
Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy

Volume 8, number 1, Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

Commentaries on

Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

By

Matthias Fritsch (Concordia University)

Ladelle McWhorter (University of Richmond)

David Scott (Columbia University)

Lorenzo Simpson (Stony Brook University)

Jack Turner (University of Washington)

With reply by

Thomas McCarthy (Northwestern University)

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<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

Historical Time and Moral Universalism.

A Response to Thomas McCarthy's *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*

MATTHIAS FRITSCH

Department of Philosophy
Concordia University
1455 Maisonneuve Blvd. West
Montréal, Quebec H3G 1M8
CANADA
matthias.fritsch@concordia.ca

In this important and well-informed study, Thomas McCarthy identifies the core problem of the current historical situation as consisting in the fact that moral-political advances are outpaced by capitalist globalization. In response to this, he argues that one should not just grab one horn of what he calls the dilemma of development, namely the moral-universal one, as many postcolonial and 'post-development' theorists have done (178). Although the goal must be to find new ways to tame globalization and its unleashing of economic, technological, and military powers by developing

"effective normative structures to contain and direct those powers onto paths of peace and justice" (149), we should not deprive ourselves of the concepts that can help us grasp the systemic forces of development operating 'behind our backs'. What I would like to ask McCarthy is whether he agrees that elaborating a "critical theory of global development" (184, 220) is not only necessary to understand this systemic side, but to rethink the historical connectedness across generations that Enlightenment ideas of progress, however problematic, also captured. If he agrees, then this critical theory and its attendant discourse ethics (14) will have to be conceived, from the beginning and not only in an applied sense or a secondary step, as aiming at intergenerational justice. In the space allotted here, I collect some elements from McCarthy's book that point in this direction.

"Development" is the name under which liberalism's universal-egalitarian ideals face historical reality. This reality includes different peoples and particular cultures, but also different generations, overlapping and non-overlapping. The refraction of universal moral ideals through the idea of progress relegated both non-Europeans and the non-contemporaneously living to a secondary status. The major part of the book under consideration is devoted to the oppression of the first of these two groups. To rethink development, as McCarthy argues so forcefully, means to understand its ongoing connection with racism and neoracism as well as with colonialism and neoimperialism. But he also notes, for instance, Kant's ambivalent justification of the 'use' of past generations in general as mere means to the development of the species' capacities (65). And today, McCarthy shows, neoracism can continue in part because present historical consciousness does not really acknowledge the past victims of racism and colonialism, forgetting slavery and the dispossession of native populations as an intrinsic, even constitutive part of modern, particularly US history (89, 113).

Oppression of non-Europeans and other generations are also at times, and not fortuitously, superimposed, as when a concern for the racial purity of lines of reproduction leads to strictures on miscegenation (51), or non-European peoples are cast into the role of children (180). This could justify paternalism while retaining universalism—“they” are in principle of equal moral worth and rationality, at least from a normative standpoint, but “not yet” ripe for self-rule (regarding the Millian version of this, see chapter 6, esp. 177; regarding Kant’s more conflicted position on the equal rationality of the races, see chapter 2, in particular 66). The conception demands that universalism takes not only a moral but also a cosmological form, presupposing one history, one common time, and one path to human perfection. The cosmological presupposition, to some extent made real by forcibly imposed modernization in what arrogant Eurocentrism then calls ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘developing’ countries (183), permits the disdain for past peoples as backward, and other ‘races’ as lagging behind. Future generations are projected as the felicitous heirs of present developments, whose advanced species’ capacities, moral standing, and global-political organization will have justified oppression in the past and the present. The future is invoked merely as that which permits contemporaries to draw advance credit, for progress will redeem past oppression and overcome the dilemma of development. McCarthy calls this a logic of deferral (180), a logic that, as Walter Benjamin argued long ago, is inherent in Kantian regulative ideals that are not interrupted by another logic, by the urgency of demands that proscribe treating the past and the present as mere means to the future, a logic that should also grant future people more autonomy and difference.

In proposing to rethink developmental racism and imperialism, McCarthy thus does not neglect the entwinement of temporality and difference. To overcome racism is to overcome the progressivist schema and the idea of a common

and totalizing history, but hardly to do away with the historical time that both divides and connects generations. We have to rethink, and alter affective attitudes toward, the relation between time and otherness, globalization and multiple modernities (68), history and histories, universality and particularity. This is evident in McCarthy’s account of the need for a politics of memory and reparative justice: facing racism today means remembering, in more than facile gestures or colossal monuments, past racism. And we can also no longer cast the future into the role of happy heir of past violence. Rather, future people are more likely to inherit, not only increased knowledge and power, but also increased burdens that range from legacies of oppression that have not been ‘worked through’ to the reckless exploitation of resources that enabled development, from widening gaps between North and South to environmental degradation (228). Most commentators today, at least in the humanities and non-economic social sciences, no longer believe that the future will be enviable, with the obstinacy of world hunger and climate change only the most palpable indicators. The inevitably retrospective perspective of contemporaries in the ‘developed’ world lets ‘us’ see more clearly the costs associated with developing the ‘capacities of the species’, at a time when the luxury afforded by previous development makes its continuation appear, at least to some, less urgent.

McCarthy argues that a non-orthodox Habermasian discourse ethics, wedded to a “discourse theory of law and democracy” (14) and to a “critical theory of global development” (220), can help us retain both moral universalism and liberal developmentalism while avoiding the oppression of temporal and racial otherness. To see how this combination should be more explicitly conceived as a non-presentist theory of intergenerational justice, let us review some of the reasons why McCarthy turns to these theoretical tools. I will focus on discourse ethics and largely leave aside Habermas’ account of modernization in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, which

McCarthy uses to account for (a) the functionalist side of development (141) as well as for (b) the interconnected advances in cultural developments (what Habermas calls “the rationalization of the lifeworld”, 142), and for (c) how systemic imperatives tend to “colonize” and thus undermine the lifeworld at a certain point (152). In short, Habermas’ theory of modernization can help to adequately account for the “ambivalence of progress” (145) and draw up the balance sheets of modernizing development, tabulating its costs and benefits (147-165). These balance sheets, however, will not be constructed monologically, by the West alone, but rather dialogically as demanded by discourse ethics (68). Even if economic development was and continues to be imposed on the non-Western world, even if it tends to colonize and outpace the lifeworld, we cannot just abandon the concept of development now that the task is to politically, democratically and discursively, bend developmental processes toward poverty relief (184) and the concerns of future generations (228).

Discourse ethics’ dialogical rather than Kant’s monological account of universalism permits and even calls for “intercultural discussion and negotiation of the universals we have to bring into play in shaping our common human lives, ongoing contestation of their meaning in practice” (165). While McCarthy, as far as I can see, does not rule out that some procedural universals may be *given* with language use, and so be not constructed but developed in a process that Habermas viewed along progressive lines, McCarthy’s version of discursive reason accepts that its unity “is not simply given but also has to be achieved” and that “human reason is always already ‘impure,’ and the universal can only ever be actual as ‘concrete’” (186). Thus, discourse ethics promises to retain universalism without exclusions in its “impure ethics” or its “discourses of applications”. To conceive of ethics as ‘impure’ from the beginning is not only, shall we say, ontologically more adequate, but promises to

avoid Kant’s problem of a ‘pure’ universal morality unequally applied in its ‘impure’ particularization (44).

Here, McCarthy implicitly criticizes Habermas’ compartmentalization of universalism and particularism into two different discourses, one in which universal norms are justified by abstracting from particular differences, and a second, subordinate discourse in which they are applied to particular circumstances. McCarthy rightly argues that a look at the history of liberalism shows that universal norms were not just unequally *applied* to non-Europeans, denying them equal standing. Rather, liberal universalism was from the beginning combined with accounts of development so as to justify the exclusion and oppression of other peoples. In fact, ideals of autonomy and equality were forged in part in response to European expansion and in a context of colonial domination. Imbalances in power, and “a hermeneutic standpoint shaped by their [Europeans’] growing superiority of force” led to a situation in which “difference” came to be interpreted, not in terms of equality, but in “hierarchical and temporal terms” (179).

As a first pointer toward the intergenerational rethinking of the relation between time and difference, one may be tempted here to push McCarthy’s insights a little further by adding that it is not only the “combination of developmentalism with universalism” that is to be rethought once we recognize that this combination was forged “as a justification of empire from the beginning” (179). Rather, to be rethought is also the very idea of morally equal standing of autonomous individuals, with autonomy conceived as a force that is measurable in terms of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’, including force over children or those deemed backwards, thus force over one’s own past and the animal nature with which it remains connected. The history of racism suggests that moral standing cannot just be linked to equal autonomy, but is to be reconceived in terms of the physical and symbolic

vulnerability of a mortal body dependent on others for support and recognition.

The 'impurity' of universal ethics provides another pointer. Again with and beyond Habermas, McCarthy grounds the "unavoidable dialectic of the universal and the particular" (186) in "the entwinement of the right and the good" (164). Justificatory discourses do not operate in independence from inherited cultural values, which are needed to interpret what the interests are that may then be universalizable. A norm proposed in moral discourse to be in the equal interest of all affected and thus to be universal must be understood to be proposed from a particular, historically grown hermeneutic perspective and lifeworld, its "context of origin" that, as we saw, is interconnected with power relations and most often with a history of violent oppression. Furthermore, to test whether the norm can be accepted by all affected, discursive participants must anticipate, in their justificatory discourses, what consequences the adoption of the norm would have upon particular lifeworlds. Universal norms, interpreted in the light of cultural values, are thus to be refracted by way of a politics of memory and claims to reparative justice that may involve bending egalitarian norms in affirmative action policies and the like. The impurity of ethics demands that each generation is only for a time entrusted with the lifeworld and political institutions that it inherits and it is in turn to leave to the future. Its autonomy is temporary, and from the beginning includes the task to prepare the next generation of trustees for its turn with reshaping traditions and institutions from a position of autonomy.

The future-oriented concern also follows from the fact that even in the economic sphere development is neither self-enclosed nor automatic, but feeds off other spheres, often with significant costs. Once progress, on economic, moral-political, and environmental terms, can no longer be assumed, trustee generations must also consider the balance sheet of

developmental effects upon succeeding generations. The recognition that the Western model of development cannot be replicated because it was based on oppression and exploitation of others also has a future-oriented dimension, for development has to become, as the buzzword has it, sustainable: "How can we achieve a more equitable access to natural resources at present without short-changing future generations?" (228). Hence, the critical theory of development has to replace the "perfection of species' capacities" as a developmental goal with "what participants judge to be in the best interests of everyone affected by those changes, including those not yet born who will have to live with the consequences of present decisions" (162). With good justification, McCarthy wishes to understand discourse ethics as a moral theory that grants equal moral standing to future people and that demands that present participants connect the past with the future. To remember the past violence of development is required to prevent its blind imposition on non-Westerners and on future people.

Many critics doubt that discourse ethics is well placed to include the concerns of non-present people, past and future, precisely because it demands present participation of autonomous individuals. One attempt at a solution lies in accepting that only the voices of presently living participants count, but that these voices may well include the concerns of past and future people. This appears to be the route taken by McCarthy on the vexed issue of dead victims of 'development', from slavery to genocide. For here he follows Pablo de Greiff in suggesting that the obligation to remember the victims of development is grounded not in the posthumous interest of the dead themselves, whose independent moral standing is taken to be dubious, but in the interests of the victims' present descendants, of whom we cannot reasonably expect that they conveniently forget what was done to their forebears (105). While one may doubt that the absence of descendants would cancel the duty to

remember, it is even more apparent that this solution alone will not do in the case of future people. Rather than depending upon the good will of the living, present discourse participants should be constrained by the universalizability principle itself to consider the interests of future people. Considering their interests, by extending the 'all-affected' principle as McCarthy suggests (162), however, seems to require that we virtualize consent to norms and policies on behalf of future people. This is a solution that Habermas, as far as I can see, has increasingly adopted, despite his earlier criticism of Rawls for not demanding actual discourses among affected parties. Virtualizing consent, however, has led to the charge that discourse ethics has become indistinguishable from a hypothetical contract view, such as Scanlon's.

One may wonder, by contrast, whether McCarthy's twin "dialectic of progress" and "dialectic of the right and the good" do not suggest another, complementary way in which moral discourses can connect the past and the present. The back and forth between universalization and particularization, between justification and application, should from the beginning be understood to permit the adoption of universal norms only in view of what future people not only may be able to re-affirm, but must in fact re-consider from a position of autonomy that it is the duty of present institutions to safeguard and enable. The dialectic of the right and the good entails generational turn taking with traditions and institutions, as each generation needs to re-affirm—and that means, filter through—its heritage and re-justify—or not—norms purported to be in the equal interest of all (103). Each generation is first of all to understand itself as the recipient of a gift of prior generations, a gift whose acceptance, no matter how involuntary, comes with the duty to compensate for the costs its production and transfer incurred. It is these costs, here principally those of neoracism

and neoimperialism, that are so unequally distributed in the present.

The duty of compensation, then, whether or not it takes the form of reparations, is grounded both in the past and the future, at that turning point in the present where time and otherness—other times and other cohabitants of the earth—intersect so as to unsettle the idea of a present time that simply coincides with itself, thereby lending itself to one linear development for all. There is an empirical side to this argument in favour of the Janus face of historical responsibility: as McCarthy shows, the effects of past oppression reach into the present and, without compensatory action, make the prospects of greater future autonomy for its victims and their descendants less hopeful than they would otherwise be. While the causes of the duty may be primarily historical as well as ongoing and contemporary, we find its beneficiaries first of all in the present and the future. But there is also a less empirical and more conceptual point: if 'we' the presently living or the presently autonomous see ourselves as taking turns with institutions and the lifeworld, our moral regard must be both to what we inherited and how we are to leave it to the next turn-takers. The duty of compensation thus originates both with the acceptance of violently costly benefits and the enabling of future autonomy, the task to leave an increasingly reflective lifeworld.

As intergenerational justice involves bringing up a next generation capable of executing its responsibilities, one can only agree with McCarthy's perhaps most important forward-looking recommendation, namely, the improvement of education about history (113) and public historical consciousness more generally (89), not only in the US but in the 'developed' world at large.

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Volume 8, number 1. Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

Development and Hope: **Comments on Thomas McCarthy's *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development***

LADALLE MCWHORTER

Department of Philosophy
University of Richmond
28 Westhampton Way
North Court, 2nd Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23173
lmcwhort@richmond.edu

Thomas McCarthy's *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* is an intriguing and important book; moreover, despite its heavy themes and its fine scholarship, it is extremely readable. *And* it is very timely. The questions it takes up are some of the most pressing of our age: globalization, international distributive justice, and sustainable economic development in particular. Its central problematic concerns the detrimental effects of developmental thinking as a core feature of modernity. The book seeks, says McCarthy, to make "a contribution to the critical history of the present" (2), but it does not stop with critical analysis; McCarthy strives to reconstruct the concept

of "development" in the interest of securing human rights and establishing global justice.

Developmental thinking is a fundamental aspect of modernity, McCarthy asserts, but it is not peculiar to modernity; the ancients (famously, Aristotle) had explicit theories of development. For the ancients, however, development was a matter of each being fulfilling its nature in the course of its existence. Time itself was not progressive; rather, it was cyclic. Development occurred only at the level of the individual entity, and each entity repeated the same basic developmental process according to its species. It was Christianity that introduced the notion of the ever-new moment in its story of the temporal progression from Creation, to Fall, to Redemption, to Last Judgment (134). However, Christianity's narrative was not progressive in the sense of improving the state of the world; the world was but a staging area for a progression that was purely spiritual. In modernity, by contrast, the notion of development is reconceived as material human progress, the gradual improvement of industry, technology, knowledge, and social and governmental institutions. This is the milieu in which Kant conceived of the inevitable social and political progression of history by natural means (conflicts generated and resolved by our natural unsocial sociability) coupled (and in tension) with the unpredictability of a history that is the domain of human freedom. McCarthy returns us to Kant's work as both the beginning of a modernity whose developmental thinking now imperils and impoverishes millions and as the source of a potential rethinking of development toward global justice for all.

Given space constraints, I must condense McCarthy's reasoning, but basically it is this: (1) Developmental thinking, like development itself, is a fact. For a variety of reasons, we cannot simply abandon it and think otherwise. As McCarthy puts it toward the end of the book, "developmental thinking

is irrepressible...” (242). That being the case, (2) we must confront developmental thinking as it has played out in our history and work through the damage it has done, the injustice, the violence, and in particular the racism that it has generated and furthered, and that it has used to further itself. If we do not do so, those elements will continue to structure our world, with all their damaging effects, into the future. (3) Embracing development, without its racism and imperialism, etc., and without the supposition of religious or metaphysical guarantees of success, requires hope for a better future, one in which global justice reigns and human misery is truly minimized. But such hope is hard to come by these days, especially after all the atrocities that have been committed in the name of human betterment and emancipation. Where will we get it? (4) We will not get it through some grand totalizing theory of history. As Kant said, history cannot be thought in its totality through speculative reason, precisely because it is a domain of freedom. Our hope lies, rather, in reflective judgment informed by empirical observation and guided by practical concern. But we may indeed hope, McCarthy insists, and in fact it is morally imperative that we do so.

I am very sympathetic with McCarthy’s concerns. I believe his location of much of the modern world’s ills in our persistent belief in progressive development on a global scale is apt, and I am impressed with his range of historical knowledge on the subject. Developmental thinking needs forceful philosophical critique, and I am grateful that someone with McCarthy’s erudition and sensitivity has undertaken the project. It is, however, an enormous project, and McCarthy’s treatment of it is unlikely to answer all the questions and allay all the concerns that we might have. In the remaining space allotted to me, I want to raise some of those concerns and questions in the hope that McCarthy and his readers will take them up in future work. (Nothing I say below should be taken to diminish the accomplishments of the book as it stands.)

First, is it the case that development and developmental thinking are facts? McCarthy is careful to qualify any appeal to factuality with a clear account of facts as products of interpretation. Hence, by “fact” I take him to mean simply that developmental thinking in one form or another is pervasive in the history of our society (insofar as we know that history) and is, for that and many other reasons, inescapable for us for the foreseeable future. There is no thinking otherwise at this juncture. And thus it is also inescapable that we perceive development and developmental thinking in the work and actions of our predecessors.

From a Foucauldian perspective, I agree with this view, although probably not for the reasons that McCarthy holds it (if, indeed, he does). Development is a fundamental feature of modernity, and we are products of it. As products of disciplinary institutions and practices, we are developmental through and through. Foucault never argued that we could cease to be developmental subjects, only that we could resist developmental *normalization* by striving to decouple discipline’s cultivation of capacities from its intensification of docility. Disciplined development can intensify resistance to domination; it can decrease docility. On this point, I believe McCarthy and Foucault are fellow travelers. At some points in the text, however, McCarthy veers uncomfortably close to making ontological claims about development and to conflating a variety of fairly different processes under that one term (see chapter 7, esp. section V). I do not think the only alternative to progressive development is sheer, atemporal difference. Whether our example is the growth and decay of a living entity, the “advance” of science, or the complexification of a social system, we observe changes that, while not merely random across time, also need not be characterized at the outset as “progress.” Temporality can be unidirectional and irreversible (thus, change is not mere differing) without being thereby progressive in any but the

barest sense of the term. It is important, historically and politically, to be careful to keep even small distinctions in the meaning of “development” in different contexts in mind. Otherwise analysis becomes normative much too prematurely. Development and developmental thinking may be facts, but they are most likely an array of facts in a variety of historically emerging deployments.

Second, I want to affirm McCarthy’s claim that racism is an inherent, not an incidental, characteristic of modernity and that, therefore, it must be worked through rather than simply disavowed. Despite the legal gains that minorities have made in the US over the last fifty or sixty years, despite the decolonization of much of the world, and despite the fact that most white people do not actively and explicitly embrace racist doctrines anymore, racism persists in entrenched practices and institutions and, as McCarthy makes abundantly clear, in the very way we think. A century ago, racism was upheld by biological theory and “fact.” That is no longer so; modern genetics does not support the division of humanity into distinct races (5). However, because race was never simply a biology concept, and, because the developmental aspects of biological racism can easily be shifted onto concepts like “cultural development” (as well as “cultural pathology”), many of the very same assumptions about many of the very same groups of people can be and are routinely made. African Americans are no longer considered to be incapable of stable family life and democratic self-government because they are Negroes; rather, their culture(s) are not sufficiently developed to support psychological maturation and independence (12). McCarthy calls this phenomenon “neoracism,” and he argues that it undergirds a “neoimperialism” characteristic of US foreign and military policy, as well as the practices of other Western powers and their conjoint institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. If we fail to acknowledge how deeply racism is

embedded in our conception of the world as developmental—and in particular as economically and technologically developmental—we will perpetuate terrible injustice. We must confront our own histories, face the injustices that our predecessors’ actions and our current institutions inflict, and—difficult though it will be—strip our developmental thinking of these dangerous and deeply injurious aspects.

But, as already noted, McCarthy declares that we must not give up on developmental thinking altogether. Instead we “should construct a critical theory of development, at a higher level of reflexivity, which takes into account and tries to avoid historical distortions and misuses of developmental thinking” (242). My concern is that, even with disaggregation of “various domains, processes, strands, and logics of development” and with acceptance of “a multiplicity of hybrid forms of modernization” (242), degree of development will still correlate with degree of worth. As long as development is valued, I suspect, this will be true. And whatever is not deemed well- or highly-developed will be devalued, shunned, or targeted for elimination. Modernity itself is conceived as a developmental stage, is it not? As such it is supposedly better than whatever preceded it. This is why we moderns tend to believe that all the world must modernize, even if we accept that different regions may become and then be modern in different ways. While I agree with McCarthy that there is “pressing need for organized collective action on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable societies” (226), I am not persuaded that we must think in terms of developing those societies (or helping them to develop) as we organize our response to their needs. Such societies have a multiplicity of needs, but it is not obvious that among those needs there is always a need for something accurately labeled “development.” We must be cautious in our presumptions; it will not do to widen or pluralize the concept of “development” or “modernity” to encompass all the economic or political needs that such societies evince.

Finally, is it true that in order to work toward global justice we must have hope that global justice can be achieved? I appreciate the note of pragmatism sounded here; certainly no one wants to commit themselves to a cause clearly lost from the outset. However, I do not believe that people generally approach moral questions in speculative terms—that is, regardless of the current rational-choice-theoretic craze in economic and ethical theory, I think what moves most people to moral action is the draw of another's need, not a calculation about the likelihood of ultimate success.

Every few months, I give money to an organization in South Dakota that provides food and clothing to people living on the Sioux reservations there. I have no illusion that my gifts make up for four hundred years of imperialism and genocide perpetrated against Native American peoples. Furthermore, I know that many of the people fed this month will be hungry next month, and those who get clothing this winter will next winter once again be cold. It would be wonderful if I could change the world, right the old wrongs and create a future that would be better than today. But even if I cannot do that, I will still help. It is not because I hope for a more just future; it is because I know that right now there are people who are hungry and people who are cold. Hope is not a prerequisite for giving.

Whenever possible, I want to do things to bring about a more just future. But even if I knew for sure that a more just future was impossible, I would not stop responding to the needs of those around me, including long-term needs for secure infrastructure, meaningful work, and political liberty. I would not stop fighting against bullies and bigots, big and small. I would not stop trying to alleviate suffering. I would not stop listening and caring. To do so would be to stop living.

Of course, a more just future *is* possible, even if the possibility of a persistent state of global justice is remote. It is not

morally imperative for people to hope for any such future, however; if anything is morally imperative, it is courage, along with a bone-deep, non-logical and non-metaphysical belief in human equality.

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Volume 8, number 1. Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

The Traditions of Historical Others

DAVID SCOTT

Department of Anthropology
Columbia University
452 Schermerhorn Extension
1200 Amsterdam Ave.
New York, NY 10027-7003
das133@columbia.edu

I.

When a distinguished American philosopher who has spent a considerable part of a productive scholarly career translating and interpreting a great and sometimes obscure German philosopher to an English-speaking audience turns at length to think about directly social-historical and political questions of moment—race and empire, for example—there is, one might expect, reason to pay attention. This is because our wager will be, naturally enough, that distinctive *philosophic* reflection on these matters will have something worthwhile to teach us about how best to *approach* them—how to formulate the most fruitful perspective, what the intellectual sources are for the most relevant or urgent questions, what

considerations of voice and location and power are necessary, and so on. For surely such topics as race and empire are topics about which a good deal has already been written, comparatively speaking, by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. So chances are that, however widely learned about the relevant social and political past, we are likely to read our philosopher less for new facts than for how she or he teaches us to connect the historical context to *philosophic* or anyway philosophically-*inclined* questions about the present. In short, our wager is going to be that we ought to read our philosopher for the *methodological* uptake, the conceptual yield of *this* way of thinking about the topics at hand, as opposed to others.

In his book, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, Thomas McCarthy takes up a large and complex set of issues that are central to the very making of the modern world, and vital, moreover, to the conundrums that shape our immediate present.¹ What animates him is an all-too familiar paradox within the story of Western liberal humanism, namely that its understanding of itself as “universal history” has seemed inseparable from the moral evils of racial injustice and imperial domination. Racism and imperialism, he says, appeared together historically in the modern world, and have been an intractable feature of it ever since. Both racial and imperial thought, McCarthy tells us at the very outset, have “drawn heavily upon developmental schemes in which designated groups have been represented not only as racially distinct but also as occupying different stages of development, with their degrees of advancement often being understood to depend on their race and to warrant various forms of hierarchical relations” (1). For McCarthy, however, this historical fact is not fatal for the development idea (let alone the liberal one). The misuses of development do not exhaust its possibilities: “Like enlightenment ideas more generally, it is inherently ambivalent in character, both indispensable and dangerous” (18). And consequently it

requires not dismissal but “ongoing deconstruction and reconstruction” (18) so as to disable its vices and advance its virtues.

McCarthy’s book is meant to be a series of committed exploratory essays—half on race, half on empire—concerned to show that a viable conception of development (and its various enlightenment cognates) is possible, and indeed important, for thinking about the prospects of global justice. He is explicit about the approach he affirms and commends. Not surprisingly, for anyone familiar with his work, McCarthy aligns himself with Habermas and his idea of “critical history with a practical intent” against Foucault and his idea of “genealogy” (13-14). He shares the view of many who align themselves this way that the Nietzschean and Foucauldian idea of genealogy is unhelpfully subversive and dismissive of enlightenment, progress, development, modernity. On his view, only Habermas’s recasting of Kant’s moral theory into a “discourse-ethical principle of equal participation by those affected in establishing the narrative structures that govern their life together” supplies the necessary analytical tools to “decenter modes of theorizing that have underwritten Eurocentrism and white supremacy in the modern world” (14). For McCarthy there is an *unfinished* project of development to be undertaken that Kant and Habermas distinctly enable. And in pursuing this unfinished project, his “guiding assumption,” he says, “is that the resources required to reconstruct our traditions of social and political thought can be wrested from those very traditions, provided that they are critically appropriated and opened to contestation by their historical ‘others’” (14).

Now this seems to me a rich and troubling formulation of methodological first principles, and in what follows, rather than take up certain substantive areas of disagreement concerning liberalism and development, I am going to consider something of how it constrains the character of

McCarthy’s inquiries on race and empire. For what may at first sight seem an innocuous formulation is, upon reflection, one that exemplifies a mode of philosophic investigation that presupposes the basic sufficiency of its own moral-intellectual resources, the generosity and respectful tolerance of its attitude toward historical others.² But, as Romand Coles might ask, how *receptive* is this generosity? How responsive is it to *receiving* as distinct from giving? Does it open itself to criticism only so as to strengthen its basic position? How *dialogical* is its ethical stance?³ Notably, McCarthy’s approach bears significant contrast with, say, James Tully’s concern to refigure a “public philosophy” to similarly engage a worldly range of moral and political preoccupations.⁴ Tully, of course, aligns himself precisely *with* Foucault (and a number of other skeptics, including Wittgenstein and Skinner) *against* the conceptual-political implications of Habermas’s translation of Kantian moral foundations that McCarthy finds compelling. For him, McCarthy’s confidence in the resources of his own traditions—his idea that all they need is to be “opened to contestation by [their] historical ‘others’”—would be questionable, too meager and passive and monological a mode of generosity. Tully is committed to what he calls a “reciprocal elucidation” between philosophic and reflective public discourses that allows for a more robustly “dialogical” way of conceiving their relationship. I aim to take seriously McCarthy’s “guiding assumptions” about the value and work of moral-intellectual traditions, what he presupposes is entailed in reconstructing them in an anti-racist and anti-imperialist direction, and especially how he imagines “opening” them up to their historical “others.” But looking to expand Tully’s idea of “reciprocal elucidation” in the direction of considerations of moral-intellectual *tradition* suggested by such thinkers as Alasdair MacIntyre, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Talal Asad, and Michael Walzer, I am going to wonder aloud whether a *receptive* generosity can at all be activated without a more substantial address toward, and engagement with, traditions other than one’s own. And on

my view, this entails, on the one hand, *unlearning* the presumptive privilege of one's own moral-intellectual traditions, and on the other, *learning* something of the internal composition of questions and answers through which the relevant traditions of others have been historically shaped. Receptive generosity in a dialogue of traditions depends on this practice of learning and unlearning.

II.

To begin with, let us take McCarthy's meditation on the problem of the progress of historical consciousness of racial injustice in the United States in his chapter "Coming to Terms with the Past: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery." This is an especially stimulating chapter because it seeks to grapple with a fundamental issue at the center of the racial present of the past in the US, namely the unrepaired injustice of slavery. To his credit, McCarthy is one among a small number of philosophers who in recent years have tried to think through the moral justification of reparations for slavery.⁵ His reflections are inspired by the German historians' debate of the mid-1980s about the significance of the Nazi past for the German present. It was urged by some that it was time to put the Nazi past behind them, that to continue to dwell on that past "served no better purpose than self-flagellation" (100). Famously, Habermas (among others) took a strong position *against* this view, arguing that there was an obligation "to keep alive, without distortion, and not only in intellectual form, the memory of the sufferings of those who were murdered by German hands," or else "our fellow Jewish citizens and the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of all those who were murdered would feel themselves unable to breathe in our country" (102-103). These are of course noble sentiments; but they are also central, I think, to McCarthy's idea of the role of history and objectivity (104) in shaping a responsible memory of the past: public memory of an unjust past is inseparable from the possibility of a progressive orientation to the future. And the lesson

McCarthy takes away from this debate in Germany is that "the politics of memory practiced there since the 1960s has had a profound effect upon political culture and national identity" (107). His aim is to use this example to gain some perspective on the problem of the historical consciousness of slavery in the US.

Now, central to McCarthy's account of the dismal state of the historical consciousness of slavery in the US is his idea that it is only with the rise of the post-World War II civil rights movement that the hegemony of the pro-Southern, anti-black perspective on slavery (such as that of antebellum historian Ulrich B. Phillips who believed that plantation slavery helped to civilize the slaves) was finally undermined. In his sketch of the historiography of slavery over the first several decades of the twentieth century, McCarthy mentions the well-known fact that black historians dissented from this white supremacist picture of the slave past. He notes *en passant*, for example, that Carter G. Woodson's seminal *Journal of Negro History*, launched in 1916, provided an important venue for alternative perspectives on the past; and he also notes, again *en passant*, that during the inter-war years the work of black historians continued to be disregarded, including W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, published in 1935. But curiously, this does not signal to McCarthy that there may be another *moral-intellectual tradition* embodying the memory of slavery and the black experience of racial injustice more generally, another moral-intellectual space of (lay, perhaps, more than professional) writing and reading and debate, which may be indispensable to his story of the progress of the historical consciousness of slavery in the US—namely an African American one, that is not merely "marginalized in the profession by the white mainstream" (109) tradition, but is non-identical with it. For after all, Woodson's work (such as, *A Century of Negro Migration* [1918], *The Negro in Our History* [1922], *The Mind of the Negro* [1926], and *The Mis-Education of the Negro* [1933]), and Du Bois's work (including, *The*

Suppression of the African Slave Trade [1896], *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903], *The American Negro* [1928], and *Black Folk, Then and Now* [1939]), are not merely isolated instances of black dissent, nor merely attempts by black intellectuals to speak to the dominant tradition of American historiography. They are dense discursive moments in a moral-intellectual tradition of black historical consciousness about, among other things, precisely the slave past. They build on earlier work, George Washington Williams's *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* (1883), for example, and they have in turn been built upon by subsequent generations of African American historians and social critics.⁶

So when McCarthy writes that "Americans" are unaware that racism is "integral" to US history and identity the question is: to *whom* is he referring? *All* Americans? *Which* Americans take (and have historically taken) race for granted, and are "without a developed awareness of the sources and causes of US racialized practices and attitudes" (114)? Again, is it *all* Americans? Furthermore, what standard of American racial consciousness do McCarthy's formulations tacitly invoke? What powers of racial ignorance or racial denial are being avowed or misrecognized in these formulations? Something in other words is oddly askew in McCarthy's appraisal of the racial landscape of American historical consciousness. Is it perhaps truer to say that *some* Americans (largely *white* Americans) don't take seriously the historical *archive* of black historical writing (lay and professional) from the nineteenth century to the present, in which a rich and diverse consciousness of the historical past of slavery is constructed and argued over?

In order to activate this archive and the moral-intellectual tradition that constitutes it, however, one will need a somewhat different conception than McCarthy has of what it means to learn from the traditions of historical others. On McCarthy's view, remember, his well-windowed traditions

already have the basic resources they need to reconstruct themselves in such a way as to free themselves from racial presumption and the practices and institutions of racial injustice; all that is required, he says, is that they open themselves to contestation by their historical others. Evidently, nothing more stringent is required, nothing say more *actively* engaged, certainly nothing reciprocal (in the sense that Tully suggests), nothing that entails learning to hear the internal idioms of these historical others. By contrast, to practice a more receptive generosity (of the sort that Coles urges), is to practice a mode of giving to others that is simultaneously a mode of receiving from them, and thus to demand of one's intellectual traditions that they strive to enact precisely the labor of learning that might enable one to grasp something of the internal texture and hermeneutic preoccupations and perspectives of one's historical others. It is not enough to merely render oneself passively open to contestation by historical others. Rather, what is necessary, in the instance at hand, is to reconstruct the distinctive questions and answers that constitute the historical traditions through which African Americans have thought and argued about racial slavery and its contemporary implications for their sense of social and moral identity.⁷

III.

As is well-enough known, the story of the colonial project from the fifteenth century onwards is not only the story of the conquest of non-European peoples and the appropriation and exploitation of their lands and resources, it is also the story of the *justification* for this violation under the varied descriptions of enlightenment, civilization, progress, development, and modernization. These idioms of European (and later, American) self-congratulation were, as McCarthy says, "deployed to reduce the cognitive dissonance between liberal universalism and liberal imperialism" (166). I am going to focus my attention on the chapter of McCarthy's book in which this formulation appears because it seems to me to

throw into the starkest relief the stakes of his argument about empire and development—as well as its limits.

McCarthy does not believe that the empirical fact of their historical convergence means that imperialism is constitutive for liberalism.⁸ This view he thinks is at the center of the incoherence—or anyway, the error—of those he refers to, comprehensively, as “postcolonial” thinkers. They are the central target of this particular essay, which is organized to demonstrate, on the one hand, the dead-end of their objections, and on the other, that what he calls the “development dilemma” that grows out of the internal tension between liberalism’s universalism and its dependence on hierarchy “cannot be theoretically eliminated, but may be politically displaced to a predicament with which we have to come to terms” (166). Not surprisingly, for McCarthy it is Kant who first recognizes this dilemma in his distinction between a “moral-legal standpoint” from which Europe is denounced for its evils, and an “anthropological-historical standpoint” from which those evils are rationalized (169). Kant, McCarthy says in an exculpatory gesture, “lived with the tension because he believed he could not do otherwise” (170). At any rate, in the nineteenth century, the dilemma remains evident in the “de-sublimated atmosphere” of John Stuart Mill, in the tension between his pronounced value of liberal autonomy and the paternalism of his attitude toward non-European people (176). And of course it does not disappear in Marx, who, McCarthy argues, retains the virtue of holding on to both horns of the universalism versus developmentalism dilemma (178). It is in fact *this* that will separate him from “postcolonial” thinkers who, losing confidence in Marx’s revolutionary universalism, “have grabbed on to the other horn of the dilemma: morally condemning neoimperial relations while dismissing developmental theory as an ideology of empire” (178).

This direction, however, derived from varieties of anti-humanism, McCarthy regards as a complete dead-end. He sketches “two broad streams” of “postcolonial” theory (one stemming from Foucault, the other from Derrida) that pursue a type of criticism aimed principally at “resisting Eurocentrism” (183). But both these streams are found wanting because they seem unable to answer the basic question: “in the name of what are these modes of resistance, transgression, and subversion exercised?” (183). If, McCarthy maintains, this sort of critique is “not to end merely in parasitic forms of discursive dissolution and identification through opposition, it should provide some idea of possible alternatives to liberal and Marxist conceptions of development” (183). And since apparently they cannot do so without drawing precisely on *modern* conceptual frames of reference, the repressed returns and we are once again faced with the intractable horns of our developmental dilemma. Here, McCarthy mobilizes Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* to argue the view that we are in any case *all* moderns now and therefore even postcolonials cannot hope to think without European categories of thought.⁹ Consequently, in his view, we can do no better than to seek a path beyond the choice between “the ravages of neoliberal and neoconservative globalization, on the one side, and wholesale rejections of modernization, on the other” (184). And this leads McCarthy straight back to Habermas’s discourse theory of democracy with its internal principle of “reasoned agreement,” which in turn serves to underscore the originary virtues of Kant’s “reflective judgment.”

Now, it is true that postcolonial thinkers (by which *I* mean thinkers formed intellectually within discursive traditions that emerge in colonies and postcolonies) cannot escape modernity. This is an empirical fact—with an imperial history. But McCarthy, I think, draws a mistaken if familiar conclusion from it. For him this fact simply underlines his expectation that such thinkers as Chakrabarty are always-

already assimilated to the structure and sensibility of *his* moral-intellectual traditions, and are therefore seamlessly and transparently apprehensible to him from within them. Consequently McCarthy has no critical work to do to inquire upon, much less excavate, the genealogy of questions and answers that constitute any other moral-intellectual tradition relevant to Chakrabarty's thought. He cannot imagine, for example, that Chakrabarty inhabits the hegemony of the modern *differently* than he does, and does so precisely because Chakrabarty is partly constituted by, and is an active participant in, a non-European moral-intellectual tradition, one of whose nodal points is the work of Subaltern Studies. Indeed *this*, and not the banal fact of our modernity, is Chakrabarty's point: from the perspective of a modern, middle class, Bengali intellectual, he writes, European thought is *both* "indispensable and inadequate" for understanding India.¹⁰ In other words, the historical fact of his modernity does not simply translate into the normative force of its values. McCarthy doesn't imagine, then, that in order to take up *Provincializing Europe* in the affiliative way he aims to do, it is necessary to think the larger cognitive and normative problem-space of debates within which that book is an intervention. And were this undertaken it might of course lead to a useful contextualizing discussion, not only about relevant asymmetries between McCarthy's and Chakrabarty's "habitations of modernity"; but also about relevant divergences *within* Subaltern Studies itself concerning the meaning and implications of colonial modernity—the recognition, say, that Chakrabarty's sense of its measure might not be exactly shared, for example, by Partha Chatterjee in such work as *The Politics of the Governed*, or more recently in *Lineages of Political Society*.¹¹

In other words, postcolonial thinkers (like Chakrabarty and Chatterjee) are indeed modern insofar as they have *learned* to read and *think* in relation to the moral-intellectual traditions of Europe (and more lately, America); they have even learned

to *inhabit* these traditions almost as their own. But does this necessarily imply that their formations and habitations are *identical* with those traditions, or are interchangeable with their European or Euro-American contemporaries? Is the "narrative life" presupposed by those traditions self-evidently, unambivalently, theirs? Do their moral and intellectual traditions, however modern, have the same sources, cognitive structures, affective sensibilities, or orientations of address? It may be doubtful. So if postcolonial intellectuals have been obliged historically to learn to think inside of modern European and Euro-American moral-intellectual traditions, as indeed they have been, might it not be a reasonable expectation that Europeans and Euro-Americans *unlearn* the taken-for-granted privilege of their traditions and *learn* to think inside of the moral languages of their historical others, rather than merely seeking to assimilate them?

IV.

So when a distinguished philosopher such as Thomas McCarthy who has spent a remarkable scholarly career helping us to see the best of a certain strain of Continental critical theory *turns* to the historical world of racial and imperial injustice, we feel entitled to hold ourselves ready for a valuable lesson in method. But what is to be the *work* of method here? Very crucially, among other labors, it is the work of learning how to *listen*. It may be easy to forget that the story of race and empire in the modern world is not only the story of the making of discursive and non-discursive regimes of racial and colonial rule and representation, but also the story of *subjects*, constituted as racial and colonized others within these regimes, and who have sought in various intellectual ways to think through and argue about the origins, nature, and implications of their subordination. These arguments constitute the traditions of historical others. And therefore what matters, methodologically, as philosophy *turns* to this historical world, may not exactly – or at any rate,

may not *only*—be who vanquishes whom in the debate about the relative virtues of Habermas versus Foucault, or whether “liberal democracy” is to be the privileged direction of our political hope, but rather how Western philosophy (understood as a disciplinary dimension of a wider Euro-American discursive tradition) constructs a productive relationship with these traditions of its historical others. It is McCarthy, after all, who places this issue very squarely on the table—and happily so—when he provocatively raises the question of (or anyway avows his confidence in) the resources of *his* intellectual traditions in overcoming their implication in the history of racism and imperialism.

But if this is so everything must now hang on *how* this relationship is conceived, how one imagines a constructive dialogue among asymmetrically empowered intellectual traditions, or at least a dialogue in which one hegemonic intellectual tradition actively strives to hear and perhaps learn something from, not isolated texts assimilated into its own archive, but the sometimes barely translatable idiomatic debates that constitute the traditions of historical others. As I have suggested, among political philosophers James Tully has recently offered an attractive methodological way of beginning to think about this relationship or at least of setting it in conceptual motion, namely as a practice of “reciprocal elucidation” between academic philosophy and the reflective citizens who inhabit its wider discursive arena. This is certainly one way to activate the sort of receptive generosity that Romand Coles believes is missing from the otherwise well-intentioned stances adopted by contemporary moral philosophy—that is, activating a mode of giving to others that is also a mode of *receiving* from them. But on my view, in order to adequately receive what other traditions have to offer it may be that even this practice of generosity needs to be extended in such a way as to enable political philosophy to comprehend a reciprocal elucidation among moral and intellectual *traditions* thickly rather than thinly understood (in

ways suggested by MacIntyre, Gadamer, Asad, and Walzer). This is because moral and intellectual traditions (as indeed McCarthy implies about his own) embody more than merely haphazard relationships or points of view. To the contrary, they embody archives of formative debates, canons of interpretive practices, and interconnected styles of reasoning; they embody agonistically organized structures of authority, horizons of expectation, and animating memories—and these together help to shape a distinctive ethos and a distinctive way of inhabiting, comprehending, and engaging the historical world. And this means that the preoccupations and sensibilities of one moral-intellectual tradition are not *transparently* commensurable or interchangeable with the preoccupations and sensibilities of another. It requires a certain labor of learning how to read from *within* another tradition to determine what these are as moral and cognitive *languages*, and what sort of platform of translation and exchange needs to be constructed in order to effect a receptive dialogue with them.

¹ Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Hereafter all references are in the text.

² One is reminded here of Richard Rorty’s confidence in the “well-windowed monads” of Western liberal democracy. See his defense of an “anti-anti-ethnocentrism” in “On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz” *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Summer 1986): 525-34.

³ See Romand Coles, *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴ See James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key: volume 1, Democracy and Civic Freedom*, and *Public Philosophy in a New Key: volume 2, Imperialism and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵ See, for example, Janna Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002). McCarthy had explored this theme in two related earlier essays: "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery" *Political Theory* 30(2002): 623-648; and "Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery" *Political Theory* 32(2004): 750-772.

⁶ For a fine account of Williams, see John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁷ This is partly of course the debate about the "trauma" of the slave past and its shaping impact on the historical self-consciousness of an African American community. See Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and see also the argument that African Americans should abandon the preoccupation with the slave past in Charles Johnson, "The End of the Black American Narrative" *American Scholar* (Summer 2008): 32-42.

⁸ Oddly, McCarthy gives as one reason for this view the fact that "critiques advanced by anticolonial liberals have typically appealed to liberal values" (169). But why should this familiar fact about anticolonial political ideology undermine the structural interconnectedness of liberalism and imperialism?

⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). McCarthy is quoting from the introduction of this book: "The Idea of Provincializing Europe."

¹⁰ Chakrabarty, *ibid.*, "Introduction: The Idea of Provincializing Europe," 6. See also, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹¹ I am thinking in particular of the concept of "political society" that Chatterjee develops in these books: *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University

Press, 2011). Does this concept merely express Chatterjee's idea that he cannot escape political modernity? McCarthy cites Chatterjee in a footnote (184, fn. 28) as though he offered merely "another version" of Chakrabarty's "line of thought" about the inescapableness of modernity in his earlier book, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). But readers of that book will well remember how Chatterjee takes Benedict Anderson to task for precisely this assumption that the modern hegemonizes "even our imaginations" (*The Nation*, 5).

Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy

Volume 8, number 1. Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

**On the Very Idea of Development: Reflections on Thomas
McCarthy's *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human
Development***

Lorenzo C. Simpson

Harriman Hall 233

Philosophy Department

Stony Brook University

Stony Brook, NY 11794-3750

Lorenzo.Simpson@stonybrook.edu

Agency and political amnesia

Central among the themes of McCarthy's powerful performative display of Critical Theory's continuing relevance is the claim that the requirements of global justice must include sustained attention to the repair of the "harmful effects of past injustice." One way of pursuing what he aptly calls the "politics of public memory" in which a critical theory of global development must engage is to address the hysteretic effects of both racial discrimination at home and colonialism abroad. By 'hysteretic effect,' I refer, to

appropriate a particularly apt term from physics, to situations where physical systems have a "memory," situations where consequences of a set of causal conditions persist well after the initiating conditions have changed, as if the past state of the system were still present. Often, corresponding to the system's "memory" is a political amnesia. Symptomatic of our public amnesia regarding matters of race is the neo-conservatives' well-known "culture of poverty thesis," and in the global arena, the invocation of "dysfunctional cultural values" of "underdeveloped" societies (Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009], pp.10, 119). In challenging the claim of neoracists that social pathology is the independent variable in accounting for social wretchedness, McCarthy suggests that social structures and processes, on the one hand, and psychological and cultural patterns, on the other, should rather be understood as being reciprocally related (McCarthy, p. 11). This is a point with which I strongly agree and would like here to develop a bit further.

The expression "culture of poverty" is a signifier for a weakness of culture and character that manifests itself as an agency deficit, a deficit conceived of either as a) a values deficit and/or as b) a volitional deficit, understood as a lack of discipline, self-control and so on. I shall first address briefly the thesis of value deficit. In an article entitled "The Moral Quandary of the Black Community," a prominent spokesperson for this view deployed the formulation "values, social norms and personal behavior observed among the poorest members of the black community" (emphasis mine).¹ However, unlike behavior, values are not observables in any straightforward sense. In order to gain access to an agent's values we must enter a hermeneutic circle, wherein the relationship between values and behavior is acknowledged to be mediated by the cognitive representations agents hold about socially available avenues of action.

This might lead us to question, for example, social-psychological studies such as those that purport to establish differential attitudes towards immediate gratification exhibited by poor black children as compared to whites. Is the unwillingness of the poor black children to forego a prize in the present in order to receive one of somewhat greater value in a specified future testimony to a culture of hedonism? Or is it rather an instance of pragmatic behavior predicated upon the rationally acquired belief that the system cannot be trusted to deliver, that is predicated upon the absence of a basis for hope? As I have argued elsewhere, it is the failure of neoconservative thinkers to acknowledge this and to *assume*, as opposed to hermeneutically demonstrate, such value differentials that underwrites their assertions to the effect that behavior regarded as dysfunctional within the global-capitalist system can be attributed to deficient values.

Next, I would like to try to complicate a bit the way in which we are typically inclined to think of agency. It is natural enough to think of agency as the capacity to produce an effect or to bring about a state of affairs. But often, if not always, what I shall now call first-order capacities are conditioned by capacities of the second order, capabilities that enable or condition the exercise of capacities of the first order. I find it useful to think of second-order agency as the ability to acquire or avail oneself of the enabling or facilitating conditions of agency in the first-order sense. I think that an example of Locke's can be turned to my purposes here. I have in mind the situation of a person who is put into a cell and is led to believe, falsely, that all the doors are locked.² The person who is put into a cell and convinced that all of the doors are locked (when in fact, one is left unlocked) is objectively, from a third-person standpoint, able to leave the cell. But because he cannot--given his information--avail himself of this opportunity, his ability to perambulate where he pleases is limited. In other words, because the second-order capacity of being able to avail himself of knowledge

regarding the doors was lacking, he was not in a position to exercise his first-order capacity to walk out. To take another example, knowing that one needs, and having the ability to gain access to, a quiet place to study can condition one's success in completing a project requiring uninterrupted concentration. If the conditions for second order agency--conditions whose satisfaction most of us can take for granted--are blocked for some due to structural features of society that are beyond their control, then it is unjust to demand, and unfair to expect, the same exercise of first order agency from them that we would expect from those of us who are more favorably positioned.

In his study's conclusion, McCarthy alludes to a tension that is subtended in our current global context of a growing transnational solidarity around a "politics of human rights" and a deepening consensus about a "human rights culture," namely, a tension or conflict between two dominant interpretations of human rights (McCarthy, p. 235). Developed societies tend to emphasize civil and political rights, while those regarded as developing societies tend to emphasize social and economic rights. This tension, he says, exerts a countervailing pressure which prevents a sufficient overlapping consensus on the extension of 'human rights' to allow for even reasonable disagreement on the interpretation or application of the idea. That would be to say, proponents of the competing interpretations would, in some important sense, be talking past one another.

One of the justifications for my having adduced what I have called second-order agency is to provide a means of mediating these two horizons of interpretation. Attention to economic and social rights is a moral-political obligation because it is a condition of agency, of the ability to exercise civil and political rights. I wonder whether McCarthy would assent to this emendation of his position.

In this section, I have briefly alluded to the importance of a hermeneutic sensitivity to the contexts in which differently situated social agents find themselves. In the next section, I exploit the potential of hermeneutics with the aim of responding to McCarthy's expressed worry that, in a culturally diverse global society, his cosmopolitan hopes for global justice might run the risk of being construed as yet another incarnation of Western normative imperialism.

Modernity and its "others"

As far as I can tell, McCarthy does not offer a full-blown *philosophical* argument for the ineluctable status of cultural modernity. He instead takes the latter as a "fact," though an inescapable one. When McCarthy invokes a phrase often associated with Bruno Latour and claims that "we are now all moderns in an important sense," I found myself a bit puzzled by the modality of his claim (McCarthy, p. 233). Are we merely contingently modern, necessarily modern, in some sense, or what? Is modernization a matter of functional exigency, of quasi-transcendental necessity? Now, to be sure, certain aspects of *cultural* modernity do seem to be cognitively irreversible. For example, the disenchantment and associated reflexivity that Weber diagnosed as symptomatic of modernity does seem irrevocable and irreversible; we cannot go back on the historicist enlightenment that led to the postmetaphysical view wherein there are *multiple contexts* of world-disclosure, each making a *hypothetical* validity claim (McCarthy, p. 222). And other aspects, such as the learning processes institutionalized in modern science, do seem to be asymmetrical achievements in problem-solving ability that we could relinquish only with loss. I find this argument from the inescapable fact of modernity generally persuasive. But, of course, Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, to which McCarthy is generally quite sympathetic, was motivated in part to combat the potential for nihilism and the one-sided

view of rationality that would be encouraged by *this* legacy of modernity. In commenting on Habermas' strategies of argumentation for his position, at least the position that Habermas held in the 80's, that "the ability to act communicatively...and to reason argumentatively and reflectively about disputed validity claims is a developmental-logically advanced stage of species-wide competencies, the realization and completion of potentialities that are universal to humankind," McCarthy notes with approval Habermas' move away from the more *a prioristic* forms of transcendental argumentation towards more empirically informed, and hence in principle defeasible, styles of rational reconstruction (see Thomas McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's 'Overcoming of Hermeneutics'," in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, eds. J.B. Thompson and David Held [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982] pp. 66f). However, McCarthy went on to raise questions, mainly from two directions, about this rationally reconstructive defense of a model of communicative action that claims to capture *universal* conditions of understanding, *general* and *unavoidable* presuppositions of communicative action. First he questioned the adequacy of the empirical bases of the reconstruction, as it made appeal to disputable studies of cognitive and moral development (McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," pp. 68-75). Here he warned us to adopt an attitude of suspicion towards construing practices in other cultures as exhibiting a more or less deficient mastery of our competencies rather than as expressing mastery of a different set of skills altogether" (McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," p. 70). Second, McCarthy pointed out that meta-ethical disputes about the most adequate styles of moral reasoning, be it contractarianism, utilitarianism, 'justice as fairness,' or communicative ethics itself, can be settled only by what I would call hermeneutic dialogue, where there presumably could exist reasonable disagreement (McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," pp. 74-75).

I briefly rehearse this “intellectual biography” of McCarthy’s to set the premise for the puzzlement on my part. The move from 1) issuing cautionary reminders in the 80’s with respect to Habermas’ rational reconstructive justification of the universality of communicative action: “we should guard against faulting *them* for not doing *our* tricks well” to 2) we are all moderns now, so 3) we’re all trying, or perhaps should be trying, to perform the same sort of tricks, is interesting to me. I assert 3) because something like it is presupposed by non-question begging claims about advance. A claim to progress or of “developmental advance” (McCarthy, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development*, p. 162) implies the existence of *mutually* identified problems that are seen to be handled more satisfactorily by “theoretical matrix₂” at time t_2 than by “theoretical matrix₁” at time t_1 . Do all cultures have to acknowledge the same “certain range of problems” (McCarthy, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development*, p. 161)? McCarthy seems more sanguine now about answering this in the affirmative than he did earlier. I am curious about the trajectory of *his* evolution. My guess is that growing interconnectedness has made it true *de facto*. But I would be interested in McCarthy’s explicit account of the route that got him from 1) to 3).

I would like to end by suggesting further reasons to persist in the hope that McCarthy so movingly articulates. I believe that we can make intelligible a non-question-begging criterion of developmental advance, i.e., a criterion that does justice to cultural difference, and therefore one that strongly couples the acknowledgment of multiculturalism to a commitment to social justice. I refer here in particular to McCarthy’s worry, expressed at the end of his book, about postcolonial objections to the “imposition of normative standards developed in the West.” I would like to point to two ways in which there may be structures that would allow *internal* normative pressure to do the critical work that the “imposition of normative standards developed in the West”

would otherwise do (McCarthy, *Race, Empire*, p. 243). These are, I would claim then, two bases for confidence that we can navigate successfully between the Scylla of arrogant cultural imperialism and the Charybdis of impotent cultural relativism.

Differently cultured others operate with an *ideal* of themselves wherein their actions can, if challenged in ways that are understandable to them, be held accountable to *reasons* that have a non-parochial purchase. Conspicuous here is a dimension of rationality that has a transcultural or culturally-invariant purchase, what I call second-order rationality. “Second-order rationality” refers to the inclination that we are entitled to impute to everyone to reform their practices in the direction of more rationality when their lack of rationality is pointed out to them in terms with which they are conversant. This dimension of rationality, which can be deployed to critical effect in scientific experimental design, in the interpretation of sacred texts, as well as in the interpretation of political constitutions, has, I would argue, a context-invariant status. Further, it implies that we can--without appealing to anything beyond the matrices of intelligibility, standards of rationality, and/or central vocabulary of any particular epistemic community or cultural group--intelligibly mark a distinction between what even everyone in a particular epistemic community *happens* to believe and what is, by their *own* lights, *reasonable* for them to believe, a distinction, moreover, that should command *their* attention. To *convince* someone of the questionability of their practices is *ipso facto* to provide them with a *reason* to consider alternatives.

The cross-cultural commitment to second-order rationality implies that social agents must, even if only pre-reflectively or implicitly, *anticipate* a relationship among their aims, beliefs and practices whose rational coherence differently situated others (including cultural “outsiders”) could also appreciate.

This gives members of a cultural tradition an optic for recognizing and acknowledging what could be problems *for them*. So a critical outsider is fully entitled to view others as being eligible, and in a way that begs no questions, to accept the burden of rational critique. In this sense, social agents, however implicitly, anticipate a dialogical confirmation of their rationality, granting an opening to potential critics.

I conclude my reflections with a brief sketch of a second way in which critical work can be done without the *imposition* of normative standards. Here I wish to make a case for a sort of conversational practice that can lay claim to being a genuine “development practice,” and I shall illustrate it with primary reference to the practice of female genital cutting or excision, a practice that is pursued, often with the apparent consent of women themselves, in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Now, to be sure, while the existence of such a practice is clearly a matter of intrinsic significance, I am not here claiming that the fact of its existence is the main problem faced by these societies. Focusing on it, however, is useful for illustrating how resources for critique can be unearthed when careful attention is paid to the *autonomously* voiced preferences and concerns of those local cultural agents who are affected by such a practice, resources whose critical potential can be redeemed independently of any one-sided imposition of “Western” standards.

We begin by reminding ourselves that cultures are not seamless wholes, that, in the words of one observer: “[s]ince a culture’s system of beliefs and practices, the locus of its identity, is constantly contested, subject to change, and does not form a coherent whole, its identity is never settled, static and free of ambiguity.”³ And further, as a United Nations report on justice and gender indicates: “the history of internal contestation reinforces [the premise] that cultures are not monolithic, are always in the process of *interpretation* and *re-interpretation*, and never immune to change.”⁴ These

statements are consistent with my view that cultural identity is a cluster concept in that few if any beliefs or professions of value, taken singly, are essential to such an identity. Cultural identity, then, need not be construed as being *identical* to one’s *prevailing* purposes, goals and projects; cultures are in general sites of conflicting interpretations. If we further concede, as I have argued elsewhere we must, that the distinction between *intra*-cultural hermeneutic dialogue and *inter*-cultural hermeneutic dialogue is a matter of degree, not kind, then we should expect to find *within* many cultures traces of the tensions that we are more accustomed to noticing between them.⁵ Consistent with this, it can be argued that many intercultural normative disagreements can be productively analyzed as *intracultural* conflicts.⁶ Consider in this regard some of the conversations about genital cutting that are now taking place, in real time, in a number of societies where it has been traditionally practiced. In the African country of Mali, for example, they are pursued under the indigenous auspices of the COFESFA Women’s Association and other NGOs. These conversations highlight the physical and emotional consequences of the ritual, the plurivocity of the cultural narratives deployed to justify the practice, and the patriarchal interests that it serves. And, though of course there are no guarantees, given that these conversations seek to engage opinion leaders and take place among both men and women in local communities, they may give rise to proposals that will be candidates for the sort of general social recognition or semantic authority that can foster cultural re-interpretation.⁷ It is useful to think of these conversations as a component of the within-group struggle to expand the moral imaginary by persuading members of dominant social groups to acknowledge the semantic authority of claims put forth by others. Indeed, such community-based discussion, sponsored by a NGO in Kenya (the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization), has in some cases led to the implementation of alternative non-invasive rituals marking female rites of passage in local communities

(Maendeleo Ya Wanawake [2000] 'FGM--advocacy strategy for the eradication of female genital mutilation in Kenya', [<http://www.maendeleo-ya-wanake.org/>]. Accessed March 25, 2011). And similar developments are occurring in Senegal. It is worth noting that in the Senegalese case, where the issue of genital cutting was explicitly raised by Senegalese women themselves, care was taken in the discussion of this issue to avoid descriptors such as "barbaric" and other potentially question-begging cognates that would invidiously pre-judge the issue (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/world/africa/movement-to-end-genital-cutting-spreads-in-senegal.html>).

What lessons can we draw from these examples, highlighting as they do the agency of local groups? Given that cultures are not monolithic, homogeneous wholes such that none of their component parts--beliefs and practices-- can be altered without loss of integrity, it behooves us to be wary of taking at face value any *single* narrative purporting to capture definitively a culture's identity. This suggests that we be attentive to ways in which cultural identity claims may be reified products. Categorically asserted cultural identity claims can be understood to be reified products in at least two ways: they may disingenuously veil strategic orientations, and they may belie conflicting interpretations of a culture's identity-defining structures, the fact that cultural identity is best seen as a cluster concept.⁸ Cultural identity claims should not then be given carte blanche to function in such a way as to immunize practices from critical examination. The operating assumption behind the conversational practice that I am here proposing, "counterfactual narrative critique," is that cultural agents can be encouraged to consider social possibilities that, while currently unrealized, might actually be preferred by them, social possibilities whose realization is suppressed not because such realization would offend against all intelligible interpretations of cultural identity, but rather primarily because it would offend against particular vested interests.

For this reason, then, we should be on the lookout for interpretations of cultural identity that operate as cloaks or ideological veils concealing prudential interest-based concerns.⁹

There may be signs that would trigger such a "hermeneutics of suspicion," signs such as observed conflicts between speech and behavior, conflicts of interest within the culture, observed indices of perceived or actual power asymmetries between interlocutors within the culture, and so on.¹⁰ But what if, as is not infrequently the case with female excision, there is no overt contestation of what seem to us problematic cultural practices? The *appearance* of asymmetrical or invidious treatment of identifiable demographic groups can serve to trigger hypotheses about the real interests implicated and about whether or not the interests of all cultural members converge in the way that prevailing cultural identity claims implicitly assert that they do. It is useful here to consider a suggestion made by Habermas, indeed one that I have myself criticized in another context.¹¹

I make the methodological assumption that it is meaningful and possible to reconstruct (even for the normal case of norms recognized without conflict) the *hidden* interest positions of involved individuals or groups by counterfactually imagining the limit case of a conflict between the involved parties in which they would be forced to consciously perceive their interests and strategically assert them, instead of satisfying basic interests simply by actualizing institutional values as is normally the case.¹² (Italics mine)

My suggestion here is that we treat Habermas' comments as pertaining to what philosophy of science was wont to call the context of generation, the context within which hypotheses are proposed. Central now is the question, How can we "test" these hypotheses concerning suppressed interests? Habermas makes reference to the possibility of indirect

empirical confirmation based upon predictions about conflict motivations.¹³ However, I want here to emphasize the extent to which the suspicion of potential dissensus can be *hermeneutically* redeemed (or, for that matter, falsified). The reasoning behind the ascription of a potentially hidden interest can, indeed should, be a collaborative, dialogical project, one involving those whose interests are in question. With regard to the question of female excision, this means the affected and potentially affected women, whose perspective would be articulated under conditions that I describe below.

As an explicit *stylization* of the sorts of question that might, whether implicitly or explicitly, underlie such a dialogical engagement, capture its critical intent, and perhaps thereby prompt some of the processes of cultural self-reinterpretation alluded to above, I suggest the following. When encountering some form of the practice of excision or genital cutting, a witness, whether sharing cultural membership with the affected women or not, might initiate conversations of a particular sort with them, conversations guided by the basic question: Armed with the knowledge of the all too likely physical and emotional consequences of the procedure, if the connection between undergoing the procedure (or the procedure in the concrete form that it now assumes) and your chances for flourishing in your society were virtualized, if that connection could be severed, would you still choose to undergo the procedure?¹⁴ This is the sort of question that could be raised in the conversational modality that I refer to as counter-factual narrative critique, a modality that, if practiced within a society, illustrates the plausibility of non-question-begging, non-invidiously ethnocentric, critical perspectives on practices within cultural formations that are not our own.¹⁵

Non-question-begging conversations with affected social agents --in "safe" spaces providing immunity from the threat of unfavorable repercussions-- aimed at eliciting fundamental

or overriding interests (interests which, for the agent herself, may not be readily apparent and may require varying degrees of introspection) can be initiated.¹⁶ Woven into such a conversation might well be discussions in which the agent is encouraged to engage in an imaginative variation of possible conditions on the realization of those interests; these are the virtualizations of counter-factual narrative critique. This would entail consideration of scenarios in which the linkage between succumbing to the procedure of excision in the form that it currently assumes and being able to realize those interests is gradually severed. These counterfactual narrative scenarios may range from replacing cliteridectomy with lesser forms of mutilation, to a ritualized symbolic circumcision consisting of a small cut on the external genitalia performed under medical supervision and hygienic conditions, all the way to nothing at all.¹⁷ If the agent, upon reflection, expresses a genuine *preference* for situations wherein her interests-- chances for marriage and other important forms of social recognition, for example-- and *foregoing* the procedure were jointly realizable, then this would count as her opting out of the putative "consensus." At the very least, we could say that a discussion that is informed by a consideration of these alternatives is more autonomously pursued--and that a life that is led in an awareness of them is more lucidly lived--than one which is not. This would be a means of conversationally interrogating the reasonableness of socio-cultural configurations wherein women are faced with the forced choice between flourishing and bodily integrity, are confronted with the demand to choose "mutilation" or face "social death." My aim here is to try to capture some of our intuitions about the criterial conditions for the exercise of genuine autonomous agency. And minimally that involves the agent's *informed endorsement* of what she does.

It might be objected that this conception of autonomy is too demanding to be of critical use, for none of us chooses all of our choices. Many of them are "thrust" upon us because of

the nature of things or in situations that we would uncontroversially regard as “normal conditions.” Everyone faces disjunctive situations not of their choosing. But some face situations of this sort that others do not, and do so for reasons that are more contingent than necessary, more “contrived” than “natural.” The critical purchase of the concept of the restriction of autonomy takes as its background what someone would otherwise--absent arbitrary constraint--be capable of doing. The asymmetrical arrangement wherein one determinate group of mature agents must exercise a choice within a dichotomous or disjunctive framework--e.g., one structured by the alternatives of flourish or retain bodily integrity, but not both-- while others are exempt from facing such a dilemma may be an arrangement that may well serve the interests of those who are exempt. This is sufficient to question the rational warrant of this arrangement and therefore to suspect the arbitrary, i.e., *unreasonably* limited, and, hence, *criticizable* nature of the framework for choice for those who are constrained by it. It is important to note that this dialogical method of critique requires no *wholesale* opposition to the actual options and choices of action available to, and sustained by, a given culture. It is attuned more to the nature of the *distribution* of those social options and choices. And what about those cases where, after such a conversation, some persist in holding to the view that such a ritualized procedure has an identity-constitutive character which is itself of overriding value? Consistent with the dialogical nature of the enterprise that I am here proposing, such a response may ultimately have to be acknowledged as a “falsifying” event. Prior to such acknowledgment, however, and given the heterogeneous constitution of culture, our questioning can be broadened to ask, Given the likely physical and emotional harms of undergoing such a procedure, whose interest is served by the perpetuation of the practice? Given the conceived alternatives that our discussion has brought to mind, and in light of the hypothesis that the restricted alternatives in terms of which you originally chose

were promulgated in the interest, or implicitly served the interests, of some as opposed to others, would you now *endorse*, in the sense of voluntarily choose, what you would have chosen before?

As a way of summarizing the significance of the analyses that I offer above, but with reference to a different locus of cultural identity, I refer to some of Akeel Bilgrami’s reflections on Muslim identity. Bilgrami, a philosopher who is himself Muslim, has argued that being a Muslim is not necessarily to accept the strategic framing of one’s identity put forward by some of one’s fundamentalist co-religionists;¹⁸ such an identity can be critically reconfigured. He points out that Muslim communities are defined by competing values, of which Islam is one and, further, that Islamic identity is itself negotiable. He goes on to make the point that given the spectrum of positions actually occupied by members of Muslim communities, such critical pressure need not necessarily be viewed as an ethnocentric, imperialistic imposition from the outside, but that rather it can be applied from the inside, where there are indigenous resources and aspirations that can fuel *internal* processes of critical response.¹⁹ I am curious to know what McCarthy’s response would be to the proposal that I have offered in this section for a way to avoid a potentially dilemmatic opposition of an arrogant imperialism to an impotent relativism.

NOTES

¹ Glenn Loury, “The Moral Quandary of the Black Community,” *The Public Interest* 75 (Spring 1985): 19.

² See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II. Xxi.10.

³ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), p. 148.

⁴ "Gender, Justice, Development and Rights," Report of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Workshop (2000), cited in Deveaux; emphasis mine.

⁵ See my *The Unfinished Project: Toward a Postmetaphysical Humanism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 105, 109-10, 112.

⁶ See, for example, Monique Deveaux, "A Deliberative Approach to Conflicts of Culture," *Political Theory* 31 (Dec. 2003): 780-807.

⁷ I have discussed the concept of semantic authority in my *The Unfinished Project*, pp. 110-111; and in my "Humanism and Cosmopolitanism after '68," *New Formations* 65 (2008): 57-58, 64-65.

⁸ On the latter, see my *The Unfinished Project*, pp. 91-92.

⁹ Deveaux, p. 788.

¹⁰ On the occasion of a seminar that he offered at the Humanities Institute at SUNY Stony Brook on September 9, 1999, I understood the cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo to offer the following methodological advice in response to a question that I put to him concerning strategic representation: one should in the first instance take what is said at face value, but be prepared to question it when, for instance, conversations with others seem to contradict it or when the respondent's own behavior seems to belie what s/he has said. Then go on to hazard interpretive projections of the form, "what would be the case if what the 'informant' has said is true? or false?" Then, making the process recursive, return to engage the interlocutor in a confirmatory or disconfirmatory dialogue informed by what one has learned.

¹¹ See my "On Habermas and Particularity: Is there Room for Race and Gender on the Glassy Plains of Ideal Discourse?" *Praxis International* 6 (1986): 338.

¹² Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 114.

¹³ Habermas, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The health implications of female genital cutting have been well-documented. See, for example, United Nations, *Human Rights Fact Sheet 23: Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children*, Geneva: United Nations, 1995 (cited in Sheldon and Wilkinson).

¹⁵ Here I am not concerned to address the putative inconsistency or hypocrisy of Western objections to such practices while apparently tolerating potentially dangerous forms of cosmetic surgery aimed at increasing sexual desirability (see Sally Sheldon and Stephen Wilkinson, "Female Genital Mutilation and Cosmetic Surgery: Regulating Non-Therapeutic Body Modification," *Bioethics* 12 (1998): 263-285). I am concerned to elaborate mechanisms for critical response to such practices that are untethered to "Western" views.

¹⁶ The idealization implied in the notion of "safe" spaces is deployed in the defense of the meta-ethical claim that non-question-begging, critical cross-cultural conversations can be meaningfully held. It does not address the equally important political question of how such spaces are to be created, maintained and respected as sources of proposals that are treated as candidates for semantic authority, that is, as candidates for general social recognition and acknowledgment.

¹⁷ On this spectrum of procedures, see Anna Elisabetta Galeotti's "Relativism, Universalism, and Applied Ethics: The Case of Female Circumcision," *Constellations* 14 (March 2007): 91-111.

¹⁸ Akeel Bilgrami, "What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 821-842.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 823 and Akeel Bilgrami, "Rushdie, Islam, and Postcolonial Defensiveness," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 4 (1990): 301-311.

Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy

Volume 8, number 1. Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

Historical Knowledge as Civic Obligation A Comment on McCarthy

JACK TURNER

Department of Political Science

Box 353530

University of Washington

Seattle, Washington 98195

jturner3@uw.edu

“Historical unconsciousness of institutional racism in the past feeds unconscious neoracism in the present,” argues Thomas McCarthy—speaking specifically of the United States (2009, 89). Similarly, historical unconsciousness of the West’s imperial domination and exploitation of nonwhite peoples from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries feeds disavowed neoimperialism in the present. McCarthy’s *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* is an impassioned plea for Americans and Westerners to develop greater historical consciousness at the national and global levels. We must learn to see ourselves (partly) as creatures of historical process—as individuals whose opportunities for freedom and self-development are (largely) historically pre-determined. The

reward, however, is an enhanced ability to practice freedom—for historical consciousness makes us more intelligent co-creators of the present and future.

Calls for greater historical consciousness are commonplace in critical race theory, but what sets McCarthy’s work apart is his detailed specification of how historical understanding can illuminate contemporary political phenomena. The most impressive example of this specification is his genealogy of cultural racism. In both the introduction and Chapter 3, McCarthy exposes the contemporary American tendency to explain racial inequality as resulting from nonwhite behavior dysfunction as the historical and ideological offspring of biological racism:

The discourses in the US about ‘the culture of poverty’ in the 1960s and 1970s, and about the ‘socially dysfunctional behavior’ of the ‘underclass’ since the 1980s . . . are instances of a general pattern of ethnoracial thinking in social science and social policy. . . . It is, of course, a much debated question whether this shift from biology to culture amounts to the end of racism or to the rise of a new modality. . . . [F]rom the perspective of critical theory, to regard it as the end of racism is not only to ignore the historical continuity of these discourses with classical racist ideologies . . . it is also to occlude the basic structural similarities cultural racism bears to biological racism. . . . Perhaps the most striking continuity, however, is that this variant logic is generally applied to *the same basic subdivisions of humanity that were socially constructed in and through classical racism* (10-11—emphasis in original; cf. 86-87).

Perceiving the essential continuity between biological and cultural racism requires the historical long view: the discourse of cultural racism must be set against the background of its

antecedents. Only then can we see “the basic structural similarities” between them and appreciate their identical function: to justify racial inequality and discourage the impulse to eliminate it.

McCarthy is equally astute in his explanation of the importance of historical consciousness in the analysis of global inequality:

Centuries of expropriation, extermination, enslavement, and empire, which were part and parcel of the rise of capitalism in the West, left its beneficiaries with vastly more power than its victims to set the ground rules of postcolonial global order. The laws and conventions, treaties and organizations, procedures and institutions that constitute this order tend to systematically advantage the already advantaged and disadvantage the already disadvantaged (236).

The historical long view dramatically exposes the glib self-congratulation inhering in the West’s use of the idea of “dysfunctional cultural values” to explain non-Western “underdevelopment” (11). McCarthy’s book recurrently poses a penetrating question: How can the white West so nonchalantly assume it has purged itself of white supremacy when its political behavior still reinforces the same basic structure of white power / nonwhite powerlessness that characterized overtly white supremacist regimes?¹ What justifies the assumption that mid-twentieth-century American civil rights gains and formal African and Asian decolonization constitutes the end of white supremacist history, the moral catharsis that reestablishes American and Western innocence? The presumption, McCarthy argues, should be essential continuity rather than seismic change. The burden of proof should be on white Americans and the white West to show themselves divested of white supremacy, rather

than on nonwhite Americans and the nonwhite non-West to show that they still suffer from white supremacy’s systemic effects. Shifting the burden of proof will require us to reimagine “[e]xploitation, expropriation, dispossession, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism” as “central mechanisms” of American and Western historical development rather than as “accidental byproducts” (226). Making this imaginative shift stick will require citizens to immerse themselves in history from the nonwhite point of view.

For this reason, I read McCarthy as making historical knowledge a robust obligation of American and global citizenship.² I say historical *knowledge* rather than the more general historical *consciousness* because it seems to me that there are some strong substantive parameters on the type of history McCarthy wants citizens to learn. First, McCarthy wants Americans and Westerners to face up to the fact that our historical understanding is strongly differentiated by subject position. How history looks from the perspective of white and Western affluence differs markedly from how it looks from the perspective of nonwhite and non-Western poverty. Neither side has a complete view of history, though I suspect that McCarthy sympathizes with standpoint theorists who claim that the views of the exploited and oppressed penetrate deeper into reality. Second, McCarthy wants the historically privileged to reread history from the perspective of the historically oppressed. This re-reading should be more than exposure to tales of woe: the historically privileged must imagine how experiences of exploitation, expropriation, dispossession, slavery, and imperialism frustrated—often annihilated—the attempts of human agents to practice freedom and realize their own visions of the good. Only then will the gravity of the injustice and loss, and the need for political atonement, fully register.³ Third, citizens must synthesize new local and national histories into a systemic understanding of modernity as fundamentally constituted by

white supremacy. This understanding must be more than abstract: it requires a grasp of the interconnections between the birth of the nation-state, the conquest of the Americas, the rise of Atlantic slavery, the evolution of Western capitalism, the economics of resource extraction, and the emergence of neoracist and neocolonial regimes in the aftermath of formal emancipation and decolonization.

McCarthy captures the tight connection between historical knowledge and political judgment when he urges his fellow citizens of the United States and the West to “become more fully aware of the barbarism at the heart of our own civilizing process”:

In the wake of the horrors associated with World War II, Europeans seem to have learned some of these lessons, as their movement toward the postnational constellation of the European Union suggests. But the United States, spared the wartime devastation of its homeland and emerging as the only remaining great power, has, it seems, yet to learn most of them, as the Vietnam and Iraq invasions indicate. Together with our anomalous policies on trade, development, energy, environment, ‘preemption,’ unilateralism, and a host of other things, they suggest that national false consciousness and self-righteousness have scarcely abated (231-232).

McCarthy here advances Lawrie Balfour’s and George Shulman’s claim that “American innocence” is not just a literary motif, but a historically entrenched form of political subjectivity whose consequences are real and deadly (Balfour 2001; Shulman 2008). The question he raises indirectly, however, is whether America must experience self-destruction on the scale of World War II and the Holocaust before critical historical consciousness can take hold.

To this last question, McCarthy wants to say no. We “cannot deny the evident advance of human learning in numerous domains and the enhancement of our capacity to cope with a variety of problems” (233).⁴ Here I want to press McCarthy. I am not as sure that vanquishing innocence—in the American case at least—is a “rational hope.” “Americans, unhappily, have the most remarkable ability to alchemize all bitter truths into an innocuous but piquant confection and to transform their moral contradictions, or public discussion of such contradictions, into a proud decoration,” observed James Baldwin ([1955] 1998, 24). The recent erection of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial on the National Mall illustrates Baldwin’s claim. In one respect, the nation’s official tribute to King is a sign of moral progress. America has officially embraced one of its sternest critics as a hero. But which King is the nation embracing? The selection of King quotations on the inscription wall suggests a sanitized version, depleted of substantive critique. Though one of the quotations records his opposition to the Vietnam War—“I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America”—even it is enveloped in patriotic affirmation. Most others, shorn of original context, do not rise above cliché: “I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits”; “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”; “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice” (Wikipedia 2011). Absent are King’s calls for a national policy of full employment and a guaranteed annual income (King [1967b] 1986, 247). Absent also are his more searing indictments of Western capitalism: “When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered” (King [1967a] 1986, 240). Even the official review from the *Washington Post*—hardly a bastion of critical theory—remarked that “the memorial is focused on the anodyne, pre-1965 King, the man

remembered as a saintly hero of civil rights, not an anti-war goad to the national conscience whose calls for social and economic justice would be considered rank socialism in today's political climate" (Kennicott 2011). The King memorial validates Baldwin's thesis that Americans are uncanny in their ability to fold any critical discussion of history into a story of self-redemption. The King memorial gives comfort to proponents of inexorable moral progress, prominently featuring his statement (again shorn of context) that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" (Wikipedia 2011).

My critique of McCarthy's suggestion that the development of critical historical consciousness among the American public is a "rational hope" is not meant to discourage his or anyone else's efforts to cultivate such consciousness. I simply wish to reframe the object's pursuit in more accurate terms: as one of what Cornel West calls "tragicomic hope" (West 2004). Critical public historical consciousness is a "tragicomic hope" because the historical record counsels strongly against belief in the possibility of its achievement. But surrendering to belief in its impossibility is not an option for any self-respecting person—for such surrender is tantamount to cooperation with history's amorality and others' immorality. The self-respecting student of history therefore faces the absurd situation—the tragicomic situation—of having to fight for a critical public historical consciousness her better judgment tells her is—if not impossible—highly improbable. Yet she still feels compelled to fight, against great odds. The hope animating this fight is not strictly rational. Its deeper source is supra-rational love of justice, whose still deeper source is wonder and awe at human beauty and equality.⁵ This, I think, is a better way to understand the motivation behind the quest for critical public historical consciousness. Given McCarthy's demanding standard of critical public historical consciousness—widespread historical inquiry by citizens, the practice of multiple perspectivism, and the

synthesis of their outputs into a systemic understanding of political, cultural, and economic modernity—the quest for its achievement requires far more than rational assessment for motivational force; it requires a leap of faith. With McCarthy, I take this leap (Turner 2012). Let us be clear-eyed about its length.

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¹ The term "white West," of course, vastly oversimplifies. My use of it—and of other equally unsatisfactory shorthands—is meant simply to map racialized spaces writ large, but at the obvious cost of obscuring those spaces' internal heterogeneity.

² Global citizenship refers to individual membership in a world network of societies, to the obligations of social reciprocity attending such membership, and to the right to expect redress for violations for reciprocity. No coercive authority exists to enforce norms of global citizenship; their force derives solely from the reasoning of agents committed to fairness and equality.

³ This exercise in historical study and imagination will also help privileged citizens recognize the complex subjectivities of the oppressed—complex subjectivities historically occluded by American and Western triumphalist narratives.

⁴ Thoreau might respond, "improved means to an unimproved end" ([1854] 2004, 52).

⁵ For helpful consideration of the sources of respect for human dignity and equality, see Kateb [2000] 2006, esp. 142-147, and Kateb 2011.

Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy

Volume 8, number 1. Winter 2012

<http://web.mit.edu/sgrp>

Response to Critics

Thomas McCarthy

Philosophy Department

Northwestern University

1880 Campus Drive

Evanson, IL 60208

t-mccarthy@northwestern.edu

Let me begin by thanking the commentators for their careful readings and many insights, and for advancing the discussion of issues that interest all of us. Because questions of method figure so prominently among the latter, it will be economical in the end to preface my individual responses with a few general remarks on the approach adopted in the book.¹

I. Prologue on Method

Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development generally attempts to provide a critical, historical-philosophical account of modern European and American conceptions of progress and development, inasmuch as they have shaped the widely shared and highly influential self-understanding of the modern West as the most civilized and advanced of all

cultures. A main aim of that account is to dismantle the master metanarrative of Progress (with a capital 'P') that has supported this self-understanding by examining the actual meanings-in-use of its basic ideas and ideals as they figured in the global expansion of capitalism since the 17th century. In doing so it displaces internalist readings of modern social and political thought with more contextualized but non-reductivist readings, which bring into view the myriad and pervasive interconnections of ideas of development with ideologies of racism and imperialism.² Because those ideologies typically turned on Eurocentric, hierarchical schemes of historical development, my critical history of theory is at the same time a critical theory of history. Finally, as Ladelle McWhorter notes, this concern with history is by no means antiquarian in intent, for the legacy of five decades of global racism and imperialism still structures our world today; from this perspective, what the book seeks to sketch is a critical history of the present.

In concert with these broadly deconstructive aims, the book also attempts to sketch a reconstructive approach to development generally - under the rubric of a "critical theory of development" - and particularly to core elements of modern social and political thought. For however dangerous ideas of development have proved to be, I argue, they are indispensable for thinking sensibly about modernization processes. That is to say, no plausible account of the historical processes that issued in a globalized modernity can ignore either the cultural learning evident in such areas as science and technology, historical scholarship and social inquiry, and the like; or the enormous increases in societal power associated with the differentiation in modern societies of specialized subsystems for economics and law, administration and education, and the like. Thus, I argue, the idea of development has to be critically reconstructed not eliminated. And in my broadly reconstructive efforts, I try to diminish and contain somewhat the dangers of

developmental thinking by stressing that a critical theory of development has to *dis-aggregate* totalizing notions of Progress and recognize that development in one domain (e.g. the technology of warfare) may well be accompanied by regression in others (e.g. political morality). To put it succinctly, the Enlightenment thinkers who envisioned knowledge, morality, and happiness as typically progressing in concert were mistaken, as were the social theorists who followed them in this regard: development is inherently ambivalent. Further, a critical theory of development has to *de-center* the Eurocentrism of received ideas of progress, and the assimilationist policies based on them, and to construct a vision of global development that is not something “we” do for – or to – “them,” but a challenge facing all of us together, proper responses to which, therefore, should be sought in dialogue and cooperation across cultural differences.

The general approach I adopt in pursuing these aims combines normative theorizing of neoKantian provenance with interdisciplinary materialism in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. This materialist turn comprises, as it did in the case of Marx’s materialist critique of Hegel, a turn away from the philosophy of history in the strict sense and toward social-theoretical inquiry into macrohistorical changes of various sorts. Thus Lorenzo Simpson is right to note the absence in the book of “a full-blown philosophical argument for the ineluctable status of cultural modernity” and to inquire after the “modality” of my (re-)statement that “we are now all moderns in an important sense.” (LS, 5)³ The ideas of such social theorists of modernization as Weber and Durkheim, Parsons and Habermas play as important a role in my rethinking of development as earlier, more narrowly philosophical accounts and as Marx’s residually inevitabilist and teleological account.

One consequence of this “naturalization” of the philosophy of history is that the claims I make are not meant to be

transcendental, a priori, or purely conceptual claims to necessity or impossibility. My use of “inescapable” when discussing what I call “facts” of modernity signals, rather, the view that no plausible interpretation of modernization processes may ignore or simply deny them; they are unavoidable features of any account of macrohistorical changes in the modern period that aspires to be “realistic.” The warrant for this claim is a critical, reflective examination of central features of the discourse of modernity since the Enlightenment; they are, if you like, important lessons one can learn from examining central approaches to development theory from Kant to the present. As such, they are certainly not intended to be infallible pronouncements but only warranted assertions and thus invitations to further discussion.

As Simpson also notes, the background to this shift away from what I regard as overly strong theoretical commitments is my embrace of the hermeneutic turn and its consequences in the domain of social inquiry. To quote from REHD: “Grand theories and grand metanarratives of development or modernization always outrun the available empirical evidence. They are macrohistorical interpretive schemes, which, as [Max] Weber recognized...are framed from interpretive and evaluative standpoints that are essentially contestable.” (REHD, 224) I directly go on to say, however, “this does not mean that empirical data and the correlations, connections, conditions, and consequences they indicate are irrelevant. They place very real constraints on which types of theory and narrative make analytical and interpretive sense.” (Ibid.) That is, though all such schemes are susceptible to ongoing comment and critique, this does not entail that “anything goes”: “fallible” and “contestable” are not directly opposed to better or worse, warranted or unwarranted, but to “certain” and “incontestable.” Thus, to respond indirectly to a remark by Jack Turner concerning standpoint theory (JT, 4), the multiplicity of socially, culturally, politically,

professionally, and personally situated interpretive standpoints means that our historical accounts of large-scale, long-term, structural changes, as well as the general interpretive-analytical schemes that frame them, are inherently contestable. The discourse of modernity will, then, unavoidably involve conflicts of interpretation, which, however, need not end in a Tower of Babel. To the extent that they can be institutionalized and carried out as continuous, discursive exchanges of evidence and argument for and against competing interpretations and evaluations, they can assume the form of ongoing discussions of reasonable disagreements.

From this methodological perspective, the principal theoretical burden of the second part of the book is to sketch out and defend *a few basic elements* of a critical, interpretive-analytical framework for the study of development. No attempt is made to set out a comprehensive theory to compete with those constructed by the great social theorists of modernity from Marx to Habermas. Instead, more in the spirit of Kant's essays on universal history, my aim is to sketch out some general lineaments of a universal history of the rise of global modernity, in which racism and imperialism figure differently and more centrally than they did in his. The most important of these elements for my purposes are summed up in the book as general "facts" of modernity, in particular, what I call the "Hegelian" facts of cultural modernity and the "Marxian" facts of societal modernity. This two-dimensional scheme marks the view that neither structural-functional changes in social systems nor discursive rationalization in cultural spheres are reducible one to the other. For this reason, I draw not only upon conceptions of sociocultural rationalization but also upon neoevolutionary conceptions of societal adaptation through the differentiation of specialized subsystems, which enhance a society's capacity to cope with environmental problems and thus its competitive advantages vis-à-vis other societies. In

distinguishing - only analytically, to be sure - societal from cultural development in this way, I want to hold on to the difference between, on the one hand, conceptions of future development that are *incoherent* because, they expressly deny the very cultural rationalization (e.g. in history and the human sciences, scholarship and cultural studies) that they draw upon, and, on the other hand, those that run the risk, in the present global circumstances, not of incoherence but of *impotence*, because they reject functional developments that have vastly expanded the productive and reproductive *power* of modern, highly complex and differentiated societies.

II. Ladelle McWhorter

In her lucid and subtle comments, Ladelle McWhorter concisely capture the complexities and nuances of this line of thought, before incisively interrogating it from the Foucauldian perspective she deployed to such great effect in her book, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America*, published in the same year as my book. She notes that, while I do not present a stark "either/or" between genealogy in her Foucauldian sense and critical history in the Habermasian sense, I do understand my reflections as belonging less to the former genre than to the latter, inasmuch as the interpretive-analytical framework I deploy has an explicitly normative dimension. (Cf. REHD, 13f.)⁴ She correctly grasps my position regarding the "inescapability" of certain "facts of modernity" but compares it unfavorably with a more Foucauldian perspective, according to which we, as products of modern disciplinary institutions and practices, recognize that "we are developmental through and through," but also realize that we can still resist "developmental normalization" and the domination it incarnates. And she argues that, while I don't deny this possibility, I do come "uncomfortably close to making ontological claims about development" and thus "become normative much too prematurely." (LM, 4) Here I will simply acknowledge that she is correct in noting these tendencies toward ontology (if by that she means some sort of

sociohistorical ontology) and normativity, and refer to the paper cited in the last footnote for their detailed defense. In short, I argue there, firstly, that Foucault's *own* social ontology of power is interpretively inferior to one that also has a place for the independent logics of directional learning processes in many dimensions of human practice, and secondly, that his *own* tacit but pervasively operative normativity is practically inferior to the expressly articulated and defended normativity of critical social theorists. So, on this point, it seems, we encounter a reasonable disagreement that has already served as the focal point for a sometimes fruitful discussion.

To McWhorter's supporting charge, that my discussion of the facts of development moves too quickly and thereby "conflates a variety of fairly different processes under one term" and thus flattens out "an array of facts in a variety of historically emerging domains" (LM, 4), I have to plead guilty and appeal to the usual constraints upon a book covering so broad a range of topics and views over such an extended period. However, in line with what I stated above, I don't think that differentiating and contextualizing these various processes at greater length and in greater detail would fundamentally alter my judgment of the relative merits of these two general approaches to development, though it might well alter my accounting of the costs and benefits of particular developments.

McWhorter also makes the valid point that atemporal difference is not the only alternative to progressive development. Historical change, she notes, "can be unidirectional and irreversible...without thereby being progressive." (LM, 4) She is concerned that, despite all my caveats, "degree of development will correlate with degree of worth. As long as development is valued...it is supposedly better than whatever preceded it." (LM, 5f.)⁵ There is no denying the historical power of such a short circuit and the

great harm it has motivated and justified. Nor can the dangers inherent in development theory be made simply to disappear by the sorts of distinctions, qualifications, and restrictions I introduce in respect to it. Rather, if developmental thinking is an unavoidable feature of modernity, then what is required, in my view, is that those dangers be relentlessly resisted and contained through its *ongoing* critical rethinking. And if developmental practice is going to be more like Amartya Sen's "development as freedom" and less like the regimes of domination and exploitation that it historically has been, then deepening, spreading, and entrenching the sorts of lessons I rehearse is also required.

At the same time, REHD offers a variety of arguments against assimilationist views and in favor of a version of the multiple modernities view. In particular, it emphasizes and explains the persistence of reasonable disagreements on ethical questions concerning interests, values, and goods; on moral questions concerning what is equally in the interest of, or equally good for, all affected by an action; and of political questions concerning collective identity and the common good. (see REHD, 160-165) Moreover, it argues that the need for and value of power-enhancing, functional adaptations depend upon historical circumstances. Thus, the separation of "degree of development" from "degree of worth" is repeatedly emphasized: "[D]isagreements about what *place* either cultural or societal innovations should have in the life of a society cannot be decided by demonstrating that a given transformation represents a developmental advance, either of 'rational capacity' or of 'functional capacity.' Once the demands of theodicy and teleology are stripped from developmental schemes, such advances no longer carry the imprimatur of divine providence, ends of nature, or the cunning of reason...The issues under discussion in practical discourses concerning the desirability of institutionalizing specific innovations in specific societies have directly to do

not with species perfection but with what the participants judge to be in the best interests of everyone affected by those changes, including those not yet born who will have to live with the consequences of present decisions.” (REHD, 162)

On the other hand – and this is perhaps what concerns McWhorter – I do argue that some cultural changes are best regarded as the results of learning processes, in that they offer improved ways of dealing with certain domains of experience; for there is no plausible account of the history of such domains as science and technology, historiography and human studies, among many others, that ignores or denies this. Foucault’s obviously troubled and constantly shifting metatheoretical remarks about his own critical histories are a case study in the difficulty of resolutely adopting a radically externalist perspective on the critique of impure reason. McWhorter is correct, then, to surmise that my account of development implicates a positive valuation of at least *some* unidirectional and cumulative processes; but that does not at all preclude disagreement about how they should be institutionalized and what role they should play in individual or social lives. As issues of this kind are being debated in a plurality of societies with a diversity of traditions and in a variety of circumstances, one would expect to find, and does in fact find, wide differences in the assessment of particular changes. For the discourse of development is, as McWhorter notes, value-laden; and that feature of it is as unavoidable on my account as is the discourse itself. But she tends to focus on individual action; and the strategies of resistance to modernization that are practicable for individuals and small groups may not be, and often are not, practicable on a national or transnational scale. My argument, by contrast, generally proceeds at the political-societal level and concerns collective responses to collective problems, and that places additional constraints on feasible strategies of resistance.

As McWhorter persuasively argues, collective responses to the problems of the poorest and most vulnerable societies need not take the form of helping them to develop. What is often called for is a direct response to immediate needs; and even when such responses have the form of improvements to existing structures, they need not amount to development in the technical sense at issue here: not every improvement is a development. On the other hand, in today’s unevenly developed world, what is often required to attack the roots of widespread suffering and injustice is indeed a modernization of basic structures – educational, economic, political, social, and so forth. My express position in the book is that collective action of this sort be organized as a collaboration and not an imposition. And it is just this sort of collective response to collective problems that I had in mind when stressing the importance of hope to progressive politics. McWhorter’s remarks in this last connection, however, address questions of *individual* motivation to *moral* action: “[W]hat moves most people to moral action is the draw of another’s need, not a calculation about the likelihood of ultimate success...[E]ven if I knew for sure that a more just future was impossible, I would not stop responding to the needs of those around me.” (LM, 6f.) Though related to it, this is a different question from the one I address in REHD, to wit: does it make sense for politically organized, collective actors to pursue societal or global changes they believe are impossible to attain? Is hope concerning the feasibility of basic structural improvements a prerequisite for concerted political action to bring them about? In the view I defend, collective action of this sort cannot be effectively mobilized and sustained in the absence of hope in its possible success. It is just at this point of the argument that Jack Turner introduces the notion of “tragicomic hope.” But before taking that up, I want to expand the methodological focus of my remarks to address some of Lorenzo Simpson’s concerns.

III. Lorenzo Simpson

My account of the derivation and status of certain general “facts of cultural modernity” may serve as a point of departure for responding to Simpson’s worries about the imposition of modern ways on non-Western peoples. As I explain them, these “facts” have become unavoidable presuppositions of the global discourse of modernity. Simpson himself grants that “certain aspects of cultural modernity do seem cognitively irreversible,” such as the fruits of the “historicist enlightenment” and “the learning processes institutionalized in modern science.” (LS, 5) But others do not, particularly those having to do with ideals and values, as is illustrated by his example of debates about genital cutting. I do not deny that ethical and political matters are susceptible to deeper and wider reasonable disagreements than, to use his examples, questions of science or historiography. In fact, as noted above, my argument expressly allows for that and attempts to explain it by much the same hermeneutic considerations that Simpson emphasizes, particularly by the different interpretive and evaluative situations of different participants in the discourse of modernity. But my account of our *present* hermeneutic situation differs from Simpson’s in one decisive point, and it is this that lies behind the shift in my view of cross-cultural dialogue since the 1980s, to which he refers in his comment.

As a master of critical hermeneutics, Simpson knows that interpreters of modernity belong to the very history they are trying to understand, and that their interpretations are never free from its effects. Thus the lively and interesting debates about “rationality and relativism” that dominated the discussion of cross-cultural encounters in the 1960s and 1970s reflected, I want to suggest, the historical situation of an unfinished process of decolonization. They were largely shaped by *representations* of non-Western peoples *constructed* by Western anthropologists, some of whom also served as energetic *advocates* for peoples who could not speak for

themselves in many institutionalized venues of the discourse of modernity. In that historical situation, it seemed to make sense to treat diverse cultures as “seamless wholes” and to represent dialogue amongst them by means of the sort of *counterfactual* thought experiment that Simpson deploys here. I adopted a similar approach in my earlier work. But since the 1980s, the accelerated transformation of an increasingly globalized world comprised in large part of postcolonial societies has altered our interpretive situation in fundamental and far-reaching ways. As Simpson notes, cultures are no longer viewed as static and homogeneous wholes, and distinctions between “inside” and “outside” are regarded as matters of degree: the “outside” is increasingly “inside” the cultural pores of every society, such that “internal” resources of critique are often not endogenous.

Accordingly, the sense in which “we are all moderns now” that I rely upon in elaborating the idea of a multicultural discourse of modernity implies that we have less reason to construct counterfactual cross-cultural dialogues or to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Every culture has its virtuosos of historical and cultural reflexivity capable in principle of participating in this discourse on equal terms; and postcolonial intellectuals are typically more aware than their Western counterparts of the unquestioned, taken-for-granted character of Western patterns and presuppositions. For this and related reasons, I do not frame issues of intercultural dialogue as Simpson does in his comment, but treat the capacity, in principle, for full participation by denizens of non-Western cultures rather as my starting point. To be sure, I add “in principle” to these formulations in acknowledgement of the very great impact that existing disparities of wealth and power exert on participation “in fact.” Finally, unlike Simpson’s, my discussion of the imposition of Western patterns of culture and society moves primarily, not at the level of “conversational practice,” but at a sociopolitical level; it is concerned with the structural

conditions and consequences of institutionalizing intercultural communication in different, more symmetrical, ways.

For the rest, I have no substantive disagreements with Simpson's reformulations and expansions of my line of argument: in specific, his remarks on the interplay of social structures and cultural patterns in perpetuating racial stratification; his observations on the interpretation of value commitments, to the effect that understanding agents' values requires understanding their views of the worlds in which they are acting, and his complication of the notion of agency by taking into account agents' ability to avail themselves of the enabling conditions of action and to overcome obstacles thereto. On this last point, however, Simpson senses a disagreement between us regarding interpretations of human rights that stress civil and political rights versus those that stress social and economic rights (LS, 3f.); but as a close reading of the book will confirm, I expressly embrace a notion of what Habermas calls "substantive equality," which includes elements resembling Rawls' fair equality of opportunity and fair value of political liberty. This idea, central to the Western traditions of social liberalism and social democracy, provides a bridge across the differences to which Simpson refers.

IV. Jack Turner

Jack Turner characterizes "tragicomic hope" as a refusal to surrender to a belief, however strongly warranted, in the impossibility or high improbability of achieving justice. His argument too moves primarily at the level of individual ethical motivation, in this case of responding to a rationally "absurd situation" with a "leap of faith." (JT, 7f.) I do not want to directly take issue with this sort of existential response to the challenges of individual life, but I do want to express my doubts that organized, collective action to achieve racial justice can be sustained by it. Nor, in fact, do I agree

with his view that "the historical record counsels strongly against belief in the possibility" of heightening public historical consciousness of racial injustice sufficiently to make the amelioration of persistent inequities a reasonable hope. (JT, 7) Beyond what I say in the book about the immense changes in this regard within cultural and political public spheres since the Second World War, I will add only that for someone who was born and raised in a *de jure* segregated America and who now lives in an America led by a black man and presently finds himself engaged in an institutionalized conversation scarcely possible in my youth, this reading of the historical record appears excessively pessimistic. In my view, that record counsels rather against abandoning hope that racial injustice can be progressively ameliorated. And that is all I need for my argument, which neither seeks to establish teleological inevitability nor aspires to a scientific prediction or estimation of probabilities, but is concerned with what we have reason to believe could be realized under the conditions in which we find ourselves and with the political will we think we can muster. With that in view, I am less concerned to discourage the ethical-existential hope of those without hope that Turner embraces than to encourage the moral-political hope for ongoing reconstruction of entrenched neoracist and neoimperialist structures.

V. Matthias Fritsch

Exploring the relation between such hopes for future justice and memories of past injustice, Matthias Fritsch's comments continue to work a rich vein of reflection on the philosophy of history that he laid open in his earlier work, *The Promise of Memory*.⁶ He notes the considerable agreement between us in rejecting the idea of a present that is simply coincident with itself, and in insisting on the need for a theory of intergenerational justice, which concerns both coming to terms with the past and securing the conditions of future justice. But he finds that I don't go far enough in rethinking the historical-ontological connections of past, present, and

future in my reflections on intergenerational justice and seeks to push me further along that path. My ambivalent response to his line of thought is, on the one hand, an appreciation of the greater depth and nuance he gives to the discussion of temporality and justice, but, on the other hand, a number of doubts about the increased symmetry toward which he wants to push me.

To put the issue straightforwardly, the presents in which we re-present our pasts and pre-figure our futures are ineluctably the situations out of which we have to think and act. To ignore this fundamental *hermeneutic and pragmatic asymmetry* is to aspire to a God's-eye-view of history, in which past and future are part of an eternal present. In specific, when we include the victims of the past in our reflections concerning intergenerational justice, it cannot be on the basis of their equal standing *as actual participants* in practical discourse about whether the consequences and side-effects of a proposed course of action are equally in the interest of *all affected*. On this point, I tend to agree with Max Horkheimer's somewhat blunt response to Walter Benjamin in a similar connection:⁷ "The supposition of an unfinished or unclosed past is idealistic, if you don't incorporate a certain closedness into it. Past injustice has happened and is over and done with. Those who were slain were really slain." Thus, "what happened to those human beings who have perished cannot be made good in the future." Benjamin of course continued to be concerned with the redemption of the past and to insist that history was not merely a science but a form of remembrance (*Eingedenken*) that can transform what is apparently closed and finished – such as past suffering – into something that is open and unfinished. Thus he endorsed an approach to history based on anamnestic solidarity with its countless generations of oppressed and downtrodden. Horkheimer acknowledged the roots of this impulse, but regarded the approach to history it inspired as, in the end, theological rather than materialist. "The thought that the

prayers of those persecuted, in their hour of direct need...are all to no avail...is monstrous...But is monstrousness ever a cogent argument against the assertion or denial of a state of affairs?"

It is with this asymmetry in mind that I center my own discussions of the politics of memory and the moral-political obligations of reparative justice around present and future generations, that is, around the need to redress the *continuing harms* of past injustice, specifically the *persisting* racial and imperial inequities that are the *enduring consequences* of capitalist modernization.⁸ To displace this moral-political orientation toward wrongs that can be rectified or ameliorated by our present and future actions with the more ethical-ontological orientation that Fritsch proposes would, I fear, dissipate the practical focus required for concerted collective action. For as the classical philosophers of history already noted, victims of injustice are omnipresent in human history -- which, as Hegel famously put it, is a slaughter house; without the focus provided by deliberation on courses of action in the present that might result in a reduction of injustice in the future, *Eingedenken* of past suffering takes on a religious or ethical-ontological cast.

I use the phrase "ethical-ontological" to characterize the genre of reflections that Fritsch endorses in view of the various "duties" and "obligations" to which they repeatedly give rise – e.g. the "duty" of "recipients of gifts" from past generations to "compensate" them for the "costs of production and transfer" – and, more generally, in view of the value-laden character of the historical ontology he presents, in which succeeding generations are entrusted with the lifeworlds and institutions they inherit from past generations and are obligated to pass them on to future generations in such a manner as to enable their future autonomy. (MF, 6) I do not dispute that such reflections may contribute to the historical self-understandings of particular individuals and

communities, and thus to the cultural and political public spheres in which they participate. But such self-understandings are obviously tied to the ethical-ontological frameworks embraced by the individuals and groups that construct them; and no one of them can claim to be morally or politically binding. Thus, for example, the interpretive framework sketched by Fritsch is in competition with those endorsed by Horkheimer, by Habermas, by expressly religious philosophers of history, and, for that matter, by me. But insofar as the type of reflection he proposes can contribute to a political culture and a politics of memory that address the practical-political aim of redressing continuing injustice, I welcome it.⁹

Finally, with regard to the relation of present and future generations, I can accept much of the elaboration that Fritsch provides; but I nevertheless want to hold on to a certain asymmetry, which is different from that obtaining between past and present generations. For unlike past generations, future generations *are* among *those affected* by the consequences and side effects of our present actions; so our moral-political deliberations do have to take their agreement or disagreement into account. But their participation in our deliberations can be only virtual not actual, and their consent can only be anticipated not actually given. And while I share Fritsch's view that this anticipated consent can be confirmed or disconfirmed only in and through the actual deliberations of future generations -- under conditions favorable to democratic deliberation, which we should do our best to secure -- the fact remains that in regard to the actual deliberations in which we are presently engaged, their participation and their assent remain virtual and hypothetical. That is to say, moral universalism requires that *we now* try also to see things from what we *anticipate* will be the circumstances, values, and interests of future generations, and to give their anticipated concerns equal consideration

with our own in determining what is equally good for all affected by our actions.

VI. David Scott

In view of the variety of methodological issues these commentators addressed, I was initially puzzled by David Scott's disappointment with REHD owing to its lack of "methodological uptake." (DS, 1) In the end, I was rather disappointed by his disappointment, for it seemed to arise from the expectations with which he had approached the book, which he mentions at the start and returns to repeatedly, and which, it seemed to me, amount to the expectation that I would -- or should -- have written a different book. And my disappointment was sharpened by my own expectation that our dialogue would be especially fruitful, which I had formed from reading his earlier reconsideration of C.L.R. James' classic account of the Haitian Revolution, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*.¹⁰ For both his book and mine are concerned with how the past is constructed in relation to the present, in his case narratively and in mine metanarratively or theoretically; and for both of us, a critical rethinking of the past's relation to the present is tied to a hopeful reimagining of desirable futures. Most strikingly, although he frames his analysis of James' narrative history mainly in poetical-rhetorical terms, while my analysis of universal history is framed mainly in social- and political-theoretical terms, both analyses end by stressing the "paradox", "dilemma", "predicament", and "ambiguity" inherent in and constituent of modernity. In short, I had understood our two approaches to the discourse of modernity as more complementary than competing. And that judgment seemed confirmed when I subsequently read that Scott viewed the mode of genealogy he employed as in itself incapable of producing "a politics properly speaking," and thus as in need of "supplementation" by addressing "the question of politics" directly, and declared this to be the aim of his recent work¹¹ -- as it was, I had thought, of the

reconstructive dimension of my book as well. Instead, Scott apparently understands our different ways of approaching common themes to be opposed rather than complementary. My response will focus on his central line of criticism.

Scott quotes and repeatedly comments upon the following sentence from page 14 of REHD: “My *guiding assumption* is that the resources required to reconstruct our tradition of social and political thought can be *wrested* from those very traditions, *provided that they are critically appropriated and opened to contestation* by their historical ‘others.’” (Emphases added here) Somehow, and notwithstanding anything that comes after, he reads this as saying that my discussion will proceed on the fixed presupposition of the sufficiency of the resources of “[my] own tradition” -- by which he seems to understand a self-enclosed and non-permeable version of modern Western moral and intellectual culture; and he construes my relation to the views of “historical others” as basically “passive and monological” rather than as involving active engagement and dialogical reciprocity. (DS, 3) In the final analysis, he charges, this “presumptive privilege” and lack of “receptive generosity” prevent my really listening to and learning from them. (DS, 4)

This came as something of a surprise, since to my mind the book was an extended attempt to articulate the results of more than a decade of listening to and learning from intellectuals formed in different traditions, both in print and in actual dialogue. Thus Scott’s judgment of my many references to and engagement with scholars from those traditions as “en passant” or based on an insufficient understanding of their backgrounds and contexts was troubling, as they were intended precisely to acknowledge what I had learned from them about the deep inadequacies of the hegemonic Western discourse about universal history before it began to engage seriously with the anticolonial and postcolonial critique of the last century. And

notwithstanding Scott’s suggestion that I “seek merely to assimilate [e] them to my tradition” (DS, 10), I had hoped it would be clear to the reader that I seek rather to promote dialogical symmetry, reciprocal elucidation, and mutual learning (see e.g. REHD, 164f.), and that I understand this as ineluctably leading to a conflict of interpretations and an ongoing negotiation of differences (e.g. REHD, 186f.), which is more likely to issue in hybridity, compromise, and (hopefully) overlap than in global consensus. It also struck me as strange that Scott’s attempt to put me in a box of his own making evinces just the sorts of either/or and inside/outside binaries that both of us are concerned to dismantle. We are both well aware that, just as many resources of postcolonial critique have their origins in Western traditions of thought, many of the resources available to Western critics of liberal capitalist modernity derive from the vast and expanding store of postcolonial critique.

Scott specifically discusses two instances of the “presumptive privileging” of my own moral-intellectual tradition and consequent failure to engage substantively with the traditions of historical others. The first is a very brief sketch of post-Reconstruction historiography of slavery. (REHD, 108-111). Acknowledging that I do reference the main black counter-tradition of historiography, he faults me for doing so “en passant” and not more fully engaging with and learning from it. (DS, 5f.) But this is to ignore that the express purpose of those few pages is to set out the dominant ideology of white mainstream historiography, for my eventual target is the public historical consciousness and political culture that this hegemonic consensus informed and was informed by. *In that context*, it would have served little purpose to present a full-fledged – “thick” not “thin,” as Scott puts it – dialogical engagement with dissident traditions. And Scott never says what *specific* difference this would have made to my line of argument.

The same is true of his commentary on my very brief account of two streams of postcolonial critique that promote a “post-development” perspective (REHD, 180-183), of which I am critical, and on my similarly brief account of another stream of postcolonial critique that promotes instead a broadly reconstructive approach to the dominant discourse of modernity, with which I am in sympathy. (REHD, 183-185) One of my concerns there was to illustrate that postcolonial thinkers themselves are divided on the dilemma of development, so that it is not simply a Western imposition to pursue it. Scott’s complaint here is similar to that above, as is his failure to say specifically where my line of argument goes wrong. In particular, he rebukes me for not substantively engaging with the very different intellectual background and context of thinkers like Dipesh Chakrabarty, who is my main interlocutor in the latter section. That would have required, he writes, that I learn “to think inside” the tradition of Subaltern Studies from which he comes; and my failure to do so means that I do not learn from him but assimilate him. (DS, 9f.) There is no doubt some truth to this, for at that point in my argument it was important to highlight the overlapping of views stemming from different traditions; but it is not the whole truth, for it was from listening to Chakrabarty that I learned to appreciate and came to adopt the practical-political approach to the dilemma of development that was salient in his context. (REHD, 188-191). In both of these cases, Scott concludes, my failure to “excavate the genealogy of questions and answers that constitute” the other intellectual traditions to which I refer, and which I sometimes “take up in [an] affiliative way,” underwrites my tendency to assimilate them to my own and betrays my inability to imagine “that [others] inhabit the hegemony of modernity differently” than I do. (DS, 9)

The underlying point here seems to be that the marginalization of the history of racism and imperialism in mainstream, Western, social and political thought is in effect a

“double marginalization”: it applies not only to those themes themselves but also to their thematizations in subaltern traditions.¹² In particular, the topics I take up in REHD have long been discussed, with great cogency and insight, by African American and postcolonial thinkers, whose contributions have until recently been largely ignored in mainstream theory. This is, to be sure, a valid point. I also agree with the related point that an integral part of understanding the history of racism and imperialism is understanding how those who were subordinated themselves experienced, articulated, analyzed, and criticized their subordination and the ideologies that underwrote it. And I will concede that I don’t do very much of that in REHD. But no one book can do justice to the massive and multifaceted problematic of these marginalized themes and traditions. My situation and my resources are quite different from Scott’s, and I accordingly addressed a different facet of the overall problem. As I explain in the first chapter, my audience and target is mainstream, Western, political theory, which until quite recently marginalized racism and imperialism rather than treating them as central to European and American conceptions of modernity. And though this does not coincide with projects like Scott’s, what I wrote in the book was certainly not meant to preclude them.

¹ *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge U P, 2009) will be cited as REHD, followed by page numbers.

² This and the next sentence are formulations used by Charles Mills in his lucid comments on my book at the 2011 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

³ References to the comments will be by author’s initials and page numbers.

⁴ In an earlier essay, “The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School,” chap. 2 of *Ideals and Illusions* (MIT Press, 1991), pp. 43-75, I remarked upon the considerable overlap between

the ideas of Foucault and the Frankfurt School, and argued for the advisability of explicitly elaborating and defending the normative dimension of critique.

⁵ Amy Allen expresses a similar concern in her review of REHD, in *Constellations*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 487-492.

⁶ SUNY Press, 2005.

⁷ I discuss their exchange in “Critical Theory and Political Theology,” chap. 8 of *Ideals and Illusions*, pp. 200-215. The passages cited here are referenced there on pp. 207f.

⁸ See also my account of the inherited obligation of present U.S. citizens to redress the continuing harm of racial injustice in the past: “Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery,” *Political Theory* (Vol. 32, 2004): 750-772.

⁹ I have a similar attitude toward “the duty to remember” discussed by Pablo De Greiff (see REHD, 105), which Fritsch comments upon. For me, it is one element of the politics of memory I discuss in relation to the overarching practical purpose of global justice. I agree with Fritsch that it cannot stand on its own as an account of intergenerational justice.

¹⁰ Duke University Press, 2004.

¹¹ Interview by Stuart Hall, *Bomb 90*, 2005, pp. 1-10, accessed at <http://bombsite.com/issues/90/articles/2711>.

¹² I owe this term and this formulation to Robert Gooding-Williams, in a private communication.