

The Persian LettersI. Review

(1) Last time, I discussed the political context of social theory. Three levels of analysis.

(2) Starting out with the biological idea of the differentiated manifold, two dilemmas.

- a) How can individuality and sociability grow together? By moral judgment, which presupposes consciousness.
- b) From the development of consciousness there comes a second dilemma: How to reconcile the recognition of the contingent and conventional character of social life with a belief in the existence of a moral order.

(3) The problem of power and legitimacy.

- a) In modern European society, there was a disruption of the low-level equilibria by which these dilemmas are dealt with in other forms of social life.
- b) The very weakening of the hierarchical order contributes to the subversion of belief in the available legitimations of social hierarchy. The less hierarchy there is, the less legitimate the remaining forms of hierarchy appear to be.
- c) The problem for social theory: to be critical without being cynical.

- (4) The disruption of legitimation affects the character of everyday life. Three features I mentioned:
- a) Proliferation of low trust relationships.
 - b) Differential allocations of trust.
 - c) Dialectic between havens of trust and the overall situation of distrust.
- (5) How these features are reflected in the characteristics of law.
- (6) The method of social understanding exemplified by this kind of analysis.

II. Introduction

- (1) Today, I begin my study of the tradition of social theory. The major immediate sources of this tradition, all more or less contemporaneous with what I called Enlightenment criticism:
- a) Classical political economy and utilitarianism: society as an association of self-interested traders. The basic schema of social life is the individual's calculus of the most effective means to achieve his own more or less arbitrarily chosen ends. Both description and ideal.
 - b) A reactionary, often mystical tradition that emphasized the organic character of social life. The group had a degree of reality and of moral worth distinct from the worth and the reality of its members. Modern individualism a transitory or pathological deviation from this normal condition. Fundamental mechanism of social life: the acceptance by the individual of shared values of the group.

c) I want to focus on a third tradition, which grew directly out of Enlightenment criticism. Represented in the works of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. May be called the liberal theory. It perceived the profound disorder of social life and of the moral sentiments brought about by the dissolution of aristocratic society. However, it regarded the process by which this dissolution was taking place as irreversible. And its attitude toward it was ambivalent: both an occasion for the growth of individuality and a threat to individuality itself. The danger: that one might have independence without diversity and equality without community. It rejected both the means-ends and the shared values schemata. Shall have more to say about this tradition next time.

(2) Today, however, I go back to a work that seems to have little to do with social theory at all: the Persian Letters. Published in 1721, in many ways a perfect early specimen of Enlightenment criticism. Nevertheless, I have chosen it for discussion because it is proto-social theory. It anticipates many of the themes of later social thought and carries some of them to a degree of depth which later works were unable to equal. This was made possible in part by its non-theoretical form, which allows Montesquieu to suggest what he might have not been capable of explicating fully.

Many of the deepest perceptions of modern society can be found in the works of the modernist writers. The problem: how to give them a theoretical form--to systematize in theory the insights of art.

(3) Montesquieu was a moderate and a brilliant man, but, despite his moderation, he was dangerous and, despite his brilliance, he was profound.

He was concerned to preserve the privileges of the upper classes and especially of the professional gentry. And he identified their interests with the interests of freedom. Yet he helped create a mode of social understanding that was potentially radical because it emphasized that society was an interconnected whole and that its arrangements were contingent. Set in motion a chain of reasoning that would lead to the relentless critique of modern society. This subversive, aristocratic lawyer, this cosmopolitan child of the provincial professional classes, this skeptical and sarcastic defender of the idea of moral order perfected the art of holding the dagger of criticism under the cloak of edification.

(4) The story of the Persian Letters. Two elements:

- a) The Parisian element: What Usbek and Rica discover about France and about Persia itself during their stay abroad.
- b) The seraglio element: The progressive disintegration of the harem during Usbek's absence.

(5) Plan of the discussion:

- a) The concerns of modern consciousness as brought out in the Parisian part of the story.
- b) The political analysis and the political lesson contained in the seraglio narrative. A proto-analysis of the problem of domination.

- c) What is the relation between these two parts of the book?
The most remarkable fact about the work is the seeming disparity between these two strands.

III. The structure of modern consciousness

Justice and facticity

(1) The first, overwhelming impression one gains from the Persian Letters: the conventional character of social life. We live surrounded by a web of appearances and delusions. Moreover, what is taken as part of nature is merely the prejudice of the age and the place. Everything seems to be other than what it is and everything might be other than what it is.

(2) This sense of arbitrariness extends to people's understandings of each other and of themselves. Exemplified in letter 54 by the two friends who agree to make each other appear as wits. Every group a mutual admiration society.

(3) Yet appearances are not merely cast aside. They reveal the truth about society in the very course of hiding it. Thus, the theme of unmasking in social thought.

(4) This practice of demystification implies that there is a truth hidden under appearances, a truth by reference to which the conventions of society can be shown up for what they are. Moreover, this truth is a moral truth; it has a normative weight.

(5) How is one to prevent this Archimedean point from being gobbled up by cultural relativism. Why shouldn't the norms of justice and equity be viewed as mere conventions? The only thing they would have

to base themselves on would be enlightened self-interest. If the individual who lived in an allegedly just society could get away with injustice without being discovered, there would be nothing to stop him.

(6) Letter 83 brings out very clearly the resulting tension in Montesquieu's thought. On the one hand, justice is "a relation of suitability among things." On the other hand, even if there were no God (i.e. even if there were no cosmological basis for these principles), we would still have to act as if they had an unquestionable authority. Enlightened self-interest would itself be insufficient. We can no longer believe that justice is objectively founded, but if we treat it as no more than a noble lie, or a convenience of self-interest, how can we expect its persuasive force to be stable?

Individual and social virtue

(7) The second major conflict is between two conceptions of the relation between virtue and society. They are expounded, respectively, in two of the great moral fables of the Persian Letters: the myth of the Troglodytes (letters 11-14) and the myth of Apheridon and Astarte in letter 67.

(8) Themes of the story:

- a) Civilization depends on the identification of individual interest with self-interest. Failure to maintain this bond leads to the extinction of the wicked Troglodytes. The Darwinian aspect of the story.
- b) Virtue harder taskmaster than law. The sharing of ends better than legal compulsion. The early descendents of

the good Troglodytes need no calculus of interests to proceed as they do. There is a spontaneous sharing of understandings and values, a perfect union of individuality and sociability.

- c) The moral ideal is one of identification of the individual with society.

(9) Themes of the story of Apheridon and Astarte (letter 67):

- a) The fact of incest. Relatively unimportant that marriage between brother and sister is permitted among the Gabars.
- b) The prohibition against incest as the most universal of social rules; the point at which the universality of nature meets with the conventionality of culture (Lévi-Strauss).
- c) Apheridon and Astarte find virtue and happiness by defying the conventions of the surrounding society. The reverse message of the myth of the Troglodytes: virtue here is founded upon the individual's rejection of the claims of the wider society.

(10) What is the relation between the two dilemmas of justice and arbitrariness, and individual and social virtue?

- a) For any given person, the tension between individual and society can only be attenuated by bringing the social order into harmony with moral standards in which he can acquiesce. The justice/arbitrariness problem must be solved.
- b) Our confidence in the moral standards of society depends in part, though perhaps only in part, on the social conditions under which those judgments developed, the extent to which they represent more than factional interests.

IV. The logic of despotism: a theory of the dynamic of domination

- (1) I turn now to the seraglio part of the story. Its refined erotic character. The erotic story contains a political message, which we must try to bring to light.
- (2) Usbek's harem as both a contrast to European society and a warning about its inner dangers. Louis XIV and his admiration for oriental politics. The situation of the French nobility: its political emasculation.
- (3) The world of Parisian sociability which Usbek and Rica encounter is already the modern world. No longer capable of achieving the ideal republicanism of the Troglodytes. Always on the verge of falling into despotism. This social situation is one in which the characteristic indirectness of social relations and the darkness of the social world (the impossibility of seeing through it easily) facilitates the seizure of power by despots and their servants.
- (4) The harem situation as one of differential trust. The attempt to preserve it by a legitimizing ideology. A structure of power ennobled by sentiment. Further defined by the role of each of the participants.
- (5) The women. Kept in bondage by both fear and love. In the harem, unlike the monogamous marriage, life is wholly eroticized. The women instruct each other in the use of their chains. The enslaved have a perverse moral interest in their own enslavement. The legitimizing ideology justifies them in seeing their own situation, which they take to be inescapable, as not entirely degrading.

Yet despotism is unstable. The instability cannot be explained by the self-interest of the enslaved. For the women, it is the sexual instinct that exercises an emancipatory function. In humanity, the "instincts" themselves are touched with a moral significance and a moral power.

(6) The eunuchs. These are the men whom the "blade of a knife separated ... from nature," and thus from themselves. The idea of self-estrangement. They have lost the means to satisfy their desires, but not their desires themselves. The analogy to the situation of the professional and bureaucratic classes. From earliest youth, they are brought up for eunuchdom. By allowing themselves to be emasculated (i.e. assuming the position of staffers), they hope to participate in power. Then they discover that their bargain is a losing one; they are powerful only so long as they serve their masters. The appearance of dominion is the reality of impotence.

(7) Usbek himself. He is unable to control the harem. His relationship to people: one of possession. Fidelity is transmuted into the concern of the bourgeois propertyowner: the desire to exclude others from enjoyment.

The inability to control and to possess leads Usbek to derangement. He too is a prisoner of the system. The dominators as well as the dominated are enslaved by the system of domination.

(8) What is the political lesson of the denouement? It is ambiguous. Is the ancien regime or the modern liberal state the highest form of social life to which modern men dare aspire? Or is there some way to give a new and realistic meaning to the republican ideal through the radical transformation of society and

the overthrow of the mechanisms of domination? It would be an understatement at best to say that after 250 years this question remains open.

V. Conclusion: Despotism and contemplation; the problem of practical reason

- (1) What is the relationship between the two parts of the work? Montesquieu himself referred to a "secret chain" binding the letters together. The most important link in the chain would be the one to connect the Parisian and the seraglio stories.
- (2) The key to a solution lies in the double role of Usbek. Usbek is the master of the harem. But he is also the man who has left his homeland in search of wisdom, just as he had to retire from court as a consequence of his determination to speak the truth. He and Rica did not want to live by the light of the East alone.
- (3) The modern bourgeois intellectual, like the despot, pretends to a kind of abstractness from the social contexts of his existence. He wants to stand outside them and to look at them from outside. In another way, the despot claims to control and to use other people without really caring for them.
- (4) The style of the Persian letters often seems like a witty interpretation of the sensibility of the voyeur. This is the style of both Usbek the harem manager and Usbek the observer of society. In both cases, it is the eye that seeks instruction and enjoyment, without deliberately sharing responsibility and involvement. And it therefore has an exploitative relationship to its human objects.

(5) For more than two thousand years, despite countervailing religious influences, the ideal of detached contemplation stood at the core of Western art and speculative thought. Ultimately, God Himself could be pictured by rationalist deism as a being who sets up the world system and watches it with His all-seeing eye but does not Himself share in the fate of His creatures.

(6) Can one define a relationship between the mind and the world--a form of social understanding--that is based upon going beyond this ideal of contemplative detachment? From the standpoint of a view that afforded primacy to practical reason, if there is a God, and if He is indifferent to our suffering, we would be justified in dragging Him down from heaven, if we could, and punishing Him.

(7) When the disengaged mind discovers that Usbek the observer and Usbek the despot are one and the same person, it denounces itself. The discovery of a hidden affinity between contemplation and domination is like the thirteenth chime of a clock--the thirteenth chime of a clock, which not only startles us, but makes us wonder about the previous twelve chimes and indeed about the clock itself.

The liberal theory of society in Montesquieu and Tocqueville(1) Review

(1) Yesterday I began a discussion of a major strand of the origins of classical social theory--the liberal theory of society. To be distinguished from two other traditions

- a) The utilitarian: Society is and ought to be an association of self-interested individual traders. The means-ends schema.
- b) The organicist: Society is or ought to be a hierarchy of groups with a reality and a worth distinct from the worth and reality of its members. Modern individualism, a pathological deviation. The sharing of values schema.
- c) The liberal theory distinguished more clearly between what actually happened and what was desirable. They saw the dissolution of aristocratic society as irreversible and they inquired into the opportunities and the dangers which this dissolution created for the development of individuality.

(2) The Persian Letters as proto-social theory. Its elements:

- a) An analysis of the structure of modern consciousness.
- b) A view of the logic and dynamic of a system of domination--the seraglio.

(3) The structure of modern consciousness.

- a) Justice and arbitrariness. Caught between the suspicion that there are no objective normative principles and the

realization that social order requires us to believe in their existence and to act as if they existed.

- b) Individual and social virtue. Virtue as a condition of acceptance of the collective standards and virtue as denial of the standards of society.
- c) There is a relationship between the organization of power in society and the degree of confidence we are entitled to have in its dominant practices and beliefs.

(4) The theory of domination. The harem as a model of despotism. The ambiguous character of the Parisian world: between republicanism and despotism. The indirectness of social relations.

- a) With respect to the women: the conflict between the acceptance of a legitimizing ideology (pretense of community) and the clarity of insight that the instincts themselves possess.
- b) With regard to the eunuchs: the pact with power leads in fact to powerlessness. Indispensable intermediaries of the despot.
- c) Usbek himself imprisoned by his own system.
- d) What are the possibilities? Republicanism or Parisian sociability.

(5) The affinity between domination and contemplation. What is needed: not to abandon reason, but to change the conception of reason. The issue is not one of activism or thought but of the spirit in which one acts or thinks.

II. Introduction

(1) Some remarks about the social theorists as people. Though I shall criticize them severely, I believe that they are all among the greatest teachers of the human race. In every case, the intellectual achievement was made possible by extraordinary moral qualities.

a) Perhaps the most necessary of these qualities was their courageous independence from petty interest and passing prejudice. Each of them was a state within a state, and each was willing to abandon the shelter of a craven subservience to convention. One of the requisites of greatness in thought: the willingness to make oneself vulnerable. Thus, there is a fundamental affinity between the conditions for intellectual and moral progress. Intellectual courage participates in the nature of personal trust.

b) Nevertheless, in each case their thought was colored by a very particular social context. It is one of the pleasures of intellectual history to see how the aspects of independence and dependence come together--often reinforcing rather than destroying each other. The decadent aristocracy (Montesquieu and Tocqueville). The radical merchant class (Bentham). The bureaucratic professoriate (Hegel).

(2) Plan for today:

a) The spirit of the laws and the structure of liberal society.

- b) Tocqueville and the dynamism of liberal society.
- c) The underlying dilemmas of this tradition of thought.
Critique of these dilemmas.

III. The Spirit of the Laws: the nature of liberal society

- (1) The Spirit of the Laws, the first work of social theory in the modern sense.
- (2) Notable for its perception of society as an integrated totality-- transformation of the idea of embodied spirit.
 - a) In the texts assigned, Montesquieu studies the nature (organization) and principle (the dominant passion) in each form of government.
 - b) Much of the rest of the book is occupied with the study of material influences on politics. These influences operate always through the consciousness of the members of society.
- (3) The ambiguous break with ancient political philosophy.
 - a) Montesquieu goes from normative to descriptive method.
 - b) From an unhistorical to an historical view of human nature.
 - c) With respect to (b), the crucial characteristics of consciousness:
 - 1) Held widely by members of a community; irreducible to individual beliefs.
 - 2) No clear division between ideals and perceptions. Distinction between fact and value vanishes at the deepest level of the mind.

- d) Break incomplete. New ideas in old words.
- (4) Normative elements remain; there is a
- a) law product of divine reason;
 - b) law derived from human nature;
 - c) law that is inherently common to all human societies.
- (5) Universal image of man. The passions on which each political regime plays are drawn from a more total conception of man within which each of these passions has a place. Montesquieu speaks as if there were a limited repertory of basic outlooks and emotions available to men in society.
- (6) The republic (democratic and aristocratic); despotism; and monarchy. Try to understand them both as examples of the struggle to relate consciousness to organization and, more specifically, as parts of an inquiry into the nature of modern society.
- (7) The republic. Its two forms:
- a) Its structure. Elected government; relative social equality; constant redistribution of property.
 - b) Principle on which the republic is based. Virtue: love of country and of equality. Private interest coincides with social good. As soon as there is social differentiation, the republic is in danger. Moderation as a surrogate for virtue.
 - c) Essence of republic: alliance of concern with universal good and respect for separateness of individuals. But how can this be? Fundamental experience of modern society

is one of disparity between private and social interest. Only frugal habits and small territory make this possible. Montesquieu evokes Sparta and Rome. Presents political dream of liberalism. Remains a dream because it is unclear how a truly universal interest could ever be generated in such a society. The education of the school is repeatedly defeated by the education of the world.

(8) Despotism

- a) Its structure. A single will prevails without legal constraints. Domain of caprice. Represented by Oriental empires. In the republic, all are equal because they are everything. Under despotism, they are equal because they are nothing. Transparency of Republic versus darkness of despotism. No law except as command of ruler. Only religion limits the power of the ruler.
- b) The principle is fear. Possession of self in the republic contrasts with the sentiment of our nothingness under despotism.
- c) In the effort to reach the republican ideal by crushing the intermediate ranks of society, we risk despotism. Both despotism and the republic imply an absence of intermediate bodies between the state and the individual. Despotism is the liberal's nightmare just as the Republic is his dream. If the Republic is the liberal's dream and despotism is his nightmare, what then is his reality?

(9) Monarchy

- a) Its structure. Single man at top, whose will is limited by law. Differentiated social order. Classes and institutions relatively independent. Separation of powers.
- b) Principle: honor. Each moved by private interest and by the sentiments of his group. They are kept in line by their reciprocal need for each other's recognition. Under the republic, each has a self; under despotism, he is robbed of this self and subject to the despot's whim. In the monarchy, what self the person has, he owes to others. The Newtonian system in society.
- c) Nonetheless, the monarchy is fragile. Will there be any institutional system for ensuring the coincidence of private and social interest? How is social interest to be defined? Once fundamental political equality is recognized, what will stop progress toward the equalization of social circumstances?

(10) The dream, the nightmare, and the reality of liberal society.

May be criticized in two directions:

- a) Underplays the despotic dynamic in the evolution of liberal society.
- b) Disregards the possibilities of recapturing the republican ideal.

IV. The Tocquevillian critique of the liberal theory of society

- (1) Way to understand Tocqueville's criticism:

- a) Internal criticism: suggestion that the liberal system is unstable; the possible remedies.
- b) The Ancien Regime analyzes this instability in detail; Democracy in America suggests its more general structure and the way in which it may be remedied.

(2) The immediate historical problem. The late 18th century revolutions had produced regimes that did not fit well into any of Montesquieu's categories. Despotic and liberal democracies.

(3) The main factors that tend to disrupt the ancien regime, which has many of the features of Montesquieu's monarchy:

- a) The revolution from below: commercialization. The break-up of the estates and the recognized transitoriness of all social positions;
- b) The revolution from above; the growth of state bureaucracy and a change in the nature of this power: becomes purely instrumental. All society as a subject of political will.
 - 1) the basic element is a lack of correspondence between the state and civil society,
 - 2) the problem of revolutionary reforms; partial reforms reveal the inadequacy of the total system, depriving it of its sanctity.
 - 3) the attack on the aristocracy destroys the ancien regime. The deep flaw in aristocratic society.
- c) The alienation of intelligence:

- 1) the separation of the intelligentsia from power;
 - 2) the union of religious and political revolutions;
 - 3) the idea of the malleability of society.
- (4) The pathology of liberal society; the tendency toward despotism.
- a) The subversion of legitimacy. The disorganization of the emotions.
 - b) Privatism. Oscillation between government as framework and as nurse. The public is privatized instead of the private being publicized. Politics about the whole of life. Government then appears as an external tutelary power.
- (5) The proposed remedies:
- a) to the subversion of legitimacy: religion.
 - b) to privatism: voluntary associations.
- (6) Why these solutions are of dubious efficacy:
- a) Religion itself privatized.
 - b) Voluntary associations:
 - 1) Partial association of role occupants;
 - 2) organized around private interests.
- (7) The situation of contemporary political thought. The conception of an invincible logic that cannot be shattered. Hence, the alternation between despairing resignation and revolutionary utopianism.

V. The false dilemmas of liberalism

- (1) Underlying this structure of thought, there is a set of dominant

concerns. They present themselves as dilemmas. But are they true dilemmas?

(2) Aristocracy and democracy. These thinkers recognized and admired the loftiness of the aristocratic ethic. At the highest levels of society, there would be room for the greatest amount of diversity and self-assertion. But the cost of this would be the oppression and standardization of the masses. The natural tendency of democracy: the increasing emancipation of the masses would destroy the occasions of diversity at the top without extending them to the rest of society. All men would be ambitious, but all their ambitions would be petty.

(3) Individuality and sociability. Montesquieu's monarchy and Tocqueville's democracy represent modest compromises between individuality and sociability. Sociability in the form of equalization without community. Individuality in the form of privatism without true diversity (for such diversity would be aristocratic).

The premise is that there is an inevitable trade-off between individuality and sociability: the more of one, the less of the other.

(4) Legitimacy and cynicism. Religion a mere convenience or a moral truth. Unwilling to reject arbitrariness because they are moderns or to accept it because they tremble at its consequences-- and the men with the daggers are waiting outside.

(5) The liberal theory of society moves beyond optimistic reformism to self-conscious tragedy. Is this the necessary tragedy of mankind

or simply the tragedy of an age? Is it the truth about our situation? Or is it the delusion of a purely contemplative mind--which, looking at the world from afar, can no longer imagine how it might be changed?

The importance of distinguishing the dilemmas that are truly universal from those that are specific to a particular form of life and thought.

(6) Aristocracy and democracy. The questions: Can one distinguish aristocratic diversity and loftiness of ambition from the particular social forms within which it is imprisoned in aristocratic society? The premise of the liberal dilemma: that the ethos of each form of social life is completely bound up with the concrete institutions and practices of the society. But there is another view. The ethos represents an interpretation of what it means to be human. At its most general levels it is capable of being rescued from its particular social manifestations and given a new but not wholly different interpretation in an alternative form of social life. An interpretation of the ideas of embodied spirit and of transcendence.

To make sense of this notion in social theory one must suppose that these different modes of experience are connected with one another. That each of them is a tendency or dimension of the human spirit; that they are capable of complementing and changing each other, by joining together in more inclusive wholes. Comparison to Panofsky's conception of art history.

(7) Individuality and sociability. The failure to acknowledge that it is true both (a) that individuality and sociability require and reinforce each other and (b) that they undermine each other. How

individuality requires sociability: (a) depends on the social medium of culture; (b) the need for recognition; (c) the fact that one can only be perfected by making oneself vulnerable to others. There is a certain threshold limit to this mutual reinforcement: the distinction between self and other cannot be wholly overcome. By sharing their ends and understandings of the world, one is in danger of losing one's own individuality. The objection to liberalism is that it fails to distinguish adequately the level of conflict between individuality and sociability that is inherent in the distinction between self and others from the level that results from the structure of domination in modern societies.

(8) Legitimacy and cynicism. This dilemma based upon the misconception that one must choose between the view that there is an objective (cosmological) basis for normative judgments and the view that all such judgments are arbitrary. Values either objective or subjective. Disregards the possibility that the authority of social practices and beliefs may be proportional to the extent to which they are expressions of collective human needs rather than of the interests and ideals of dominant groups. Such a view would require us not to take for granted the structure of domination in modern society.

(9) The forms of spirituality available to the elites in modern bourgeois and bureaucratic societies:

- a) A shallow and optimistic reformism. Belief in the possibilities of endless progress within the given system.

- b) A despairing and tragic liberalism that identifies the dilemmas of modern society and modernist consciousness as the universal condition of man. Leads into a stoic religion of resignation to the world as it is, complemented, but not reversed, by a utopian flight from political reality.

(10) The root of this tragic liberalism is idolatry: the vice that consists in mistaking the contingent for the necessary and the transitory for the eternal.

A lesson for the spirit in which to approach social study. The first and most common kind of failure consists in the tendency to underestimate the constraints imposed upon action and thought by any social system. The blindness to the "stubborn resistance of material things" and, even more, to the power of modes of thought and conduct of whose very existence we may be only imperfectly aware. This is a failure of lucidity: the spirit is embodied and, at any given moment, its embodiments impose limitations upon it.

But once one has grasped these constraints, one must then learn to discover the secret flaws and the hidden possibilities of transformation latent in every historical circumstance. The failure to detect these occasions is a failure of hope, which is also a limitation of insight. When lucidity has laid the ground for hope, hope itself can become a higher form of lucidity. To be both lucid and hopeful--that would be wisdom, if one could have it.

Theories of social orderI. Review: the liberal theory of society in Montesquieu and Tocqueville

(1) I singled out for discussion one among the various traditions that lie at the origins of classical social theory. Characterized by:

- a) Its perception that the disintegration of European aristocratic society was an irreversible process;
- b) Its ambivalence toward the moral and political implications of this process. A spur or a threat to individuality?
- c) Its rejection of both the means-ends and the sharing of values accounts of social conduct.

(2) The typology of governments in the first three books of the Spirit of the Laws. One may see this typology as a source of insight into the dominant concerns of the liberal imagination, its hopes and fears, and its sense of the limits of political possibility.

- a) The republic whose principle is virtue. The dream of liberalism: perfect harmony of the individual and the collective consciousness.
- b) Despotism whose principle is fear. The nightmare of liberalism: subjection to a capricious will untrammelled by law. The central preoccupation of liberalism: to avoid direct subjection to another's will. Law as the antidote to personal dependence. The common feature of the two governments: the absence of intermediate bodies

between government and the individual. The danger that as we try to carry out the communal republican ideal we may in fact end up with despotism.

- c) Monarchy whose principle is honor. Each individual moved to perform his role by his need to be recognized by his fellows. The social context: one of a proliferation of intermediate bodies and legal restraints on public power. An artificial link between private interest and public order.

(3) Tocqueville's argument in the "Ancien Regime" and "Democracy in America." A study of the instability of the aristocratic liberal society, of the birth of a new post-revolutionary order, of the despotic tendencies that menaced this order, and of the measures that might allay these tendencies.

- a) The disintegration of the ancien regime:
 - 1) the revolution from below: commercialism;
 - 2) the revolution from above: the expansion of governmental power and the change in its character;
 - 3) the opposition of the intelligenstia to the government.
- b) The pathology of democratic society:
 - 1) the subversion of legitimacy;
 - 2) privatism.
- c) The solutions:
 - 1) the reaffirmation of religion and morals;
 - 2) the establishment of voluntary associations.
- d) The inadequacy of these solutions.

e) The resulting sense of a labyrinth without an exit.

(4) The dilemmas of liberalism. Though largely implicit, they gave unity to this tradition of thought. In each case, there is a conflict between two ideals or two visions that appears to be insoluble. Upon looking more closely, we discover that this claim to universality is at least partially false. A danger in philosophy and in politics: to fall into the opposite error and to treat these dilemmas as entirely false. The task: to distinguish the aspect of these conflicts which inheres in the nature of society and subjectivity from the aspect that depends upon the organization of modern society and, specifically, upon its structure of domination. Once we tear away the legitimizing ideologies, certain ultimate problems remain. It is of the utmost importance that they be recognized for what they are.

a) Aristocracy and democracy.

- 1) Each form of social life associated with a characteristic ethos, a mode of experience.
- 2) One of the marks of the aristocratic ethos: its high-spiritedness and largeness of ambition. At the cost of the standardization of the masses. The emancipation of the masses would destroy forever the social basis of this ethic rather than extending it to the people. The reign of equality would also be the reign of pettiness.
- 3) Another view. Each mode of experience is interpretive and constitutive of human nature. Embodied in specific social practices yet capable of being dis-

sociated from them. The analogy to art history. The universal element in every style is reinterpreted and if necessary reinvented by other styles rather than simply discarded.

- 4) The practical application of this idea: the need to distinguish between the superbness of a dominant caste and the high-spirited possession of self which is built upon the individual's sense that he is always capable of transcending the limitations of consciousness and practice in the groups to which he belongs.

b) Individuality and sociability

- 1) The liberal thesis that there is a trade-off between them.
- 2) But, on the contrary, this is only half of the truth. It is true both that they require and that they undermine each other.
- 3) The need to distinguish those interferences between individuality and sociability that inhere in the distinction between self and others from those that result from contingent structures of domination. No way to tell a priori into which category a given interference fits. No general presumptions.
- 4) The practical importance of this principle. The twin dangers. Modernism in art and thought cultivates the sense of tragedy. Identifies the conflicts of liberal society with the necessary condition of man.

Vindication of the established order. The opposite danger: the effort to create a total and impossible harmony of individuality and sociability suppresses the former and transforms the latter into a new form of domination. The manifestation of this distortion is a terroristic politics.

c) Legitimacy and cynicism.

- 1) Liberal thought hesitates between conceptions that seem equally unacceptable: that there is an objective basis for normative judgments and that all such judgments are arbitrary. These correspond, respectively, to the positions of "ancient" and "modern" philosophy. Impossible to accept the ancient position without accepting the idea that values are real entities that can be apprehended by the mind. Such a view leaves no room for the sense that man creates his values as well as discovering them. It also serves as a device by which contingent beliefs and practices are given an appearance of necessity.
- 2) But we must not assume that the categories of objective and subjective valuation are exhaustive. Our willingness to rely upon collective practices, to take them as authoritative, may depend on the extent to which we see them as representing merely factional interests of dominant groups rather than collective needs and aspirations chosen in conditions of greater

autonomy and equality. The problem of the basis of normative judgment not an all or nothing matter; an issue of degree.

3) This view coherent only insofar as we acknowledge that no one set of social practices can constitute a definitive rendition of human nature and thereby attain perfect objectivity. The individual moral imagination capable of going beyond any particular form of social life.

d) The common ground in my treatment of these dilemmas. Theoretical lucidity as well as political prudence require that we find an alternative to both the belief in the possibility of a secular millenium and the conviction that the conflicts of our present situation are inescapable. Our understanding of the limits of possibility affects our thinking and action in the world today much more deeply than we imagine.

II. Introduction

(1) My purpose today: to speak in general terms about theories that deal with the basis of order in society. This will serve two functions:

- a) to place the liberal theory of society within the broader context of alternative theories;
- b) to introduce the study of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

(2) Plan of the class:

- a) Enumerate and criticize four main kinds of theories of social order.

- b) Suggest two ways of looking at the relation among these four kinds of theory.
- c) The premises that account for the inadequacies of these theories of social order.
- d) The proper role of theory in the transformation of these premises.

III. Theories of social order

(1) The starting point of the modern analysis of social order. The perception of a double breakdown:

- a) of established forms of social hierarchy;
- b) of the kinds of moral beliefs that were partly shaped by these forms and, in turn, lent them support.

(2) The private interest theory. Exemplified by utilitarianism and classical political economy. Two versions of the theory. The more general and more familiar: society as an association of self-interested traders. These individuals have divergent wants, ends, or interests. They specialize in different activities and then exchange their goods and services with each other. Each one ends up with more than he would have if he attempted to satisfy all his wants for himself. Thanks to the institutions of the market (and to other forms of reciprocity in social life), the very diversity of ends becomes a device of harmony. Because each individual can treat his fellows as a means to the satisfaction of his own ends, social order is possible without the repression or transformation of egotism. The major objections to this view:

- a) Exchange and reciprocity can only occur within the context of rules and institutions such as the laws governing contract and property. The calculus of means and ends can only operate when there are stable criteria that determine what sorts of conduct a person may resort to in order to further given goals, i.e. what counts as a legitimate means. These rules and institutions presuppose a set of shared beliefs and values. Without these shared values and beliefs, there would be no consensus for choosing the rules and no common standpoint from which to interpret their meaning when the time came to apply them.
- b) The collective goods problem. The private interest theory makes sense for one kind of good upon which society depends but not for another. Commodities are ordinarily non-collective goods, i.e. goods such that nonpurchasers can be excluded from their consumption. With respect to non-collective goods, diversity of interests may promote integration in the manner described. But then there are collective goods, i.e. goods such that nonpurchasers cannot be excluded from their consumption. An example would be defense. Insofar as collective goods are important, integration requires agreement on a common policy, shared understandings and values. But there are many collective goods about which men are willing to struggle in even the most privatized and commercialized of societies. Among these goods are the basic rules and practices of social life themselves.

(3) A narrower version of the private interest theory. An important strand in the genesis of political economy. The passions have been let loose by the decay of social hierarchy and moral precept. Among the passions we can distinguish one that is constructive and peaceful rather than subversive and warlike: the interest in money-making. Difficulty: underestimates the change that occurs when the commercial capitalist classes seize power for themselves. They will use that political power to promote their interests against other classes and other peoples.

(4) Integration from above: the state theory. Found in one form in Hobbes and in another in Hegel. There is a distinction between the state and civil society. The disorder is rooted in civil society; hence, it may be extirpated by the state. The state intervenes in civil society to impose its order: men as self-interested traders must accept the constraints on self-interest established by the dictatorial sovereign or by the collectivity of men as citizens (absolutist and democratic variants). The fundamental objections are found in Marx's critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state:

- a) The state is a limited agency. When the state and society can be conceived as two entirely different entities, politics touches upon but a limited aspect of life.
- b) The people who staff the government are themselves part of society. Hence, they are necessarily partisan. Not only do they belong to classes with interests of their own, but the bureaucracy itself develops its own interests and ideals which it tries to present as the universal

interest of society. Modern liberal capitalist society is a society where by definition all interests are private interests; there can be no public interest.

- c) The very existence of politics as a separate sphere of life--the separation of state from society--is a symptom of moral and social disintegration: a circumstance in which man acts as a communal being only when he acts politically--and even then his acts are more often than not expressions of selfish interest. The state, which is a product of disintegration, cannot be its cure.

(5) Integration from below: The theory of moral discipline. Exemplified by Tocqueville. Would play a central role in Durkheim's thought. The egotism of civil society and the subversion of legitimacy are to be contained by moral discipline: the resurgence of morals and religion, the cultivation of a sense of shared values, and the creation of associational forms that would stimulate such consensus. In this tradition, the social theorist aspires to the role of moral teacher. Objections:

- a) Insofar as there are generally shared values in modern society, they are self-regarding ones, i.e. the ideal of private autonomy. What people have in common is precisely what pulls them apart. Shared values would have to be imposed values; consensus means the subversion of freedom.
- b) The spirit of religion does not survive the rationalism of modern society. No stable cosmological framework on which to rely.

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- c) The normative beliefs that do remain are privatized; they have little public authority.
- d) All such forms of moral consensus justify and veil realities of domination. Hence, they cannot survive the onslaught of critical thought.

(6) The group domination theory. Exemplified by a certain kind of interpretation of Marx. All these responses to the question of order are inadequate. They are a mythical solution to a mythical problem. They all assume that society is an association of roughly equal individuals in struggle with each other. But in fact the main subjects of social action are groups and classes. There is a structure of group and class domination of society and this structure creates and imposes its own order. At one blow, the ground seems to be taken out from under all the other theories of order.

(7) But to say that this fourth theory makes the other three unnecessary is but a half-truth. The problem to which the other theories address themselves is not simply the existence of an order, but its legitimacy in the eyes of the members of society themselves. The issues of existence and legitimacy are connected because an illegitimate order cannot be stable. Therefore, we must complete the theory of group domination by saying: There is an order but one that has lost its basis of justification. Commonly interpreted as a conflict between authority and equality.

(8) The psychological counterpart of this situation of power without legitimacy. The individual recognizes himself as part of a collective

structure in whose moral authority he is unable to acquiesce. Oscillates between resignation and revolt. Isolated without being independent; resigned without being reconciled.

IV. Two ways of looking at the relations among the theories of order

(1) One approximation to understanding the relations among these theories in a quasi historical fashion.

- a) The private interest, state, and moral discipline theories belong to the prehistory of classical social theory. Though they proposed different solutions to the problem of order, they were all based upon a common perception of what the problem was.
- b) The group domination theory as formulated by Marx represents a rejection of the premises on which the earlier theories of order were based. Order is created and maintained by the differential power of classes and production units. A first moment in the evolution of classical social theory.
- c) The focus of concern in the generation of Durkheim and Weber was the problem of legitimacy. The first three doctrines of social order were answers to a misconceived problem. But the group domination theory was not enough. What were the consequences for social life of the fact that these modern liberal capitalist societies were unable to settle upon stable principles of legitimacy? And under what circumstances might such principles be re-discovered and agreed upon? But what are we to say of

this concern? Was it as the Marxists claimed the mark of a more or less indirect effort to shore up the bourgeois order? Or did it represent, on the contrary, as Marx's critic's argued, the introduction of a theme to which Marx had failed to do justice? This question must remain open for our study of the classical social theorists.

(2) There is a second way to conceive the relation among the theories of social order. It is frankly unhistorical, but perhaps it can lead us more directly to the core of the conceptual links among these doctrines. There is a dialogue going on among these theories which we must learn to overhear.

- a) The doctrine of moral discipline is inapplicable because it seeks to restore a situation that is irremediably lost--unreflective acquiescence in shared moral beliefs and in the power systems with which those beliefs are associated. It is a cure that the very nature of the disease renders ineffective.
- b) The doctrines of the harmony of private interests, of state order, and of group domination may describe a situation of fact, but they do not tell how the problem of legitimacy is or might be solved to our satisfaction. Until we have grouped the relationship between the way men actually live their lives and the beliefs they do, can, or should entertain about their obligations to each other, we cannot understand how societies hang together or why they change.

- c) The theoretical inadequacy of the doctrines of social order reflects an actual political inadequacy in the life of modern societies: the difficulty of carrying conviction in the attempt to define social order as moral order.

V. The source of the problem

(1) The theoretical and political inadequacy has its source in a structure with two elements. Both these elements indispensable to an understanding of the situation. Everything turns on their relation to each other.

(2) The first element: a structure of unequal power and trust. The hierarchical order less integrated and inclusive than in aristocratic societies. Its two main aspects: (a) class system of inherited degrees of access to wealth, power, and knowledge; (b) a commitment to meritocracy in the division of labor. These aspects complement and conflict with each other. Class position influences job occupations, but meritocracy has its own dynamic and ends up changing the character of the class system and the place of individuals within it.

(3) The second element: skepticism about the possibility of objective normative judgments. All such judgments now tend to be viewed as individual and arbitrary.

(4) The two elements are related to each other as follows:

- a) The weakening of the hierarchical order was a precondition for the increasing abandonment of earlier beliefs in the objectivity of normative judgments. The power structures

no longer seemed a self-legitimizing part of the natural order of things. Moreover, the dominant beliefs seemed compromised by their association with these structures.

- b) On the other hand, power relations cannot be rendered legitimate unless we know wherein legitimacy consists. We depend on each other and we ought to, because dependence is an aspect of trust, and the willingness to enter into relations of trust is indispensable to the joint progress of our individuality and our sociability. But how can we distinguish dependence as trust from dependence or subjection to domination? How can we create a situation in which collective beliefs and practices are more than the projections of a factional interest?

(5) The intellectual puzzle of the theory of social order is thus shown to be based upon a real political puzzle. Can we break out of this structure? Or is it eternal? Can a change in the power relations within which our moral beliefs arise be expected to give new content and, above all, new authority to those beliefs. That is what a break out of the structure would have to consist of.

VI The role of theory

(1) What is the role of theory in this transformation? Ordinarily viewed as a necessary though insufficient condition of change. But there are two difficulties with this view.

- a) Change--even radical change--may be, and often is, an utterly unintended consequence of action undertaken for other purposes and upon wholly mistaken premises about the world.

b) The fact of self-consciousness may serve as an excuse for inaction. The critical mind delights in the position of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, who, according to Dr. Johnson, felt "some complacence in his own perspicacity and . . . [received] some solace of the miseries of life, from consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt, and the eloquence with which he bewailed them."

(2) We must affirm not that self-enlightenment is a condition of change, but that is a good in itself. Even this, however, somewhat misses the point. It is a good whose authority cannot be long eluded. Any form of social life based upon a denial of this good is in principle unstable.

(3) In previous eras, however, this instability existed only in principle and in the long run. But in modern society the relation of intelligence to the social order was modified. For the most part, social thought was condemned in the past to the double role of celebrating and moderating established power. It was the halo of the existing order, and the thinker or the artist who was neither a Jewish prophet nor a Greek philosopher had no place to sit in but the throneroom, together with the soldiers and the priests. But in modern European history the relationship of culture to the social order underwent a change. On the one hand, the social order, losing its appearance of naturalness, became increasingly dependent on theoretical, artistic, and popular culture for the principles of legitimation indispensable to its own stability. Thus, the need for a set of justifications that would not fade away under the light of

self-consciousness. On the other hand, however, it became possible for a part of this culture to escape from the thronerooms and to pass judgment upon the kings of the earth. That is why the time of moral confusion, the era in which power begins to be stripped of pretence, is also the age in which the truth has achieved a new degree of power.