild" (155). If this is not a form of manipulation, I am not sure what is.

Anti-foundationalism has been grossly misrepresented. This is due to a host of factors. The media is certainly an accomplice in this as they have been unable to expose the underlying motives and politics of conservatism. Because conservative dogmatism has generally gone unchallenged, significant strides to promoting a truly plural society have been curtailed. Hopefully this thesis has helped to correct the type of democratic distortions and repression that fascism is so likely to produce. Given the alternatives that postmodernism and other theories provide, I hope that individuals will feel free to envision a new type of society, one that is both the work of humanity and the means for developing its potentialities. I believe Fromm provides a good idea of how to begin envisioning such a society:

> It is the weakness of contemporary society that it offers no ideals, that it demands no faith, that it has no vision—except that of more of the same. We [liberals] are not ashamed to confess that we have a deep faith in man and in a vision of a new, human form of society. [Democracy] is not only a socio-economic and political program; it is a human program: *the realization of the ideals of humanism under the conditions of an industrial society*. [*Democracy*] *must be radical. To be radical is to go to the roots; and the root is Man. Today, Things are in the saddle and ride man.* [*Democracy*] *wants to put man, the total, creative, real man, back into the saddle* (1960: 36).

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