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Two Models Of Consensus

Sudarsan Padmanabhan
University of South Florida

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Two Models Of Consensus

by

Sudarsan Padmanabhan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Stephen Turner, Ph.D.
Kwasi Wiredu, B.Phil.
Charles Guignon, Ph.D.
Martin Schoenfeld, Ph.D.
Willis Truitt, Ph.D.
Michael Gibbons, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation titled “Two Models of Consensus” is based on five arguments. 1. Consensus is asymmetrical. 2. Consensus is partial or limited unanimity. 3. Consensus and democracy do have a concomitant relation. 4. Consensus is not organic to political systems. 5. Consensus depends upon civil society, subsidiarity, and the dominant cultural paradigm of society.

In the first chapter titled “Historical Specificity of the Western Conception of Civil Society” I argue that concept of civil society evolved under certain conditions in a liberal democratic tradition such as shared social imaginaries. As an example of how diversity could lead to hypostatization of cultural differences, I exposit the concept of Indian caste system.

In the second chapter, “Intersubjectivity and the Problem of Cultural Identities,” I compare the ideas of Hans Georg Gadamer and George Herbert Mead about self- interested action and mutual cooperative action. Gadamer and Mead emphasize intersubjective communication, ‘I – Thou’ relationships. I explain the importance of the ‘I – Thou’ relationship for a consensual activity.

The third chapter, “Consensus in the Realm of Science,” discusses the impact of science as the context of justification in advanced liberal democracies and its effect on consensus. Charles

Sanders Peirce's attempt to apply his scientific method to arrive at a consensus in the social sphere is also discussed in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter, "Kwasi Wiredu – The Akan Conception of Communitarian Consensus," I discuss Kwasi Wiredu's emphasis on achieving a consensus on the basis of 'what is' and not 'what ought to be,' in the social realm. Wiredu differentiates between a government by consent and a government by consensus. I elaborate Wiredu's analysis of the process of consensus that was in vogue in the Akan community of Ghana.

In the final chapter, "Political Consensus – Intra-cultural and Extra-cultural," I argue that consensus is asymmetrical. It is imperative to compromise in social, political, economic, and religious beliefs on the basis of weak deontological and weak consequential approaches. Consensus necessitates a synthesis of different kinds of social actions such as purposive-instrumental, traditional, value-laden, and communicative action into what I call the Cooperative Action. Only such an action can speak across cultures and facilitate genuine cross-cultural interaction.

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Introduction

My dissertation titled “Two Models of Consensus” explores how seemingly unproblematic process of consensus becomes very complex and vexatious. The term “Two Models” represent the general sociological and anthropological distinction between societies and communities, culture and nature, and open and closed societies that is used to conceptually differentiate modern Western societies from non-Western traditional communities.¹ Consensus in a pejorative sense means agreement or compromise. Etymologically, consensus is related to consent, which means to agree.

I was troubled by why an agreement even in simple matters remains elusive. I realized that the entire process of consensus or agreement is informed by a fore-structure, fore-understanding, and fore-judgment. Doctrines and dogmas are intertwined in the process of a discourse aimed at achieving consensus. Hence, there is no plateau of knowledge from which cultural paradigms could be theorized. What we have is a rough terrain full of cliffs and valleys. My interest in the problem of consensus began as an aesthetic question. Habermas claims that a genuine consensus is not possible in the aesthetic realm because of its emphasis on subjective expressions. Only an evaluation in

¹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, Trans. Charles P. Loomis, New York: Harper & Row, 1963. pp. 5-29. Tönnies characterizes communities (*gemeinschaft*) organic and society (*gesellschaft*) mechanical. Both Tönnies and Max Weber argued that communities inexorably became societies due to social rationalization. According to Tönnies, science plays an important role in the transformation of a community into a society.

the form of aesthetic criticism is possible, according to Habermas. My argument is that since every cultural paradigm including religion, language, and science is influenced by the social and political, aesthetics cannot be relegated to the realm of the subjective because of its perceived absence of objectivity. Aesthetic objects are not ahistorical. It is understandable that a consensus could be difficult to achieve in the aesthetic realm because of individual tastes, but even normative and descriptive issues are problematic. In order to understand the factors that support or vitiate consensual activity, I explore the structural conditions of a process of consensus. The process of consensus has to be normative and hermeneutical. Therefore, I surmised that consensus has to be both diachronous and synchronous.

Consensus on any issue involves socio-political, interpersonal, and cultural aspects. I choose to examine the process of consensus from three aspects. They are:

- 1) Civil society (Social conditions)
- 2) Interpersonal relationship within a society (I – Thou relationship)
- 3) Contemporary cultural paradigm (Science)

All the three afore-mentioned aspects are interconnected. In my research on the process of consensus, I found that most social and political theorists have started from a ground zero and then constructed a theory. In this sense, I call the theories of consensus of Rawls or Habermas, symmetrical theories of consensus. Their theories search for conditions of uniformity of opinions and do not deal with divergence of opinions. I decided to analyze

consensus not as a total agreement but a tentative agreement of divergent views. Consensus is about an agreement on how to make things better. The process of consensus involves both good and bad ramifications. In a consensual process, tactics, strategy, honesty, threat, and conciliatory gestures are all involved. Hence, it is not only moral but also strategic. I argue that consensus is asymmetrical. It is not only a discourse on what is the right path but an agreement to act cooperatively in spite of disagreements. Hence, I call consensus “co-operative action.” My conclusion is that even a definition of consensus must be consensual and flexible. I discuss the process of cooperative action in the fifth chapter.

In this dissertation I also compare and contrast the predominant Western models of consensus such as Habermas’ ideal speech situation and John Rawls’ hypothesis of the original position with the political system of the Akan society in Ghana, which traditionally had a system of government by consensus. The Akan political system emphasizes consensus in resolving all disputes. Habermas’ concept of an ideal speech situation contains the following features.²

1. Clarity in the structure of communication
2. Description in formal terms and show of force within the process of understanding or from outside
3. Only the force of better argument is allowed
4. All motives except the cooperative search for the truth are to be banished.

² Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, Trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. p. 10.

John Rawls defines the original position as follows: “It is a state of affairs in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of social forces. Thus, justice as fairness is able to use the idea of pure procedural justice from the beginning.”³ Since the aforementioned approaches emphasize ideal conditions that are necessary for a process of consensus, I call them symmetrical approaches to consensus. I have argued in the course of my dissertation that a need for consensus in the political or social realm necessarily indicates unrest or instability of social situations. Hence, a theory of consensus based on a theory of ideal situations fails to recognize the dynamic nature of the dialogical process necessary when there is strife between two social groups or paradigms. I have constructed my arguments on the basis of five assumptions, which are as follows.

1. Consensus is asymmetrical. It has no ideal starting or culminating state.
2. Consensus is partial or limited unanimity.
3. Consensus and democracy are not concomitantly related. For example, some African societies have a strong participatory political system, which emphasizes consensus as the only method of resolving disputes. I have discussed the role of consensus in the communitarian democracy of the Akan society in Ghana.
4. Consensus depends upon civil society, interpersonal relationships, and the dominant cultural paradigm of a society.
5. Consensus is not necessarily organic to cultures or political systems. It is deliberative and accommodates cultural differences. Hence, a consensus is

³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999. p. 104

possible only as a fusion of horizons, exchange of viewpoints. Consensus is the recognition of cultural interstices and it is a cultural middle-path.

In the first chapter titled, “Historical Specificity of the Western Conception of Civil Society and its Problems,” I analyze the development of civil society in liberal democracies. Civil society is characterized by freedom of association. In this chapter, I discuss the role of individuals, social and political institutions, and modern social imaginary discussed by Charles Taylor and how consensus evolves in civil society. What Taylor calls direct-access society, horizontal relationships, unmediated interaction, and secular polity are explained in sufficient detail. Taylor mentions Habermas’ idea of the transformation of the public sphere as an important aspect of the modern social imaginary. I discuss Habermas’ theory of communicative action, which facilitates mutual understanding. I also analyze in detail, the development of civil society from ancient Greek civilization to the modern period. This chapter also contains a brief description of the Akan society and the caste system in India. I also introduce concepts of solidarity and subsidiarity in order to explain the complementary relation between the individual and the social. The notion of subsidiarity is a catholic notion that says, “... nothing should be done by a larger and more complex organization which can be done as well by a smaller and simpler organization.”⁴ The aim of the principle of subsidiarity is to encourage social relationships and mediating institutions.⁵ I argue that democracy does not necessarily encourage consensus while communitarianism is not necessarily authoritarian.

⁴ David Bosnich, “The Principle of Subsidiarity,” *Religion and Liberty*, Volume 6, Number 4, Grand Rapids: Lord Acton Institute, July and August 1996.

⁵ P. W. Hogg, “Subsidiarity and the Division of Powers in Canada” (1993) 3 *National Journal of Constitutional Law* 341. ‘Subsidiarity’ is a jurisdictional principle regarding the distribution of

Kwasi Wiredu's analysis of the Akan system of governance through a process of consensus is a very good example of how non-Western cultures have institutionalized cooperative concept of governance. The best example of equilibrium between solidarity and subsidiarity is the Akan political system. Solidarity is the common identity of a group. Subsidiarity is the mutual relationship between the individuals in a society. As a contrast, I have also examined how social stratification has been rationalized in India as a response to divergent social, linguistic, religious and ethnic population. Indian social structure displays a lack of subsidiarity. Consensus becomes redundant when there is social solidarity but not subsidiarity. But even a notion of solidarity is questionable with respect to India.

In the second chapter titled "Intersubjectivity and the Problem of Cultural Identities," I further expand on the importance of the notion of subsidiarity, I analyze two conceptions of intersubjective relationships. One is Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical approach and the other is George Herbert Mead's social behaviorism. The former emphasizes the independence of the 'other' from the 'I' and the latter attempts to define the 'other' in its relation to the 'I.' I have argued that the relationship between individuals in a society is an important factor in political, social, and cultural debates.

competence between federal and sub-federal levels of government. The leading statement of this principle is Article 5 of the *Treaty Establishing the European Community* (Official Journal C 340), which states that "In areas that do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community". Although the principle of 'subsidiarity' is not found in the text of the [Constitution Act, 1867](#), several commentators have been attracted to the principle because it appears to provide a principled and rational basis for allocating jurisdiction between the provincial and federal governments. It recognizes both the importance of provincial autonomy and the functional superiority, in certain circumstances, of federal jurisdiction.

The 'I – Thou' relationship in a society is an indicator of the balance between solidarity and subsidiarity. A climate of mutual cooperation is possible only if there is an equitable 'I – Thou' relationship between the members of a society. There are several underlying factors underlying a strong 'I – Thou' relationship among the members of a society. Religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and nationality could influence the 'I – Thou' relationship. Both Gadamer and Mead distinguish between interest based interaction and mutual cooperative action. Gadamer characterizes communication as the fusion of horizons, a confluence of cultural perspectives. I argue in favor of the need to treat communicative interaction as the fusion of horizons rather than stimulus-response activity. Consensual activity becomes more flexible if a conversation of cultural horizons is encouraged. Gadamer's emphasis on non-strategic communication encourages multicultural interaction.⁶

In the third chapter titled "Consensus in the Realm of Science," I argue that essential characteristic of scientific disciplines is the emphasis on the theory-laden nature of an idea. I will supplement Peirce's analysis of consensus in science with Stephen Turner's distinction between a scientific consensus and consensus among scientists. Kwame Anthony Appiah asserts that science is the context of justification in contemporary Western society. With science as the dominant cultural paradigm, consensus is heavily influenced by scientific practices. What C.S. Peirce defines as the experimental method or the scientific method demands a shift in paradigm since a knowledge episode contains tenacity, authority, and a priori methods of belief. Peirce

⁶ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 355-361.

attempts to apply the same methodology applied by the natural sciences to arrive at epistemic consensus in scientific disciplines to the moral and social realm.

In advanced liberal democracies, the government and the people alike appeal to scientific evidence in order to establish truth. People generally share a belief in science and in the veracity of its method. Hence, scientific methodology has become the most dependable tool even in non-scientific disciplines. Demonstrability of empirical evidence and the cultivated emphasis on reciprocity and justifiability due to the proliferation of freedom and equality has complicated the process of education and the fixation of belief. A doctrinal approach such as the ones adopted by religion or pseudo-scientific disciplines is inadmissible in the age of science and democracy. Vast variations in individual standards of understanding, the tension between various dogmatic positions in the civil society, and the progressive movement of science are always in a state of constant flux. Hence, consensus is influenced by the dominant cultural paradigm of science.

In the fourth chapter, “Kwasi Wiredu – The Akan Conception of Communitarian Consensus,” I explain how a pragmatic and operational system of consensual governance based on personhood and human rights was followed by the Akan society of Ghana. A government by consent and a government by consensus were fused together by representative and deliberative mode of governance. I argue that such a system of governance was possible because of the communitarianism and the shared culture of the Akan community. Ironically, Habermas’ ideal speech situation could be more plausible in societies such as the Akans in Ghana, which are communitarian in nature. The Akan

community insists on a consensus based on a conception of common good of the community. A decision is arrived at in the Akan council only if all concerned agree unanimously to a course of action. Hence, the community of Akans mandates consensus. Kwasi Wiredu's emphasis on a non-party democracy and his views on the process of achieving a consensus in the Akan community are also discussed.

In the fifth chapter titled "Political Consensus – Intra-cultural and Extra-Cultural," I argue that cross-cultural interactions are hampered by a lack of agreement due to intra-cultural and extra-cultural variations in the social, individual, and cultural realms. Hence, only a tentative understanding of alien cultures is possible. A consensus cognizant of differences rather than uniformity is necessary in a multi-polar and multi-cultural world. A failure to recognize the asymmetrical nature of the global village would result in cultural conflicts within and without the society. It is here that subsidiarity as the notion that engages differences at the micro-level rather than the macro-level becomes invaluable. There is no seamless transition between the social, the individual, and the institutional. A consensus that emerges from cultural interstices is anti-essentialist and anti-metaphysical. It also, in some sense, disputes the emancipatory effect of the process of deliberation within a society. The term 'cultural interstices' indicates an opposition to rigid social and conceptual categorizations. Homi Bhabha defines his philosophy of culture as a philosophy of cultural interstices. Normal characterizations such as center – periphery, north – south, society – community, and majority – minority relations are ineffectual as concrete social categories. Instead of homogeneity and uniformity, a philosophy of cultural interstices advocates an analysis of cultures in terms of their

differences. A consensus in a global and multi-cultural world is plausible only as informed by a philosophy of cultural interstices.

A philosophy of difference is a philosophy of ever-expanding possibilities. A concrete example of a consensual approach based on cultural interstices could be borrowed from a completely different topic. Stephen Turner's description of a 'third way,' which is the middle-path between market economy and welfare state, is a robust case of cultural interstices.⁷ Globalization is creating problems in terms of cross-cultural interaction in the fields of economics, science, health, political systems, religious beliefs, and terrorism. Hence, in order to achieve consensus conjoining deontology and consequentialism is inevitable. I suggest a concept of cooperative action that coordinates action orientations not on the basis of rationality but on a shared conception of good. Such a conception of a good can evolve in the process of consensus.

Ultimately, the aim of a consensus is peaceful resolution of problems. In such a situation, a consensus need not be a rational agreement but a non-violent disagreement that enables cessation of hostilities. More often than not, consensus is inherently asymmetric because one side always sacrifices more than other on account of social, economic, and political inequalities. The need for consensus indicates the existence of disagreements because of the asymmetric nature of the lifeworld. Irrespective of whether a consensus is sought to resolve violent or non-violent confrontations, the force of better argument does not bring about a consensus but only the will to concede ground on the part of interlocutors. That is the function of consensus as a cooperative action. My

⁷ Stephen Turner, "The Third Way," *Society*, Volume 42, Number 2, January/February 2005.

conclusion is that Western cultures emphasize legal remedies of disputes and not consensus. The Akans emphasize consensus and hence attempt to find a solution within their community. In the caste-based Indian society, religion, morality, lifeworld, art, culture, law, and economics were fragmented by social stratification. Contemporary Indian society is constructing new social imaginaries by redefining the relation between solidarity and subsidiarity in civil society. In a rapidly changing world, a cooperative action emphasizing the redefinition of both individual and social imaginaries through a conversation of cultures is inescapable.

Chapter 1

Historical Specificity of the Western Conception of Civil Society and its Inherent

Problems

The concept of civil society is an important part of the modern Western socio-political tradition. But the idea of civil society has been transformed over the course of history. In the modern period, the emphasis of civil society was on individual liberty in the Lockean tradition, while in the Rousseauian tradition the emphasis was on citizenship. A conception of civil society was antithetical to feudalism and represented freedom of expression, free economy, and participatory democracy, to name a few. Civil society belongs to the realm of non-governmental association of people. The history of civil society begins with Plato and Aristotle in Greece. Later, Romans and Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Francisco Suarez emphasized different aspects of civil society. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Montesquieu were the progenitors of the contemporary notion of civil society. Alexis de Tocqueville, who traveled in America in the nineteenth century, identified the concept of voluntary associations as the most distinguishing aspect of the American civil society.¹ According to Howard Wiarda, civil society signifies civic consciousness which functions as an effective institution of checks and balances on the government. Wiarda says, “Civil society thus meant the possibility of participatory citizens living together in a condition of protected property rights providing for economic prosperity and political freedom guaranteed by regular, constitutional procedures and the rule of law.”²

¹ Howard J. Wiarda, *Civil Society – The American Model and the Third World Development*, Cambridge: Westview Press, 2003. pp. 13-19.

² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the following: 1) Solidarity and subsidiarity – defining features of a civil society; 2) Development of civil society in ancient Greece and India; 3) Archaic and modern aspects of civil society; and 4) The impact of the modern social imaginary. I have also given a short introduction to the Akan communitarian democracy and the Indian caste system. I argue that civil society has ameliorated social, religious, and political schisms in the West. But, genuine consensus is elusive in the West on account of the emphasis on law for adjudication of disputes and the irreconcilability of individual interests with common interests. In contrast, African communitarian traditions emphasized the role of consensus in order to arrive at decisions in a non-adversarial manner. I have discussed the Akan communitarian system elaborately in the fourth chapter.

A civil society has two facets, namely, the individual and the collective. For a society to function effectively there is a need for both arms of the society, the individual and the collective, to have a balanced relationship. But a distinction between the individual and the collective is not one of binary opposition to each other. Rather, a society achieves equilibrium on account of flexible and mutually enriching nature of the relationship between its members and the social apparatus that governs their everyday practices. Everyday practices are encapsulated in the habits, manners, customs, religion, and other shared practices in a society. But the most important aspect of a society is the role of the collective in the unfettered and unencumbered development of the individual. While the individual is not pitted in an antagonistic relationship with the social whole, factors such as freedom, security, and opportunities for the optimal development of an all-round personality in an individual depend upon the structure of a society to a large

extent.

While equality of opportunities is dependent upon the equality of individuals as members of a society, all ancient societies did not practice equality of social status with guaranteed rights and autonomy. Autonomy and rights for all people are recent developments after the advent of liberal democracy in the West. In any society, factors such as economy, justice, social rules and regulations, standard of living, facilities such as housing, sanitation and water, health, occupations, and creative expressions in the form of art, sculpture, painting, and music were viewed as demonstrative of the advancement and progress of the society under consideration.

In both ancient as well as modern societies, artistic expressions and even religion and philosophy were considered to be the bastion of the literati and the cognoscenti. By dispossessing the masses of their access to intellectual achievements the higher echelons of the society could reign over the masses with untrammelled freedom. When a society is sapped of its creative energy and aspirations, it ceases to prosper and becomes vegetative. In most of the troubled areas in the world, the main reason for social unrest is not the lack of existence of a civil society, but the destruction of the social structure by religious extremism, political turmoil, ethnic violence or foreign intervention. This is demonstrable with an analysis of the nature of violence perpetrated on the populace in developed and developing countries. In the developed countries, the nature of violence and crimes are more often than not individual. In a developing country, the nature of violence is mostly of the character of group versus group, caste, religious, and ethnic. In some ways, the notion of community or collective is stronger than the individual.

The tension between the individual (I) and the collective (Thou) is present in all societies. In democracies, avenues for ventilating the tension between the individual and the collective are available in the form of political and social institutions. In advanced liberal societies, existence of a common justice system serves as an effective avenue for ventilating the tension between the individual and the collective. In a closely-knit community, there are institutions that adjudicate disputes. But, legal institutions in ancient Islamic civilizations, China, or India were different from the modern day institutions in the liberal Western countries and hence comparisons between the Western and traditional cultures are not tenable. Even if comparisons are inevitable, thinkers such as Habermas claim that a dialogical process of argumentation is peculiar to the Western hemisphere because of the emphasis on rationality from the modern epoch. Habermas argues that traditional cultures are monological and a dialogical rational argumentation is possible only in socially rationalized Western countries. Hence, according to Habermas, a rationally motivated consensus in a debate is possible only in the modern societies that have democratic institutions, freedom of speech, communicative rationality, and secular ideals.³ In contrast to the Habermasian position of symmetrical nature of consensus, it can be shown how traditional cultures had a methodology of achieving consensus even in asymmetric situations. An example of symmetrical nature of consensus is Habermas' "ideal speech situation". According to Habermas,⁴

This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus – bringing force of the argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and owing to the mutuality of rationally

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, Trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 46, 284.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

motivated conviction, assure themselves of both unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity in their lifeworld.

In Ghana, the Akan society debated all decisions and arrived at a consensus not by the force of majority but by hearing arguments from all sides. Only when all participants were convinced of the veracity of the consensus, the debate ended. Hence, even traditional societies had a very amicable system of conflict resolution.⁵ The aim of the Ghanaian political system is not only a consensual decision making but also encourage the participation of people in the deliberative process, which is the strength of the modern day democracies. But, Ghana was forcibly turned into a Western style democracy, after its independence from Britain, and its traditional social structure was neglected, which resulted in a crippling economic, social, and political situation. On the other hand, the process of consensus arrived in the Akan society is based on a strong cultural bond existing within a group sharing a common framework of understanding.

Charles Taylor argues that the modern social imaginaries that characterize Western democracies and the social imaginaries that characterize other cultures are different, which brings forth the issue of cultural particulars and universals. Cornelius Castoriadis formulated the concept of social imaginaries. According to Castoriadis, “Each society is a construction, a constitution, a creation of a world, of its own world.”⁶ George Elliott writes that the concept of social imaginary has a Freudian ring in Castoriadis. A

⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain,” in *World In Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, Trans. David Ames Curtis. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 3–18. Cited from Anthony Elliott, “The Social Imaginary: A Critical Assessment of Castoriadis’ Psychonanalytic Social Theory,” *American Imago* 59.2, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. pp. 141-170.

social imaginary is the world of creation effected by a subject for itself.⁷ Hence, it is imperative to distinguish cultural universals and cultural particulars. In short, Kwasi Wiredu emphasizes the difference between custom and morality. Customs are particular to a culture whereas morality has universal connotations.

Solidarity and Subsidiarity – Defining Features of a Civil Society

George McLean defines two most important aspects of social interaction between the society as a whole and its individual members. They are: solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity is defined as the communication or interaction between social groupings and communities in a society. Subsidiarity is defined as the participation of the groups and communities in the social activities. The notion of subsidiarity is a catholic notion that says, "... nothing should be done by a larger and more complex organization which can be done as well by a smaller and simpler organization."⁸ The aim of the principle of subsidiarity is to encourage social relationships and mediating institutions.⁹ The solidarity could be construed as a feeling of togetherness or a sense of belonging together found in a society. Subsidiarity is the operational element that tests the solidarity of a society as it

⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

⁸ David Bosnich, "The Principle of Subsidiarity," *Religion and Liberty*, Volume 6, Number 4, Grand Rapids: Lord Acton Institute, July and August 1996.

⁹ P. W. Hogg, "Subsidiarity and the Division of Powers in Canada" (1993) 3 National Journal of Constitutional Law 341. 'Subsidiarity' is a jurisdictional principle regarding the distribution of competence between federal and sub-federal levels of government. The leading statement of this principle is Article 5 of the *Treaty Establishing the European Community* (Official Journal C 340), which states that "In areas that do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community". Although the principle of 'subsidiarity' is not found in the text of the [Constitution Act, 1867](#), several commentators have been attracted to the principle because it appears to provide a principled and rational basis for allocating jurisdiction between the provincial and federal governments. It recognizes both the importance of provincial autonomy and the functional superiority, in certain circumstances, of federal jurisdiction.

involves the participation of the people living in that society.¹⁰ For example, in ancient Indian social organization, social groupings were mobile and hence formation of identities, namely, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic was not static. Also, migration in large numbers from one place to another happened when the situation became hostile for a group of population. For a society to have a concrete framework of administration and government, it must become sedentary and urban.¹¹

When a society settles down, efforts are made to streamline its infrastructure such as roads, buildings, lakes, health, agriculture, education, government and trade that would benefit the whole population. In this regard, a society is a voluntary association of its members to improve their standard and culture of living. Even nomadic communities had rules and regulations concerning the conduct of the group in marriages, sharing wealth, family, occupation, social habits and other customs. For example, early Vedic communities of India had a standardized system of procedures and rules required for a common law.¹² Even anterior to the Vedic Aryans, urbanization was at its zenith during the Indus Valley civilization.¹³ Indus Valley civilization appears to have been effectively administered.

Unlike modern social imaginaries that emphasized absolutely secularized ethics of argumentation which itself had a very strong influence of religious tradition,

¹⁰ George F. McLean, p. 15.

¹¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. II, Ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. pp. 1213-1226.

¹² Romila Thapar, p. 119.

¹³ Mortimer Wheeler explains the characteristics of a civilization vis-a-vis a settlement or a community. According to this criterion, only the Egyptian, Sumerian and the Indus Valley cultures could be classified as civilizations in spite of several settlements in the forms of towns, cities and villages found in several places all around the world.

contemporary societies need a discursive framework that incorporates hermeneutical understanding of different cultures and traditions. In Western democracies, political relation between subsidiarity and solidarity defines the social imaginary. In most liberal societies, subsidiarity and solidarity are interconnected.¹⁴ Even in traditional societies, the city-dwellers had a better understanding of the notion of subsidiarity when compared to their rural brethren. Problems arising out of rapid urbanization even in less populated and abundantly rich countries such as the United States could be catastrophic to the social, political, and economic aspects that are integral to the maintenance of social equilibrium. As Taylor observes, in rural societies, groups coordinated their activities with each other in the spirit of mutual cooperation while social status was not always based on mutually equal relationships.¹⁵ One of the most salient features in the social imaginaries envisioned by the modernity is the secularized transcendental principle of the equality of human beings.

Development of Civil Society in Ancient Greece and India

The origins of civil society in the West can be traced to ancient Greek *polis*. Plato envisioned a corporate system of governance that culminated in the Utopian ideal of a Republic, in which the philosopher-king was at the helm of Athens. Plato's pyramidal structure of social stratification was based on a classification of physical, mental, and spiritual capabilities of the people of Athens. The philosopher-king was the most meritorious candidate who has been trained in several disciplines and who had outshone all others. Such a system actively encourages social stratification in which the lower

¹⁴ George F. McLean, p. 57.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 15.

classes such as artisans only had a theoretical chance to graduate to the next rung of the social ladder.¹⁶ The chances of an artisan or a handicraftsman ascending the throne of Athens as a philosopher-king are remote in Plato's Republic. Thus, Plato's Republic is elitist. While Aristotle's *polis* did not defy the prevalent social stratification in Greece, it suggested a more ecumenical form of governance that included a broad spectrum of population called community. Even in Aristotle's conception of *polis*, women, and slaves were not liberated. Ironically, Plato had an elaborate training regimen for women since he envisioned a functional role for women in the society. Plato's characterization of women appears to be strong, independent and dynamic because their role is oriented towards the welfare of the Republic.

Plato claims that men are physically stronger than women. Romantic relationship between men and women is discouraged in Plato's Republic. Even procreation is for the purpose of strengthening the Republic. The relationship between men and women is devoid of traditional male-domination because even conjugal relationship is for a higher cause. Hence, women have more equitable status under the auspices of the Republic. But a philosopher-king could rarely be a woman because Plato did not consider men and women equal in terms of natural abilities thereby adhering to the social hierarchy. While Plato's Republic is designed to eliminate factors that contribute to disorder in the state by a system of governance that respects knowledge, Aristotle's politics is regulated by the ethics of the *polis*. A *polis* is administered as per the wishes of its citizens. Aristotle did not consider women and slaves part of the citizenry. But the role of an individual citizen

¹⁶ Interestingly, Plato's Republic does provide opportunities to the qualified candidates. In contemporary rentier societies, privileges are converted into rights, even though considerations of social justice necessitate affirmative action, compensation, pensions, and other employee benefits. Refer to Stephen Turner's article "The Third Way" in *SOCIETY*, January/February 2005.

is very clearly delineated by Aristotle in his ethics. According to Aristotle, positive qualities such as responsibility, friendship, non-acquisitiveness and duty if nurtured in its citizens would strengthen the *polis*. A strong and cordial intersubjective relationship amongst the citizens of a *polis* cements its stability. But, it is very clear that the welfare of the citizens is always subservient to the stability of the *polis*. Thus, *eudaimonia*, as the concept of good life, is always in the context of the *polis* towards which its citizens have a duty.¹⁷

While the city-states of Greece were strong cultural entities, India was the land of immigrants. Pastoral and agrarian cultures were in constant tension, which necessitated continuous redefinition of cultural identities. After the demise of the Indus Valley culture, the Aryans who were pastoral inhabited the Indian subcontinent. Re-urbanization of Northwestern India was at its pinnacle after the period of the *Upanishads*.¹⁸ Urbanization is the result of the development of subsidiarity, the spirit of participation of the members of a society. A city administration requires the participation of its people in an orderly fashion in its political and development. There was a paradigm shift in the social organization of the post-*Upanishadic* India, which was already beginning to move away from a society of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists towards a full-fledged agrarian population. After several stages of social development, urbanization was achieved.

While ideas of individual enterprise, moral values, a good life, a happy family,

¹⁷ Richard McKeon, Ed. *Introduction to Aristotle*, New York: Modern Library Edition, 1947. Refer to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. George F. McLean, Ed. *Civil Society and Social Reconstruction*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I, Volume 16, Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values & Philosophy, 2001. p. 15.

¹⁸ Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1987 p. 17.

work ethic, and religious activities were all part of the Indian social fabric, the role of the collective was dominant and the individual had freedom within limits as prescribed by the collective. Indian society was stratified into four classes from the time of the *Rig Veda*. The famous *Puruṣasukta* (the hymn to the *Puruṣa*) clearly delineates the class distinctions that existed during the Vedic times.¹⁹ Social distinctions were common to almost all contemporary ancient civilizations such as the Egyptian civilization and Mesopotamian civilization. In the Western hemisphere, the Greeks and the Romans also had social stratification in the form of class structure. But the factor that distinguishes other civilizations from the Indian civilization is the entrance of the caste system into the class structure. With the advent of the caste system, the application of concepts such as solidarity and subsidiarity assumes an entirely different connotation. In India, solidarity and subsidiarity were based on the imperceptible law of *karma*, which explains social status on the basis of past deeds. A concrete social imaginary is a more recent phenomenon in India. Religion had a minimal bonding effect while the caste-system effectively divided the Indian society into windowless pockets of social space.

While society can be theoretically mapped as a whole and its parts, in practice, a society cannot exist as a collective without its parts, the individual members or vice versa. The subtle distinction between the society as a whole and its members lies in the perspective of the members as individuals and their function as a part of the collective. When a society fails to produce conditions conducive to a good life, then such a society will witness dissensions and schism between its individual members and the collective

¹⁹ Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1994. Wendy Doniger discusses important portions of the *Rig Veda* such as various kinds of sacrifices, Gods such as Indra, Agni, Soma, Vishnu, Śiva, Surya and Varuṇa, issues such as death, marriage, women, spells and incantations.

community that oversees the everyday functions of the society. When mutual cooperation between members of the society and the general social order breaks down, the society is thrown into turmoil. The absence of a cultural social imaginary in the form of a nation-state, religion, language, or culture in India and the daunting task of governing a diverse culture resulted in the hypostatization of cultural differences.

In India, in order to preserve the social order, solidarity was emphasized to the detriment of subsidiarity. Even though novel attempts, as those found in *The Bhagawad Gita*, to instill a sense of purpose and belonging to those who were disempowered in the form of non-attached action (*niśkāma karma*), order (*dharma*), action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) were philosophically appealing, these concepts could not be put into practice due to asymmetric social relationships.²⁰ Even religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam tried in their own ways to redress caste stratification in India. But, all Indian religions could only suggest a spiritual escape to the social problems. *The Gita* proposed an indirect way of reconciling social stratification and individual freedom by the concept of non-attached action that could lead any person belonging to any caste to achieve liberation.

In almost all societies that were either contemporaneous or anterior to the Greek society, social stratification was based on perceived natural qualities. African societies did not practice social stratification. Plato stipulates four virtues required of the citizens of the republic. They are: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. The aforementioned qualities are imperative for being the citizens of a successful state. Plato also

²⁰ *The Bhagawad Gita*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2000.

describes three qualities that In India, social stratification was justified on the basis of *guṇas* (qualities). Three qualities equivalent to appetite, courage (spirit) and reason (wisdom), respectively, *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva* combine in different ratios to constitute the human species.²¹ Interestingly, the concept of *guṇas*, which sought to adduce natural justification for the class distinctions in India, was developed over a course of several centuries. From a classless society, gradually the Indian society was divided into four classes, namely, the *brahman* (priest), *kshatriya* (warrior), *vaisya* (business), and *śūdra* (labor).²² From a society of hunter-gatherers and clans, the institution of kingship evolved with increasing urbanization.²³ Weber's account of cities as centers of political administration could be applied to the development of the cities in the Indian context as well. The development of a class-system aided administration and the specialization of occupations led to the institutionalization of kingship. Thus, from a diffuse and consensual decision-making social structure in the form of clans, Indian civil society came under the control of kingship and its supporting institutions.

Simultaneously, a hitherto non-class society also began to stratify itself on the basis of endogamous and exogamous rules of kinship, social status based on vocation, access to religious rituals, and political clout. But in the context of India, what Socrates euphemistically called a noble lie, the *guṇas* or qualities, was ennobled in the scriptures

²¹ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994. pp. 271-272. Also refer to *The Republic of Plato*, Trans. F.M. Cornford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965. pp. 119-120.

²² Wendy Doniger, p. 29.

²³ Romila Thapar, *Early India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002. Romila Thapar gives a very detailed account of the process of urbanization in ancient India that finally culminated in the development of the institution of kingship.

and became rigidified.²⁴ The *guṇas* became constitutive in determining behavioral and hereditary qualities of the individuals but only in the context of a society classified on the basis of vocational status. Because of relentless migrations and intra-social stratification, class distinctions were gradually replaced by more minute caste distinctions. The caste distinctions were based on birth and hence any chance of upward mobility in the social hierarchy was impossible. Interestingly, religious ideologues realized the problems inherent in reconciling the concepts of *svadharmā* (individual duty), *kuladharmā* (family duty) on the one hand, and *apadharmā* (duty under extraordinary circumstances) *sādhāraṇ dharmā* (everyday duty).

The tension between the individual and the social duty is one of the main aspects discussed in *The Bhagavad Gīta*. The term *dharma* contains the social aspect, which is in turn linked to the cosmic order (*ṛta*). Thus, the concept of *dharma* is akin to a conception of duty of the citizens of a *polis*. According to the concept of *dharma*, individual duty is always attuned to family and social obligations. Interestingly, in a class-based society, different modes of *dharma* were based on various occupations whereas in the caste-based society one's birth determines one's individual, family, and social *dharma*. The ineluctable causal relationship divined by the votaries of the caste system absolutely arrested upward mobility in the caste hierarchy by connecting birth, social status, and past deeds. It was only by fulfilling duties pertaining to one's caste that

²⁴ In chapter 13 of Plato's *Republic*, he claims that a soul has three parts. According to the predominance of the three qualities or parts, namely, spirit, appetite, or wisdom a person acts. In chapter 10, Plato invents a myth that is known as the allegory of the metals. According to this myth, God created people mixing three metals, namely, gold, silver, iron, and brass representing the rulers, auxiliaries, farmers, and craftsmen respectively. The rulers were supposed to propagate this myth in order to earn the allegiance of the people for the proposed state. F.M. Cornford calls this "a single bold flight of invention" whereas other translators call this myth a "noble lie".

a person could graduate to the next caste in the hierarchy which could ensure rebirth in higher classes for attaining liberation from the birth-death cycle.

One could argue that while the higher classes were living and enjoying the present, the lower classes were wallowing in the fruits of their past while yearning for a better future all the while ruining the present. Throughout human history the higher classes have subjugated the lower classes by denying and depriving their hope for a better future. Very seldom has there been an uprising in the history of mankind that has been unaided by disgruntled elite classes even in revolutions inspired by popular movements. As Charles Taylor observes, people seem to be paralyzed with fear without a leader.²⁵

One of the reasons why the Indian society did not witness revolutions in the scale of the French or the American Revolution is the lack of one identifiable singular cultural objective and mind-boggling diversity of cultures. The political, economic, and religious power in the Indian society was distributed among the three forward classes, namely, the priestly, warrior and mercantile classes. Apart from the fourth class, the *śūdras*, there was a fifth class (*panchama*) or *pariah* (drummer). Furthermore, because of the in-group/out-group, ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural differences, the interstices of the society were filled with intra-caste distinctions. No attempts were made to unify the society based on a common goal. Instead, individual, family, and social goals were meshed with the caste and class obligations, which prevented any mobilization of the masses. Even the

²⁵ Charles Taylor, p. 188. Taylor's observation also underscores the tension between liberal and republican ideas of liberty in the contemporary discourse. While liberal conception of liberty emphasizes non-interference from centers of authority including the government, the republican conception of liberty emphasizes non-domination.

elites who authored the codes of conduct, interpreted scriptures, and taught statecraft to the rulers could only provide the masses with a vague and abstract concept of liberation (*moksha*) that is actually expressed vividly by the Buddhist conception of *nirvāṇa*, which is the total destruction of the birth and death cycle.

In the absence of a unitary social imaginary, Indian society was not able to either produce huge empires such as the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East or the Greek, the Roman, the British or the French Empires in the West. The same reason could be attributed to the lack of concerted and unified effort to fight the British when they ruled India for almost two hundred years. The vertically stratified Indian civil society helped the British unseat the top layer of the society and conquer India without much bloodshed. The lower classes, which were alienated from the higher classes, did not feel any structural difference in political governance or moral compunction when power changed hands from the Indian kings to the British Viceroys because the social structure was left unmolested. In somewhat similar manner, present day democracies fail to inspire the populace even during elections unless some revolutionary events such as war, assassination, terrorism or economic depression happen.

In the Indian society, myriad distinctions among the castes made it difficult for the people to fight for their rights as well as social change. The rumblings due to discontent were usually passed on to the vertical and horizontal social structures that are immediately above or below one's caste. For example, a group of people belonging to a lower caste if they feel disempowered and disgruntled usually fights with the immediate

sub-caste above or below themselves. Ironically, each caste has its own chosen nemesis and seldom do members of different castes join together in a clash between two castes.

The Modern Aspects of Civil Society

The concept of civil society is considered to be one of the finest achievements of Western social and political theory in terms of social organization. Civil society is considered to be the consummation of a politics of discussion that empowers democratic system of governance. The history of civil society has traversed a long and torturous path culminating in advanced liberal democracy in which the State and the society are separated. The Western conception of civil society is situated on certain cultural, religious, economic, and political contexts. Civil society has acquired the connotation of a religious dogma as the panacea for all the ills of the world. Principles such as democracy, freedom, rights, law, and free market are considered to be irrevocable for a harmonious existence. Civil society, which is a cardinal feature of democracy, emphasizes freedom from authoritarian institutions such as religion.

One of the cornerstones of religious dogmatism was the community of believers and the Enlightenment attacked the very conception of a religious community by encouraging individuation. Civil society is ineluctably intertwined with democracy and market economy in which freedoms of action, speech and expression are guaranteed. While democracy facilitates individual freedom and social cooperation, civil society is the non-political manifestation of democracy. But, many vexatious issues such as religious tensions, ethnic strife, abject poverty, majority-minority differences and ethical

questions that characterize the public sphere are not considered to be a part of the political-legal spectrum, by thinkers such as John Rawls.

John Rawls' in his "Justice as Fairness – Political not Metaphysical" defines issues such as justice, equality, and liberty as conceptions that could be approached procedurally. But Rawls expressly affirms that his notion of justice as fairness must be considered only in the context of liberal democracy.²⁶ This salient claim of Rawls has been neglected by most advocates of civil society who have treated the conditions required for a liberal democratic society as the end-result of a democracy.²⁷ Democracy requires stable economy, representative government, peaceful society, and a justice system that adjudicates disputes. Scholars such as Rawls and Habermas have attempted to rationalize democracy by adducing ideal conditions such as the original position and a veil of ignorance in the case of Rawls and ideal speech situation in the case of Habermas. In many ways, social and political theories of Habermas and Rawls are democratizations of the Kantian categorical imperative. The categorical imperative has two aspects. The first aspect emphasizes the duty of a moral agent to act not out of self-interest but common interest. In many ways, it is a restatement of the Golden Rule, which exhorts people to act towards others in a way they themselves would like others to act towards them.²⁸ The second aspect of Kant's categorical imperative emphasizes the autonomy and

²⁶John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 398. From *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, Ed. Samuel Freeman, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

²⁷ Stephen Turner, "The Third Way," *Society*, Volume 42, Number 2, January/February 2005. p. 11.

²⁸ The Golden Rule states: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). In reality, all religions and cultures of the world have the conception of the Golden Rule.

Kant's first formulation of the CI states that you are to "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." "We should never act in such a

human value of individuals. Kant asserts that every human being must be treated as an end and not as a means. In a democracy, the Kantian concept of duty has to be rational, redeemable, justifiable, and discursive. The Kantian conception of categorical imperative facilitates a conception of procedural democracy. But a procedural democracy could be deliberative. The categorical imperative is the summum bonum of practical reason, for Kant.

When questions are raised about the justification of the categorical imperative, questions of happiness and good life arise. But, for Kant, categorical imperative is far removed from the expectations of happiness. The categorical imperative is universal and hence beyond the confines of individual happiness. Only a rational and moral person can act according to the principles of Kant's categorical imperative. Kant's moral philosophy has tremendously influenced the modern social imaginary.

Civil society and democracy are procedural categories that cannot be uprooted from their contexts and transported to other cultures. All cultures have the potential to cultivate democracy but the fertile conditions have to emanate organically in order to sustain it. Even if governments in countries such as the United States and Britain sow the seeds of democracy accompanied by a civil society in an attempt to rationalize non-democratic regimes all over the world, the connection between democracy, freedom, prosperity, and justice cannot be replicated without a precipitous process of forcible democratization of the lifeworld of those cultures. Hegel's brilliant expression "the owl of

way that we treat Humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, as a means only but always as an end in itself. Johnson, Robert, "Kant's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2004 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2004/entries/kant-moral/>>.

Minerva flies at the dusk” explains the progression of reason towards the Absolute Idea and the process of sublation.²⁹ The problem facing Western cultures is that of simulating the flight of the Owl of Minerva on those cultures in which the dusk has not been reached yet or long forgotten.

Habermas’ Communicative Reason and its Problems

Habermas' emphasis on communicative reason necessarily assumes linguistic and communicative competencies on the part of the interlocutors who debate in a speaker-hearer situation. For Habermas, social rationalization cannot be reduced to purposive-instrumental activity. Hence, communicative reason presides over a normatively regulated discourse, which invokes the illocutionary force of an argument in an atmosphere of free and un-coerced interaction. This is in essence the ideal speech situation.³⁰ The underlying assumptions of a theory of communicative action suggest a specialized discourse that, even though conducted in an everyday language, is not accessible to common people. Moreover, by overzealously guarding communicative discourse against all forms of defects, Habermas limits its scope. Habermas considers the open society (modern Western rational society) as dialogical in nature and the closed (archaic societies) as monological. Habermas argues that an archaic understanding of the lifeworld was seamless and undifferentiated while the modern understanding is objective

²⁹ Garbis Kortian, *Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. p. 13. "When philosophy paints its gray on gray, then has a form of life grown old, and with gray on gray it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known; the Owl of Minerva first takes flight with twilight closing in." G. W. F. Hegel, "Preface," *Philosophy of Right*

³⁰ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 25.

and critical.³¹ In Heidegger's terminology, a distantiating between the subject and the environment is not found in the archaic understanding.

Robin Horton argues that archaic or traditional societies do not have a distinction similar to the public – private sphere distinction, between a person, a group, and an environment. Horton calls a lack of critical-rational framework as the absence of inner-theoretic critique. According to Habermas, archaic societies do not possess critical-rational understanding. But the modern worldview is constructed upon critical rational distinction and universalizing validity claims which are in turn discursively justifiable. While Habermasian communicative theoretic bolsters the Enlightenment rationality it humanizes the purposive-rational component by positing a communicative rationality. The emancipatory intent that Habermas assumes is, however, as irrational as the archaic understanding that he examines. A deliberative democracy is an abstraction from the existing democratic societies. Democracy did not evolve out of a disinterested search for a true form of government. Hobbes emphasizes the presence of self-interest in the formation of a state and Locke's political philosophy emphasizes the value of individual rights and property. Furthermore, Locke even justifies the exploitation of foreign lands if they lay unutilized. Thus, the emancipatory intent envisioned by Habermas does not stand scrutiny in a democracy.³²

Ancient Greek society with its *polis* had a conception of a *utopia* or *eudaimonia* but such a conception is not possible in a liberal democracy. Democracy is a result of

³¹ David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. pp. 22-26.

³² C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.

social rationalization, not in terms of emancipation, but economic and political freedom. Economic and political freedom for the individuals is antithetical to a conception of emancipation akin to religious concepts of liberation. There is no salvation but only progress and betterment. Habermasian attempts at social rationalization leads us to some unpalatable conclusions. Habermas' process of argumentation is applicable only in a highly specialized discursive environment and his communicative discourse is symmetric. But Habermas does not adequately address issues pertaining to an asymmetric discourse in which participants belong to all sections of the society.

The process of disengagement with other cultures because of the difference in the conceptual apparatus has real life consequences. The most catastrophic examples in recent history are the World Trade Center and Pentagon terror acts and the Iraq War. The failure to understand, hermeneutically, cultural conflicts and their potential social and political manifestations have resulted in the clash of cultures.³³ Ironically, Western societies are considered to be civilized and non-Western world less socially rationalized. Such a conclusion is inescapable not only because of the historicity of understanding but also due to an attitude of possessive individualism cultivated in advanced capitalistic societies.³⁴ By making the enemy the other or vice versa, once again the West is mired in the religious binary-oppositional framework of good and evil.

For a good life, which Habermas aims to facilitate in his *Communication and Evolution of Society* (1979), linguistic and communicative competencies serve only at

³³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

³⁴ C.B. MacPherson,

the level of meta-theoretical and meta-practical discourse. Communicative action is required to formalize and universalize opinions. But, an interpretation of social, political, and scientific discourse does not stop at the level of communicatively competent actors but filters down to actors at different levels of linguistic and communicative competencies. Hence, there is a need for addressing social and political issues at different levels simultaneously. A communicative action, at once, needs to appeal to actors with strategic (oriented to success), norm-forming, and dramaturgical (expressive) intentions. In this sense, I argue that there is a need for a broader conception of social action than communicative action that coordinates strategic, norm-forming, and dramaturgical actions. Hence, I would call such an action, a co-operative action. A co-operative action does not aim at outright conversion of viewpoints but accommodation, rational persuasion, and non-violent problem solving.³⁵

Charles Taylor's analysis of the modern social imaginaries of the Western hemisphere deals with societies that have less religious strife and less rigid social stratification than countries such as India or Nigeria which are culturally diverse. Taylor also forewarns that any attempt to replicate the Western experience in a non-organic manner elsewhere could produce catastrophic results. While Taylor accepts the existence of several social imaginaries even within the Western hemisphere, differences between them could be termed as variations in cultural particulars rather than universals.

³⁵ William M. Evan, Ed. *War & Peace in an Age of Terrorism – A Reader*, Boston: Pearson, 2006. pp. 259-265. Refer to Gene Sharp's article "The Politics of Nonviolent Action."

Impact of the Modern Social Imaginary

There is a need for de-centered understanding of civil society in terms of procedures that supply the contours of what Taylor calls modern social imaginaries. Modern social imaginaries are those imagined structures of social beliefs that determine the social practices particular to a society. The concept of social imaginaries is also reflexive in the sense that people belonging to a particular social grouping understand themselves and their goals from what they perceive as their social milieu.³⁶ People belonging to a cultural and social milieu have an idea what their society stands for. It is this centered understanding of one's position in a society, what is valued in the society and what the society stands for, which determines the civil society. Contemporary Western discourse on civil society seems to conveniently neglect the ontological remnants that underlie an ontic understanding in the emphasis on human rights, individual liberties, and equality.

Liberal democracy that facilitated the emergence of free market and individual freedom is hailed as the panacea for all ills of the world. Due to the dissociation of the individual and the society, in the modern social imaginary the state became more responsive to individual interests. This is a reversal of the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian conception of the individual as the citizen of the *polis*. Plato and Aristotle emphasize the unity of the *polis* as most important function of justice. The social imaginary of that particular epoch is fractured along the lines of social classes. In contemporary liberal democracy, the social imaginary has less solidarity and more

³⁶ The term 'social imaginary' was coined by Cornelius Castoriadis. Refer to "Castoriadis and the Democratic Tradition," written by Takis Fotopoulos in ELEFTHEROTYPIA, a Greek daily on January 3rd 1998. Fotopoulos cites Castoriadis' *The World in Fragments*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

subsidiarity.³⁷ The social imaginary also varies according to the contexts and hence it is not stagnant. In a discourse, the social imaginaries of interlocutors are constantly shifting. Another important aspect of the liberal democratic discourse is regarding the question whether it only applies to the population belonging to the society with which the government has a compact or are the rules applicable to the interaction between the countries with different forms of governments.³⁸ Taylor's notion of a 'social imaginary' is contextual and limited to a society or a lifeworld to which one belongs.³⁹ The choice of the term 'imaginary' underscores the point that it is the perception of the people of a society about the objectives and practices of their own society. The social imaginary of a society is a mosaic of perceptions. The social imaginary has several parts but reconciled in a whole. The social imaginary also affects the 'I – Thou' relationships, mutual respect and equality that Charles Taylor mentions as the main aspect of the modern Western social imaginary.

³⁷ George F. McLean George F. McLean, Ed. *Civil Society and Social Reconstruction*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I, Volume 16, Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values & Philosophy, 2001. p.15.

³⁸ In a real life situation, the dilemma of the United States government how to treat the Prisoners of War, especially with respect to the terror suspects detained in Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan and other United States Military bases all over the world as enemy combatants with no legal status under the constitution of the United States or under Geneva Convention proves the inadequacy of the laws of a liberal democracy which has not foreseen the asymmetric nature of the conflict. The notions of equality, mutual respect, individual rights or innocent until proven guilty which are considered to be the paradigmatic virtues of a liberal democracy fail to impress Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas and other terror organizations. Furthermore, the hypocrisy of liberal democracy came to the fore when the abuse of the prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq filtered out, the whole of the United States recoiled in moral indignation. All the while, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was held incommunicado in some undisclosed location by the United States military which was extracting information about the Al Qaeda and other terror plots. Taylor's social imaginary must include positive, negative and wrong perceptions of the social characteristics by the people of the society which in turn leads to events such as the September 11, 2001. But Taylor agrees that the social imaginary is not stationary and illusory but always tested against ground reality.

³⁹ Charles Taylor warns about the danger of reducing the social imaginaries to unitary perceptions. He cites the example of France and the United States which became democracies by taking different paths.

Charles Taylor identifies economy, public sphere, and democracy as the three most distinguishing features of modernity that govern the self-understanding of the people. The pre-modern conception of politics contains a strong religious dimension imbedded in the perception of the world as totally ordered by a God who was a benevolent supernal artisan, micro-managing the events happening in the world. The institution of monarchy was a replication of such a God controlled the conception of nature, which is an ancient idea. But in modernity, the upward despondent gaze towards the whims of a celestial being was abandoned and terrestrial prospects were eagerly explored.

In an interesting transformation, what Weber characterized as the ethics of the puritans, encouraged people to toil and succeed in this world rather than worrying about what was in store for them in the nether world.⁴⁰ Such an insouciant attitude towards the designs of God was largely due to the development of science. The laws of nature that governed the world prompted people to doubt the unseen cause. Adam Smith recognized such a need when he claimed that economic prosperity was indispensable and social order would be better served if they were causally related to observable phenomena rather than intangible qualities such as virtues and wisdom.⁴¹ Another important attitudinal change palpable in modernity is the recognition of mutual cooperation. Kant's categorical imperative identifies the inescapability of the need for mutual cooperation among human beings. But most of the political thinkers of the eighteenth and subsequent

⁴⁰ Max Weber, Protestant Ethic, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1958. p. 181.

⁴¹ Taylor, pp. 69-73. Taylor cites Louis XIV who claims that the show of respect for the monarch is in return for the offer of protection and justice to the people. According to Montchretien, a good ruler has to be a guiding force to the economy of a state by enacting good policies.

centuries have been content with the prudential imperative of Kant.⁴²

Weber's and Tönnies' diagnosis of the inexorable triumph of purposive rationality also anticipates mutual cooperation based on mutual benefit. Weber attributes the development of political associations and cities in Western Europe in the Middle Ages to the realization of the potential of mutual cooperation to economics. Economics and politics are inextricably related. Taylor argues that in modernity, political institutions adapted to the changing scenario of crumbling social hierarchy and growing democracy by facilitating mutual cooperation. Interestingly, the reflexivity of the civil society in Europe and America was not reflected in their economic and political exchanges with the third world countries. The third world countries were not deemed sufficiently civilized to warrant an attitude of mutual cooperation.

A sense of solidarity, which ensures the social imaginary of any social organization, and subsidiarity, which indicates mutual cooperation, cannot be dissociated from each other. Thus, the subsidiarity of a society is in a hermeneutic relation with the solidarity of its constituents. Such solidarity could be organic or politically forged as witnessed in the development of democracy in the United States. There are two possibilities if the equilibrium between solidarity and subsidiarity is disturbed. They are: 1) the notion of subsidiarity would become predominant in a society with excessive emphasis of individual rights and property. As a result, economics becomes increasingly a citadel of powerful corporate interests. Hence, intervention of government through law

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *The Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, 2nd edition, Trans. Lewis White Beck, New York: Macmillan/Library of the Liberal Arts, 1990.

enforcement to curb malpractices and other predatory market tendencies increases. This is an extreme result of Locke's social contract. Neither Hobbes nor Locke envisaged such a scenario. 2) If a tendency to emphasize solidarity predominates, then nationalistic fervor, secessionism, religious fanaticism, and ethnic cleansing are distinctly possible results. It is my intention to explore a middle path between the afore-mentioned options. Consensus makes such a middle path possible.

The notion of equality that spawned the concept of mutual cooperation is the cornerstone of a discourse aimed at achieving consensus in the Western societies. In the Akan society in Ghana, personhood and human rights are intuitively recognized. In status societies such as India, solidarity needs to be redefined in terms of contemporary social imaginary. Subsidiarity needs to be oriented with respect to newfound solidarity and social imaginary as a nation. Hitherto, subsidiarity was based on a code of conduct in a caste system, religion, language and ethnicity.

There are structural differences in an asymmetric lifeworld that preclude any rationally motivated agreement. A theory of civil society must create conducive environs of intersubjective interaction among the members of a society. The power structure and relations between various strata of a civil society defines its strength as a society. If a civil society is robust, then the rights of individuals in a society are guaranteed and vice versa. For corporate civil societies that exist in countries like Japan and some South East Asian countries, individual rights are subservient to the welfare of the society. In such a situation, a notion of order is paramount and the individual rights are less important in

comparison to the common welfare.

In countries such as India, which have had a cultural continuum of over five thousand years and a rigidly stratified society, structural transformation of a communal society into a democracy, that respects individual rights, has not been without difficulties. Especially, reciprocal relationships and mutual cooperation have had different connotations because of the unequal caste-class relationships. Reciprocity and mutuality were always considered in the background of individual duties within the ambit of caste duties. Hence, before the terms reciprocity and mutuality are considered within the framework of equality of social status, there is a need for votaries of democracy and liberalism to evaluate the social conditions of those countries that are forced to become democratic. The question that arises here is: Does democracy restore equality of social status? Or is equality of social status a must for democracy? In a culturally diverse democracy, it is imperative that the political discourse is not reduced to majority-minority framework. The cultural interstices or the intermediary viewpoints, which straddle the center-periphery, majority-minority, and first world-third world, and social-communal categorizations, would go a long way in initiating a process of rapprochement. I will discuss the philosophy of cultural interstices in the fifth chapter.

Chap 2

Intersubjectivity and the Problem of Cultural Identities

In this chapter, I will be arguing in support of a reflexive approach to intersubjective communication in a consensual activity. Intersubjective communication creates optimal conditions for achieving consensus while debating controversial issues. Institutional safeguards such as strictures against any form of verbal or physical coercion or stifling discussion that guarantee formal conditions of a debate only prevent abuse of the individual rights of the participants. Formal conditions of consensus such as ideal speech situation or the original position ensure that a debate is democratic. But the will to create a moral bond between interlocutors demands much more than the formal conditions of a discourse. In order to achieve a consensus or a tentative agreement, the interlocutors ought to engage each other at an inter-personal level. A relaxed and cordial atmosphere is more conducive for a discussion of difficult issues. Absence of personal rapport or the presence of mutual distrust more often than not derails negotiations. Hence, civility is one of the basic requirements of a discourse. Civility also encourages an ethic of mutual recognition.

In this chapter, I have discussed two approaches to intersubjective interaction aimed at achieving consensus. One approach is that of Hans Georg Gadamer who

advocates hermeneutical understanding of intersubjective communication. The other approach is that of George Herbert Mead, who is a proponent of social behaviorism. Mead emphasizes mutual adjustment of behavior as the basic condition of a successful communicative activity. I will illustrate how Gadamer's hermeneutical approach is more accommodative of differences. An asymmetrical concept of consensus necessarily requires recognition of differences in the conceptual and cultural understanding of those individuals who are participating in a consensual activity. Gadamer's idea of communication is a fusion of horizons of autonomous human beings. Communication is a participatory activity for Gadamer. Hence, the 'I' and the 'other' have an equal, reciprocal, and independent relationship.

Gadamer and Mead approached the concept of intersubjectivity as a process of dynamic inter-relation between human beings. Hence, their theories of intersubjectivity are essentially theories of understanding the 'other.' I characterize the 'other' as the 'Thou.' It is necessary to have an understanding of the 'I – Thou' relationship for an asymmetric idea of consensus in contrast to Habermas' idea of consensus as a rationally motivated agreement. A dynamic notion of 'I – Thou' relationship prevents hypostatization of human interaction. Mead and Gadamer emphasize intersubjective interaction that unveils problems associated with a teleological approach to human relationship.

George Herbert Mead and Hans Georg Gadamer considered the problem of intersubjectivity to be pivotal in explaining concepts such as language, culture, history,

science, and religion. George Herbert Mead's method is avowedly scientific because it germinated from the methodology of science espoused by celebrated pragmatists such as William James and John Dewey. Mead wanted to understand the nature of human interaction and thereby control the factors that hamper the establishment of a smooth process of communication. Mead's method is teleological because it is tailored to achieve success in communicative activity. [For example, if there is a vexatious economic issue, internalizing the perspectives of one side by the other will foster a better understanding of the problem.]

Mead, as a social behaviorist, believed in connection between impulse, stimulus, and response in any communicative activity. Therefore, if a general schema of how individuals react in a particular situation could be framed then Mead felt that mapping human behavior and achieving success in communication and avoiding conflicts would become easier. Mead's analysis of a successful communicative activity emphasizes direct and free interaction between the 'I' and the 'Thou' or between various interlocutors participating in a debate or a dialogue.¹ But the 'I – Thou' relationship involves internalization of various roles performed by the social actors in various roles of 'I' and the 'Thou.' As a behaviorist, Mead analyzed the behavior of social actors by observing and mapping their interactions among themselves. Mead writes as follows:²

¹ Mead does not use 'Thou' in his works. Mead uses 'I' and 'me.' By 'I' Mead refers to the individual subject and by 'me' the social self. Mead also uses 'we' and 'other.' 'Thou' is my usage to represent 'the other.' In both second person and third person application, I think that 'Thou' is more evocative than the 'other' or 'You.'

Social psychology has, as a rule, dealt with various phases of social experience from the psychological standpoint of individual experience. The point of approach which I wish to suggest is that of dealing with experience from the standpoint of society, at least from the standpoint of communication as essential to the social order. Social psychology, on this view, presupposes an approach to experience from the standpoint of the individual, but undertakes to determine in particular that which belongs to this experience because the individual himself belongs to a social structure, a social order.

In contrast to Mead, Gadamer treats the 'other' as irreducible to the 'I' or vice versa. Gadamer's analysis of the 'I – Thou' relationship is in terms of a hermeneutical understanding emphasizes the inexhaustible or unique nature of the 'other.' Gadamer conceptualizes the 'I – Thou' relationship as unproblematic within the framework of historical consciousness and as a fusion of horizons as the paradigm of hermeneutical consciousness. In this chapter, I will explain the structural difficulties associated with Mead's analysis of the 'I – Thou' relationship. Gadamer's analysis addresses problems that arise out of a behavioral approach by a contextual interpretation of all intersubjective activities. For Gadamer, the 'I' cannot transcend its own conditionedness and know the 'other' in its entirety. Any attempt at reducing the 'I' to the 'other' or the vice versa violates the moral bonding that exists between the individuals whose relationship is based on mutual respect and recognition of freedom. In this sense any observation and response to the 'other' is only an interpretation of the gestures, actions and communicative activity of the 'other.' Hence, an objective spectator of Aristotle is non-existent for Gadamer because any understanding of the 'other' as an interpretive activity is laden with assumptions or prejudices (*vorurteil*).

² George Herbert Mead, *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Ed. Charles W.

Mead's Social Behaviorism

Mead's behavioral method is based on an observation of human behavior in different situations, gestures, and roles. In order to come up with a schema that denominates common factors shared by people, Mead formulated concepts such as 'significant gestures,' 'generalized other,' and role formation, which is the ambit within which understanding of the 'other' could be grounded.³ The 'significant gestures' are normally verbal gestures that elicit responses because of their deliberate nature and directedness.⁴ Mead emphasized the fact that only if the proponent of an idea assumed responsibility for his/her verbal proposition, communicative activity would move forward. With the help of 'significant gestures,' Mead sought to thematize the concept of role-formation. According to Mead, one's knowledge of other human beings is possible only by understanding others through the roles assumed by oneself. For example, one's idea of a teacher is plausible only by an introjection of the role of a teacher. Furthermore, one assumes the role of a teacher while internalizing ideas about teaching. Only in this way, could knowledge of other human beings be possible, that is, as teachers, doctors, engineers, singers, and dancers. This is what Mead means by role-formation.

The logical corollary of role-formation, in Mead, is the 'generalized other.' Mead defines the 'generalized other' as "taking the attitude of others toward himself and of his

Morris, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934. pp. 1 - 8.

³ I have used the 'other' to indicate the independently existing human beings without being subordinated to the 'I.' In the case of Gadamer, I have used the 'other' more frequently because Gadamer does not collapse the 'other' into the 'I.' While explaining Mead, I have used 'others' more frequently in the common sense of the term which indicates that which is not 'I.'

finally crystallizing all these particular attitudes into a single attitude of standpoint.”⁵

Mead avers that in order to understand the attitude of others toward oneself, one must understand the attitude of oneself towards others. Only if a person takes the attitude of others towards oneself, would he/she be in a position to see a problem from different angles. Once the conceptual horizon of a person is widened, then conflicts could be easily resolved because of better communication and shared understanding. In furthering knowledge and scientific understanding by observation and control of social behavior of human beings lies the teleology of Mead’s social behaviorism. Mead believed that a lack of proper understanding of the behavior of other social actors complicated communication. In Mead’s social behaviorism, human interaction consists of three factors:

- 1) The views of the individual about oneself
- 2) The views of the individual about others (role-taking), and
- 3) The views of the individual about the views of others about the individual (the generalized other)

Relationship between two individuals is always hyphenated with the ‘I,’ for Mead.

Hence, the ‘other’ or for that matter the ‘I’ is never separated from one another. Thus, the ‘Thou’ exists only as how the ‘I’ views the ‘other,’ which is in turn dependent on how the ‘I’ views itself as viewed by others. The above-mentioned thesis of human interaction of Mead reduces the ‘other’ ultimately to the views of the ‘I.’ Thus the ‘Thou’ never exists

⁴ J.L. Austin’s illocutionary speech acts would serve as good examples of significant gestures.

on its own. Mead also assumed that through concepts of role-taking, significant gestures and generalized other, the 'Thou' could be understood and human interactions controlled. Mead staunchly believed that an individual could objectify oneself and take the attitude of the society towards oneself, which would educate the individual to effectively remove irritants in the process of resolving conflicts.

Mead believed that the future could be determined by the present from the lessons learnt from the past. Social progress, for Mead, is possible by tailoring one's actions in response to the interests of others. In order to gain knowledge about people, Mead wanted to observe and gather knowledge of the social actions of people. Once knowledge about social acts and social actors is categorized then the facilitation of a cooperative approach to solve problems would be simpler, according to Mead. Concepts of mind, consciousness, language, meaning, and self are possible only as social acts. Thus, social action is imperative to any individual activity. Since all individuals are also social actors it becomes easier to observe and categorize social behavior. For Mead, science of "social psychology" is "the study of the experience and behavior of the individual organism or self in its dependence upon the social group."⁶ The individual has the power to change the future of the society, according to Mead. Mead's social behaviorism is situated on his firm belief in the theory of evolution, the principle of continuity, and human development.

⁵ Paul P. Fuetze, *The Social Self*, New York: Bookman Publishers, 1954. p. 76.

⁶ P. Fuetze, p. 36.

As an advocate of evolutionary biology, Mead assumes that human beings are at the zenith of evolutionary cycle, which is typified by the capacity to communicate with each other and share information. Language is the defining feature of the human beings. Language is the tool of socialization and socialization is a behavior peculiar to human beings. Language consists of gestures and symbols. Gestures are the bedrocks of the 'I-Thou' relationship. By analyzing the linguistic behavior of human beings, Mead also adduces reasons for the religious, social, political and economic behavior of human beings in his theory of understanding.

Mead views the formation of mind and self as products of social activity. Both mind and self arise out of social activity. Mind is natural while the social activity of the mind gives rise to the self. Mind is a biological form and when mind assumes a social attitude it becomes a self. The formation of a social attitude includes linguistic communication, role-taking, and mutual adjustment.⁷ For Mead, mind is the capacity to interact verbally, through gestures and symbols. Communicative activity between individuals is deliberate and intended to evoke a response. Thus, a self is a socialized mind. The need for a social mind arises out of the need to communicate with others. Communication is possible only through gestures. Mead distinguishes between 'ordinary gestures' and 'significant gestures.' Ordinary gestures are those gestures that do not bind the individual to own responsibility for his/her gestures. Mead gives an example of the gestures of children. In the case of significant gestures, they are deliberate and aimed at

⁷ Pfuetze, p. 61.

eliciting responses from the hearer. Business activity is a good example of significant gestures.

Significant Gestures

Society comes into existence only when individuals share a common perspective, according to Mead. A common perspective consists of not only the perspectives of individuals but also the perspectives of members as a group. A common perspective objectifies social goals; it also helps in creating a social organization. Social organization is possible only if social actors take the attitude of others or only if they are able to internalize the viewpoints of other members of the social group.

Mead introduces the notion of comprehensibility, which is pivotal to his conception of communication and common perspective. Mead's emphasis is on the relation between individual perspective and common perspective. Mead's theory of interpersonal relationships is based on two assumptions:

- 1) Interest based interaction
- 2) Cooperative interaction

In the first category, Mead analyzes the common environment of ants and bees. The dwelling place of ants is the anthill while bees live in hives. Mead argues that there is no communication among the ants or bees. In communication, deliberate intent to discuss an issue is displayed by both the speaker as well as the hearer. Under the second category,

the speaker or the gesturer commits himself or herself to sincerely involve the hearer in a discourse. Thus, cooperative activity is facilitated by the 'significant gestures' in the form of communication. Mead gives an interesting definition for the concept of 'significant gestures.' 'Significant gestures' are defined in terms of communication. Mead writes as follows:⁸

It does not become communication in the full sense, i.e., the stimulus does not become a significant symbol, until the gesture tends to arouse the same response in the individual who makes it that it arouses in the others. The history of the growth of language shows that in its earlier stages the vocal gesture addressed to another awakens in the individual who makes the gesture not simply the tendency to the response which it calls forth in the other, such as the seizing of a weapon or the avoiding of a danger, but primarily the social role which the other plays in the cooperative act. This is indicated in the early play period in the development of the child, and in the richness in social implication of language structures in the speech of primitive peoples.

Mead avers that an individual becomes socialized only when he or she assumes the attitude of the others towards himself or herself, respectively, whereby the individual assumes an objectifying attitude towards one's own actions. This attitude of others towards oneself is known as the 'generalized other.' Mead also claims that only if the mind is able to take the role of the 'generalized other' that a self is formed. There are two factors that make the role-taking attitude possible in the individual. One is comprehensibility and second is intelligibility. The aforementioned factors are responsible for the two most important developments that made possible the sociality of human beings.

⁸ George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, Phoenix: Open Court Publishing Company, 1980. pp. 167-168. fp. 1932.

- 1) In the early stages of communication, human beings assume the attitude of others and thus become an object to themselves, becoming a self in the process. The same attitude also constitutes the other too.

- 2) The next stage is that of the generalized other in which the individual is known by the roles played in the society. The individual is always known only as a 'generalized other.'

Mead explains the concept of the "generalized other", with an example based on property holding. Mead points out that unlike squirrels, which store the nuts gathered from the ground, property is not only acquired but also protected and maintained. In buying a property, an impulse is transformed into a stimulus-response framework. The impulse present in a person to buy a property elicits an expected response from the seller. "An offer is what it is because the presentation is a stimulus to give. One cannot exchange otherwise than by putting one's self in the attitude of the other party to the bargain."⁹ The core concepts of Mead's social behaviorism can be explained with the help of the example cited above. They are as follows:

1. The conversion of a mind into a self happens as a result of the buyer assuming the attitude of the seller and vice versa because of the participation of the buyer and the seller in the social act of property exchange. Only when the subjective mind assumes the objective attitude about itself does a mind become a self.

⁹ G.H. Mead., *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 183. Hereafter, **TPP**.

2. By assuming the role of a buyer, the seller puts himself \ herself in the shoes of the other. The buyer also assumes the role of a seller while bargaining for a property.

3. The role-taking attitude is possible only as a generalized other. Human beings know others only in the variegated roles played by people in the social setting. In order to understand the roles played by others, it is imperative to know the roles assumed by the individual in the social setting. If the self is objectified and its roles analyzed, then the roles played by others are understood better. The different roles played by the individuals as teachers, doctors, mothers, fathers, engineers, etc., are first known in terms of one's own actions and then generalized into a framework about the other. This is the concept of the 'generalized other.'"

4. Before proceeding to the concept of the "generalized other" one needs to stimulate a response in the people who are part of a social act. This is possible only in terms of a shared linguistic understanding. Such a linguistic understanding is a part of the social act.

In the four aforementioned steps, I have traced the development of a self in the descending order. The emergence of a self from the mind is preceded by the notion of the 'generalized other,' which is preceded by the concept of role-formation. The role-formation is possible only when the complex linguistic communication comes into play. A meaningful linguistic interaction is known as 'significant gestures.' A social act,

which is a part of the social organization, is not possible without any of the above-mentioned four steps.

Social Act and Social Organization

Social act is possible only if the individual introjects social roles. Introjections of the roles of others into one's own understanding is a process of becoming a self, that is, an individual organizes his\her response with respect to the tendencies of the others to respond to his\her act.¹⁰ A social act is possible only if the individual and the common traits move into each other, in a manner akin to the "fusion of horizons" of Gadamer. When an individual takes the attitude of others, that individual becomes the object of study for oneself. Mead takes great care to emphasize the ineluctable relationship between the parts and the whole, the individual and the social. The individual becomes an individual only in lieu of the social. The social is the common reservoir of all individual tendencies. Thus the self-consciousness or the 'I' consciousness is never divorced from the other consciousness or the 'Thou' consciousness. Construction of a self is a dynamic process that is made possible by language, which operates as the bridge for communication. According to Mead, language is the social stimulus that makes possible the same response in the hearer that a speaker would expect of herself for the same stimulus.

¹⁰ G.H. Mead., *TPP*, p. 184.

Mead elucidates the beginning of the 'I – Thou' consciousness in terms of an example of a play and a game. Interestingly, Mead and Gadamer have similar views about the analogy of a play and a game. Given below is Mead's analysis of a play and a game. In a child's play, the child takes the attitude of different social actors, viz., teachers, mother, father, sister, brother, friends, etc. The child acts all these attitudes towards itself while at the same time internalizing the actions of himself/herself towards others. The 'I – Thou' attitude in a play arises simultaneously and does not really involve social actors in a real life situation. Hence, a child's play remains as a prototype for social roles played by the individuals.

In a game, there are rules and regulations to be followed meticulously. An individual has to match wits with social actors. Only if there are commonly agreeable ideas, can the individual communicate successfully with other actors. In a game, reactions to the stimulus are more organized and hence the advent of the 'generalized other.' Every action takes into account the social reaction. Thus, the individual has an overarching idea of the 'generalized other.' Concepts such as rights, law, religion, education, culture, and other institutions take into account the concept of the 'generalized other.' Mead even goes to the extent of saying that a breakdown in the schema of 'generalized other' leads to war. According to Mead, if only people would put themselves into other's shoes, conflicts could be reduced significantly. Mead cites the examples of the League of Nations, the International Court and other kindred organizations that try to settle disputes as the result of the notion of the 'generalized other.' Thus, Mead sees the application of the concepts such as 'generalized other,'

significant gestures [language], and role-taking in augmenting social controls that serve the society better in managing conflicts.

For Mead, communication and interaction are tools for social control. Social actions of human beings are reflected in the social behavior of the individuals. Thus, Mead applies his conceptions about the 'I - Thou' relationship to control the social behavior of human beings. On the other hand, Gadamer accords more freedom to the 'other' and holds that objectification of the 'other' leads to problems of power and ethical dilemma about the treatment of the 'other' as a tool to achieve a goal. The lack of contextual situatedness in the analysis of Mead becomes a major impediment in analyzing cultures and processes about which we do not have prior experience. Hence, Gadamer suggests a more encompassing and empathetic hermeneutical consciousness that treats the 'other' as a free entity without being reduced to a 'me' which is the 'objectified self' for Mead. The 'objectified self' is the social self that is known in its various roles as the 'generalized other.'

Gadamer - The Nature of Intersubjective Experience

In contrast to social behaviorism of Mead, which lays emphasis on observation and control of social behavior of human beings, Gadamer's approach is humanistic. An understanding of social phenomena is a part of the human experience, for Gadamer. According to Gadamer, the 'I - Thou' relationship is a hermeneutical relationship and not a historical relationship. In the hermeneutical view of the world, the 'other' is not

reducible to the 'I'. While advocating hermeneutical understanding, Gadamer follows the Kantian principle of not treating others as means to an end. Thus by stipulating the inviolability of the freedom of the 'other' Gadamer also delineates the guidelines for an ethics that recognizes the value of the 'otherness.'

According to Gadamer, understanding encompasses both what is agreeable to us and what is contrary to our beliefs. Gadamer thus recognizes the sovereignty of the 'other.' Since Gadamer does not believe in absolute truths, the views of the 'other' stand on its own strength instead of gaining its validity in the altar of an absolute truth. Thus understanding, for Gadamer, is not a power over the 'other' gained through the knowledge of the 'other.' The 'other,' thus, cannot be understood in its entirety. Thus, the experiencing of the 'Thou' is a moral experience whereby the 'other' is not objectified. In understanding a person, what must be kept in mind is that the person, with whom we are interacting, 'is in relationship with us.'¹¹ Gadamer is very particular about respecting the subjectivity of the person whom we seek to understand. Gadamer delineates three forms of 'I – Thou' relationship. They are as follows:

1. The 'other' is experienced by the observation of his or her behavior.
2. The 'other' is assimilated by the 'I' reflectively and co-opted and preempted.
The 'other' is understood in terms of one's own behavior.
3. The 'other' is given a voice. The 'other' is experienced as an independent individual 'Thou.'

The first two ways of understanding are based on what Gadamer calls the historical consciousness. In a historical consciousness, the 'I' perceives the 'other' as if the 'other' is historically objectified. The historical situatedness of both the 'I' and the 'other' is neglected in the first two ways of understanding the 'other.' Only in the third form of understanding the 'other' is the historical situatedness of the 'I' also taken into account so as to consider the views of the 'other.' Only as an equal interlocutor does the 'Thou' stand a chance of being represented as it is. Mead's analysis of the 'I-Thou' relationship falls under the second category of 'I-Thou' relationship.

Gadamer distinguishes between theories of experience that are based on scientific methodology and those that are historico-critical in nature. Scientific theories of experience neglect the inner-historicity of individual experience and objectify experience. In this sense, the scientific method is a-historical. The historico-critical method takes into consideration the historicity of experience and interprets experience critically and contextually. But the historico-critical method also objectifies experience. Gadamer criticizes both scientific and historico-critical methods for their unswerving emphasis on repeatability.¹²

According to Gadamer, the verificationism inherent in the scientific method is not applicable to the lifeworld. Repeatability is concomitant with verification and

¹¹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, New York: Continuum Publishers, 2000. p. 358.

objectification of experience. Gadamer cites Francis Bacon as the ideologue *non-pareil* of the method of science. Bacon went as far to suggest that language muddles thinking by distracting the mind to pour over empty conventional forms.¹³ Gadamer criticizes the unidimensional and unidirectional experience advocated by science. He also defends language through which we experience the world. Even though Gadamer concedes that problems exist in language due to conventions and other systematic distortions, he reiterates that the lifeworld is governed by linguistic behavior.

Gadamer expresses his reservations about the application of the methodology of natural sciences in human sciences. The specific goal-oriented activity of science straitjackets human experience. Scientific experience does not encompass the whole gamut of experience and it is situated on everyday experience.¹⁴ For science, only the positive experience, which successfully fulfils the objective of a scientific method, is acceptable. For human sciences, all kinds of experiences are acceptable. Experiencing is itself a learning activity, for Gadamer. Hence, the characterization of an experience as positive or negative is constrictive. For the natural sciences, any theory is valid only as long as it continues to remain unfalsified. [Gadamer indicates the similarity to Karl Popper's theory of falsification in this context.]¹⁵

¹² Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, New York: Continuum Publishers, 2000. Pp. 346-347.

¹³ Ibid. p. 349.

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 350-351.

¹⁵ Gadamer, pp. 352-353.

Language, for Gadamer, illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of experience. Experience is not reducible to those that conform to our expectations alone. There are new experiences, always. In a manner akin to Mead, Gadamer writes:

In his *Phenomenology of Mind* he (Hegel) shows how the consciousness that would be certain of itself has new experiences. For consciousness its object is the in-itself, but what is in-itself can be known only as it presents itself to the experiencing consciousness. Thus the experiencing consciousness has precisely this experience: that the in-itselfness of the object is in-itself “for us.”¹⁶

Gadamer takes a very catholic view of experience by designating openness to variegated forms of experience as the primary condition of gaining knowledge. The validation of experience must not be biased and dogmatic. Experience must always welcome new insights. Gadamer writes: “The dialectic experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in openness to experience that is made possible by the experience itself.”¹⁷

One of the most important aspects of lifeworld experience is the role of tradition. Tradition is the treasure-trove of experience. Tradition makes experience possible as the continuum of events. Tradition adduces meanings to identities, cultures, and languages. The lifeworld is inextricably entwined with tradition. Tradition is the landscape in which hermeneutical consciousness, which is not only historical but also open and undogmatic, validates its experience. There is an unceasing fusion of horizons between tradition and hermeneutical consciousness through language. Tradition is a ‘Thou’ that always forms the backdrop of a dialogue, interaction, and communication. But traditionary meaning has

¹⁶ Gadamer, p. 354.

an existence of its own. Tradition is not reducible to the opinion of others or opinions about others. Gadamer thus criticizes those approaches that objectify social roles. In such approaches, tradition is seen as an aggregate of individual opinions. This critique of Gadamer applies to Mead's role-taking attitude. Gadamer avers that tradition becomes universal because it is always a partner in all activities and it is accessible to all in different ways. Tradition is not a person and hence personal relationship is not emphasized. In 'I-Thou' relationship the 'Thou' is always a person and hence moral questions arise when interacting with others.

Experiencing the 'I-Thou' relationship

Gadamer distinguishes three types of 'I-Thou' relationships. In the first type, a person tries to categorize the behavior of his/her fellow beings. The behavior of other people is then categorized in several ways. These categories are used to predict any future behavior. Gadamer writes: "We call this a knowledge of human nature. We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field – i.e., he is predictable."¹⁸ Gadamer disavows such an analysis on the basis of the Kantian categorical imperative, which forbids any one from treating fellow human beings as means to an end. When a person is treated as an object of knowledge, the humanity of that person is not acknowledged. Thus, the other, 'Thou,' is used as a means to gain knowledge, which is the end.

¹⁷ Gadamer, p. 355.

According to Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness, the relationship between the individual and the other (I – Thou) must not be subordinated to each other. The problems in such approaches, as we see in Mead, could be traced to the dogmatic emphasis on the method and the objectivity of knowledge.¹⁹ Because of the emphasis on the method, the historicity of the experience in question is not acknowledged by the scientific and the historico-critical methods. It is impossible for a person to experience tradition in a detached manner shearing himself \ herself from the tradition which is the underlying framework. Gadamer attributes this method of isolation of facts to the methodology of social sciences borrowed from the eighteenth century scientific methods, whose progenitor was Hume. The scientific method only accepts as knowledge what is 'typical and regular in behavior.'²⁰ Gadamer criticizes this method as a-historical because it purely depends on induction; from a known behavioral analysis accruing from observation of human behavior, the future actions of human beings are predicted.

In the second type of 'I-Thou' relationship, the 'Thou' is recognized as a person. But the 'Thou' is always understood in terms of the 'I'. The dialectical relation between the 'I' and the 'Thou' is deduced from the way the 'Thou' is understood through the 'I'. Under this process of understanding, the proponent of an idea is countered by another idea, emanating from the opponent, and this is the way all forms of communication are carried out. The dialectical relation is only reflective and hence this opens up the floodgates for the understanding of the 'other' through one's own categories. Mead's

¹⁸ Gadamer., p. 358.

¹⁹ Gadamer., p. 358.

²⁰ Gadamer, p. 359.

concepts such as role formation and ‘generalized other’ fall under this category. Mead assumes without any compunction the uniformity of mental structures. As a result, Mead concentrates on explaining the knowledge of self with the help of the knowledge others. The mind gathers information about the behavior of others by assuming various roles donned by others. The self is formed when these experiences about the behavior of others are introjected. Mead does not have any qualms about coopting and preempting any reflection on the part of the other.²¹ Mead uncritically assumes that the ‘I’ can know about the other without any questions being raised about the mediacy or immediacy of such knowledge.

Gadamer traces the dialectical analysis of the ‘I-Thou’ relationship to the struggle for mutual recognition that characterizes human interaction. Gadamer cites the example of a Master-Slave relationship that Hegel uses so effectively to illustrate the dialectical relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou.’ But, the dialectical relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ is very complex and multi-dimensional. The dialectical relationship is not just a calculated evaluation of human behavior but a commensurate reaction, which also has what Gadamer refers to as the ‘negative element.’

Gadamer avers, “The experience of the ‘Thou’ attained here is more adequate than what we have called the knowledge of human nature, which merely seeks to calculate how the other person will behave.”²² Mead’s analysis of the ‘I – Thou’ relationship is more concerned with the knowledge of human nature and only less

²¹ Ibid. p. 359.

remotely with the dialectical mode of interpersonal interaction. Gadamer's critique of the dialectical model of 'I-Thou' relationship is that reciprocity that governs the relationship is not always apparent to the interlocutors. Individuals are not self-conscious in the dialectical model. Gadamer gives the example of a servant who tyrannizes the master by serving him as a slave. The servant does not know that he is tyrannizing the master by his unswerving allegiance. In another interesting example, Gadamer also maintains that welfare and charity work strip away the individuality of the person to whom they are directed.

The dialectical model of reciprocal relationship is the bulwark of historical consciousness. The otherness of the 'other,' the past, and the understanding the 'other' as a person is assumed to be unproblematic for the historical consciousness. The historical consciousness aspires to transcend its own conditionedness in search of certainty in knowledge. Gadamer addresses the above-mentioned lacunae in the historical consciousness in his concept of hermeneutical consciousness.

The Hermeneutical Consciousness

Gadamer emphasizes the role of hermeneutical consciousness in understanding third form of 'I – Thou' relationship. In the hermeneutical consciousness, incompleteness of the knowledge of human nature and the dialectical mode of understanding human relationships are recognized. The prejudices (*Vorurteil*) in viewpoints are inescapable

²² Ibid. p. 359.

according to Gadamer and hence neutral knowledge free of all prejudices is impossible. This makes the hermeneutical consciousness historical too. The mutuality of the 'I – Thou' relationship is emphasized in the hermeneutical consciousness. The hermeneutical consciousness is the consciousness of the presence of tradition as the refractory crucible in which all interactions are validated or invalidated. By accepting the commitment to treat each other mutually, the moral bond is cemented. Gadamer says, "A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way ... To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible."²³ The most important of the hermeneutical experience is its emphasis on a reflective relation to tradition. In this context, Gadamer argues that the 'Thou' has to be seen as a partner and it must be allowed to voice its opinion without being constrained by the 'I.' Gadamer explains openness to tradition as follows: "Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so."²⁴ As against historical consciousness, which is not critical of the historicity of the knowledge of historian, Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness recognizes its historicity, its prejudices, need for openness and the empowerment of the 'Thou.'

Mead and Gadamer : Behavioral Versus Hermeneutical Perspective

Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness enshrines the role of tradition, intersubjectivity, historicity, openness to opinions of others, fallibility of knowledge, power of the

²³ Gadamer, pp. 360-361.

negative, and the entitlement of the 'Thou.' Gadamer lays emphasis on the irreducibility of the 'Thou' to the 'I.' The 'I – Thou' relationship in Mead is restricted to what Gadamer calls the first two levels of his categorization of 'I-Thou' relationship. Gadamer subsumes all types of 'I – Thou' relationship examined by Mead and goes a step further by a critique of historical consciousness. Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness advocates the treatment of the other in its own immediacy without reducing the 'other' to the 'our.'

In Mead, self-consciousness is possible only through the consciousness of the 'other.' But the 'other' is accessible to the 'I' without any problems of mediacy or immediacy, for Mead. If the social roles of others are internalized, then the understanding of the 'other' is possible in Mead's social behaviorism. Activities involving intersubjective enterprises like language, society, tradition, economics, and religion are all reducible to stimulus-response framework in Mead. Even though Mead himself criticized the scientific method for being mechanical in its application without any window for interpretation, he is entrapped within the scientific method. Mead introduces the future-oriented approach to his method of observation of human behavior but the scientific method is causal in character and hence not open to negative results. Only a successful response is gratifying to a stimulus. Hence the historicity and the multifaceted nature of knowledge are neglected.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 361.

Mead introduced concepts such as novelty and cooperation in the 'I – Thou' relationship. But there is an uncritical assumption inherent in Mead's schema that the 'I' and the 'Thou' are equally empowered in terms of status (mental, social, political and economic). Since Mead fails to show how the 'Thou' could be understood immediately, problems persist in the individual – social relationship. Furthermore, Mead also readily assumes that any knowledge-driven activity is good and the society is willing to participate in communicative activity to solve problems. The aforementioned assumptions are only ideals whereas Mead installs them as the pillars of his theory of sociality. Mead, though he concedes that experience has to be historical in taking into consideration the past, the present and the future, does not successfully explain how a universal framework is possible for the interpretation of the social and the individual. The only interaction possible is through the 'generalized other.' Mead, perhaps, assumes that 'generalized other' is a universal concept. But the 'generalized other' is a signification and not a symbol as Mead claims because communication is not perfect.

Gadamer argues that there are no custodians of knowledge in hermeneutics. Knowledge is an event, which is never complete. Only universality is the hermeneutical situatedness. Tradition is the only horizon into which all other horizons merge. All knowledge arises only inside tradition. Historicity is an integral part of the tradition. Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness opens new vistas in ethics, law, philosophy, and art. By empowering the 'other', Gadamer gives a voice to the unheard. The empowerment of the 'other' dismantles the structures of domination. Gadamer's emphasis on the openness to the 'Thou' has enormous significance for cross-cultural

interaction, religious tolerance diverse interpretations of history, political dialogue and economic liberty. Gadamer's non-teleological approach unfetters him from any transcendental goals. But, even for Gadamer, resolution of conflicts while accommodating divergence in viewpoints is a problem because a discourse has to end in a consensus.

A consensus necessarily means that one opinion is considered superior to another and hence more correct. Gadamer's and Mead's conception of the "I – Thou" relationship has great significance in multicultural dialogue with respect to liberal democracies. But liberal democracies have a strong economic focus, which emphasizes competition in the promotion of individual interests. A majority promotes social interest only as an aggregate of individual interests in the form of legitimation.

Dialogue and Cultural Tradition

Dialogue is a pivotal part of interpretation. Interpretation is possible only in the context of language. Unlike Habermas, who initiates a shift in paradigm from 'consciousness' to 'language,' Gadamer does not accord foundational authority to language.²⁵ While Gadamer entirely agrees with Heidegger that language is the dwelling place of being, language is a product of tradition. Every epoch is defined by a cultural paradigm and vice versa, which is representative of dominant ideas informing that epoch. A cultural paradigm of a period is its social imaginary. Social institutions of an epoch embody its

²⁵ *Habermas: Critical Debates*, Eds. Thompson & Held, pp. 46-48.

cultural paradigm. By stipulating a cultural paradigm, other important aspects of a culture are marginalized. Based on the determination of a paradigm of a culture, cross-cultural comparisons are performed. In order to illustrate the democratic character of a dialogue, Habermas differentiates the monological character of traditional communities and the dialogical character of the Western societies on the basis of social rationalization. The underlying assumption in Habermas' comparison is that social conditions influence the dialogical framework. While linguistic development is also a part of the process of social transformation, it does not entirely exhaust the cultural paradigm. Habermas assumes that Western civil society has been transformed structurally and hence un-coerced dialogue is indeed possible. A direct-access society, which according to Taylor the liberal democracy is, seems to indicate a social transformation that has given rise to a civil society, which is capable of making better social choices. According to Max Weber, such a civil society is the resultant of social rationalization.²⁶

Max Weber has described the path of the social, political, and cultural transformation of the public sphere in Western Europe in his mammoth *Economy and Society*. Max Weber's analysis of the quantum leaps achieved by the Western society during a particular epoch also delves upon various social, political, religious and cultural aspects. Science and technology have been a part of the market and hence have a rhythm of their own in development and consumption. But democracy, as anticipated by Lyotard, has been outflanked by globalization. Hence, there is a need for more openness to other traditions. Democracy as a tradition needs to be hermeneutically questioned. The

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

question that needs to be answered is whether democracy has become hypostatized. As the individual-social relationship is being constantly redefined, Gadamer's broader perspective with emphasis on conversation and dialogue rather than a political system that is based on majoritarian rule facilitates consensus in a democracy. Gadamer's emphasis on a convergence of horizons accommodates cultural particulars and universals. In this respect, Mead's strict scientific methodology excludes the issue of cultural particulars, differences in human capabilities, emotional persuasion, rhetoric and strategic action. The assumption that after the Enlightenment, some how, people have been transformed into rational beings intent on achieving a consensus was pervasive. But in other disciplines such as science, technology, politics, and business that encounter ethical issues only in terms of social responsibility conducive to a successful enterprise, reason never assumes an emancipatory function. Hence, in those disciplines consensus is contractual agreement.

Gadamer indicates that the nature of scientific methodology and scientific enquiry does not successfully explain the realm of the social sciences and art. Imbedded in Gadamer's emphasis on tradition is the relation of the self (I) to the notion of the 'Thou,' which is possible only as a part of the culture (*Bildung*)²⁷. Gadamer says, "What remains important is the concept that a self can be formed without breaking with or repudiating one's past and that this formation cannot be achieved by any merely technical or methodical means."²⁸ Interestingly, Gadamer discusses two kinds of experience, one is *Erlebnis* and the other is *Erfahrung*. With respect to the *Erlebnis*, Gadamer speaks of

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xii.

aesthetic experience or experience of works of art. *Erlebnis* has a subjective tinge. With reference to the *Erfahrung*, Gadamer discusses experience that pertains to the lifeworld and perspectival horizon. It is within this experience that the 'I – Thou' relationship needs to be situated. According to Gadamer, *Erfahrung* is a constant fusion of horizons, integrating new experiences.

In Habermas' search for a postnational constellation there is an urgency towards universalization of horizons, which does not allow a role for subjectivity. Gadamer warns against such a hasty generalization in which the individual moments are tyrannized in search of the universal. By defining experience as shades of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, Gadamer addresses the issues of being and becoming respectively. The 'I – Thou' relationship in Gadamer is one of creative interrelation. Such a dynamic interrelation between two interacting subjects could be understood from Gadamer's views on communication. Communication is akin to excavation of historical sites. In a communication, the subject matter (*Sache*) becomes mutually accessible.²⁹

Habermas' emphasis on the illocutionary force of arguments in a normative regulated action has the *telos* of uncoerced consensus. But in spite of universal pragmatics, which emphasizes communication aimed at mutual understanding, discourse is not mutually accessible to the participants with strategic and dramaturgical motives. While a self-imposed code of conduct emphasizes coherence of intentions and declaration of intentions, which is epitomized by the illocutionary speech acts of Austin,

²⁸ Ibid. p. xii.

normatively regulated discourse has an expressly practical *telos*. Truthfulness, truth, and rightness are associated with validity claims that are contested in a discourse. But truthfulness or sincerity is not the defining feature of a normative discourse. Truthfulness or sincerity, which is the hallmark of a concept of authenticity, cannot be institutionalized except in a religious discourse because of its subjective nature.

Everyday discourse is authentic in its sphere and there cannot be a generalized account of authenticity, which is epoch defying.³⁰ In Habermas' normatively regulated action, only filtering cultural differences in an "ideal speech situation" ensure personal autonomy, which is incumbent on the rationality of human beings. Mead explains the social situatedness of communication. He says,

The social environment is endowed with meanings in terms of the process of social activity; it is an organization of objective relations which arises in relation to a group of organisms engaged in such activity, in processes of social experience and behavior. Certain characters of the external world are possessed by it only with reference to or in relation to an interacting social group of individual organisms; just as other characters of it are possessed by it only with reference to or in relation to individual organisms themselves. The relation of the social process of behavior -- or the relation of the social organism-to the social environment is analogous to the relation of the processes of individual biological activity-or the relation of the individual organism-to the physical-biological environment."³¹

Accessibility of language camouflages inequalities and differences that a culture injects into the language. Here, Gadamer's critique of Habermas' emphasis on rationally motivated consensus is especially valid. According to Gadamer, language conceals more

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xvii.

than what it reveals. Habermas' emphasis on the illocutionary force of an argument is based on the concept of authenticity belonging to the Enlightenment epoch. But in a decentered world of understanding, any attempt at universalization is paradoxical. On the one hand, universalization is possible on the basis of objective and empirical observations. On the other hand, universalization is anti-thetical to a decentered understanding. In Lyotard's parlance, there are only petty narratives and not grand narratives. Habermas seeks to conjoin petty narratives and grand narratives in a decentered lifeworld. In this sense, Habermas' has effected a change in the paradigm from 'consciousness' to 'language.'

Mead clearly distinguishes an ideal discourse from a socially situated discourse. He also mentions that a social discourse is influenced by economic, religious, and political factors. Mead says,

Universal discourse is the formal ideal of communication. If communication can be carried through and made perfect, then there exists the kind of democracy to which we have referred, in which each individual would carry just the response in himself that he knows he calls out in the community. That is what makes communication in the significant sense the organizing process in the community. It is not simply a process of transferring abstract symbols; it is always a gesture in a social act which calls out in the individual himself the tendency to the same act that is called out in others.

What we call the ideal of a human society is approached in some sense by the economic society on the one side and by the universal religions on the other side, but it is not by any means fully realized.³²

³⁰ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, London: Routledge, 2004.

³¹ G.H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 130.

³² G.H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, pp. 327-328.

Both Mead and Habermas envision a state of perfection even though philosophically they realize the vacuousness of such an idea whether it is a perfect democracy for Mead or “ideal speech situation” for Habermas. Thus, a theory of consensus constructed upon a theory of perfection in an atmosphere of imperfection is bound to be exclusionary. Gadamer refuses to acknowledge such a state of perfection even though language as a paradigm is not inimical to a hermeneutical understanding of the tradition.

Consensus must necessarily take into account individual interests and values. Mutual cooperation must not neglect individual aspirations. In this chapter, I have discussed two approaches to interpersonal communication. One is an interest-based interaction and the other is mutual cooperation. Mead’s theory of social behavior is based on the success of internalization of the perspectives of other actors. Hence, it restricts the scope of the otherness. Gadamer’s approach recognizes the autonomy of the other and requires the interaction of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ as independent but culturally informed actors who cannot be reduced to each other. I favor Gadamer’s treatment of en-worlded subjects who as historically situated and hermeneutically conscious agents have to come together and discuss mutually important issues. An asymmetrical process of consensus does not stipulate rationality or an ideal social choice. Preferences become values or vice versa in the course of a consensual activity. Values and preferences evolve only in the process of consensus. Thus, cultural particulars are dialogically contested.

Chapter 3

Consensus in the Realm of Science

Science – Cultural Paradigm of Democracy

In this chapter, I have attempted to explain the triangular relation between science, culture, and liberal democracy. The dominant cultural paradigm in the Western hemisphere, which is science, informs the background understanding and shared lifeworld in social, political, and cultural spheres of interaction. Consensus in the Western hemisphere is to be understood within the framework of the dominant cultural paradigm.¹ Charles Sanders Peirce emphasized the importance of science for the betterment of society. Charles Sanders Peirce's writings on community of observers and unlimited community indicate his interest in the social relevance of scientific method. Peirce argued that an experimental method devised along the principles of science would facilitate convergence of beliefs. Peirce applies an experimental method, which is similar to Karl Popper's theory of falsification in order to verify the logical certainty of beliefs. Kwame Anthony Appiah asserts that science as a paradigm questions existing social and

¹ From the Middle Ages, science has captured the imagination of philosophers such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, to name a few. But, only in the twentieth century, due to the importance accorded to scientific disciplines and technological advancements, science has become the cultural paradigm. Even Pope John Paul II apologized on behalf of the Catholic Church for the persecution of Galileo and others for their scientific endeavors during the Middle Ages. Science and technology have complete dominance in our daily lives. Religion unabashedly uses science to advance its agenda.

cultural beliefs, while stipulating what is and what ought to be believed.² Synchronous questions such as what is scientific and unscientific, justification of scientific hypothesis, and diachronous questions such as the historical development of the discipline of science inform the discourse about society, politics, education, and economy in the Western hemisphere.

In advanced liberal democracies, science is the context of justification for important issues. Our attempt to achieve a consensus is dependent upon science, which is the context of justification. I will also examine Rawls' theory of justice, which applies the method of hypothesis but without the supporting premises. Rawls neglects the impact of science on the lifeworld. I will show how Peirce and Popper accepted the historicity of science while Rawls begins with the ahistorical conception of politics in his theory of "Original position." Rawls is thus guilty of theorizing for an entirely different lifeworld. His theory of justice is theory laden but suffers from the lacuna of positing an ahistorical, stationary, and isolated social thought experiment. In order to explain the effect of Peirce and Rawls's theories on liberal democracy, I will utilize Stephen Turner's writings on liberal democracy. I will show how the method of hypothesis is conducive to achieve consensus in scientific and social spheres.

Karl Popper claims that disciplines such as psychology and history are afflicted by demarcation problems. Disciplines such as psychology and Marxism were considered to be scientifically justifiable in the early twentieth century. Popper argues that scientific

² Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Thinking It Through*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. pp. 127-130.

predictions are not possible in the afore-mentioned instances and only a negative utilitarian (reducing the misery instead of increasing the happiness) thesis is possible. Popper's social and political thought is characterized by his theory of falsification, which will be discussed more elaborately in the course of this chapter. Popper believed that in order to test the validity of scientific theories, they must be subjected to the attempt of falsification. Unlike the post-Enlightenment optimism of an emancipated society, Popper has a very moderate projection of social advancement, which he calls "piecemeal engineering."³ Popper attributes historicism and holism to the natural yearning of human beings to control their lives with the knowledge of future events. Popper argues that society is not static, isolated, and recurrent like the solar system.⁴ Hence, according to Popper, future-oriented social programs are not scientifically justifiable. But Popper concedes that scientific advancement impacts education and hence social and political changes have occurred. Popper, himself, was a staunch advocate of liberal democracy.

Lakatos and Putnam criticized Popper's theory of falsification for simplifying the process of critical evaluation of a scientific hypothesis.⁵ Lakatos argued that Popper's disjunction of falsification/corroboratorion does not encapsulate how major theories in science are corroborated. Only repeated experimental failures could undermine the scientific validity of major theories of science. Unless a theory fails to satisfy both simple and complex experimental applications consistently, only the auxillary hypothesis to the established theory is altered.

³ Stephen Thornton, "Karl Popper," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2002 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2002/entries/popper/>>.

⁴ Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 338.

⁵ Refer to "Karl Popper," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Winter 2002 Edition)

Popper's philosophy of science has direct influence on his social and political thought. According to Popper, applying the method of natural sciences in social sciences would encourage totalitarianism. Popper admits that science is the major social paradigm. By denying science of the task of predicting historical development, Popper seeks to preempt social engineering. Popper emphasized the importance of creativity and heuristic motivation in scientific research. Similarly, Charles Sanders Peirce also emphasized the methodology of science in understanding the phenomenon of the world. In order to cultivate the habit of scientific thinking, Peirce envisaged a community of observers. For Peirce, scientific research was a social activity and hence a need for consensus among the scientists was necessary for the development of critical inquiry.

There is a stark difference between the consensual activity of a group of scientists working on a specific scientific problem and a group of scientists who are working on a problem that involves multi-lateral levels of understanding. An example of the former would be nuclear scientists and the latter environmental scientists. Another example is that of a group of medical scientists discussing an epidemic. In the field of science, there is a contrast between the cognitive understanding of the expert and the audience. For a specialized group of professionals, linguistic and communicative competencies about their field are immediate. For the group of experts who observe the process and development of a theory, product, or policy, results are explainable in terms of structural factors within their discipline. But, the non-experts resort to a belief in the authority of the experts, which is tenaciously clung on to by them. The cognitive understanding of the

expert is identified by her proximity to the process of structural changes within a particular paradigm where as in the case of non-expert it is defined in terms of an ardent adherence to the principles laid down by the experts.

The clash of paradigms within a culture is due to the conflict between the expertise and non-expertise aspects of theorization of knowledge within a scientific discipline. Instead of characterizing the debate between science and other disciplines as theory – practice problem, it is imperative to recognize the chasm between the status of experts and the audience. Russ Hanson argues that all observations are theory-laden.⁶ Hence, Hanson refutes the existence of a theory-practice problem. The cognitive authority of scientists emanates from their expertise. Since there is no real plausibility of direct access to the citadels of scientific knowledge for the non-experts, only avenues of fixing beliefs are that of authority, tenacity, and a priori forms. The non-expert audience understands science, as an alien paradigm, in terms of other accessible paradigms. In several ways, the process of understanding science by non-scientific audience stunningly resembles Plato’s “allegory of the cave” and the Indian parable of “five blind men and an elephant.”⁷

Expert Versus Audience

The expert or the non-expert tag is dynamic and interchangeable when paradigms change. Depending upon the esteem need of the society, expertise is valued. A doctor is a non-expert when she learns music or dance from an artist and vice versa. But there is a tacit

⁶ K.A. Appiah, p. 154.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, Trans. F.M. Cornford, London: Oxford University Press, 1945. Book VII.

understanding of the hierarchy on the social scale. For all the popularity and fame, in the corridors of power, scientific, economic, and legal experts have more political clout than artists. There was an epoch when art was considered divine. During that epoch, even management was considered to be an art. Martial art is a classic example. Now, martial art is called martial science. What was considered to be a divine individual talent is now harvested scientifically. Social rationalization has transformed many an art into a science. John Dewey's writings on aesthetics bespeak of the importance of education and training in art, sport, law, psychology, and science.⁸ This could be attributed to the disenchantment of the lifeworld due to a change in paradigm to science and the democratization of the public sphere. Religious bewitchment of the intellect has given way to the scientific mastery of the environment. Science is about universals and hence cultural particulars have played a limited role. Or science can also be explained as essentially a bourgeoisie steering mechanism from the viewpoint of the left.⁹ Science has been an effective justificatory context for the communists and the capitalists alike. My objective in emphasizing the scientific method and science as a cultural paradigm is to explain that symmetrical conception of consensus is based on an idea of rational citizen who is heuristically motivated to know the reality. Democracy and science have transformed the process of achieving consensus.

In the Middleages, as long as science did not challenge the existing paradigm, which was religion, there was an uneasy peace between them. In some sense, the paradigm conflict between science and religion was also a clash between religious and

⁸ Paul Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 20-21.

⁹ Stephen Turner, *Liberal Democracy 3.0*, pp. 23, 117.

scientific bourgeoisie, in which the proletariat were the infantrymen. As Turner points out, the masses are ensnared by the sentiment of self-denial and whichever paradigm portrays itself as the epitome of self-denial that paradigm would be respected. In a liberal democracy, there are institutions and processes to legitimate paradigms and the most important avenue for legitimating is by discussion. To some extent, knowledge associations, boundary organizations, and commissions bridge the distance between the experts and the audience.¹⁰ But the question that is upper-most in our midst is whether consensus achieved via knowledge associations is a surrogate-consensus?

Expertise – Transformation of the Cultural Paradigm

Kwasi Wiredu emphasizes the need to recognize the objective of a dialogue that seeks to achieve consensus. According to Wiredu, questions about cultural particulars in religion, ideology, and ideals can be intractable. The objective of a consensual activity is to arrive at an agreement on ‘what needs to be done.’ A debate about ‘what ought to be done’ would never end. The everlasting struggle between the proponents of various ‘ought’ positions is based on dogmas and hence positions that are at variance cannot be reconciled without a complete transformation of the belief systems of the participants in a dialogue. Hence, Wiredu insists on the separation of ‘is’ and ‘ought’ issues in the epistemological realm from social and political issues while attempting to reach a consensus. The testability of ‘is’ and ‘ought’ positions is logical in the realm of epistemology and more specifically science. In social and political realm, what Peirce calls the methods of fixing beliefs such as tenacity, authority, and the a priori operate

¹⁰ Turner, *Liberal Democracy 3.0*, pp. 72-96.

along with the experimental method. In the social realm, logic is a heuristic tool.

Wiredu's position is very similar to Rawlsian theory of avoidance and his separation of political idea of justice as fairness, on the one hand, and metaphysical, religious, moral, and subjective conceptions of justice, on the other. But Wiredu does not advocate an ideal situation in which social and historical conditions must be suspended in a political discourse.

Pragmatic Consensus

Charles Sanders Peirce's writings on fixing beliefs, clear ideas, and necessity elucidate the need to have guiding principles or provisional hypothesis, not only in science but also in everyday transactions, rather than absolutely indubitable principles as the starting point.¹¹ Science is a discipline that emphasizes common skills, training, and common discourse.¹² Turner points out the monopolistic nature of scientific expertise and its inalienable connection with politics. The general tenor of Turner's argument that scientific expertise is political could be extended to other forms of expertise such as religious, economic, literary, artistic, and therapeutic. Expertise in its nature is monopolistic. As Turner points out, what Ulrich Beck terms as demonopolization is never plausible in any form of expertise.¹³ A political consensus on subjective, emotive, and vexatious issues is even more intractable. Hence, what Turner calls self-denial is indispensable for achieving a political consensus on issues pertaining to individual interest such as income tax, distribution of resources, agricultural subsidies, affirmative

¹¹ Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," pp. 372-382. Cited from Baird & Kaufmann, 2000.

¹² Turner, pp. viii-x.

¹³ Ibid., p. 3.

action, and healthcare.¹⁴ Consensus becomes even more difficult when the paradigm is as asymmetric as social justice, ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, and terrorism. Let us discuss the prospects of applying scientific models in social communication.

Most of the early pragmatists such as Peirce, James, and Dewey believed that a functional model of science could effectively solve the problems of authority, dogmatism, and a priori modes of ascertaining beliefs. Peirce suggested an interesting idea of what could be termed as working hypothesis, which resembles the theory of falsification suggested by Karl Popper. According to Popper,¹⁵

The result of tests is the *selection* of hypotheses which have stood up to tests, or the *elimination* of those hypotheses which have not stood up to them, and which are therefore rejected. It is important to realize the consequences of this view. They are these: all tests can be interpreted as attempts to weed out false theories - to find the weak points of a theory in order to reject it if it is falsified by the test. This view is sometimes considered paradoxical; our aim, it is said, is to establish theories, not to eliminate false ones. But just because it is our aim to establish theories as well as we can, we must test them as severely as we can; that is, we must try to find fault with them, we must try to falsify them. Only if we cannot falsify them in spite of our best efforts can we say that they have stood up to severe tests. This is the reason why the discovery of instances which confirm a theory mean very little if we have not tried, and failed, to discover refutations. For if we are uncritical we shall always find what we want: we shall look for, and find, confirmations, and we shall look away from, and not see, whatever might be dangerous to our pet theories. In this way it is only too easy to obtain what appears to be overwhelming evidence in favor of a theory which, if approached critically, would have been refuted. In order to make the method of selection by elimination work, and to ensure that only the fittest theories survive, their struggle for life must be made severe by them.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.p. 81- 83. The most striking example of the emphasis on self-denial in expertise is the commotion created in the Congress while implementing the September 11 Commission Report. It is imperative for the intelligence agencies such as the CIA and Military Intelligence to indulge in self-denial or else be characterized as politicizing national security. Already, there is a suspicion that the veneer of self-denial has become unstuck and the whole process is viewed as the turf war between the Pentagon and the State Department to control the budgetary authority.

¹⁵ Karl Raimund Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. pp. 131-136.

According to Peirce, both deductive and inductive inferences do not need absolute certainty.¹⁶ As MacIntyre describes in *After Virtue*, problems concerning generalization of predictions in social sciences could be traced to their tendency to model their methods on the basis of the mathematical models of natural sciences.¹⁷ In the natural sciences, there is an ‘Original position,’ which is, according to Peirce, provisional and hypothetical. Peirce’s aim was to discover a method of forging an agreement in the realm of community and not just individuals. The most important tenets of Peirce’s pragmatism are as follows:

1. Beliefs are identical if and only if they give rise to the same habit of action.
2. Beliefs give rise to the same habit of action if and only if they appease the same doubt by producing the same rule of action.

The underlying assumption in Peirce’s pragmatic definition of belief as a habit is the emphasis on the motivation for action. Only that which motivates a person to act is a belief. By tracing the pattern of beliefs, one can also anticipate the path of action. The scientific methodology imbedded in this approach appears to be hampered by stereotyping action-habit-belief patterns. But as John Murphy points out, there can be different beliefs, which produce same actions. This is the iconic method of signification of Peirce. The meaning of an action is dependent upon the result it produces. According to Peirce, “ ... we come down to what is tangible and conceivably practical, as the root of

¹⁶ Baird & Kaufmann, Eds., Peirce, p. 387.

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 88.

every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be; and there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference in practice.”¹⁸ An allied aspect of Peirce’s pragmatism is his experimentalism. Peirce wanted to cultivate a habit of thinking as a question of experimentation as it is thought in the laboratories. In his “The Fixation of Belief” he delineates four methods of fixing beliefs. They are as follows:¹⁹

1. Method of tenacity
2. Method of authority
3. A priori method
4. Experimental method.

A true belief, for Peirce, is the one, which elicits general agreement. Peirce’s experimental method emphasizes a concomitant relation between habit, action, true belief and consequences. Peirce’s experimentalism is incumbent on scientific realism. While the experimental method poses several important questions about religion, culture, customs, and manners, it is not directly applicable to issues that have a long and torturous history.

Scientific consensus that was sought by Peirce is easier to achieve in a laboratory setting in which heuristic motivation is an important factor. But in politics, the emphasis is not on knowledge but power. For politics, science is an instrument of power, which has

¹⁸ John P. Murphy, *Pragmatism – From Peirce to Davidson*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990. p. 26.

¹⁹ Baird & Kaufmann, Eds. *Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief,” pp. 378-382.

replaced religion. A scientific consensus, which is a broad consensus about a scientific finding, is different from a consensus among scientists. The former is an informed judgment, which is more debatable. Stephen Turner gives the example of global warming. There is a broad consensus among scientists about global warming while on the other hand there are wide variances in conclusions drawn in different studies on global warming.²⁰ A good example of consensus among scientists would be a group of medical professionals who discuss the most effective treatment to epidemics and arrive at a consensus.

Peirce, while trying to clear the cobwebs of metaphysical muddles, suggests the application of the model of consensus among scientists to non-scientific realms. The community of observers who are more scientific in their approach would have to contend with conflict of interests in social, political and economic spheres. While an emphasis on functionality could redress metaphysical muddles, which paralyze society, especially in the religious realm, into inactivity, it could also create new modes of reality that is scientifically constructed.

In the laboratory, scientific procedures that are adopted need an objectivating attitude. It is impossible to adopt such an objectivating attitude to social and political issues because people have different beliefs on which they are prepared to act. (It is to be noted here that Peirce was an anti-foundationalist and believed that knowledge was historical.) Habits of action have become ingrained in people's minds. In the public

²⁰ Turner, p. 61.

sphere, there is no ground zero (theoretically) in contrast to what a scientist has in the laboratory, especially with respect to vexatious religious, social, economic, and political issues. However, for the purpose of consensual activity, the tenor of Peirce's experimental method could be utilized. The concept of non-teleological activity with emphasis on procedures rather than final ends could be a viable alternative. In the post-modern epoch, is it possible to have a purposive activity as practiced in Aristotelian *polis*? It appears impossible to have a concrete purposive goal for a society or a community without subordinating the individual goals to the common goal. In a liberal democracy, the assumption of inviolable individual liberty is both a boon and a bane. For the protection of individual rights and facilitating individual cultural development, an emphasis on individual rights is inevitable. But, how are the social goals to be reconciled with the individual goals? There is an inherent contradiction in liberal democracy. By emphasizing absolute inviolability of individual rights, a position of compromise is preempted.

Ian Hacking argues that there are problems related to the scientization of moral or ethical issues. Hacking explains how the concept of child cruelty was medicalized into the phenomenon of child abuse.²¹ In the 1960s, a group of physicians in Colorado decided to define child cruelty in medical terms. Thus, the scientization of child cruelty began deliberately in an effort to take it away from the realm of ordinary discourse to the realm of scientific discourse. In course of time, most of the developed Western countries promulgated laws and elaborate procedures to address the issue of child abuse. Hospitals

²¹ Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. p. 125.

and law enforcement agencies were inundated with reports of child abuse. Since, the occurrence of child abuse is not akin to traditional criminal activities, the help of the society was enlisted to inform the police and child-care agencies about plausible cases of child abuse. While the process of determining whether a child has been abused was scientifically analyzed, the process of affixing the blame was carried out in a haphazard manner. Thus, scientific method does not ensure fairness.

One of the problems that Peirce did not envisage with the scientific method was the evolution of technology as the business engine of science. As long as science remained as the pursuit of knowledge, the fruits of its endeavors trickle down to the public sphere only as a movement from above. On the other hand, with the inextricable matrimony of science and technology, science has also lost its perceived emancipatory telos that it gained during the Enlightenment epoch. The aim of reason to emancipate the humankind from the throes of despair into which it was thrown by religion was frittered away once again with the intervention of politics. Religion, as long as it did not attempt to legislate what reality was, had an important role in constituting a goal for human life. But with the ascent of reason, it gradually abdicated its authority to science. Science, as long as it was concerned with the discovery of the wonders of nature, had an emancipatory telos. But, once science started constituting reality by mastering nature and altering the balance of nature, it became a dominating force. Science has effectively replaced religion as the new religion.

As monarchy, oligarchy, timocracy, and tyranny were the political expressions of a religious-communitarian society, democracy is the expression of a scientific society.²² Democracy and science, together, constructed the world of freedom and suffrage. As religious institutions of the West fervently proselytized in foreign lands and on many an occasion engaged in forcible conversions, which were justified in terms of superior knowledge and culture, the present day democracies of the West justify the proselytization of democratic practices based on a scientific methodology. But Peirce's experimental method is not aimed at the construction of an infallible foundational ideology. But still it suffers from a failure to recognize the infelicities and abuses that would have ensued from a total emphasis on experimental methodology.²³ Peirce explains that synonymous sentences could be used to explain different beliefs and antonymous sentences could be used to express similar beliefs.²⁴ Ultimately, the behavior determines the efficacy of the belief. Peirce seems to anticipate perlocutionary speech acts of Austin.²⁵ While Peirce's theory explains the problem of beliefs in a refreshingly explicit manner, the variance between beliefs could cause gargantuan problems. The society is, at once, dogmatic, authoritarian, and speculative. The experimental method assumes a community of observers who share the same goals and aspirations. Peirce's provisional hypothesis is applicable to a situation in which interlocutors share values. But

²² Plato, *Republic*, Trans. F.M. Cornford, Book VIII

²³ Probably, the society needs to participate in an orgy in the disenchanting and individuating epoch. The absence of Salem witch trials or religious persecutions in the modern day democracies necessitates such a display of community ritual in which the community participated wholeheartedly. Such a process is akin to the enactment of Greek tragedy and also has a cathartic effect on the collective soul of the society. Wars and genocides have been replaced by celebrating capital punishment and following democratic practices with religious zeal.

²⁴ Cited from Baird & Kaufmann, 2000. Refer to C.S. Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," p. 388.

²⁵ John Austin, *How to do things with words*, Eds., J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

in a civil society, consensus is difficult to achieve because interlocutors are culturally diverse. One can only find adherence to laws of the society, which are guaranteed to elicit penal actions from law enforcement. Laws are the religious rituals of liberal democracy.

Peirce's Community of Observers

Charles Sanders Peirce viewed the experimental model of science as the pragmatic technique for clarifying the meaning of ideas.²⁶ Peirce was opposed to metaphysical system building and hence questioned whether determinism should be the postulate of science rather than indeterminacy. In his philosophy of evolutionary categories, Peirce emphasizes the role of tychism (chance), synechism (continuity), and agapism (evolutionary love). In several ways, Peirce's philosophy has phenomenological leanings. Peirce likens people who are unsettled by doubting a concept of truth in science or religion to Ostriches that bury their heads in the sand. Doubt is identified with weakness and truth with certitude. For Peirce, ultimately, the problem of doubt pertains to the community and not restricted to the individual alone. So, Peirce identifies method of tenacity with individual belief. The second method of fixing beliefs is that of authority. Peirce says that the method of authority is the chosen method of upholding theological and political doctrines. In a manner similar to the tirade of Socrates against Athenian citizens, Peirce derisively remarks:²⁷

Let the people turn out and tar-and-feather such men, or let inquisitions made into the manner of thinking of suspected persons, and when they are found guilty of

²⁶ Paul Kurtz, Ed. *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1967. p. 47.

²⁷ Cited from Baird & Kaufmann. Peirce, p. 378.

forbidden beliefs, let them be subjected to some signal punishment. When complete agreement could not otherwise be reached, a general massacre of all who have not thought in a certain way has proved a very effective means of settling opinion in a country. If the power to do this be wanting, let a list of opinions be drawn up, to which no man of the least independence of thought can assent, and let the faithful be required to accept all these propositions, in order to segregate them as radically as possible from the rest of the world.

Peirce claims that the method of authority thrives on religious and political power. The individual right is always subordinated to the community need. A feeling of sympathy and fellowship creates a very strong bonding which creates an intoxicating social feeling, which demands absolute servitude. Such servitude as demanded by institutions such as religion, guild, and aristocracy spawns an emphasis on authority. Peirce tellingly points out the scheme of intellectual slavery initiated by organized faiths. Peirce's examples are also multi-cultural. The monumental stone structures erected in the name of religion in Siam and Egypt illustrates the power of the social feeling of fellowship that characterizes religious fervor. Peirce cites the institution of priesthood in religions as the best example of authority. The method of authority is challenged by cross-cultural interaction, which poses questions about the superiority of the belief perpetrated by the religious or political authorities. A reflection on the veracity of knowledge-claims of religious or political institutions also causes authority as a method of fixing beliefs to flounder.

A more complex method replaces the method of authority and it is called the a priori method. The emphasis on the agreeableness to reason is the basis of the a priori method. A description of the a priori method resembles that of the search for an essence during romanticism. The uncanniness inherent in human beings would naturally decide

what is reasonable in “harmony with natural causes.”²⁸ Peirce refers to Plato’s reasoning that “the distances of the celestial spheres from one another should be proportional to the different length of the strings which produce harmonious chords.”²⁹ The afore-mentioned relation appears reasonable but it is not factual. Another universalization that Peirce indicates is “the doctrine that man only acts selfishly-that is, from the consideration that acting in one way will afford him more pleasure than acting in another.”³⁰ The latter observation could be construed as an attack on utilitarian emphasis on pleasure. Peirce is skeptical about the a priori method because it depends on social sentiments, accidents, and instinct. Only distantly, the a priori method is connected to observation and verification of facts. Inductive generalizations are rampant in the a priori method.

Methods of fixing belief such as tenacity, authority, and a priori are capricious and unsystematic. Demonstrating external certainty is not possible in the afore-mentioned methods of fixing beliefs. Science obeys laws that are not individual but common to all. The modes of reasoning in science are not inspirational but factual. Hence, Peirce claims that the method of science is the only valid form of inquiry. According to Peirce, science resolves the problem of doubt by illustrating practically and objectively the cause of such a doubt. On the other hand, Peirce also pointed out that isolated experimentation would not contribute to the corpus of scientific knowledge and hence science needs a community of observers. Interestingly, Peirce also encouraged the process of formulation of scientific hypothesis that would be a precursor to actual experimentation. In this

²⁸ Cited from Baird & Kaufmann, 2000. Peirce, p. 379.

²⁹ Ibid.,

³⁰ Peirce, p. 380.

context, he called the process of trial and error method of formulating successful hypothesis abduction. For Peirce, beliefs were not infallible but probable or provisional. What Peirce called “critical common sensism” is a perfect example of conjoinment of teleological and deontological understanding of the process of science.³¹ The term “common sensism” in terms of reflecting the “sense of the commons” is not critical. But, “common sensism” as recognition of the commonly understood but in the backdrop of a critical method, which is the scientific method, defines pragmatism as a philosophy, for Peirce. The process of consensus among the community of observers operating upon a provisional hypothesis enables the confluence of reason and experience. Reason allows experience to manifest itself, which results in the phenomenology of the given. Thus, in Peirce’s scientific method, procedures, application of procedures and consistent readjustment of hypothesis have great importance. Peirce’s emphasis is on the inferential relation between the premise and the conclusion of a scientific hypothesis. Peirce contends towards the end of “How To Make Our Ideas Clear” that even though there are variations in the results in the experimental method as more perfection is achieved, the results will tend to converge rather than diverge.

Peirce’s method of logical inquiry could be applied to the process of achieving political consensus. Peirce rejects the need for ultimate foundations in fixing beliefs and clarifying doubts.³² Even though Rawls insists on the need for tolerance of variegated beliefs and a phenomenological suspension of judgment in the form of ‘veil of

³¹ James K. Feibleman, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Charles S. Peirce*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1946. pp. 310-316.

³² Burch, Robert, "Charles Sanders Peirce", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2001 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/peirce/>

ignorance” unlike Peirce’s theory of inquiry, Rawlsian theory of justice is handicapped by an ascetic approach which does not engage but withdraws from the world. In some ways, Rawlsian approach mirrors that of Romanticism that searches for a deeper self or true meaning by valorizing one perspective of a theory of justice.³³ On the other hand, the scientific objectivating attitude necessary for social rationalization makes Rawlsian theory of justice very much a product of the Enlightenment thinking. Rawls utilizes economics and sociology to explain inequalities in the distribution of goods. In this context, Ronald Dworkin contests Rawls argument that the original position would lead to equality of resources. Dworkin argues that only equality of resources would lead to the original position.³⁴

In *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Habermas discusses the development of moral consciousness in relation to the process of learning and behavior. Habermas analyzes moral rationalization on the basis of developmental psychology of Piaget, Selman, and Kohlberg.³⁵ The first stage of moral development is based on the success or failure of an action and hence at the physical realm. In the second stage, the paradigm is “Do unto others that you want to be done to you,” the Golden Rule. Not surprisingly, the Golden Rule has been applied in all cultures and religions. Habermas criticizes Mead for not going beyond the second stage, even though Mead proposes mutual cooperation. The third stage is the Kantian categorical imperative “Never use

³³ Charles B. Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, pp. 49-77.

³⁴ Ronald Dworkin, “What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Volume 10 Number 4, Fall 1981. p. 345.

³⁵ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Trans. Christian Lenhardt & Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.

others as means to an end.” The last mentioned is the deontological perspective in which success or failure of desires becomes immaterial. Only the means of an action becomes paramount. The rectitude of the means, especially in the sense of Kantian duty, attains foremost importance. In Rawlsian and Habermasian approaches to issues such as justice, the deontological perspective predominates. The other two realms as discussed above, is not accorded as much importance as the categorical imperative of treating everyone as ends and not means. Concepts such as “ideal speech situation” or “overlapping consensus” or “reflective equilibrium” target the realms of esteem needs and not the preliminary levels of moral development explained by Kohlberg and Sellman.³⁶

For the purpose of achieving a consensus, is it possible to ground the process on the supposition of highest moral development? Applying Peirce’s thesis of provisionality of hypothesis, a strong emphasis on an emancipatory or altruistic course of moral development appears illogical.³⁷ But, Peirce believes very strongly that chance plays an important role even in science. The physical world, which is governed by laws, according to Peirce, also changes. In Peirce’s logic and scientific method, probability occupies a special place. The Hegelian identification of the manifestation of reason in the state and the Marxian subversion of the state as the repository of false consciousness seems to lurk beneath the surface of most liberal theories. It is in this sense that Peirces’ provisional hypothesis about fixation of beliefs is necessary. But, Peirce vehemently argues for unconditional love, self-sacrifice, and unlimited community in his ethics. There is a

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 116-167..

³⁷ The best example of structural violence is the after-effects of colonial freedom struggle. Some other examples are genocide in Rwanda, caste and religious violence in India, and other oppressive regimes. All the afore-mentioned episodes are justified on altruistic grounds and demand great sacrifice and self-denial.

strong sense of asymmetric and communal relationship. Even while discussing the problem of evil, Peirce advocates unadulterated love.

Peirce's ethics has a strong deontological component. In an almost Kantian tenor, Peirce says, "The only moral evil is not to have an ultimate aim."³⁸ In another context while pursuing his idea of 'unlimited community,' Peirce says,³⁹

...the very first command that is laid upon you, your quite highest business and duty, becomes, as everybody knows, to recognize a higher business than your business, not merely an avocation after the daily task of your vocation is performed, but a generalized conception of duty which completes your personality by melting it into the neighboring parts of the universal cosmos.

Peirce's passionately claims that one's duty is to expand the ethical horizons to embrace the whole world. Ethics, for Peirce, is a science of ideals. As a habit, ethical action is desirable and logical. Since conduct is a rational action that aims at the ideal good of the society, even self-sacrifice must not limit its horizons. In this sense, Peirce advocates universal love. He calls evil a limited and imperfect stage of love. In that sense, Peirce also separates science and ethics. A question of justice for Peirce, thus, would be asymmetrical. Peirce's conception of an "unlimited community" stems from the finitude of human beings and the illogicality of hatred and destruction. Hence, Peirce's deontology is based on the purposelessness of fighting over issues that are ephemeral. Peirce's realism is evident when he emphasizes unconditional love for all. One can sense almost Buddhistic non-attachment to the triviality of individual desires vis-à-vis common good. Peirce strongly argues that the welfare of the community defines individual goals.

³⁸ James K. Feibleman, p. 386.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 386.

The Original position – Precondition of an Overlapping Consensus

Rawls' theory of justice emphasizes the liberal notion of the inviolability of individual rights. In the same breadth, Rawls also propounds a proviso, which ensures equal distribution of opportunities and resources in a manner advantageous to the under-privileged groups in a society. The original position, according to Rawls, is the initial situation. Rawls says, "These principles are those which rational persons concerned to advance their interests would accept in this position of equality to settle the basic terms of their association." Later, Rawls claims, "The original position is defined in such a way that it is a status quo in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of social forces."⁴⁰ In the following quotation, Rawls refutes the utilitarian theory of the greatest good of greatest numbers. According to Rawls,⁴¹

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of a society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of justice for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.

Rawls' afore-mentioned emphasis on deontology is aimed at preempting purposive rationalization, that is, a theory of justice as a confluence of individual interests. An emphasis on purposive-teleological rationality encourages individual pursuit of happiness. Rawls, by emphasizing the deontological aspects of theory of justice, ensures

⁴⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 102-104.

⁴¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 3-4.

an overlapping consensus based on shared consent, mutual respect, reciprocity, fairness in terms of equality and opportunity and other primary goods. But Rawls' 'difference principle' is akin to the Lockean proviso that characterizes his theory of property.⁴² Rawls acknowledges the existence of inherent inequalities in a society. But by propounding the condition of 'Original position' which when characterized by a 'veil of ignorance' leads to the two principles of justice, Rawls ignores the historicity of the social understanding of democracy.

A Lockean program for the colonization of the American continent was based on the justification of acquiring landed property on the basis of labor.⁴³ Equality and human rights were not universal ideals during Locke's era. But it is quite clear that for Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, slavery was not as unproblematic as it was for other philosophers and thinkers of their era. There is definitely a paradigm shift from 'what ought to be' to 'what is to be done,' especially, in Hobbes and Locke. A strong emphasis on individual rights and property was a great leap in political philosophy for the reason that a less comprehensive doctrine of social and political conceptualization was being introduced in the West. The British society, during the period of Hobbes and Locke, was governed by strict religious dictates that spawned the entire spectrum of life. Hence, horizontal socio-political associations and voluntary associations were available only to the upper classes. But with a common law ensuring the safety and security of the individuals without reference to the class or creed of the people brought about a great revolution in Britain.

⁴² John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government*, London: A. Millar et al., 1764. Cited from B.J. Diggs, *The State, Justice, and the Common Good*. Glenview: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1974. pp. 75-76.

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 75-76.

By ordaining the state with the responsibility of guaranteeing safety and security of the individuals, social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke engineered a formula that benefited both the state and the citizens. Hitherto, the state was corporate and hence encumbered by lugubrious inefficiency on account of its monumental administrative tasks. Since, religion, education, sports, arts, economy, and foreign policy were all concentrated in the hands of the state the task of administration became cumbersome and unwieldy. With the diminution of religious and social tasks, which were to be followed by the liberalization of trade, the state became more efficient in delegating authority whereby ensuring responsibility. Thus, social contract and later democracy rescued the suffering state. With social responsibility vested in the individuals, social values underwent a tremendous change. Institutions that were more democratic and reciprocal such as constitution, parliament, congress, courts, and elections gradually replaced the elite political systems that installed institutions and established values.

One can deduce the unmistakable imprint of the Enlightenment reason, which had quashed the divine rights theory or even a theory of privilege masquerading as a theory of natural selection. In many ways, Socratic *polis* is a paradox and reveals the maladies of a comprehensive and centralized state. Socrates also assumes an original position in the form of selection and training regimen for the auxiliaries. The laborers and handicraftsmen are naturally bereft of qualities that are to be found in the guardians and auxiliaries. The Socratic *Republic* indicates the failure of a totally deontological system and the need for teleological action. A *Republic* exists as a just state, which is

purposive.⁴⁴ In order to maintain the sanctity of the *Republic*, those factors that do not assist in the betterment of the *Republic* have to be weeded out.

For Rawls, the original position entails the foundation of an equitable system of social equality and freedom. Rawls assumes those conditions as a given in a liberal democracy what Hobbes and Locke envisioned as proposed guarantees. In Rawls' theory of justice, the goods that were so important for Hobbes and Locke are already enshrined in a constitutional democracy and hence the ascent to the next stage is that of justice for all. Hobbes and Locke enunciated a social contract theory, which also assumed certain shared qualities of human beings. Both Hobbes and Locke were influenced by Newtonian mechanics, particularly, and science, in general. Hence, the concept of 'becoming' assumed more importance to that of 'being.'

Rawls does not accord importance to the process of expertization of the liberal public sphere. But Rawls did not apply the methodology of science because of an inversion in the conception of politics. Aristotle's good life in a *polis* is not the basis of Rawlsian minimal conception of the role of politics. Instead of integrating the horizontal (an emphasis on addressing those issues that affect the society in the present) and vertical concepts of development (future-oriented objectives), Rawls precludes politics from social reality by performing an *epoche* on everything except what could be simplified as food, clothing, and shelter. Thus, politics, which is hailed as the mother of all sciences by Aristotle, has been reduced to a discipline that can arbitrate issues, which do not brook

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic*, Trans. F.M. Cornford, 1945.

emotional or ideological responses. Thus, in Peircean parlance, Rawls' theory of justice only aspires to be an a priori theory of fixing beliefs in the political arena.

Rawls' theory of justice operates on the concept of arriving at a consensus, which faintly resembles Peirce's experimental method of inquiry. The foundational principle of Rawls' theory of justice is the 'Original position.'⁴⁵ The 'Original position' is a situation in which individual interests are kept in abeyance and only a rational approach to common interest is suggested. Among a community of believers in the rectitude of reason, the two principles of justice, namely, the principle of equal opportunity and the difference principle will be the final rational evolutions. Rawls believes that there would be consensus in the process of distribution of resources because of the absence of individual interests. A veil of ignorance is the self-imposed restriction on rationalization on the basis of individual interests and goods. According to Rawls, in the Original position none will be advantaged or disadvantaged by social or natural contingencies. While Rawls' approach is less comprehensive, the procedural approach itself is a long-term approach. A procedural approach to the concept of social justice demands a very strong commitment to the process, which is not debatable. While Rawls does not define a hierarchy of ends, rational interlocutors would decide for themselves whether the principles chosen to represent the process of realizing justice is fair to all. Rawls tries to conjoin rational foundations and pragmatic functionalism.

⁴⁵ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 15-19.

The theory of justice is comprehensive because it follows a causal argument ensuing from the concept of impartiality of reason and scientific objectivity. Rawls' theory of justice is comprehensive in terms of cultural universals and not in terms of cultural particulars. Rawls' thought experiment is thoroughly an Enlightenment ideal recast in the mold of twentieth century liberal democracy. A concept of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* with the social conditions of a Greek *polis* is more comprehensive while Rawlsian approach is less comprehensive because of the triumph of individual rights and right to property in a democracy. The foundational principles of Rawls' theory of justice, principle of equal opportunity and the difference principle are constant. Only a process of institutionalization of justice in the form of laws, institutions, and government policies could usher in social change. Reflective equilibrium, the state of theory merging with the practice, which is asymptotic to the say, the least, maintains an emphasis on the principles of justice.⁴⁶

Rawlsian theory of justice needs both empirical and theoretical justification as indicated by Dworkin.⁴⁷ By neglecting theoretical justification of a theory of justice, Rawls does not accord importance to the critical evaluation of empirical justification. A theory of justice encounters great difficulties when faced with ethical dilemma, scientific issues, and political decision-making. While Rawls might eschew a comprehensive theory of justice in order to avoid controversial and vexatious claims that are ideological in nature, a compartmentalized view of human lifeworld into public and private spheres has never been able to withstand the onslaught of media, government, religion, and

⁴⁶ Rawls, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁷ Wolfe & Hittinger, pp. 23-42.

technology. Unless Rawls proves the absolute separation of physical and mental qualities of human beings, the attitude of avoidance amounts to an act of ascetic withdrawal from the hostile world. As enworlded subjects, human beings do not have the luxury of withdrawing from the world.

Most of the theories on justice are hampered by either an entirely comprehensive or minimalistic approach. In order to have an effective theory of social justice, there is a need for not only normatively regulated approach but also a theory of justice that speaks to people both at the individual and social realms. That is a theory of justice or good have to be of interest to the society as well as the individual. There have been several attempts from Plato to Rawls to situate a theory of justice as a communal virtue or as an individual motivational principle. In all these approaches, there is a tacit assumption that people want to live in a certain way. Interestingly, Chanakya and Machiavelli also arrived at the conclusion that people yearn to live peacefully with their families and aspire for wealth. There is a tendency not to consider human life as a mixture of both good and bad. Liberal democracy is an approach, which harnesses the good and discourages the bad with respect to individual rights. Any absolute frame of reference for good and bad is not amenable to addressing problems addressing social justice at different levels, as the paradigm of religion proved. Religious faith sought eternity in an ephemeral world. Hence, Rawls constructs his theory of justice on a soft consensus that ignores social situations.

Problems in Peircean and Rawlsian Models of Consensus

I will first discuss the problems associated with Peirce's experimental method and then Rawls' procedural method. In Peirce's method, the appearance-reality problematic of Plato remains alive. While science is not a vain search for Utopia, for Peirce, it is inherently better than other methods of affixing beliefs such as tenacity, authority, and the a priori method because of its provisional foundations and critical methodology. But on the other hand, science is also a social construct and it battles other disciplines for being the tool of social change. What Peirce also considers the convergence of logical thinking and scientific knowledge necessarily requires the eclipse of methods of tenacity, authority, and a priori. I emphasize that even scientific method contains appeals to tenacity, authority, and a priori justification since science is institutionalized. This was the reason why Karl Popper recommended falsification as the method of ascertaining the validity of scientific theories.

In the course of time, science also spawned institutions akin to religious institutions. Religious institutions had the priestly class, the oligarchic patrons, powerful rulers, and loyal followers.⁴⁸ Science has effectively replaced religion with its own hierarchy with the experts on top of the hierarchy. As Lyotard predicted, governments and experts have a mutually enriching relationship as long as the relationship is cooperative to the agenda of the government. But with great technological advancements, governments need technocrats and not just bureaucratic administrators. Such a class requirement only serves

⁴⁸ Stephen Turner, "Religious Pluralism, Toleration, and Liberal Democracy: Past, Present, and Future," in *Religion and the Political Order*, p. 278.

to cement the hegemony of the educated elites, which is meritocracy, admixed with aristocracy. Such an arrangement led Plato to anoint Philosopher-King as the ideal concoction of reason and spirit. In a society composed of “noble lies,” such a concoction of qualities (Gold, Silver, Iron or Bronze) is plausible.

The dilemma of convincing the people about the imperative need to change a system of governance underscores two possibilities. On the one hand, it takes a long time for a system of governance to change procedurally. On the other, democracy, which is a “government by discussion”, is problematic because of the universalistic ideals that characterize a conception of democratic polity in general. One of the prime examples given by Turner in *Liberal Democracy 3.0* is that of Rawls’ theory of justice.

Rawlsian theory of justice takes into consideration a sample of people who are already democratic and hence already into the scheme of social rationalization particular to liberal democracy. Furthermore, the sample of people chosen also has an ideal though minimal in the Rawlsian sense. Thus, whether one person or a group of persons imagining oneself in the situation of the original position would come up only with the two Rawlsian principles of justice. Rawls tacitly applies the experimental method of Peirce and introduces an Aristotelian intent. Hence, Rawls wants to conjure a science of morality. It is a vividly Aristotelian project sans social stratification. Even though Turner criticizes Rawls for not taking into account the impact of science in determining the character of liberal democracy, following the tradition of pragmatism, Rawls and other political theorists have imbibed the scientific method adopted by both Peirce and Dewey.

The 'guiding principle' and 'provisional hypothesis' of Peirce find an echo in Rawls as original position and a veil of ignorance respectively. While Peirce is optimistic about his experimental method and the application of the consensus among scientists to the realm of everyday discourse, Rawls banishes science from the political realm. It is ironical that Rawls says that the science follows a different methodology that cannot be discussed in the political realm. But Rawls' notion of a healthy liberal democracy assumes the following about a good society.⁴⁹

1. No sexual discrimination
2. No racial discrimination
3. No religious discrimination
4. No social discrimination

The afore-mentioned injunctions require laws supported by scientific procedures from fields such as economics, statistics, biology, and physics, to name a few. Laws necessary entail enforcement of penalties in case of infringement. Science disproves bogus theories about evolution of human beings, sexual differences, and rational capacity.

Rawls assumes a pervasive sense of a humaneness as the foundation of a democratic community as a given. In Rawls' monumental work on justice, one can find a

⁴⁹ David M. Adams, *Philosophical Problems in the Law*, Belmont: Wadsworth, 2005. pp. 276-381. For excellent articles and case studies on affirmative action, non-discrimination, equality, and race please refer to the book mentioned above. Though Rawls does not explicitly state specific forms of discrimination, I have taken the liberty of assuming that he would not object to my assumptions about equality and non-discrimination so important to his concept of the original position and a veil of ignorance.

divergence of good and justice. This divergence also impacts Rawls conception of natural duties and institutional obligations. Rawls himself discusses how his theory of justice takes an Archimedean standpoint because of its emphasis on long-term wellness of the society. Rawls also emphasizes how individual desires that conflict with the principles of justice are to be discouraged.⁵⁰ But contrary to Rawls' claim that justice supersedes good, justice is also a good. Perhaps, as Socrates claims in the *Republic*, justice is the highest good. As Joseph Raz, William Galston and Alasdair MacIntyre emphasize relentlessly, at least a minimal perfectionism is necessary.⁵¹ In his chapter on "Justice in Political Economy," Rawls speaks of "embedding ideals in our working principles" which encapsulates the necessary connection between short-term and long-term goals. But what Rawls maintains as the independence of the theory of justice from the existing wants and needs is not possible by a less comprehensive theory of fairness.⁵² I strongly argue that the process of establishing a just society is a positive conception, which requires a metamorphosis of the existing social conditions that ferment injustices in the society.

An ideal thought-experiment while functioning as a driving force needs an overlapping consensus with the progressive elements of the various arms of the society such as science, religion, law, and education. While disciplines such as economics, law, and science have changed the conception of social reality, an emphasis on a political and non-comprehensive theory of justice is based on a conception of a static self. Charles Guignon describes the drastic transformation of even the conception of a social self from

⁵⁰ Rawls, *ATJ*, pp. 231-232.

⁵¹ Wolfe & Hittinger, Eds. *Liberalism at the Crossroads*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994.

⁵² Rawls, *ATJ*, p. 231.

the pre-modern to post-modern epoch.⁵³ Globalization has mandated the need for a comprehensive re-evaluation of the concept of justice. Both Rawls and Peirce emphasize deontology. But Rawls espouses a policy of avoidance while Peirce advocates active engagement. Rawls posits an ideal beginning, which would lead to an ideal outcome. Peirce's scientific method is "a search for the laws demanded by the facts and inclusive of them."⁵⁴

Feibleman claims that Peirce learnt from Kant's observation that self-love propel people to act. The logical connection begins with the individual and ends ultimately with the universe. According to Peirce, human beings are driven towards the possession of ecumenical things. But, paradoxically, everything in this world is ephemeral and the community of such things, he calls an 'unlimited community.'⁵⁵

I conclude from the afore-mentioned argument of Peirce that a consensus in a multiculturally diverse society must logically begin with the analysis of the metaphysics of relations between conflicting practices and extend it to the 'unlimited community.' This is the ideal. But Peirce also claims that consensus could be elusive due to interpersonal and social factors. This is the reality. Peirce's paradox presages Kenneth Arrow's impossibility theorem, which states that individual interests and social choices are logically divergent.⁵⁶ I have tried to argue in the course of the chapter that individual and social components are integral to any social, political, or scientific enterprise. A

⁵³ Guignon, pp. 107-109.

⁵⁴ Feibleman, p. 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 46.

⁵⁶ Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

consensus in the political arena necessarily needs a provisional hypothesis that engages on the one hand, beliefs that emanate from tenacity, authority, and a priori reasoning, and on the other, illustrates and justifies the superiority of the scientific method. Democracy is entwined with the concept of provisional hypothesis because even ideal original positions are subject to a provisional consensus. Based on the provisionality and justificatory nature of the method of hypothesis when applied to a social and political system, preparatory conditions of a partial or limited consensus are established. This is the strength of any participatory democracy, whether it is communitarian or liberal.

Chapter 4

Kwasi Wiredu – The Akan Conception of Communitarian Consensus

In the first chapter, I applied Charles Taylor's framework of modern social imaginaries to analyze the character of civil societies. Society, morality, and polity derive their legitimacy from the social imaginary of a culture. In the context of the United States, the bitter antagonism between the Democratic and the Republican parties reminds one of the Ghanaian imagery of two crocodiles with one stomach and fighting over food. Partisan politics in democratic societies emphasizes political success and not consensus. Because of antagonistic relationship between different political parties intent on furthering the interests of their supporters, social imaginary is fractured. Such a fractured social imaginary leads to a thoroughly confused civil society. The Democratic and the Republican absorption with each other, prevents a more ecumenical understanding of the world. Consensual politics, which is considered to be one of the defining features of advanced democracies, is rare in the United States or any multi-party democratic politics. In this chapter, I advance the thesis that plausibility of consensus is more in traditional African communitarian societies than in multi-party democracies. I also explain the equilibrium between solidarity and subsidiarity that exists in the Akan political system. Solidarity is the unified social imaginary, which is broadly shared in a culture. The Akan have a strong cultural identity. Subsidiarity is the element that cements mutual social

relationships between individuals. It is a necessary condition for social cooperation, in other words consensus.

The absurdity that prevents consensus in our lifeworld is epitomized by the Ghanaian imagery of two crocodiles having the same stomach but fighting over food. The Akan community in Ghana followed a system of consensual decision-making process, traditionally. But the emphasis on consensus has suffered due to the shift in the social imaginary of Ghana from traditional Akan community to colonial Ghana and then to post-colonial Ghana. The sense of solidarity and subsidiarity that is organically fostered in a communitarian society is entangled in the quagmire of competitive and avaricious individualism that is alien to the Ghanaian social imaginary due to colonization. Thus, African thinkers such as Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and Kwame Anthony Appiah emphasize the need for cultural decolonization of African thought.

Kwasi Wiredu especially emphasizes a system of consensual democracy with no parties.¹ Wiredu argues that traditional Ghanaian decision-making was non-majoritarian. Wiredu further goes on to say that in parliamentary or other forms of majoritarian democracy, only the winning political grouping has greater power on decision-making. Wiredu says, “It is, then, from a consensus-oriented standpoint, a system that is frequently deleterious of genuine representation, that is, representation beyond parliamentary window-dressing.”

¹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. pp. 143-144. Hence forth abbreviated as *CUP*.

The Need for Conceptual Decolonization of African philosophy

The conceptual colonization of African tradition has debilitated the conceptual schema of African thought process. While manifestation of external influence is cause enough for concern, dearth of scholars trained in traditional African thought in modern Ghana is far more appalling. The superimposition of an alien thought-schema on traditional African culture, language, religion, and political institutions has created conceptual complications for African philosophers in distinguishing what is traditional African thought. An impartial and critical analysis of the conceptual schema of native African thought requires decolonization of modern African thought.

While educated Africans were twice removed from their own culture due to colonization, scholars from erstwhile colonial powers have written extensively about the African culture. The already de-Africanized post-colonial Africans have recourse mainly to those texts written by non-Africans scholars about Africa. Some writings that were inaccurate created artificial philosophical, linguistic, and religious muddles. Kwasi Wiredu lists several concepts such as God, Reality, Being, Existence, Belief, Knowledge, Faith, World, and Universe prevalent in African cultures, which have been distorted due to conceptual inaccuracies in their rendition into Western languages.² Kwame Gyekye cites the works of Horton, which characterize entire African thought as collective, rigidly

² Kwasi Wiredu, *CUP*, pp., 136-137.

monolithic, lacking inter-theoretic competition and alternative possibilities.³ Wiredu delineates three factors that cause conceptual colonization the most. They are as follows:⁴

1. Language
2. Religion
3. Politics

Wiredu cites the example of Cartesian skepticism, which is explicated by the famous method of doubt. The Cartesian claim for explaining certainty is *Cogito ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am]. Wiredu explains the complex process involved in unraveling the philosophical import of the Cartesian doubt in Akan. Descartes' attempt to illustrate infallible certainty would be very difficult to formulate in Akan for the simple reason that in the Akan conceptual schema, there is no place for infallible proposition. The Akan discourse assumes that knowledge is possible without being infallible and at the same time recognizing that certainty is not possible at all times. Hence, "I think, therefore I am," translates into a variety of expressions such as:⁵

1. I know very clearly or I know very clearly therefore I am there. [*Minim pefee* or *Minim koronyee enti mewoho*]
2. I very much know. [*Minim papaapa*]

³ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. pp. 44-45.

⁴ Ibid. p. 136.

⁵ Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 139.

The level of conceptual colonization is evident from responses from John Mbiti who argues that the Cartesian dictum 'I' must be replaced with 'We.' Leopold Senghor averred that traditional Africans had a participatory view of knowledge and hence would rather say, "I feel, I dance the Other; I am."⁶ Alexis Kagame points out the absurdity of 'I am' in Bantu since it always has to be followed by an attribute or an adjunct of a place. Mind, in Akan, is conceived as an ability to think and does not the status of an entity.

Wiredu indicates the conceptual incongruity between traditional conception of the universe as the place in which human beings exist and divining a mythology about the creation of universe along the lines of Christianity which requires the postulation of a creator God. While a religious affiliation or conversion to the religion introduced by the colonizers does not indicate an abdication to colonial mentality, a steadfast refusal to evaluate critically the beliefs of one's religion does smack of irrationality. Wiredu argues that an uncritical mixture of indigenous and foreign religions have led to severe distortions in the African conceptual schema.⁷

The third avenue, which has been completely distorted by colonial domination, is the political system of Africa. All African countries had their own system of governance. Governing bodies were of two kinds; centralized and decentralized. In both forms of governance, political representation of various groups was accorded importance. Wiredu and Gyekye, specifically mention the political system of the Akans in Ghana that arrived at decisions through consensus. The Akan system of decision-making emphasizes a

⁶ Ibid. p. 140.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 142-143.

political rule by consent through consensus, which is more rigorous than any modern system of democracy.

Western democracies, especially, the Anglo-American system of democracy, are attuned more towards transaction of daily business. The decision-making has to be short and swift so that time is not lost in haranguing over disputes. Time is translatable into money in Western democracies that are maintained by advanced liberal economies. Hence, the market considerations are more important than humanistic considerations. But, in Akan, for example, the political process could not avoid consensus. The empowerment of each person as an indispensable part of a community supersedes any other consideration. Since each person is considered invaluable as a member of the community, considerations ranging from individual human rights, personhood, and ethical obligations are imbedded in the process of consensual mediation.

In Akan, the person and the community are intertwined. Hence, there are no separate armies; no bureaucrats; and no landowners. Land is jointly owned by the lineage. Each person as a part of the community performs all the aforementioned functions. Western democracies adhere to a majoritarian decision-making process. This alienates a huge chunk of people who do not form a part of the winning majority. In Africa, the traditional African form of government by consensus was not encouraged during the colonial rule. The British government insisted on a multi-party democracy with elections as a precondition for independence. Most of the African countries accepted the system of multi-party democracy foisted on them only to get independence from

ruling foreign powers. Once independence was attained, the elected rulers became dictatorial and dissolved all opposition parties. One-party system was introduced in most African states.

Even though Africa boasted of leaders such as Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere who were highly educated freedom fighters, all of them banned other political parties and garnered power. The lack of critical counsel and accountability, which was the defining feature of traditional African political systems, severely damaged the cultural, social, economic, and political fabric of nascent post-colonial African states. The quagmire created by despotic leaders of the newly independent African states created incalculable amount of suffering.

Liberal Democracies and Adversarial Politics

Colonial powers such as Britain and France forcibly introduced majoritarian democracy as a pre-condition for the independence of their colonies. Questions could be raised about the rationale for laying down the precondition of democratization of traditional societies that had a communitarian form of government. The political, geographical, and cultural landscapes of the colonized countries have been ravaged beyond redemption. Hence, by installing a system of democracy with which people did not identify what were the chances of such a country surviving as a unified political entity? Democracy and colonial rule being oxymoronic, what was the rationale behind the insistence of the colonial powers on a democratic form of government as the precondition for freedom? Only the

educated elite of the colonized countries had exposure to the process of that foreign style of democracy while the vast multitude was never educated in that system of democracy.

In countries such as India, during the colonial rule, monarchy was operative and the governance was based on village, town, and city administrations that still followed the native system of governance. The British had taken over the top administration and the Viceregal powers regulated the already existing forms of governance. The kings, petty kings, and other regional rulers were made subservient to the British crown. The British, who left religious, cultural and ethnic demography of India mostly unmolested, undertook very limited structural transformation of the social sphere. Only for strategic reasons, did the British encourage the Hindu-Muslim divide and later sow the seeds of dissension between the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Muslims. After decades of struggle, the British granted Indians limited political participation at the state level while the final decision-making authority was with the British. The British had also trained Indians in the democratic system of governance and hence a transition to democracy was less problematic compared to several other newly independent colonies.

But, in Africa as well as in Asia, what caused gargantuan miseries to the population was the arbitrary division or formation of nation-states based on religion, tribal affiliation and ethnicity. In some cases such as Nigeria, arbitrary grouping of tribes into one nation has led to calamitous consequences. While colonial powers attempted to religiously homogenize the colonies with the objective of civilizing the barbarous native population in many countries, as the religious climate changed in the mother country

giving way to democratic forms of political legitimation, those new ideas were introduced into the colonies without any time for gradual assimilation or organic development. Thus, within a space of a few decades, the conceptual schema of the colonized countries underwent frequent changes, which totally unsettled the social and political systems that evolved organically. Colonialism was also a cultural invasion. In that sense, both good and bad aspects of the colonizing cultures intermingled with the native culture of the colonies. After independence from the colonial powers, those cultures that could not disentangle the complex web of inter-cultural miasma hurtle down the path of self-destruction. The process of cultural de-colonization involves both learning and unlearning that requires cultural self-reflection.

After democracy became the ruling form of government in all colonizing countries, the logical corollary was to introduce the same system of governance in the colonies. The colonies were devastated in the spheres of economy, politics, religion and education after being ruled by foreign powers for several decades. Christianity was used to “civilize” the native population of the colonies; democracy was also introduced as a system of governance not with any consideration to the social and political framework of the colonized countries but because it was the only system of political legitimation known to the colonizing powers. The process of aggressive democratization undertaken by Britain and the United States in the twenty first century also has a dogmatic element but in a manner much different from the French and the British as colonizers.

When Britain withdrew from India, Iraq, Pakistan, Ghana and other countries after ending its colonial rule, all those countries were required to design a democratic constitution. But, in the present climate, constitutional democracy has assumed the proportions of a religious dogma. With the separation of the Church and the State, the only good-in-itself whose specter lurks even beyond cultural, religious, and geographical identities is democracy, the religion. Democracy has assumed a transcendental identity and, in a manner reminiscent of all religious ideologies, shuns immanent critique. Democracy is the state religion of the twenty-first century.

Wiredu rejects both multi-party democracy and one-party rule for Africa. While the multi-party democracy is majoritarian and power-oriented, the one-party rule is more despotic. Hence, Wiredu advocates a system of non-party democracy devised along the lines of traditional African systems. Such a non-party system of democracy could be a very important structural adjustment in diverse civil societies such as those found in India, Nigeria and even the United States which is increasingly becoming a home to multi-lingual and multi-ethnic population with more concrete-identities. Wiredu's analysis indicates the flaws in a bi-partisan political system found in countries such as the United States.

In a two-party system, diverse interests are broadly classified and identified with either of the parties contesting statewide and nationwide elections. Only those interests that have powerful financial and political support achieve their ends whereas the voices of people who belong to the downtrodden sections of the society are seldom heard. While

the separation of the Church, the state, and the market has benefited the people in general, the strong nexus between the market and the state prejudices the political authority. Even civil society which in democracies plays a very pivotal role in galvanizing public opinion on issues of common welfare does not have as much access to the corridors of political power as the multi-national corporations. In most cases, issues such as health-care, education, security, and social justice are debated endlessly and totally politicized in a partisan manner. Proceduralism, unwittingly, contributes to the dilatory tactics of partisan interests.

Procedurally, in a democratically elected body such as the United States Senate or Congress, the Republican and the Democratic parties have to pass laws by a majority vote. In an atmosphere vitiated by diametrically opposite interests, both parties wrangle over the items that need to be added or deleted for a bill to pass in the Senate or the Congress. Finally, when a compromise is reached, a skeletal law that is a pale resemblance of the original draft of the law is passed. More often than not, the most powerful interests would have influenced the outcome of the law or bill and the interests of the common people would have been neglected.

The supporters of a competitive and adversarial politics of the democratic system found in the United States would indicate the efficacy of the decision-making powers of the Senate and the Congress. The deliberative politics in the United States is unequivocal in ensuring legal safeguards, which guarantee the individual rights of the people. But, even in the court of law, the legal process benefits those with access to good lawyers,

financial support, media exposure, and the willingness to tenaciously pursue a lawsuit. Even law is politicized in the United States because people elect judges, district attorneys, and sheriffs according to their party affiliation. Thus, ultimately, procedures that have been agreed to by the Democrats and the Republicans determine what is true or false and good or bad.

The domination of corporate interests and emphasis on majority decision-making is justified by an appeal to possessive individualism and ethical egoism, which culminates in the reluctance to coordinate social actions on the basis of common welfare interests.⁸ By encouraging ethical egoism, the welfare of less privileged population is neglected. Such an emphasis on individual self-interest that evolves into selfishness could be traced to the total inviolability of individual rights and property as instituted by Locke.⁹ Hobbes and Locke also influenced Jefferson and Madison who encouraged science, public schools, economic independence of individuals and a separation of religion and state.¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin was a proponent of Republican ideals and represented the mercantile interests of America quite admirably.¹¹

⁸ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962. While Macpherson's emphasis on possessive individualism as the defining feature of modern liberal tradition of Hobbes and Rousseau is persuasive, several thinkers disagree strongly with such an emphasis. Joseph Carens, James Tully, Jane Mansbridge, and several others have disagreed with Macpherson's characterization of modernity. Refer to Joseph H. Carens, Ed. *Democracy and Possessive Individualism: The Intellectual Legacy of C.B. Macpherson*, New York: SUNY Press, 1993.

⁹ T.O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558-1995*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. pp. 41-46. Also refer to C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

¹⁰ Henry Adams, *The History of the United States of America*, Ed. Ernest Samuels, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

¹¹ T.O. Lloyd, pp. 78, 89.

While Protestant religious ideals were a binding factor, economic interests predominantly influenced American society because of an emphasis on property and individual rights as envisaged by Locke. Even today, welfare measures of the government of the United States always face opposition from the Libertarians because distribution of property under any guise is an attempt to distribute property. Even the changing face of the United States which has increasingly integrated people from scores of nations into its society and the need for investments in social security, education, science and technology, and infrastructural development has little impact on the Libertarians and the Republicans who zealously protect their inviolable right to property. Thus, American civil society is riven by a conflict between the republican and the liberal ideologies. Both ideologies have allied with interest groups for support. In spite of the United States having drastically transformed into a multi-cultural society, both conservative and liberal ideologies do not encourage a system of coalition government democracy with more representation from under-represented ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups.

Effects of Cultural Colonization of Africa

Wiredu's non-party democracy could theoretically redress the problems of non-representation or under-representation of several cultural, ethnic and racial groups that feel disenfranchised due to a lack of recognition of their problems. Gyekye and Wiredu concur on the conceptual reconstruction required to rediscover the cultural past of Africa and chart a path to the future, through a turbulent present. Africa of the future needs address issues that arise from colonization in the linguistic, cultural, and political spheres. In this context, Gyekye analyzes problems inherent to the traditional African corpus of

knowledge. Some problems discussed by Gyekye are technological skill, scientific knowledge, rights of the spouses in the event of death of the other, one-lineage rule, and women's rights.¹² Wiredu also mentions the disadvantages of a commentarial tradition vis-à-vis written or scriptural traditions of philosophy found in the West and the East. Gyekye evaluates both positive and negative aspects of post-colonial African culture. Wiredu and Gyekye also recognize the need to challenge distortions of African philosophical thought caused by the discoloration of African culture, language, and religion during colonial rule. Okot p'Bitek lambasts Western studies of African religious texts for their ulterior motives. Okot p'Bitek cites several instances in which incorrect assumptions have completely distorted the meaning of religious beliefs.

Wiredu's example of the Akan concept of "*Anyamesom*" will elucidate the lack of linguistic clarity in English accounts of the Akan practices. The root of "*Anyamesom*" is "*Onyame*." Roughly translated "*Anyamesom*" means "service of God." The word "*Onyame*" translates into Akan "supreme being." Christian scholars have translated Akan religion as "*Abosomsom*." "*Som*" means "service" and "*Obo*" means "stone." Akan religion is then translated as "the service of the stone service." The Akans do believe that some spirits reside in stones and natural objects. But they do not have any service for the stones. They do not even worship *Onyame*, their supreme being. Hence, the Judeo-Christian belief system has been unreflectively transposed on the Akan belief system.¹³

¹² Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 217-271.

¹³ Okot p'Bitek, p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, p. 109. Okot p'Bitek argues that Akan God is made for man and not vice versa. p'Bitek, *Religions of the Central Luo*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971. Ghanaian philosopher Oguah also criticizes the cultural bias against African philosophy.

P'Bitek attributes the flippant translations to the motive of defending colonialism and demeaning African religions. As Wiredu believes, de-Christianization of African religions is a very important step in disentangling the thread of colonization of African culture. Religion and culture cannot be de-colonized without recourse to linguistic devices. Hence, it is necessary for the Africans to philosophize epistemic and metaphysical concepts in their own language.

Destructive Power of Colonial Myths

In the political arena, the most cataclysmic effect was brought about in Rwanda and Burundi. The gradual injection of the Hamitic hypothesis into the psyche of both Hutus and Tutsis was responsible for the eruption of genocidal violence.¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani's work on the factors that contributed to the genocide in 1994 in Rwanda and Burundi traces it to the strong belief in the Hamitic hypothesis of both Hutus and Tutsis. The Tutsis were considered to be different from the Hutus on account of the former being Hamitic. The Christian fables have a story about the curse of Noah who was the father of Ham. Noah cursed Ham for showing disrespect to him. Thus, Ham's son Cannon purportedly was the progenitor of a clan of black people. The descendants of such a race were the Tutsis according to the colonial masters. While the Tutsis were Africans, the colonizers painted them as the descendants of Ham arguing that the curse made them black. Since the Tutsis were the ruling clan in Rwanda, the Tutsis were hailed as Hamites who were considered to be more of European stock than the native Hutus. All the while

Helen Buss Mitchell, Ed., *Roots of World Wisdom*, Canada: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999. pp. 106-111. Also refer to Kwasi Wiredu's "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture" for Akan ethics which places great emphasis on the interconnectedness of sociality and morality. pp. 331-341.

¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002.

the Hutus were being ruled by the Tutsis who themselves started believing in the Hamitic hypothesis.

For the colonial masters, the Hamitic hypothesis gave ample ammunition to support the Tutsis who were ruling the Hutus. After the independence of Rwanda, the Hutus who outnumbered the Tutsis in Rwanda captured power and also the jobs. The Tutsis who were sulking under the Hutu regime repeatedly attacked Rwanda in the name of Rwandan Patriotic Front from the neighboring Uganda. This resulted in brutal reprisals from the Hutus. To exacerbate the situation, just before the genocide, the Tutsi army assassinated the Hutu President of Burundi. What followed were several raids of the RPF into Rwanda. The Hutus started retaliating by killing several thousand Tutsis in Rwanda. After repeated provocations by the proponents of the Hutu power, several hundreds of thousands of Tutsis were killed in a clinical fashion. Thus, the genocide began and with the assassination of both the President and the Prime Minister of Rwanda, there was no one to stop the genocide in which the army, hospitals, colleges, schools and Churches participated as a community ritual. Such a situation arose as a result of colonization and the resultant distortion of history that poisoned the relationship between the Hutus and the Tutsis.¹⁵

Intersubjectivity in Akan Philosophy

The eyepiece of African culture has been the colonial past, thus far, and hence an entirely different discourse is needed to balance the colonial past and the post-colonial future. It is not entirely possible to revisit the ancient African culture because of the irreversible

¹⁵ Mamdani, pp. 132-136, 195-196.

changes that have taken root in the African society such as Western education, Christianity, urbanization and political system of multi-party democracy. But there are ways of incorporating traditional African procedures that would foster a consensual mode of arriving at political decisions. The traditional Akan emphasis on consensus has underlying strong moral and communitarian assumptions. Morality in Akan is not individual but communitarian and hence always has a strong ‘I-Thou’ (intersubjective) connotation.¹⁶ Intersubjective relationship also ensures reciprocity that is a defining feature of the Akan conception of personhood.

A process of introjection of social roles is natural to the Akan conception of personhood, which is connected with being a responsible member of the Akan community. Proverbs such as the following emphasize the reflexive nature of Akan interpersonal relationships, morality and polity.¹⁷ They are:

1. If you do not allow your neighbor to reach nine you will never reach ten.
2. Somebody’s troubles have arrived; those of another are on the way.
3. It is a fool that says, “My neighbor is the butt of attack not me.”
4. The stick that was used to beat Takyi is the same that will be used to beat Nyankomago.
5. One person’s path will intersect with another’s before too long.
6. Do not do unto others what you would not that they unto you.

¹⁶ I am using ‘I –Thou’ as a variation of George Herbert Mead’s ‘I – We’ relationship which, he says, constitutes the self. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

¹⁷ Helen Buss Mitchell, Ed., *Roots of World Wisdom*, pp. 334-336.

Wiredu argues that the golden rule of doing unto others what one wants to be done to oneself is enshrined in Akan injunctions against selfishness and egoism. Deontic theories of ethics of which Rawls was one of the most recent proponents do not address issues of social inequality effectively and consequentialist-utilitarian ethics of happiness neglects the need for a social structure and the ineffable nature of happiness. Akan communitarian ethics allocates roles for a conception of duty as well as happiness within the confines of Akan community.

Wiredu calls the Akan ethics humanistic because of its emphasis on the importance of coordination and cooperation within a community without reference to a God or other supernatural foundations of ethics. In the Akan community, the notion of personhood required procreation as a necessary qualification. The youngsters were expected to reverential obey the elders. The strong communal identity itself depends on traditional agrarian rural culture. In liberal capitalism, civil society replaces traditional communitarianism.

Consensus and the Political Structure of the Akan Community

The Akan notion of consensus is communitarian in nature. Akan notion of community stems from concepts such as *mogya* (blood principle), *onipa* (person), and *okra* (life principle.) The *okra* is also the divine element that is present in all human beings according to the Akans. According to the Akans, human beings are naturally endowed with the qualities of equality and dignity. The Akan society is matrilineal. Members of

the Akan lineage are found far and wide in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The Akans believe that human beings are interdependent. From childhood till death, people need help from others and hence the individual is always beholden to the society. Some Akan sayings to this effect are as follows:

- a) A human being is not a palm tree so as to be sufficient unto himself.
- b) A human being needs help.
- c) It is because of the need to have someone blow out the speck of dust in one's eye that antelopes go in twos.

There are several adages in Akan that emphasize the need for mutual cooperation, interdependence, reciprocity, and equality of status of human beings. Akans also repeatedly indicate equality of human beings in their religious outlook. God bestowed responsibility on the Akans as masters of their own destiny and at the same time also vested the individuals with the duty of social responsibility. Akan communitarianism also stems from a dependency on land. Since agriculture was the main occupation land was not owned by individuals but by the community. Even the Akan lineage chiefs did not have the right to sell off land.¹⁸

The Akan political system was essentially composed of a council of lineages. The council chiefs were the most experienced and respected village elders representing various villages. While most of these positions were hereditary, they were subject to the

¹⁸ In the context of the Akans, a lineage is a family tree of a group of people who live in an Akan village or town that traces its origin to a woman. There are several lineages in Ghana. For example, Ashanti is one of the lineages of the Akans.

will of the people. Some positions such as the 'leader of the young men' went to the most eligible young man of the village who represented the village in the council of chiefs. He had the right to speak fearlessly about the issues such as those relating to the non-performance of chiefs. The Akan community strongly enforced the rule that the chiefs were selected according to the will of the people. The Akan towns had a council of village heads with the Chief of the town accorded the role of the chairman. The office of the chief was both hereditary and elective. Out of the group of eligible leaders from a lineage, the Queen Mother selected a candidate based on factors such as experience, reputation, military prowess and integrity from a pool of candidates. But finally the decision to appoint a chief was in the hands of the council and popular consent. Deserving candidates from other branches of royal lineages were also given an opportunity to participate in the political process.

The title of the 'chief of the young men' (*Nkwankwaahene*) was given to a person who did not belong to the ruling lineage but who had the support of the population of the village in general. Such a person was authorized to raise objections and convey the misgivings of the people about a candidate for the title of the chief of the council and on any other issue. The Akan political system had confederacies at both state and national level and the paramount chiefs serving at the level of a group of states were in charge of the administration of the whole nation.¹⁹

The Akans recognized the need for an administrative head of the state while at the same time instituting a system of checks and balances that mirrors the attempts of modern

¹⁹ Wiredu, *CUP*, pp. 157-162.

day democracies. By making the office of the chief accountable to the council of elders and also popular consent, tyranny was preempted. The decision-making in the council of village elders achieves its fruition only when a consensus was reached. Such a consensus became the view of the chief and not vice versa. Since great efforts were made to hear all views without dismissing or marginalizing any strand of opinion, the final decision was totally binding on all members of the council. Public criticism of consensus achieved by the council members was viewed with reprobation. Only the popular representative who did not belong to the council of elders could question the decision of the council even after a decision was reached.

In the event of a chief failing to adhere to the rules of political governance, he faced the prospect of being 'destooled.' The Akan equivalent of a throne is the stool. The office of the chief had sanctity. But the chief was considered to be a spiritually endowed person only as long he followed the rules of the political governance. Thus, one can discern an apparently seamless relation between village, town, state and national governance. Because of a strong local organization and a federal structure at the central level that emphasized participatory decision-making at all levels, the Akan system of governance ensured that local issues were resolved at the local level. Instead of proceduralizing issues and taking them to a separate judicial authority, issues were resolved within the community with the aim of establishing peace rather than demanding retribution.²⁰ Another important individual right enshrined in the Akan community is the right to trial. No punishment is meted out without a trial. Wiredu mentions an instance in

²⁰ Wiredu, *CUP*, pp. 161-164.

which even the dead-body of a person who committed suicide and suspected of some wrongdoing was tried posthumously.²¹

The Akan concept of right to land is not based on individual ownership but lineage ownership. The land belonged to the lineages and not to the individuals. No land could be sold or bartered away. Only the chief has the right to reallocation of possession in times of distress for a lineage while other lineages have more than what they require. But the right to the redistribution of the land also requires the cognizance of the lineages concerned and cannot be done arbitrarily by the chief.²² In spite of Akan practices such as right to trial accorded to everyone, community land ownership, non-discrimination, religious freedom and political consensus, there were social practices which appear anachronistic such as ritual killing of people to accompany the dead chiefs and the total supplication demanded of the non-adults as they were not considered mature enough to voice their opinions. Some of the positive traits of the Akan culture have been ravaged by colonization, modernization and greed of the chiefs. Wiredu laments the lack of moral rectitude that has led to the cultural and political chaos in Ghana in particular and Africa in general due to the collapse of traditional communitarianism.

Some of the modern African leaders such as Senghor, Nyerere, Nkrumah, and Kaunda took advantage of the traditional emphasis on non-party democracy to install themselves as unquestioned leaders and established one-party rule. By obfuscating the distinction between a non-party democracy and one-party rule, despotic African leaders

²¹ Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 165.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166

justified their rule on the basis of traditional communitarian political system of Africa. As Wiredu points out, one of the most cherished rights of the African culture, the right to representation in political decision-making, has been denied by despotic regimes in outright defiance of the UN Human Rights declaration. But more recently, because of the tremendous pressure exercised by the UN and other member countries on military dictators and other tyrannical rulers, Africa has multi-party democracy in several countries. Wiredu argues that even though a multi-party democracy is better than tyranny; it only breeds adversarial attitude and not consensual decision-making because of the emphasis on majority vote. While the ethno-centric approach of the colonizers to political, social, economic and religious affairs of Africa has contributed to a large extent in the ensuing political instability of those African states that gained independence in the second half of the twentieth-century, a dearth of African leaders with a vision for better Africa and also the collapse of traditional political institutions and the post-colonial pangs of anxiety have contributed to the desuetude.

Difference between the Akan and the Western notion of Consensus

The notion of consensus has different connotations in the Western and African contexts. In the Western conception of a notion of consensus idealized by Habermas, which is designed on the Enlightenment idea of reason, people debate an issue aiming to arrive at an understanding with the only deciding factor being the force of arguments (rationally motivated agreement). Every person will be allowed to speak without being coerced. The process of argumentation and discourse will require people to be linguistically competent, rational, and democratic. All these prerequisites demand Western education, linguistic

skills, and a particular type of rationality. Such a notion of consensus in which the best argument wins the day does not take into account variations in linguistic competence, social practices, political system, education, and cultural traditions. Moreover, by stipulating the necessity of a winning argument, the other parties feel excluded and unrepresented. Thus, by reducing the rationality to the outcome of an argumentation process, the resultant agreement does not qualify as a consensual agreement.

The Western notion of consensus is arriving at an agreement without recourse to extra-verbal remonstrations. Disagreements are to be resolved within the framework of a discourse and the discursive framework has been agreed upon before the commencement of the debate. Hence, only those arguments that stand out as rational will be acceptable to the people who are chosen as interlocutors based on their communicative competence.²³ Thus, a concept of consensus in Western democracies, according to Habermas, is only aimed at arriving at a mutual understanding among free and equal individuals. The Western concept of consensus depends upon the conception of individuals as capable actors who can engage in rational argumentation. But a consensus among variegated ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious groups requires genuine compromise and understanding. The asymmetrical nature of multicultural dialogue would be best served by adopting a path of consensus similar to the Akan notion of consensus.

Thinkers such as Wiredu and Gyekye refer to an entirely different conception of consensus in their writings. The African notion of consensus that Kaunda, Nyerere,

²³ Jurgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I.*, Trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. pp. 273-344.

Wiredu and Gyekye talk about is related more to a compromise that is achieved as a result of detailed consultation on thorny issues in which people from all sections are represented by delegations at various levels of the government. Among Western countries, the United States of America practices a form of democracy in which two big parties (the Republican and the Democratic Parties) contest elections and the power changes hands between them. While legal and constitutional safeguards are in place, all sections of people are not represented, especially minorities, handicapped, and women. The decision-making power rests with the party that has more members in the Congress or the Senate. Every political decision boils down to a power game between the Democrats and the Republicans. Finally, in order to transact business in the House or the Senate, there is a need for compromise, which is more often than not based on expediency. The acrimony and antagonism that is created between the two political parties is matched only by the apathy shown by the suffrage due to the cynicism arising out of the irremediability of the situation.

A large portion of American voters believes that the Republican and the Democratic parties are only after power and not common good. Since there are no alternatives because of the domination of two major political parties in the United States, the Democratic and the Republican parties, it is not possible for small political parties such as the Green Party or the Libertarian Party to advertise their message adequately to the general public. Bipartisan consensus is more akin to the concept of interest-based

democracy and not the Habermasian ideal of deliberative democracy.²⁴ Even fundamental issues such as education and health-care are contentious because of the procedural incompatibility between the liberal and the conservative strands of American political system. Max Weber's characterization of the Western bureaucracy as driven by purposive-rationalization has been consummated in the American political system.²⁵

Reductionistic analysis in terms of good-evil, friend-enemy, and rational-irrational categories have gained such a stranglehold on the American populace that a third option is never considered a viability.²⁶ More often than not, Habermas's ideal consensus operates even rarely in the rarefied atmosphere of the board meetings of multinational companies. On the contrary, paradoxically, Habermasian consensus unlike in the highly rationalized societies is possible only in communities such as Akans in Ghana.²⁷ The underlying assumptions in Habermas' "ideal speech situation" based on the

²⁴ Benhabib, Seyla. Ed. *Democracy and Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996. Refer to Habermas' article "Three Normative Models of Democracy" and Seyla Benhabib's "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy."

²⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1958.

²⁶ The influence of theology on politics could be gleaned from Stephen Turner's *Liberal Democracy 3.0* and Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker's *The Puritan Oligarchy*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1947. which describes the strong religious element in education, politics and civic life of America from its inception. Even though Jefferson declared the need for public education, his Lockean ideals influenced economic and political individualism that became the hallmark of American culture.

²⁷ David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic Reason*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. pp. 174-176. Habermas' distinguishes between rational Western social organizations and traditional monological communities. Dialogue, for Habermas, is possible only in those social formations that emphasize reason. Habermas' suggestion of replacing the United Nations Security Council with a global executive with representation from all countries in the world is plagued by several crippling problems. It first requires an indiscriminate universalization glossing over economic, political, ethnic, linguistic and religious factors. The argument that vast advances in science and technology and in political liberalism would some how bring the eternally feuding cultures together is a pipe-dream. While Habermas' utopian dream is a theoretical possibility, the structural problems are exposed even at a much smaller magnitude in terms of what Stepher Turner describes as the tension between liberalism and the need to safeguard liberalism. Majoritarian democracies are better than the one-party government, theocracy, and tyranny. As Habermas himself describes in *The Postnational Constellation*, the twentieth century has been the most violent of epochs while at the same time the most drastically transformed. That there is a need for a complete

categorical imperative of Kant have become supererogatory in the post-modern scenario. Hence, consensus along the lines of Habermas' theory of communicative action is ironically out of place in advanced liberal societies such as the United States. Unlike interest-based democracy, Africans especially in Ghana practiced a form of delegacy, a form of consensual communitarianism that was non-party.

The consensual form of governance that was prevalent in African groups such as the Akan, the Zulu and the Swazi have a long history of successful resolution of conflicts. According to Wiredu, a need for consensus indicates conflict and a successful consensus is in the resolution of the conflicts taking into account the views of all concerned. Unlike the Western notion of consensus that has been constructed around the Hobbesian social contract that is negative in connotation, the African notion is positive. In the Western notion of consensus, the innate assumption is the vacuousness of involving all sections of the populace in the consensual decision-making process. Another negative assumption that characterizes Western debates is a sense of disbelief in the ability of people to come together to resolve conflicts, which could be due to the failure of the Enlightenment ideal that reason would free the world of all its ills. The classic example of such a mutual distrust is the doctrine of mutual destruction practiced by the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United States of America. Perversely, the tenuous peace that lasted for more than thirty years between the Soviet Union and the United States validates both Hobbes and

structural transformation is indisputable but Habermasian postnational constellation has been theorized only from the viewpoint of advanced liberal countries and a global economy. The prospects of the twenty-first century appear to be more daunting and more catastrophic and with the absence of a doctrine of mutual deterrence, however sinister it then appeared, the world looks even more dangerous and self-destructive. Thus, Habermas' oxymoronic ideal espouses a universal communitarianism, which is antithetical to liberal individualism, which would require a Sisyphean sadomasochistic self-denial on the part of the entire population of the world.

Socrates. The fear of awesome retribution acted as a deterrent for both the USSR and the US while extraordinary amount of restraint and back channel diplomacy also bespeaks of some last vestige of goodness that prevented the respective governments from taking extreme measures. While any direct strike on the US or the USSR was deterred, it did not preclude both the US and the USSR from waging proxy wars in different parts of the globe. The cost of those proxy wars has been colossal for both the USSR and the US. Especially, in the case of the US, it culminated in the events of September 11th 2001.

A doctrine of mutual deterrence, strict surveillance of people, an adversarial political process, and a society that encourages competition than cooperation is not the best setting for consensual interaction. While the African consensual process presumes an intention on the part of the interlocutors to arrive at a consensus irrespective of their positions, the Western notion of consensus has too many mandatory requirements to even qualify to be a part of the consensual process, which stipulates necessary cultural prerequisites.

The imagery that characterizes the Akan rationale for a consensus is that of a crocodile with two heads and one stomach fighting over the food.²⁸ The colourful imagery portrays the paradox of the people belonging to a same group with same interests fighting over matters that could have been resolved amicably if only they had understood that the final destination or the ultimate objective is best achieved by working together. The crocodile imagery scoffs at the stupidity of human beings caused by selfish motives. Another striking example of the Akan openness is the statement “even a fool is entitled to

²⁸ Kwasi Wiredu, *CUP*, p.173.

be heard.”²⁹ Any consideration of social status, intelligence quotient, or any other discriminatory factors have been dismissed by the edict that everyone needs to be heard.

While the preparatory process of an Akan consensus is laudable for its emphasis on equality, the procedural part of a consensual process is even more rigorous. Any vexatious issue would have to be discussed at various levels such as villages, towns, cities and finally amongst the king and the advisory council. Instead of a process that imposes the will of a numerical majority on everyone else, the Akan process of consensus necessarily involves the participation of the people at every level.³⁰ But, does the Akan process of consensus lead to unanimity? While K.A. Busia nostalgically remarks about the emphasis on unanimity among the interlocutors, Wiredu argues that the condition of unanimity is meant to be only an ideal objective of a consensual process.³¹ Unanimity is the avowed goal but not if it is forced. A consensus is achieved through compromise between clashing viewpoints on social issues. Epistemic and ethical issues have underlying assumptions about truth and value respectively. These are assumptions that are shared by all cultures. Hence, they are known as cultural universals. An example of a cultural universal concept is human rights. Epistemic or ethical issues need to be justified critically and rationally. But on social issues, compromise leads to consensus. A general broad-based consensus presages unanimity while the particulars and the specifics are open for further discussion. “Unanimity is the perfection of consensus. But consensus

²⁹ Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 174.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 175.

³¹ K.A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, London: Frank Cass, 1968.

does not call for unanimity.”³² Wiredu clarifies that while unanimity of opinions will solve all conflicts, it is next to impossible to arrive at unanimous decisions while tackling thorny issues. Hence, consensus is a peaceful reconciliation of differences by taking into account various ideas voiced by the affected people. Even if the process takes more time, the objective of a consensus will have to be pursued to its logical end. A consensual decision-making process, in the African context, is very close to a decision-making process by consent.

Democracy - A Government by Consent

In a democracy, individual opinions are supposed to be valued. But, in Anglo-American forms of democracy, the majority group enjoys total political power. Democracy is identified more with the possession of decision-making power than a form of governance that takes into consideration the common good. Since winning elections is the only form of power, the whole process is categorized by competition, jealousy, and rivalry. The winner take all policy is not representative of all sections of people and this leads to alienation amongst people who are not part of the winning party. Wiredu also points out the lack of representation from various sections of the electorate in spite of various committees, commissions, and other constitutional safeguards guaranteeing a voice for the minorities.³³ The minority has Hobbesian privileges of rights to self-preservation and Lockean rights of property while the majority has the power to enforce their social and economic policies on the minority.

³² Ibid. p. 174.

³³ Kwasi Wiredu, “Tradition, Democracy and Political Legitimacy in Contemporary Africa,” [TDPCA] *Rewriting Africa: Toward Renaissance or Collapse?* JCAS Symposium Series 14, Osaka: Japan, 2001. p. 166. See also Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 177.

In the case of African traditional societies such as the Akan, the Zulu and the Swazi, the aim of a consensual process of decision-making is not triumph or defeat but amicable settlement of problems. The majority opinion does have its significance but the minority needs to be heard and its concerns noted. If the minority is convinced by the sincerity of majority opinion then there is no objection to implement the majority decision. But the majority opinion cannot be imposed as a decision on minority based on the numerical strength of the majority.³⁴ The main objective of democracy is to protect individual freedom from the tyranny of the majority.³⁵ Wiredu constantly reminds us of the perils of a contentious and adversarial form of democracy encouraged in Britain and the United States. But democracies in the United States and Great Britain, while situated on the ideal of common good for all, are influenced by public opinion or vested interests. In a rights based democracy, any infringement of individual rights would have to be fought procedurally.

The Weberian analysis that the movement for democracy has been influenced heavily by monetary and mercantile considerations can be applied to the interest-based forms of democracy practiced in the United States. It has been widely recognized that economic interests determine the political clout in especially countries such as the United States. If an individual has wealth, then he/she has access to power and vice versa. The macro-economic trickle-down theory is the predominant economic principle that is aided by a strong procedural streak embedded in the United States political system. A partisan

³⁴ Wiredu, *CUP*, pp. 174-175.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 172-182.

war is fought on several fronts in the United States political system such as immigrant rights, welfare, health insurance, education, social security, foreign policy and trade.

While the conservative right and the liberal left both recognize individual liberty, their interpretations of the concept of liberty are different. While the liberals emphasize negative liberty with non-interference from the government, the conservatives emphasize positive liberty with non-domination as the guarantee of the individual rights.³⁶ Thus, economic liberty is paramount for the conservatives while the liberals value individual rights in terms of sexual orientation, body, and religious beliefs. While the libertarians avowedly oppose any intervention in both economic and individual rights, the Republicans support the trickle down economy of neo-classical capitalism while the liberals want social security, unions, education and health-care all affordable to ordinary citizens.³⁷ There is a subtle class conflict but more complex than those found in the mines of England in the mid-nineteenth century.

The salutary effect of proceduralism, even while producing alienation and individuation, is that it protects the social fabric of capitalistic economies, by creating a complex web of bureaucracy, entertainment, courts and elections, from descending into the Hobbesian state of nature. The governments in such democracies have to perform a balancing act between various interest groups and hence are necessarily majoritarian in policy implementation. Such governments do not have a holistic view of common good. As Wiredu rightly points out, the basic premise of such democracies is based on the

³⁶ Phillip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Governance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

³⁷ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books, 1974.

assumption that there are not many possibilities for arriving at a consensus in order to solve problems. In order to expedite the decision-making process, the majority opinion necessarily overrides minority sensibilities.³⁸ Even though, in some sense, most democracies are interest-based democracies, majority opinion has greater procedural force in the United States. Hence, there is minimal scope for a government by consent or consensus in adversarial democracy practiced in the United States.

Democracy – A Government by Consensus

Traditional African societies such as the Akan, the Zulu, the Swazi, the Banyankole, the Tallensi and several others have had either centralized or non-centralized forms of governance.³⁹ Wiredu analyses the system of political governance in the Ashanti group of Ghana to illustrate how consensus is achieved. The Ashantis, who are a subgroup of Akan, are matrilineal. Every Akan town or village is composed of several clans. A lineage from one of these clans constitutes the royal lineage and the people of the town or village accept the royalty of the lineage. From this lineage, the chief is elected. A lineage comprises of individuals who are linked by kinship relationship. Every town or village constitutes a political unit and together the villages and towns form a paramountcy, a state (*oman*), namely, the Asante state or Akim Abuakwa state headed by a paramount chief, the *omanhene*. While selecting the chief of a state, the council comprising of village chiefs and the 'commoners' Asafo company have to authorize the selection out of a pool of worthy men. Thus, a chief cannot be imposed upon the Akan community.⁴⁰ The chief does not have an agenda apart from the one given by the people. The chief publicly takes

³⁸ TDPCA, p. 169.

³⁹ Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 183.

⁴⁰ Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 120-121.

an oath assuring the people that he would implement and adhere to what has been ordained by the people of Akan. Some of the demands imposed by the people on the chief are as follows:⁴¹

We do not wish that he should curse us.

We do not wish that he should be greedy.

We do not wish that he should be disobedient [or, refuse to take advice].

We do not wish that he should treat us unfairly.

We do not wish that he should act on his own initiative.

We do not wish that it should ever be that he should say to us, “I have no time,” “I have no time.”

The above-mentioned dictates of the people illustrate what is meant by the concept of ‘democracy by consent.’ While the people have invested political authority in the chief, he/she cannot act unilaterally without consulting the people at every level of the Akan political organization, be it the village or the state. The council of elders, who are themselves chiefs or lineage heads of the villages or the towns, will have to consult their constituents before taking the matter to higher levels. The chief will then act on the advice of the council of elders. Thus, the chief does not exist apart from the people and the people demand a part in the decision-making process. Any violation on the part of the chief invokes the punishment of de-stooling.

⁴¹ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 122.

While the rule by the consent of all is a sublime ideal, the question is how to translate consent into practice. Or in other ways, how does the consent of people manifest into political action? The answer is through consensus. While the consent of the people is sought at every stage of decision-making, divergent views are processed at the crucible of consensus. Consensus brings about a compromise between various options. The Akan system of governance fervently believes in collective thinking. Adages such as “One head does not go into council,” and “Wisdom is not in the head of one person,” betray a strong sense of participatory decision-making that is supposed to be the hallmark of modern democracies.⁴² Since the people of the Ashanti community did not feel themselves alienated from the political process, a separate system of checks and balances was not needed.

In the final analysis, African ethnic groups such as the Akan, Zulu, Tallensi, and Swazi fostered a system of governance that could be viewed as democratic, broadly. Some of them had centralized governance, for example, Akan, and some did not such as Logoli and Tallensi. But, the emphasis on consensus is found in many groups such as the Akans. For Akans, consensus is the only way to resolve conflicts and no other way is better. Consensus is the only avenue for cementing the consent of the people. Majoritarian democracies of the Anglo-American model do not rule by the consent of the people by any stretch of imagination. Consensus in such democracies operates at the level of deal making or compromise on what is acceptable to both parties in conflict. A change of cultural paradigm is not possible from such positional negotiation process. Two sides

⁴² Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 131.

involved in a debate dogmatically hold on to their foundational ideologies and hence a solution outside the existing paradigmatic framework fails to emerge.

Wiredu captures the essence of the sense of deprivation and alienation that permeates the being of the vanquished political party and its supporters.⁴³ Wiredu also suggests that the democratic models of governance found in Switzerland and Belgium are better models than those found in the United States and Britain for the simple reason that the government includes people belonging to political parties representing different sections of the people.⁴⁴ The inability of the Anglo-American models to include diverse interests and the stranglehold of the business interests on the government has resulted in adversarial politics and the neglect of the process of rapprochement between eternally feuding political parties. While the system of traditional governance in Africa, theoretically, took into consideration the will and the welfare of the people, modern democracies attach more importance to the system of administration. While individual liberties and rights are enshrined in the UN Human Rights Charter and in the constitution of various countries, translating rights into practice is seldom smooth. In traditional African societies, protection of individual rights was coeval with governance and hence there was little need for a separate charter of human rights.

African Communitarianism and Post-Colonial Political Ideology

Post-colonial Africa produced several leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, Kenneth Kaunda, and Kwame Nkrumah, who utilized their Western education to suit the

⁴³ Wiredu, *CUP*, p. 177.

⁴⁴ TDPCA, p. 170.

African context. All the afore-mentioned leaders were trained in Western cultural environment and also received advanced Western educational training. Julius Nyerere espoused an indigenous approach to social organization and economic development similar to traditional African form of communitarianism, which he called Ujaama socialism.⁴⁵ As the President of Tanzania, Nyerere pursued an agro-based economy and encouraged cooperatives that would be supported by communitarian African society. Leopold Senghor, who ruled Senegal as its President for more than two decades, advocated a strong blend of native African culture of Senegal and the acquired knowledge in science and technology from Europe. Senghor also accommodated religion in his philosophy. Senghor was a Christian leader in a predominantly Muslim country.

In his writings, Senghor was refreshingly candid about the foibles of African culture and the benefits of European scientific development and the need to strike a right balance between European education and African culture.⁴⁶ Senghor's European education influenced his political ideas. Senghor's words encapsulated his thoughts about the concept of a nation: "What makes the Nation, *is a common will for a life in common.*"⁴⁷ Senghor's approach took a critical view of European capitalism as well as Soviet-style socialism. Senghor's avowed idea was to integrate the contributions of European socialism with African traditional values.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Julius Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

⁴⁶ Leopold Senghor, p. 146.

⁴⁷ Leopold Senghor, *On African Socialism*, p. 84. Senghor delivered this speech at the first Young Seminar of the PFA, May 16-19, 1960.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 92-93.

Julius Nyerere, who was the first President of Tanzania, endorsed communitarianism and opposed capitalism. Nyerere felt that only a shared enterprise characteristic of African communitarianism would be suitable for Tanzania. Hence, Nyerere was more interested in state participation in the distribution and sharing of wealth than in state ownership of the means for the creation of wealth. “The Arusha Declaration” clearly outlines Nyerere’s emphasis on rural development and cooperatives. He disavowed the economic theories of both Adam Smith and Marx. While Adam Smith is considered to be the high priest of capitalism, Marx’s theory of class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie created a crevasse between various sections of the society. Nyerere and Senghor, both contest the relevance of the proletariat-bourgeoisie dichotomy in the African context.

Kwame Nkrumah, who was the first President of Ghana, was a sworn Marxist but tailored his ideology to the Ghanaian topology. Since Nkrumah did not have to contend with the Marxian binary opposition between the bourgeoisie and the exploited proletariat in Ghana, Nkrumah went on a reckless spree of mechanization in Ghana that brought disastrous consequences. Nkrumah did not find any contradiction between religion and Marxism. For Nkrumah, the Marxist revolution was only contingent upon the situation. During the Ghanaian freedom struggle, Nkrumah charted a course of non-violent protests and strikes rather than espousing armed revolution. It is ironical that Nkrumah advocated revolutionary socialism while in exile after he was deposed in a coup in 1966. It was convenient for Nkrumah to talk about armed revolt since he was deprived of political power and wanted to recapture power. Nkrumah exhorted his compatriots to rise in revolt

against the people who deposed him. Hence, the Marxian element of inner-contradiction in capitalism and also the tension between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are not a part of the political ideology of Nkrumah, in a true sense.

All the afore-mentioned leaders were culpable of identifying communitarianism in non-partisan traditional African societies with one-party system of democracy, in which alternative processes of electing leaders were scuttled. A despotic leader forcibly imposed the one-party system on the populace in order to perpetrate a system of governance without a choice for alternatives. While Nkrumah was unscrupulous in changing strategies to consolidate his political power, Nyerere truly believed in the efficacy of African communitarianism and systematically implemented measures to encourage people to get involved in rural reconstruction. Senghor understood the lacunae in Western socialism and capitalism and hence advocated self-reliance, cultural rejuvenation and pooling of resources. Senghor's Mali Federation was an idea in promoting federalism amongst Sudan, Senegal, Upper Volta and Dahomey. Upper Volta and Dahomey did not join the federation as the referendum failed to muster support and later they joined Niger and Ivory Coast in the *Council de l'Entente*.⁴⁹ Senghor also tried to initiate a federation of twelve West African states with the exception of Madagascar.

Senghor's integration of West African states is based on the concept of negritude. The concept of negritude defines Senghor's communitarianism as African collectivity. Nkrumah contributed little or nothing to strengthen the notion of African communitarianism in Ghana. Nkrumah dreamed of a federation of African countries. But,

⁴⁹ Senghor, p. 14.

Nkrumah's drastic measures to indiscriminately industrialize Ghana in a short span of time and revitalize the economy by huge imports proved to be a disaster in the long run. Nkrumah, who was a despotic ruler, neglected Ghana's traditional system of governance, which symbolized communitarianism.

Nyerere is the best example of an African leader who designed his whole political enterprise on the concept of communitarianism. But Nyerere also ruled Tanzania with an iron hand under a one-party system. The Akan concept of communitarianism, which encompasses personhood, human rights and consensual political decision-making, distinguishes communitarianism from individualism.⁵⁰ The Western notion of communitarianism is rights-based and treats community as an aggregate of individuals. Gyekye rejects any such description of African communitarianism and also asserts the proviso of individual value imbedded in the collective decision-making process of communitarian African groups such as Akans.⁵¹ Gyekye refers to Senghor's moderate stance on African communitarianism and his simultaneous emphasis on the importance of the role of individuals in a community. Hence, African communitarianism is not inimical to individual development.

⁵⁰ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 189.

⁵¹ Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 40.

Chapter 5

Political Consensus – Intra-cultural and Extra-cultural

In the postmodern epoch, the originary or foundational categories have been replaced by the interstitial spaces of the binary oppositional categories such as subject-object, black-white, colonizers-colonized, and capitalist-communist discourse. While globalization has created a common market, post-colonial and post-modern frameworks have created a sense of the present in terms of subjective-identities. The post-colonial and minority groups have started experiencing the presence while advanced liberal democracies are oriented towards the future. Hence, there is a phase-difference in the conceptualization of concepts such as democracy, religion, economy, justice, and education and what they signify for the developed and developing countries. The tyranny of the universal, which was total in the pre-modern and modern cultures, had camouflaged the interstices, which epitomize difference and instead constructed a canopy of illusion of universality.¹ In this chapter, I have argued that a process of consensus cannot avoid cultural differences, conflict of identities, systematic distortions, and a clash of social and individual imaginaries. Conflict between cultural universals and particulars afflict both intra-cultural and extra-cultural discourse. In intra-cultural discourse, a debate on cultural

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 1. I will refer to it as LOC.

universals and particulars depends on a shared social imaginary within a culture. In an extra-cultural discourse, there is a clash of social imaginaries of different cultures. In the former there is confusion about what constitutes cultural particulars and universals. In the latter, there is a need for conceptual clarification of social imaginaries. In order to facilitate consensus, I propose cooperative action, which aims at partial or limited unanimity, a joint venture in pursuit of agreement, recognition of cultural differences, mutual adjustment of viewpoints, and a flexibility in initial and final conceptual positions.

While there is always the danger of panoply of individual identities dissolving into egoism, at the individual level, and ethnic conflict, at the social level, celebration of individual identities have immensely contributed to the colorfulness of world in terms of variegated cultures, languages, customs, and religions. It must be noted that as Cornel West and Bell Hooks averred, historical descriptions of pre-modern, modern and post-modern epochs have differing significance depending upon social contexts.² The aforementioned contextual framework is emphasized by Amartya Sen as evaluator-relative ethical framework.³ Homi Bhabha argues that there is a cultural consciousness of the interstitial and that of the presence that characterizes the postmodern firmament. Bhabha writes as follows:⁴

² Cornel West, Ed. *The Cornel West Reader*, New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999. Refer to the chapter “The New Cultural Politics of Difference,” pp. 119-143. Bell Hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” reprinted from *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Boston: South End Press, pp. 23-31

³ Amartya Sen, “Evaluator Relativity and Consequential Evaluation,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.

⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated. How are subjects formed ‘in-between’, or in excess of, the sum of ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?

While Bhabha’s description would encapsulate the Indian post-independence cultural experience to a nicety, it is also true of most advanced countries that are addressing the issue of multiculturalism. Michael Dummett’s writings on the plight of economic refugees in European and North American countries have revealed glaring deficiencies in addressing the issues of economic and political asylums.⁵ Bhabha refers to an underlying process of cultural hybridization that has cultural difference at the center. Cultural differences are recognized and respectfully engaged. According to Bhabha, “The borderline engagements of cultural difference may often be consensual as well as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.”⁶

Bhabha reiterates constantly that internationalism must be a ‘middle passage’ that does not totalize individual experience. A lack of recognition of cultural hybridity and the presence of the interstices have had incalculably damaging consequences as witnessed in Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Rwanda-Burundi, and Palestine, to name a few. Totalization of

⁵ Michael Dummett, *On Immigration and Refugees*, London: Routledge, 2001.

⁶ Bhabha, *LOC*, p. 2.

particular cultural experiences lead to exclusionary lifeworlds. Bhabha argues that the postcolonial epoch is a celebration of cultural hybridity and interstitial spaces. The concept of fusion of horizons brilliantly explicated by Gadamer has a hoary history. Kant, Hegel, Marx, Husserl, Levinas, Benjamin, Adorno, and Heidegger have been the torchbearers of the ethics of mutual recognition.⁷ Of all the above-mentioned pantheon of philosophers, Gadamer and Levinas have given the most positive and constructive reconciliation of the *theoria* and praxis of the ethics of mutual recognition.

Intersubjectivity and Cultural Hybridization

The approach that characterizes Gadamer's and Levinas' theories of alterity is the warmth and comfort exuded vis-à-vis the 'other.' Heidegger grounded the *Dasein* as the dynamic being-in-the-world that straddles the ontic and the ontological level. The ontological level is not an abstraction from the ontic level.⁸ But Gadamer and Levinas take the concept of intersubjective relationship to a new level by creating the optimal non-instrumental conditions for a mutual interaction between the 'I' and the 'other.'⁹ While Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics desists from a categorical incarceration of the 'other,' Levinas makes the 'I' completely subservient to the 'other.'

I would characterize Levinas' inversion of the Enlightenment prejudice towards the 'I' as the tyranny of the slave. This would probably engender a dread that Sartre

⁷ Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley Press, 2000.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: SUNY Press, 1996. pp. 77-83.

⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 2000.

perceives in the other being the enemy.¹⁰ Levinasian conception of the ‘other’ could also in a remote sense lead to concepts such as reverse colonization, which does not necessarily follow from Levinas’ enthronement of the ‘other’ vis-à-vis the ‘I.’¹¹ On the other hand, Levinas’ enthronement of the ‘other’ to the detriment of the ‘I’ could inflame the fear of the ‘other.’ Hegel frequently describes a mediational relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ in his political writings. Even his much maligned master-slave relationship has a reversible moment.¹² What Gandhi characterizes as a ‘cycle of repression’ cannot be indiscriminately applied to what Hegel terms as master-slave relationship. On the other hand, structural violence and internal colonization are very much plausible in a state that does not ensure inviolable individual rights. Perhaps, Levinas wants to prevent what is traced to the supremacy of the self, perpetrated by the Enlightenment, by establishing the supremacy of the other.¹³

The failure of the Enlightenment to reconcile reason with reasonableness and to acknowledge the historicity of the theory-practice relation has created conceptual muddles. Bhabha’s claim that Goethe’s analysis of the unconscious character of progression of history of the peoples necessitates a philosophy of the interstitial cultures and cultural hybridization appears to be both nostalgic and romantic. In some sense what Bhabha describes as the voice of the unhomely is exploited brilliantly by the forces that

¹⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. Cited from Robert C. Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy*, New York: HBJ Publishers, 1993. pp. 644-645.

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. Cited from Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, *On Levinas*, Belmont: Thomson-Wadsworth Publishers, 2005.

¹² Robert Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, pp. 52-59.

¹³ Bhabha, *LOC*, p. 17. Bhabha refers to Levinas’ ethical love as “the inwardness of the subject ... inhabited by the radical and anarchical reference to the other.”

drive the process of globalization.¹⁴ The question that haunts most of the procedural political theorists such as Habermas and Seyla Benhabib is whether a genuine consensus is possible in such an unhomely atmosphere. Seyla Benhabib argues that a discursive consensus is possible in culturally variegated societies and that procedural democracy is amenable to overlapping consensus. Benhabib also qualifies her description by stating that she has late capitalistic societies under consideration.¹⁵

In the late capitalistic democratic framework, relation between market and civil society is very clearly defined. In early capitalistic and developmental economies, the state regulates markets and civil society is dependent upon the state. Moreover, because of globalization the public sphere has undergone a startling metamorphosis. Social categories such as center – margins are under attack. What Habermas considers central to his project of communicative action, the linguistic-communicative competence has to be reevaluated in lieu of the tectonic shift in the center-margin relations. Thus far, liberal political theorists have analyzed the polity only in terms of the corporate-hierarchical and civil society-horizontal (liberal) social formations. What C.K. Prahalad characterizes as the bottom of the pyramid has not been the focus of political theorists because of the yawning theory-praxis chasm.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cornel West's analysis of the process of globalization with respect to the culturally marginalized groups and the problems of redefining their cultural identity vis-à-vis changed social relationships with their erstwhile masters. The cultural politics of difference emphasizes social analysis of binary categories that have historically been unquestioningly accepted.

¹⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996. pp. 67-94.

¹⁶ C.K. Prahalad, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty through Profits*, New Jersey: Wharton School Publishing, 2005. It is ironical that a lack of understanding about the economic status of the poor has been due to the corresponding lacuna in treating them as the 'other,' which has in turn prevented both the markets of the profit as well as the service of the needs of the poor.

Existing political theory cannot, because of the politics of liberalism, encourage a drastic rearrangement of social and political sphere in advanced liberal democracies. On the other hand, liberal society has become too fragmented to address issues within a common framework. The emphasis on competition has an osmotic effect on both market and public sphere. Even Habermas advocates a third alternative to the existing liberal and republican conceptions of politics.¹⁷ So, in order to redress the problems engendered by the estrangement of the public sphere, market, and the private sphere, a more cooperative interpersonal relational framework is necessary. While the distinction between market, civil society, and government stands in a broad sense, structurally the social sphere has been transformed into a clash of alterities and unhomely selves. Even social epistemologists such as Alvin Goldman are trying to grasp the cultural failures in terms of a framework of responsiveness rather than in a deeper sense of cultural particulars versus cultural universals as described by Wiredu. It is here that Gadamer's and Levinas' respect for the 'other' attains the status of an imperative. Even though Habermas indicates the absence of advanced moral development in Mead's philosophy of the other, which is theorized on the basis of role formation, significant gestures, and the generalized other because of its neglect of the post-conventional rationalization potential of the human beings, it has great relevance at the level of everyday interaction and in multi-cultural exchange.

In a conflict resolution process involving multicultural interlocutors, the ground condition for a dialogue is recognition of mutual interests. Multicultural dialogue is

¹⁷ Seyla Benhabib, Ed., *Democracy and Difference*, pp. 21-30. Refer to Jürgen Habermas' article "Three Normative Models of Democracy."

asymmetric because it involves theoretical, practical, and aesthetic issues, simultaneously. Habermas' stipulation for a successful dialogue aimed at a consensus such as comprehensibility, redeemability, justifiability, and discursivity could be combined with Mead's method of social communication.¹⁸ In multicultural exchanges, the conventional level of social rationalization has greater utility than the post-conventional. It is interesting that while Habermas criticizes Hegel for subjectivizing the 'I-Thou' relationship in the analysis of master-slave relation, the post-conventional moral understanding is an abstraction. The post-conventional stage of moral development espoused by Habermas must necessarily encompass the pre-conventional and conventional stages and there must be a vertical movement among the three stages both synchronically and diachronically. At any juncture, each member of the public sphere is at different levels of moral understanding and there is a grid of cooperation and competition that intersects each actor's life in different ways. The post-conventional stage of rationalization of Kohlberg, endorsed by Habermas, is not a linear category.¹⁹ It assumes a shared cultural history, egalitarian social environment, motivational factors, and organic development but neglects the vicissitudes of individual experience. In its extreme, the post-conventional stage is fit only for a Buddha, a Jesus, or a Gandhi.

Consensus – A Need for Asymmetric Communicative Action

The concept of symmetry is applied in this chapter with respect to the disparities in epistemological, conceptual, linguistic, and physical aspects of the participants in a social

¹⁸ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2 Life World and Systems*, pp. 1-15.

¹⁹ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. pp. 116-125.

discourse. As Habermas points out in *Communication and Legitimation of the Society* (1979), a social equilibrium is assumed as an underlying condition in theories on achieving a consensus through a dialogue. Habermas avoids strategic action or discourse because the former is overtly consequential while the latter is overtly procedural. Hence, there is a hiatus in the process aimed at arriving at an understanding in asymmetrical situations. In the event of such a breakdown both tacit and explicit assumptions about culture, knowledge, and politics are scrutinized.

More often than not, there is a need for paradigm shift, which is not recognized in political discourse. Social epistemology, which Alvin Goldman defines as the impact of knowledge acquisition on society, is mostly assumed as unproblematic in political theory as long as the existing cultural paradigm has wide currency.²⁰ Howard Zinn claims that people are responsible for changes and not governments. Zinn's observation is logically correct. But the question is: Who are the people responsible for social change? For the sake of convenience, let us divide the society into three classes. They are: the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class. In the history of humankind, the cultural paradigm has always been the bastion of the upper class. Even though, the above-mentioned observation appears to be a hackneyed expression of Marxian historical materialism, Zinn's statement implies that the government is the last to realize the need for a social change.²¹ It is only a logical corollary that the government is the last to awaken to the need for social change because it is far removed from the civil society and the market.

²⁰ Alvin Goldman, "Group Knowledge Versus Group Rationality: Two Approaches to Social Epistemology," *Episteme*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. pp. 11-20.

²¹ Howard Zinn, *Oracle*, Tampa: University of South Florida, December 1, 2004.

The upper class is always advanced in terms of science, technology, political authority, economy, and philosophy, which are the deciding factors of a cultural paradigm. Because of the disparity in the epistemic levels in the society, an idea takes a long time to evolve into a social policy. An idea developing into a social or public policy is coeval with the awareness of people at the lower strata of the society, because only if a majority of the population realizes that it needs to create a change in public policy is the government forced to act. Otherwise, the benefits of individual enterprise would never be shared equitably even in a democracy. From the above analysis, it can be surmised that the chasm in expertise and power on the one hand and non-expertise and powerlessness is impossible to bridge.²² There are several plausible reasons for the failure to maintain what Rawls would call a reflective equilibrium in a society.²³ Some of them are:

1. Group knowledge versus Group rationality (Goldman's comparison)

²² Cornel West's critique of the postmodern politics of difference as "prophetic criticism" emphasizes the aspect of reductionism in terms of sociological, psychological or historical factors. West, while acknowledging the critical consciousness of the demystificatory criticism, terms it one-factor analysis. What is interesting in lieu of West's criticism of the cultural politics of difference is the anachronistic position of postmodernism. For some, in West's case, people of color, the pre-modern, modern, and the post-modern distinction remains meaningless. This is true of colonies and the third world economies.

²³ Daniels, Norman, "Reflective Equilibrium", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2003 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2003/entries/reflective-equilibrium/>>. "The method of reflective equilibrium consists in working back and forth among our considered judgments (some say our "intuitions") about particular instances or cases, the principles or rules that we believe govern them, and the theoretical considerations that we believe bear on accepting these considered judgments, principles, or rules, revising any of these elements wherever necessary in order to achieve an acceptable coherence among them. The method succeeds and we achieve reflective equilibrium when we arrive at an acceptable coherence among these beliefs. An acceptable coherence requires that our beliefs not only be consistent with each other (a weak requirement), but that some of these beliefs provide support or provide a best explanation for others. Moreover, in the process we may not only modify priori beliefs but add new beliefs as well. In practical contexts, this deliberation may help us come to a conclusion about what we ought to do when we had not at all been sure earlier. (Scanlon 2002). We arrive at an optimal equilibrium when the component judgments, principles, and theories are ones we are un-inclined to revise any further because together they have the highest degree of acceptability or credibility for us."

2. Liberal democracy versus Corporatism
3. Expertise versus Audience
4. Communicative actions versus Strategic action
5. Community versus Society
6. Solidarity versus Subsidiarity
7. Deontology versus Consequentialism

Most of the afore-mentioned categorizations are discussed with respect to the symmetric nature of the lifeworld in liberal democracies. Most liberal political theorists have an approach that is culture-specific. While liberalism does not overtly encourage self-denial or sacrifice, social transformation from a stratified society to a direct-access society is possible only at terrible human costs. In this sense, most of contemporary political theory is synchronous and not diachronous.

Procedural democracy is intimately connected with historical conditions of society. By abstracting the procedural from the teleological, the form is accorded supremacy over content. Procedural theorists speak of liberal democracy as the Promised Land that needs only a reflective equilibrium or an overlapping consensus with respect to the internal dynamics of the process. As a process, procedural democracy is considered to be the panacea for the ills of world. Habermas universalizes formal categories of procedural liberalism through a theory of universal pragmatics. Universal pragmatics

combines formal linguistic structures with everyday spoken language.²⁴ It is also an important aspect of Mead's notion of role-formation and generalized other. Universal pragmatics is also related to the post-conventional rational development of Kohlberg and Selman. But there is a need to engage people not only at the level of the moral and political but also at the cultural. Hence, there is a need for social action that emphasizes cooperation, self-denial, good social consequences, and a procedural consensus.

The social action that I envisage encompasses Weberian purposive-instrumental action and Habermasian communicative action. It also emphasizes truthfulness, rightness, and truth, Habermasian criteria for successful validity claims. It supports evaluator-neutrality and evaluator-relativity, in a weak sense. I call such an action co-operative action. In the realm of social action, there are several variables such as social choices, individual circumstances, political process, and cultural factors. Hence, there is a need to coordinate individual actions with social objectives. In achieving limited or partial unanimity (Arrow's terminology), co-operative action does not exclude different social choices.²⁵ The social attitude required is performative and not pedagogical but without a sense of possessiveness or attachment to the pleasures of the favorable outcome as the sole motivating force. Happiness, heuristic motivation, self-sacrifice, and personal satisfaction are not prohibited in co-operative action. What is prohibited is internal colonization and structural violence, which democracy is required to address. As Arrow

²⁴ Habermas, *Communication and Evolution of the Society*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1979. Refer to the article "What is Universal Pragmatics?"

²⁵ K.J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. p. 74.

repeatedly points out, individual and social choices cannot be reconciled under all conditions.

Co-operative Action

Concepts emphasizing deontology tend to trivialize an emphasis on consequences, while the converse is true for those concepts of action that privilege consequences, such as utilitarianism. Co-operative action is modeled on the concept of non-attached action. The concept of non-attached action emphasizes the performance of an action with truthfulness and sincerity on the part of most of the participants. It emphasizes procedural fairness in the pursuit of wealth, happiness, and success. Non-attached action is at once an individual and a group action. In the context of *The Bhagawad Gīta*, non-attached action is a clever reconciliation of the deontological with the teleological. As a treatise that emphasizes social action within the confines of Indian caste system but at the same time recognizing the need to transcend social barriers, *The Gīta* offers the solution of ‘renunciation in action as against renunciation of action.’²⁶ The context of non-attached action is a battlefield in which cousins, uncles, teachers, and friends are on opposite sides. A simmering feud assumes gargantuan proportions and culminates in a war between two royal clans (first cousins), the Kauravas and the Pāndavas. Eventually, it becomes a war in which friends fight with friends, uncles with nephews, and teachers with their students because of what could be termed as a confusion of deontological dogmatism with social responsibility, on the one hand, and extreme purposive-instrumental reason on the other. Arjuna, the Pāndava prince, who is the recipient of the teachings of Lord Krishna on the

²⁶ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000. p. 121.

battlefield described in the Indian epic of *The Mahabhārata*, is confused between his sense of duty and sense of civility. Is killing some one even for deontological reasons justified? Can one relinquish what is one's duty to kill in the pursuit of justice and, instead, sacrifice the desire to avenge what is perceived as a denial of justice? Should injustice be tolerated and ignored without any opposition?²⁷

In *The Gīta*, which is a religious text, the ultimate purpose is merged with God's will and the duty to adhere to fulfilling one's role in achieving such a purpose. Hence, at some level, deontology and teleology merges into God's will. Hence, we are once again revisited with the Socratic question of whether the Gods advocate an action because they are just or actions are just because the Gods say so. *The Bhagawad Gīta* within its context provides an answer that *karma* or one's duty is to be performed at all costs on account of the social responsibility attached to it. There is a causal link between individual and social action. In the *Vedas*, the concept of *ṛta* or cosmic moral order is connected to the *dharma* or righteousness of the individuals and the society. In order to explain how an action that is purportedly both right and wrong (killing one's own kin for the sake of revenge or possessions, which is entailed by duty to protect one's honor and regain what is rightfully one's property that was unfairly usurped by Arjuna's cousins and prohibited by one's *dharma* not to kill one's own kin for the sake of wealth). Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to perform his duty, which is to lead the war since the battle has been announced and the armies were facing each other.

²⁷ *The Mahabharata*, edited and translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-78). *The Mahabharata* is one of the two great epic-poems of India and the longest epic-poem in the world. *The Bhagawad Gīta* is a part of the epic.

According to Krishna, Arjuna was concerned with the outcome of the war and the blame that would be attached to him for his actions on the battlefield rather than the rightness or wrongness of his actions. Hence, Arjuna was more mindful of the consequences of his actions than the rightness of the means of achieving his goal. Krishna also emphasizes that the war was not wished by the Pāndavas and that all other avenues of *sāma* (discussion), *dāna* (concessions), *bheda* (warnings and threats), and finally the time for the use of *daṇḍa* (force) had arrived. Hence, Arjuna cannot shirk his responsibilities as a soldier to fight a righteous battle even if it was against his own clansmen. That being said, attitudinally, Arjuna had to become involved with the process of waging war. Here, Krishna introduces the concept of *karma-yogi*. A *karma-yogi* is one who performs an action without an attachment to the consequences of an action.²⁸ Here, the consequences refer to self-interest and egoism.

One can argue that in the final analysis, deontological positions cannot be bereft of common or individual good. The issue for the deontologists is whether an action is procedurally correct irrespective of its outcome. Underlying such an approach is the assumption that procedural correctness would ultimately lead to the right objective. Such an act of self-denial is anathematic to the consequentialists and they emphasize the primacy of the consequences more than procedural correctness. A secularized concept of non-attached action, in the form of co-operative action, in which the actors must be accommodative to self-denial as an exception but not the rule would not violate voluntary

²⁸ M. Hiriyanna, pp. 121-124.

action encouraged in a democracy. The concept of co-operative action fuses subsidiarity and solidarity together. As a deliberative action, co-operative action does not stipulate conditions of linguistic competencies. The only pre-condition for co-operative action is the freedom to voice opinions irrespective of the linguistic or communicative competencies.

The aim of co-operative action is progressive betterment of any potential conflict-producing situation. Group decisions must not infringe upon individual rights unless society is adversely affected in terms of shared goods. The aim of co-operative action is to arrive at a consensus or a general agreement. The emphasis of co-operative action is not on unanimity. Hence, Jane Mansbridge's advocacy of rational persuasion could also be accommodated.²⁹ Mansbridge argues that rational coercion is inevitable in a deliberative process. The underlying principles of co-operative action are non-violence and truthfulness. While the consequences, both individual and social, are important, the social impact of the consequences of one's action must be reconciled with the benefits or damages that accrue to the individual and the society. Once a decision about a course of action is reached then it could be adopted as a social policy. But if the policy fails to achieve its objectives, then alternatives must be pursued. Procedural dogmatism must not be condoned. Procedures are adjusted according to their effectiveness in problem solving and their social impact. If a group action causes harm to individuals, then the individual must be compensated. Issues pertaining to individual, social, religious, and cultural practices must not be a source of discrimination. Neither the valorization of individuals to

²⁹ Jane Mansbridge, "Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity," pp. 46-66 in Seyla Benhabib, Ed. *Democracy and Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

the detriment of society nor society to that of individuals must be encouraged. Most of the problems in the arena of politics arise due to the lack of understanding of the scope of problems in social and personal spheres. A personal solution for social problems and a social solution to problems pertaining to personal lives of people have caused tensions between private and public spheres.

Co-operative action encourages cooperation as well as competition. Since, the emphasis is on the optimal performance of an action rather than a victory, the accomplishment of a task gives heuristic satisfaction. Accolades and benefits that accrue out of co-operative action must not be coveted but need not be shunned. Thus, the enjoyment in terms of personal agency for the success of an action is exchanged with an attitude of self-releasement. Thus, the emphasis is on accomplishing a task with desired consequences with a sense of detachment to the fruits of action. This could be best illustrated with the help of an example of driving on the road. Each driver who is driving on the road must follow the rules of traffic. But in any given situation, there are involuntary violations of traffic rules. Voluntary violations are penalized. A driver who follows traffic rules assiduously and also constantly adjusts her driving according to the traffic would reach her destination safely, barring any unforeseen incidents. On the other hand, a driver who is always worried about delays, other drivers, and also about the possibility of accidents, losing her way, being stopped by police, or driving too slowly or too rashly, will more often than not commit serious errors which will cause problems for other drivers and to herself.

Ultimately, fruits of an action accrue when procedures and consequences are calibrated and evaluated according to the situation. Violations of procedures occur only when consequences of an action assumes more importance than procedural propriety. This would lead to impropriety and avariciousness. On the converse, a dogmatic adherence to procedures without a constant re-evaluation of consequences would be meaningless. It would only lead to despondency and also impose unnecessary constraints on fellow citizens. Co-operative action emphasizes consensus that does not require specialized discourse. Hence, it is also effective in dealing with asymmetric cultural discourse. For a consensus to be achieved should optimal conditions be established such as a public sphere that is structurally democratized or a process of consensus has to necessarily engage unequal and unhomely spaces? I strongly emphasize the need for a provisional procedural and purposive frame of reference in order to facilitate cooperative action.

Consensus – A Conflict of Identities

Bhabha's reading of concepts such as nation or culture as containing the double moment of being a part of history as well as the makers of history creates a convulsion in the concept of civil society. It is this liminal conception of a dynamic, historical, and ephemeral self that is imbedded in the ever-emerging interstices of the cultures of the world. Can liberal democracy or republicanism encourage a discourse that emanates from the margins and not the center? Both liberal democracy and republicanism are based on the assumption of a nation-state, as a shared idea of a population. What happens to a liberal discourse when there is a proliferation of cultures and not one dominant culture or

religion? Can liberal democracy sincerely engage the shifting margins while staying in the center? Bhabha writes:³⁰

The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.

The struggle between the subjectivization and the objectivization of the population of a nation contains the binary oppositional structure listed in the beginning of this chapter. The advocates of liberal democracy more often than not fail to recognize the smoldering fire in the interstices. In a liberal democracy that enshrines individual liberty and which contains social shock absorbers such as courts, political institutions such as Congress and Senate, secular polity, freedom to protest, religious freedom, lobbying groups, elections, and referendums have successfully alleviated the problem of group violence.

It is interesting that group violence and rioting breaks out more often than not in the under-privileged sections of the city in liberal democracies. Individuated human beings who have been inculcated with conceptions of individual rights and property inhabit the cities. Hence, the nature of crimes in a city is individual versus individual, mostly. But in the third world countries and in the rural areas in the liberal democracies,

³⁰ Bhabha, *LOC*, p. 145.

the nature of the crimes could be classified into the group versus the individual, group versus group, and very seldom individual versus individual. In ancient cultures such as Africa and India, what Bhabha describes as the dual body politic is played at the vertical and the horizontal levels; at the vertical level as social and economic stratification and at the horizontal level as culturally diverse groups that are involved in a discourse aimed at cooperative or coercive action. Bhabha also identifies the vulnerability of a discourse because of its inability to confront its own historical contingency.

Bhabha describes the split in the narratives of national identities as the pedagogical and the performative. The pedagogical totalizes people into a totality and the social and political identities are defined in terms of a homogeneous and consensual community. On the other hand, the performative is specific and addresses unequal interests and identities within a population.³¹ Habermas, for the above-mentioned reason, emphasizes the importance of universal pragmatics, in which formal and pragmatic elements of the language are conjoined. Bhabha agrees with Claude Lefort's description of the 'enigma of language,' which is related to the internal and external referential framework of language as the both reflexive and reflective. The construction of a self in a language occurs only with reference to the other, which is very close to Mead's conception of the self. This view also reflects the independence of the text, a view that is especially espoused by Gadamer.

³¹ Bhabha, *LOC*, p. 146.

Can procedural democracy successfully surmount the problem of a split national subject? Can liberal democracy meaningfully engage cultures that epitomize liminality of identities? Bhabha cites Raymond Williams' distinction between "residual and emergent practices in oppositional cultures which require, he insists, a 'non-metaphysical, non-subjectivist' mode of explanation."³² Habermas' theory of communicative action that emphasizes a perpetual thrust towards agreement also borders on the pedagogical. Why should the world have a post-national central authority? As Bhabha argues, such a conception of post-national authority is abstracted from the context of everyday experience and remains a utopian ideal. Pragmatics is sacrificed on the altar of the formal. Why is there a need for a consensus that culminates in the formal transcendental idea of the post-national when even national identities are nebulous? Hence, there is a need for self-releasement and non-attachment to a universal foundational principle.³³ Instead of theorizing about absolutes, there is a need to thematize validity claims performatively. Is the world safe from hypostatization and reification if the interstitial becomes the cultural norm? What prevents the hypostatization of the non-consensual cultural interstices? Are differences sufficient to ward off cultural homogenization? I would argue that in terms of the individuation, interstices could be celebrated. But in sociation, the interstitial is analyzable only in terms of the already hypostatized categories. This has been proved in the Indian caste-system, which was anterior to the class system but did not originate from it.

³² Bhabha, *LOC*, p. 148.

³³ It must be mentioned here that Habermas explains Apel's influence on the concept of universal pragmatics in an article titled "A Master Builder with Hermeneutic Tact" on Karl Otto Apel in Habermas, *The Liberating Power of Symbols*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001. pp. 66-77.

Difference as the Absolute

The caste system that exists in India is the classic example of the absolutization of liminality. Instead of effecting a cultural integration of the society horizontally, the social distinctions were institutionalized and hypostatized. In a manner similar to the Socratic ‘noble lie,’ but in more earnest tenor, the concept of *guṇas* or qualities elucidated in the *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, has influenced *The Bhagawad Gīta* profusely. Unlike the United States or other countries that had a national consciousness due to religious and cultural identities, India’s diversity was both a blessing and damnation. Towards the later part of the *Ṛg Veda* in the *Puruṣasukta* (hymn to the *Puruṣa*), the beginnings of the class system based on occupation of priests, warriors, merchants, and laborers had begun. The outcasts or *pariahs* attained notoriety only later. The word *pariah* literally means ‘drummer’ in Tamil. At some point of time, the drummers were considered to be of lower caste and thus they were relegated to the group of untouchables. In the Buddhist chronicles, there is only a mention of the ruling class and the laboring class. Even when the Aryans and the native *dāsas* first came into contact, the caste-system was yet to develop. There were only the hunter-gatherer Aryan society and the agrarian *dāsas*. But social classification in terms of the four afore-mentioned classes became hereditary in course of time and the constant flow of people belonging to different cultures into the Indian subcontinent created a miasma of social grid formation in the form of the caste system. Hence, the diversity of India evolved organically but also in an unpremeditated fashion. A procedure, which was justified on the basis of the quality of birth, was the caste system.

Indian Caste System - A Systematic Hypostatization of Cultural Differences

Indian social organization was necessitated by a constant process of sedimentation of cultures one over the other. Max Weber diagnosed the lattice-like social structure of the Indian caste system, which was nurtured by the class system in the beginning but overwhelmed the class system by institutionalizing occupational and cultural differences.³⁴ The minute nature of the caste system extends to social, political, cultural, and religious practices of the individual, family, town, village, city, and the country as a whole. Caste system was a total and absolute social organization, which in simple terminology, what in Charles Taylor's parlance could be termed as, the social imaginary of India. A multi-culturally diverse cultural sphere differentiated by every possible factor evolved into an oppressive system because of the very difference that has made India a tolerant democracy.

Most writers on India have remarked that religious persecutions in India were exceptions and not the rule. With such a strong grid-like social structure, internal colonization and structural violence were localized. Religion was a superstructure while social organization in the form of caste system was the base. Religious conflicts occurred outside the sphere of the caste system. What is interesting is the fact that a modern shared social imaginary that developed in the West was not possible in India because of the fractious nature of the Indian society. But religion survived by incorporating various native and foreign practices into an amorphous Hindu culture.

³⁴ Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, University of California Press, 2004. Thapar has elaborately dealt with the phenomenon of the emergence of caste system in India.

The concept of India as a country can be explained only in terms of the Upanishadic negation of *neti, neti* (not this, not this). Could Indian culture be explained as indescribable (*anirvaccaniya*)?³⁵ But while ineffability is a philosophically attractive principle, politically it is potentially dangerous. Manifestations of ineffability occur in myriad ways and they are more often than not utilized to stultify the efforts of unsuspecting masses while the elites inject ideologies that are imprinted indelibly into the social psyche of the people. Ineffability is the magic wand that obfuscated social inequalities. Ineffability paralyzed people into inactivity while poets and artists prospered under its shade. Ineffability was nourished and nurtured by sacralizing language. Habermas elaborately discusses the process of demystification of the ineffable by what he calls the linguistification of the sacred.³⁶

In American history, consensus required for enacting a law in the aftermath of the American Revolution was channeled through two groups led by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. There was a shared common goal of individual freedom and protection of individual property, which was the cultural paradigm of the independent American nation. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century America, which was predominantly racially homogeneous, language, culture, political institutions, and religion were common factors that united the population. Contemporary political theorizing has not incorporated changes in the essential character of American democracy. An interesting contrast would

³⁵ Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1987. pp. 274-275.

³⁶ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, pp. 43-74.

be the Indian Constitution, which is a document that has been designed with cultural diversity and social inequality as the defining criteria.

The Indian Constitution was framed under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar in order to ensure peaceful coexistence of a secular, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual population. In the case of ancient Indian society, due to a lack of horizontal political system multicultural diversity was arranged in the hierarchical framework in which each vertical division was horizontally expanded on the basis of the social status of the new entrants. In ancient India, corporatism was the determining factor of the social status and hence horizontal relation between various groups could happen only within a particular grid. In the contemporary context, corporatism is the domain of the market and the public sphere is characterized by democracy. In a sense, corporate market and democratic public sphere are always in conflict. But because of a judicial system based on common laws and free elections, most advanced democracies have ameliorated the tension between the democratic public sphere and the corporate market, though not entirely.

Caste system that unfortunately still exists in India is the best example of a corporate system.³⁷ Indian caste-system has been considerably weakened because of a strong emphasis on individual rights, equality, freedom, and affirmative action after India's independence from the British. But the process of dismantling casteism, empowering women, and establishing religious amity began almost two centuries ago.

³⁷ Howard Wiarda, *Civil Society: The American Model and Third World Development*, Cambridge: Westview Press, 2003.pp. 27-42.

India needs to elevate herself to the next rung of the democratic ladder by strengthening democratic institutions locally. India, still, does not have a culture of co-operation, but only co-option. The culture of competition that is hailed as the central feature of advanced liberal capitalism is very much absent in India. The concept of doing one's dharma (*svadharma*), contentment, non-attachment, and social responsibility has been misinterpreted to exclude competitiveness as a moral good, thus making competition deplorable.

On the contrary, *The Bhagawad Gīta* encourages a healthy sense of competition by emphasizing the non-instrumental aspects of the process of achieving one's objective. In the absence of a coordinated definition of competition and regulatory bodies, the cultural diversity of India spawned a culture of accommodation. Such an attitude of accommodation gave rise to a culture of co-option. On the other hand, the fractured social organization of India into various castes also institutionalized attitudes. Competition was encouraged on the part of *kshatriyas* (warriors). Learning and religious practices were the forte of brahmins, while unquestioned servitude in physical labor was assigned to the labor class (*sūdras*). Acquisition of wealth was the domain of the merchant class (*vaishyas*). The class distinctions mentioned above had a dual role. On the one hand, it created a hierarchical society, which later became hereditary. On the other hand, even during severe social unrest, the Indian society did not crumble because of the *svadharma* of each class did not depend on the government but on the social organization itself. Since social hierarchy was the structural foundation of the Indian society after the period of the *Vedas* it was impossible to disentangle the hereditary nature of social classification.

Even though, social policies of the Indian governments over the past fifty years have been more populist than progressive and the bureaucracy itself wreaking of corruption, the reason why India has grown into a stable democracy is because of the manner in which social transformation was achieved by people such as Gandhi.

From the eighteenth century, there was a concerted effort to alleviate social evils in India by progressive individuals and social movements. As Gandhi, repeatedly stressed, Indian independence was both an internal as well as external freedom. Gandhi called for a complete social change as the precursor to political freedom. For Gandhi, political rights were meaningless without a concept of duty. Duty, for Gandhi, was to strive for the development of the downtrodden people of India. Progress was a social, political, religious, and economic activity. Hence, for Gandhi, a political transformation was a spiritual transformation and vice versa. Moreover, the spiritual was intimately connected to the welfare of the people around him. When India gained independence from the British, the attitude of the majority had become sensitive to the plight of the discriminated population. Only those states and regions that had feudal landholdings continued to discriminate against the lower castes whereas in more literate states caste-discriminations shrank significantly.

Affirmative action, which is called reservation in India, poses an interesting problem for Bhabha's politics of interstices. Ironically, before the reservation for lower castes was passed into law by the Indian government, people wanted to advance their castes in the social hierarchy, that is, aspired to be a part of the upper castes. But, with a

strong emphasis on reservation in education, jobs, and promotions for the lower castes, there is a downward trend. Quixotically, all castes including the Brahmin castes are demanding reservation on the basis of their caste, minority, and economic status. Hence, the institutionalization of the social interstices does not always alleviate problems of social justice. Economic assistance program of the government of India has turned into rentier rights based on heredity. For the brahmins, privilege has turned into a disadvantage while under-privileged status for lower castes, have become a privilege.

The proponents of reservations for the lower castes such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who himself belonged to an untouchable caste, advocated reservation only for a certain period resembling Rawls' "difference principle." A period of fifty years is not sufficient to recompense the victims of thousands of years of discrimination. Only the top-tier of the erstwhile-discriminated population enjoys the fruits of reservation while the poorer section does not have access to quality education and employment opportunities. This was partly due to what is derisively called the Hindu rate of growth of 3 – 4% in economy.³⁸ With economic liberalization and less governmental interference, India has a healthier rate of growth of 6-7% for the past few years. But the private sector has not encouraged reservation in employment either due to political implications or quality of the work force. Only if the private sector encourages the under-privileged, would Indian society surge forward. Hence, at least, metaphorically, the interstices must dynamically interact with the centers of culture in India. Democracy is a passive phenomenon and not an active phenomenon amongst the Indian population that still struggles with the

³⁸ Shashi Tharoor, *From Midnight to the Millenium*, New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997. p. 159.

problems of everyday existence such as water, electricity, transportation, jobs, housing, and rampant corruption. Democracy in spirit is yet to pervade entire Indian population.

Cultural Melting-pot or Multi-cultural Democracy

India did not have a caste system during the early Vedic period. Only when the Indian society became sedentary, did class divisions emerge in India.³⁹ Ironically, there is a reversal of privilege and caste hierarchy, at present. It is interesting to observe that dynamic social interstices challenge cultural stereotypes and hypostatization while a settled procedural democracy is less sensitive to socio-cultural changes and aspirations of the margins. The philosophy of the interstitial that Bhabha advocates could be institutionalized in a procedural democracy, for example, in the form of affirmative action for cultural minorities and, hitherto, oppressed classes. But once the politics of interstices is institutionalized, it ceases to be a philosophy of presence. Without a binding principle or a social commitment at both institutional and individual levels, procedures are ineffectual.

The melting pot or multi-cultural democracy as the ideal of America is a later justification of the idea of America as a symbol of freedom.⁴⁰ In any culture, immigrants begin with a distinctive disadvantage of being treated as aliens. In the United States, legal immigrants have more rights and are not discriminated overtly. There is a cultivated sensitivity amongst the American populace with respect to immigrants. But events such

³⁹ Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, London: Penguin Publishers, 1990. pp. 28-49.

⁴⁰ Sidney Hook, pp. 95-105.

as the September 11th 2001 could drastically alter the opinion of the people especially against minorities from the Middle Eastern countries.

It is in this context that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr's observation that there is an obsessive search for the roots amongst the immigrant population of the United States poses an interesting issue.⁴¹ While Takaki responds that multi-culturalism or multi-ethnicity could be an enriching aspect of the American society, it must be noted that America and other countries that encourage immigrants need to have a social, political, and cultural response to multiculturalism. In so far as there is a measured distantiation between various cultures encouraged by the conception of negative liberty rather than studied engagement with other cultures, a multicultural democracy is impossible irrespective of whether a nation is a cultural melting pot such as India or an advanced liberal democracy that encourages multiculturalism such as the United States.

⁴¹ Ronald Takaki, Ed. *Debating Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Refer to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s article "The Return to the Melting Pot."

Conclusion

The necessary function of a successful political system is to establish consensus between individuals, civil society, political hierarchy, and electoral institutions, not exclusively procedural and symmetric, but responsive to the asymmetry of human relationships. I discuss the reasons for disagreements on important issues such as affirmative action and multicultural democracy in this chapter. I analyze the daunting challenges to multicultural democracies such as the United States and India and the need for consensus in social, religious, economic, and political spheres. Both India and the United States have multi-religious and multi-ethnic population. Hence, there is a pressing need to encourage consensus in the public sphere. Subsidiarity or mutual social relationship rather than frivolous legal wrangling is necessary for the peaceful coexistence of a diverse society. A possessive individualistic society or an authoritarian community cannot engender consensus. Only a mutual social relationship in which people are willing to give more than or at least as much as they take and tolerant to cultural differences will be able to support consensus.

In most of the academic programs that are actively engaged in research on multicultural issues, religions, and cultures one finds de-contextualization and essentialization of alien cultures. The most significant de-contextualization occurs among already settled

generation of the immigrant population themselves. There is a hypostatization of imported cultures, which are completely isolated from the dynamic developments of the native countries from which the immigrants themselves hail. More often than not, there is a clash of cultures between the immigrant settlers and the countries of origin.

Fundamental factors that contribute to the organic development of an immigrant culture are not present in the same degree in the United States as in the native countries. Hence, there is a concerted effort to search for roots among the ethnic population of the United States. There are several ways in which the multi-cultural question could be handled. I will list some of them.

1. The presence of English as the common language. Even though the immigrants might have a different language as their mother tongue, the dominant linguistic framework of English would evoke no challenges from the immigrant population because of the functional and cultural prestige attached to English.
2. The two-party system. The American political system shifts the cultural paradigm to that of class-issue from that of ethnic allegiance. In this sense, the American political system needs to make compromises and turn into a word-world fit to a world-word fit.¹ Thus far, the word-world fit has helped range the ethnic minorities within the two-party framework, which has helped in the assimilation of the minorities. But

¹ John Searle, *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

as the minorities become politically more active, the polity needs to become more sensitive to the ethnic divisions because of issues such as dual-status citizenship, religious fundamentalism, and issues such as terrorism.

3. In course of time, the two-party system might undergo a transformation into a multi-party democracy. Wiredu's emphasis on a non-party democracy supplies the best atmosphere for a government by consensus. But, in a capitalistic environment, non-party democracy is difficult to achieve.

4. The question of universal pragmatics poses a very interesting challenge to the multi-ethnic and multi-party democracies. Habermas does not address the structural problems imbedded in a linguistically diverse polity even when the emphasis is on universal pragmatics. As the United States recognizes the need for training in other languages, then the vexatious issues pertaining to a linguistically constructed lifeworld will come to the fore. Linguistic construction of social reality differs with cultures. Without self-denial in terms of a language, which is in turn a denial of an en-worlded self, there is neither a concept of universal pragmatics nor that of national unity.

Habermas attempts to circumvent this problem by positing a post-national constellation, which avoids problems of cultural relativism. But such an enterprise demands gargantuan self-denial of individuals who belong to variegated cultures, religions, nations, and languages. Institutionalization of such an idea into a political enterprise would definitely engender what Lyotard calls the tyranny of the consensus. The problem posed by Habermas' grandiose conception of a post-national organization in the form of United Nations Government resembles Nathan Glazer's idea that the Constitution of the United States must only guarantee equality of individuals and not redress inequalities of hitherto oppressed ethnic groups.² Such a formal notion of an egalitarian democracy is plausible under conditions that resemble Habermas' ideal speech situation.³

In the United States, secularism or multi-cultural acceptance has occurred in an incremental manner. Inclusion of African American minorities into the political spectrum happened in the course of time and not suddenly. Asian Immigration Act (1965) and other legislations that were inclusive of the cultural differences indicate the gradual cultural maturation of America. Concepts such as secularism, racial equality, anti-apartheid policies, gender equality, and other concepts that enhance natural rights have developed inductively. In the case of the United States, the original position as the status quo ensuring equality that Rawls discusses is relevant because of the founding of a new world influenced by the ideas of Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau. The

² Ronald Takaki, Ed. *Debating Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2002. Refer to Nathan Glazer's article on "The Emergence of an American Ethnic Pattern."

³ Habermas' notion of ideal speech situation has been elaborated in his article "Wahrheitstheorien" which has not been translated into English. In his later works, "ideal speech situation" has taken different guises as communicative action, universal pragmatics, and discourse ethics. From a list of pre-conditions for a successful communicative action, the "ideal speech situation" has metamorphosed into a more thematic principle that is interlinked with the process of argumentation.

American Revolution was a reaction against the abuse of power of the British monarchy, which viewed America as one of the colonies. In many ways, the American Revolution of 1776 was an internal revolt that ended with the formation of a separate country, which expanded on the basis of joint-business interests, not to mention the Bible Commonwealth. Hence, the American idea of a socio-political consensus was centered on commerce and individual rights. [It must be noted here that there was a strong political movement in favor of republicanism. Great American personages such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams supported the republican ideals.] Nathan Glazer and other claimants to the pristine American idea of non-ethnic liberal democracy have not acknowledged the tacit understanding of a social imaginary underlying the ideal of America.

In any social situation, the historicity of the prevalent cultural framework can never be exorcised from any socio-economic analysis to create artificial conditions of equality. Only through a culturally immanent dialogue can a consensus be achieved. Whether a consensus achieved is a hard or soft-consensus depends upon the gravity of the issues debated. Only in a discourse based on heuristic motivation can there be a hard-consensus. For example, hard consensus is plausible in a discourse among nuclear scientists about a specific issue or a group of scientists working on a project. In a discourse among warring groups or in the event of ethnic strife, a hard-consensus is neither sought nor achieved. On the contrary, soft-consensus or provisional consensus is preferable to a hard-consensus. Because of the differences in the cultural paradigm and a possible abortive bid to forge a hard-consensus, the simmering differences between two

divergent factions could lead to serious conflagration. In such situations, Habermas' depth-hermeneutics would not be of great help but rather an aesthetic claim to the truthfulness of subjective expression would thaw frigid interpersonal relationships. In many ways, a type of co-operative action, which is a combination of self-denial, a belief in progress, broad consequentialism, and broad deontology, is warranted. Weber's analysis of purposive-instrumental rationality emphasizes a strong sense of consequentialism that is not necessarily utilitarian. On the other hand, Habermas' emancipatory telos would be strongly deontological.

Habermas tempers the concept of emancipatory telos in his later works by emphasizing socially contingent critical self-reflection and universal pragmatics. Thomas McCarthy's explains the role of systematic distortion in universal pragmatics as a tension between those experiences imbedded in the unconscious of individuals and the social dimensions of individual experience. Habermas calls these experiences historico-hermeneutic critical experiences.⁴ A concept of consensus requires integration of the individual-social experience at the level of depth-hermeneutics, according to Habermas. When the interlocutors interact with each other at the level of depth hermeneutics, does it really constitute a consensus in the ordinary sense of the term? Furthermore, at that level I argue that a dialogue becomes argumentative, which Habermas seeks to avoid. On the other hand, Parsonian social system seems to be restrictive to individual creativity because of the conception of society as a system.

⁴ Habermas, *Communication and Evolution of the Society*, 1979. pp. xiii-xv. I refer to this work as *CES*.

Habermas' objective was to situate his theory on an entirely new paradigm. The paradigm of consciousness that characterized pre-modern and modern eras had to be replaced because of the contingency of social conditions. Hence, Habermas builds his theory of communicative action on the new paradigm of language. Habermas writes:⁵

What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure autonomy and responsibility are posited to us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus. Autonomy and responsibility together (*Mündigkeit*) comprise the only idea we possess a priori in the sense of the philosophical tradition.

Habermas' program of integrating the formal and pragmatic structures of communication has important portends for the entire spectrum of social and political philosophy. The structural conflict between a liberal civil society and a corporate system characterizes advanced liberal democracies.

C. B. Macpherson's writings on possessive individualism that underlies liberal capitalistic societies describe the tension between democracy and property.⁶ The reduction of democracy to liberty in terms of individual human rights and individual property rights precludes the necessity for a *civitas*. Macpherson clearly does not accede to the claims that procedural democracy could be the final solution to political issues. Jane Mansbridge criticizes Macpherson on his diffidence to endorse the importance of democratic participation as the bedrock of a consensual polity. But democracy is an

⁵ Habermas, *CES*, Ibid. p. xvii.

⁶ C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy and Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

ideology that needs critical self-reflection and it is not a state of emancipation.

Democracy facilitates critical self-reflection but does not necessarily demand it.

On the surface, Glazer's claim is powerful, but only plausible in Rawls' 'Original Position' or 'veil of ignorance.' By declaring that everyone is equal, injustices cannot be punished, deterred, nor corrected. Glazer also performs a Rawlsian *epoche* when he limits political rights to individual rights and severs group rights. In the civil rights violations, the question was blackness versus whiteness and not individual black versus individual white. Another interesting but weak argument is that of exoneration from culpability for past injustices due to a lack of deliberate design on the part of the perpetrators. Social and historical conditions that prevailed during the period when atrocities were being committed are claimed to be accidental. Those who do not belong to the pre-1964 generation claim that they have no culpability for what happened before 1964 and hence they must not be penalized by affirmative action in the post-1964 era.

Liberalism imposed a divide between the individual and the social that has been ingeniously utilized to champion causes such as gun-rights and anti-affirmative action by questioning the constitutional authority of the Federal government to intervene in favor of the minorities in the United States.⁷ The liberal conception of individual rights has historicized the individual and hence has also encouraged an evaluation of history as individual history (petty narratives in Lyotard's words). But such an individuation of the

⁷ The afore-mentioned appeal to individual liberty is based on a liberalism of convenience rather than ritualistic liberalism (Sidney Hook's phraseology). This is a problem of pseudo liberalism and hence there are no rational solutions.

self is a post-modern conception. Post-modern conception of selfhood is a social rationalization applicable for a group of people who have undergone the transformation in successive stages from the pre-modern to the post-modern selves. But in the case of stunted evolution of a historical self as witnessed in the discrepancies in the third world – first world division and, even within a society, between the upper classes and the down-trodden classes, there is a need for self-denial on the part of the whole society, the oppressors and the oppressed. Otherwise, what Gandhi refers to as the ‘cycle of repression’ and what Franz Fanon proposed as what was an unavoidable recourse to violence against colonial repression would destroy the social fabric. Rawls and Habermas propose institutional solutions. But such institutional solutions guaranteed by liberal democracy needs to be supported at the societal level by human leadership and sacrifices. Such a responsibility rests on social integrators or the group of people who have an idea of society as a collective.⁸

Democracy is neither a self-regulatory nor a self-righteous system. It was under the eyes of the United States Constitution that slavery flourished. Even what Charles Taylor considers modern social imaginary a only a self-projection of prevailing social values of a society. Hence, modern social imaginary is a mirror image of a society. It is not very clear whether a self-imagination of how one’s society is would eliminate the social ills. History proves that all religions of the world proclaim charity, magnanimity, honesty, non-violence and other venerable traits required by human beings. But in all

⁸ Alvin Goldman, *Episteme*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004. pp. 11-20.

parts of the world, wars, oppression of women, casteism, religious persecution, colonization and slavery have been unabashedly condoned.

As Fanon argues, the oppressor and the oppressed have no shared beliefs in humaneness. There is no human connection between the colonized and the colonizer. Hence, for Fanon, the only solution possible is through violence.⁹ The encapsulation of a situation of pathological loathing between the colonizer and the colonized is what Gandhi refers to as the 'cycle of repression.'¹⁰ Such situations lead to genocide. Democracy provides a non-violent way of resolving conflicts. But constant checks and balances are required to prevent the hypostatization of democratic institutions. Thus, liberal democracy in its procedural forms is not free of systematic distortions. Unlike Habermas' ideal speech situation, the entire political system is under the spell of a social imaginary. Is it plausible for a society to be reflexive and transform itself or is it necessary for an external agency to disrupt its inertia?

Social transformations have been brought about only by sustained opposition to injustice and not only by self-evaluative political action. It is also very much possible that in procedural democracies, injustice can be committed procedurally. Criminals, in order to circumvent the consultative political process that is integral to liberal democracy, often utilize ineffectual procedures and procedural loopholes. More often than not, it is difficult

⁹ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin Books, 1978. In the book, Fanon advocates the inevitability of anti-colonial violence on the premise that there is no human connection between the colonizer and the colonized because the colonized do not acknowledge the human worth of the colonized.

¹⁰ Dennis Dalton, Ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998.

to respond to individual violations because of the universal nature of the procedures. In a procedural democracy, individual responses need procedural validation. More often than not, a false social imaginary about the procedural aspects of democracy could lead to insensitivity about alien cultural paradigms. The deification of procedural democracy, which Sidney Hook aptly calls ritualistic liberalism, has elevated the celebration of American democracy to the level of religious fervor. The unquestioning acceptance of the notion that there is a passionate yearning for democracy, in all cultures, stems from a lack of critical self-reflection in the Western countries about their history.

The question that arises is whether the American style of a Democrat versus Republican conception of liberty would be applicable in the third world context. In the Searlean sense, America is a word to world fit. Searle claims that there are two kinds of word-world relation. One is the word to world fit and the other is the world to word fit. In the former, there is a pre-understanding of the meaning of words while in the latter the meaning emerges with the usage. Searle argues that assertive sentences have ‘word to world’ direction of fit while directives have ‘world to word’ fit.¹¹ India is a world to word fit. In spite of a specific agenda of liberty for all enshrined in the American Constitution, women’s and minority suffrage has taken almost two hundred years after independence to fructify. The deliberative process was completely unable to convince the American people of the abominable practice of racism and discrimination. Civil War was required to abolish slavery in America.

¹¹ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An essay in the Philosophy of Language*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Also refer to Barry Smith. Ed. *John Searle*, Buffalo: SUNY Press, 2003. p. 9.

In the third world, the Indian caste system and the denial of women's rights were the two most atrocious inhumane practices. Gandhi consistently advocated the abolition of caste system and the liberation of women in India.¹² Most of the contemporary political theorists neglect the failure of the deliberative process, which was guaranteed to represent the grievances of the people even in an advanced liberal democracy such as America. Joshua Cohen's idea of associative democracy is laudable for its emphasis on the role of civil society in informing decisions of the government pertaining to social issues. Even in Cohen's theory, there is a tacit assumption about the common goals of the government and the people of a country. Both the government and the people work in tandem to address social issues. Pluralism in the Western context, more often than not, means pluralism of individual ideas. Since democratic ideals have permeated the West and people believe in the political process, pluralistic ideas are channeled through the Congressional process of representation. But, a country such as India which is not only pluralistic in terms of individual opinion but also in terms of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious population which has inherited problems bequeathed over several millennia cannot perform an *epoche* and adhere to a deliberative-associative democracy.¹³ In this context, Habermas cites Jaspers. "To understand each other through ciphers implies a form of communication in contact with the transcendent. Here the most intimate tie can be accompanied by the most remarkable hostility."¹⁴ Jaspers also further

¹² Please refer to the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, India.

¹³ Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," Ed. Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Liberating Power of Symbols*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001. p. 39.

explores whether a maximal shared framework of understanding heterogeneous faiths possible.

In the context of affirmative action as a cultural reparation to the blacks in the United States, Nathan Glazer's critique of affirmative action as reverse colonization is a denial of the history of the evolution of the social self of America. Is it a form of psychological escapism instead of encountering the past? Glazer's critique attempts to scuttle the process of cultural sublimation of the American self.¹⁵ Glazer's analysis of the emergence of ethnic group politics in the form of affirmative action extended to native Americans, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Pacific Islanders as contravening the ideal of a non-ethnic and non-religious America. Glazer's analysis appears very incisive until one compares the evolution of American democracy and the discordant notes that emanate between the words enshrined in the Constitution of America and the stark reality of slavery and racial discrimination. Here, once again the clash between consequentialism and deontology come to the fore. Glazer emphasizes a turning away from the sanguine past of America.

For the people who did not suffer the oppression of slavery and discrimination, much is not lost as a result of turning away from the past by declaring equality of opportunities for all. But for those who have to turn away from a horrid past, the future hopes always remind them of the horrors of the past. The present is a distant dream since

¹⁵ Ronald Takaki, Ed. *Debating Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2002. Refer to Nathan Glazer, "The Emergence of an American Ethnic Pattern."

they are haunted by the past.¹⁶ What Glazer suggests is not a catharsis for the people who were oppressed but even more repression that would only indelibly scar the analysts perpetually and turn them into psychopaths or socio-paths. One of the reasons why America did not become another Algeria or South Africa was because of the democratic institutions that allowed a sliver of hope to filter into the psyche of the blacks.

Glazer's espousal of an anti-affirmative action stance has some merits. There are abuses of affirmative action policies and because of deontological emphasis on affirmative action the consequential import of affirmative action policies as a privilege are construed as rights. Demands of reparations and other retrospective corrective measures create a fiasco. Glazer concedes that the political rhetoric of the founding fathers of America has not been honored with action as witnessed in the denial of women's suffrage and continuation of slavery after 1776. But Glazer's approach neglects historical atrocities committed on the black people and the native Indians. The American dream of an egalitarian state is the ideal that is to be coveted and defended and the perversions of this ideal must not be mistaken as a purposive activity, according to Glazer. Glazer also claims that since slavery and other acts of discrimination happened not with an underlying deliberate teleology, affirmative action as a purposive corrective measure is remiss of the non-partisan role of the government in encouraging an action aimed at the advancement of the minority ethnic groups in America. Ethnic minorities who were discriminated against thus far must be declared free to pursue their dreams in

¹⁶ In status societies, prevalent philosophies emphasize a type of fatalistic determinism in explaining the present plight of people. In such societies, the philosophy of present and future are ineluctably intertwined with the philosophy of the past. Such a philosophy effectively maintains the status quo. An example would be the caste system in India.

the same way as other Americans. Glazer cleverly separates economic affirmative action as distinct from political discrimination. Glazer claims that since political and ideological discrimination were perpetrated on the blacks and other minorities, a restoration of the political rights would alleviate the problem of discrimination.

On the surface, Glazer's proposition is attractive. Glazer's suggestion is passable as a liberal theory sans Rawls' difference principle and definitely supports Nozick's 'night watchman state.' But what Glazer fails to mention is that the manifestation of ideological deprivation is not only in the political realm. Ideological oppression is a malnourishment of cultural, social, political, economic, and healthy individual development. By denying the basic necessities of human life, the growth of the oppressed people is stunted which is in turn used as a tool of justification for their underdevelopment, thereby justifying more repression. Cultural repression is a human rights violation.

For a more natural evolution and justification of the institution of slavery, Glazer needs to compare slavery in America with Indian caste-system. It is interesting to compare the history of the United States and the history of India. One can cite thousands of glorious verses from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagawad Gita*, Buddhist and Jain canons and other philosophical, religious, and literary works about the ecumenical strands of Indian philosophy.¹⁷ In the *Bhagawad Gita*, Lord Krishna goes as far to say

¹⁷ A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1999.

that a liberated soul must not discriminate between a man, a dog or an untouchable.¹⁸

Does this mean that the general Indian population is to be likened to a Yogi? On the contrary, the emphasis on the liberated soul affirms the discriminatory nature of ordinary citizens. On the other hand, Habermas concedes that Western tradition, especially the institution of religion, has not been fair towards other religions.

Multiculturalism in America is to be viewed in terms of enrichment of social mosaic and the American populace must become willing participants in making America a cultural melting pot. A multi-cultural democracy is the tottering first step towards becoming a cultural melting pot. Glazer is correct in arguing that the non-ethnic character of America has contributed to a sense of freedom to multi-ethnic and multi-religious population that were allowed into America in greater numbers after 1965. But what Glazer did not take into account is that America is not an isolated continent. America has a foreign policy and also makes decisions with regard to its relationship with other countries, which would have good or bad consequences.

An America that encourages possessive individualism in the garb of freedom and simplifies ethnicity in terms of exotic cuisines, attires, cultural artifacts, and few catchy phrases will not be able to utilize the cultural advantages that accrue out of being a multi-cultural democracy. What Glazer in a catchy phrase calls ‘salutary neglect’ of cultural politics but not of ethnic-cultural freedom to run schools, religious institutions, and indulge in cultural activities has been advantageous and disadvantageous at once for

¹⁸ *The Bhagavad Gīta*, Trans. Jayadayal Goenka, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1996. Ch. 5.

America. The advantage of American politics and not cultural-ethnic politics has kept the focus on the American dream. On the other hand, disruptive features of ethno-cultural politics have always been outside the American cultural paradigm, which has led to a fragmented foreign policy. Because of a flawed social epistemological framework that encourages avoidance and tolerance of other cultures and not constructive engagement, the American intelligentsia and the government reveled in the self-congratulatory nature of the American dream and failed to recognize the gathering danger outside the American continent. The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks on the 11th of September were a stark reminder for all countries to sincerely engage their cultural minorities socially and politically. Cultural interaction must be facilitated between people at all levels: between nations and between communities. Only when people recognize others as socially embedded with similar concerns in their lives in all cultures will there be a genuine interaction. Only a cooperative action among various cultures can facilitate multi-cultural understanding.

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About the Author

Sudarsan Padmanabhan is a Graduate Teaching Associate in the Department of Philosophy, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA. He has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Pondicherry Central University, Pondicherry, India. His dissertation is titled “Jürgen Habermas’ Rational Theory of Social Action.” Sudarsan Padmanabhan recently completed his second Ph.D. in Philosophy. His dissertation titled “Two Models of Consensus” has interdisciplinary focus and engages in a running dialogue with political theory, developmental theory, sociology, religious studies, ethics, cultural and ethnic studies, and public policy.