Ethics and Government: Setting Limits to Critique

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Should the humanities remain locked up within a romantic ethical conception of critique or should the humanities start re-negotiating some of the renaissance ideals (without discarding the romantic framework)? Should the humanities act as a bourgeois bastion by laying the grounds for massive introspection or should the humanities (as a gesture of response to the collapse of the giant 19th century social models) prepare its participants for specific targets and specific engagements? Both have their positive sides and their limits and if the two are not put together we do not become politically able. A commitment to the changing shape of the thinkable calls for locating potential transformations inscribed in what is actually existing.

SPIVAK opens her article 'Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiating with Unacknowledged Masculinism' with a statement on the potential of deconstructive politics, which she (consistent with her general rhetorical strategy) phrases in terms of limits: "It is not just that deconstruction cannot found a politics, while other ways of thinking can. It is that deconstruction can make founded political programmes more useful by making their in-built problems more visible" [1989:206]. Roy Boyne [1989] characterises it more metaphorically as a 'mischievous lubricant' that circulates through the text while Spivak [1980] calls it the method of the criminal rather than of the revolutionary, thus making a conscious bid to strip deconstructive operations of any sense of moral supremacy that might be attached to them. The project of deconstruction, to Spivak, is the project of the 'othering of the proper'. Approached thus, she argues, it can act as an effective critique of 'classical' Marxism as well as deconstruction itself. As for its latter target, deconstruction is aimed at those of its advocates who approach it as *realia*, as a register for living deconstructively, ignoring Derrida's caution about taking grammatology as a positive science.

Deconstruction dislodges the traditional notion of critique and as part of the same act, it also sets operational limits to its own practice. It acts as an expose to critique's moralistic role as a detective. Much like a detective fiction, critique attempts to hold out to the reader the hidden flaws or imperfections in the main body of the text. Deconstruction strikes at the very heart of critique, exposing the latter's commitment to truth as complicit with the institutional politics of truth-production. By the same token, however, deconstruction cannot be a limitless operation, neither can it regard its characteristic gesture as the whole story of construction. One ignores deconstruction's self-imposed limits only at the risk of being aligned with critique's 19th century bourgeois heritage. Spivak sets the agenda of deconstruction in terms of these limits, even while not depriving it of the valid claim that the mode of 'unfounding' it initiates is actually an act of 'founding' in a special sense:

The aspect of deconstructive practice that is best known in the United States is its tendency towards infinite regression. The aspect that interests me most is, however, the recognition, within deconstructive practice, of provisional and intractible starting points in any investigative effort; its disclosure of complicities where a will to knowledge would create oppositions; its insistence that in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique; its emphasis upon 'history' and upon the ethico-political as the 'trace' of that complicity—the proof that we do not inhabit a clearly defined critical space free from such traces; and, finally the acknowledgement that its own discourse can never be adequate to its example [1987: 179-80].

The notion of the critic's complicity with the object of critique is seminal for Foucault as well. For Foucault, truth and power directly imply each other; there is "no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" [1977:27]. True to their common Nietzschean heritage, both Foucault and Derrida propose a radically anti-Kantian understanding of reality since in Kant's scheme power and truth cannot be brought into the vicinity of each other. More often than not the two thinkers seem to talk past each other and this is partly, and importantly, due to their engagements in different fields of knowledge. Derrida's engagement is with philosophy (by saying this, no attempt is of course made to vindicate Bourdieu's charge [1985] that Derrida merely philosophises[1]); Foucault's with history. The demands of the different fields show up increasingly as their work progress: Derrida's project of making philosophy literary takes the form of semi-autobiographical meditations in his recent writings while Foucault's historical anchorage leads him, ultimately, to questions of personal ethics on the one hand and of governmental rationality of capitalist states on the other.[2] To be sure, the late Foucault does not endeavour to realise a definite political project. Rather, he looks for strategic (i e, more effective) points of intervention into existing power apparatuses— not from the perspectives of paranoid politics (which explain everything as a trap)

but by foregrounding the non-repressive, positive dimension of power. Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis brings back the political in an interesting way, creating an interface between the personal sphere and the political sphere since in the process of participating in those institutions where particular forms of knowledges are created, one (along with intimately forming oneself) goes, through a passage which is institutionally organised and, hence, governmental. The power-knowledge question, thus, focuses effectively the issue of the limits within which political critique can take place since it reminds us that no critique exists outside the exercise of power. One's own capacity to do critique is often profoundly the product of one's own position inside an institutional setting—legal, informational, pedagogical, etc. There is no purer position, just as there is no power from outside.

Critique's propensity to assume an abstract, holistic and global form is largely a 19th century legacy—the giant social models (Hegelian in their origin) that centre around the notion that in the end history triumphs by bringing to light reason and the full development of the humanities. The temptation to evoke mega-reason dies hard and its vestiges can be traced in a variety of contemporary social theorisings that, professedly, are antagonistic to it. For instance, Michael Ryan. In his collection of articles, *Politics and Culture: Working Hypothesis for a Post-Revolutionary Society* [1989], Ryan correctly identifies the absence of any effective notion of power or ideology in Habermas as a sign of the latter's participation in the dominant power-politics of our times. But the way Ryan attempts to dislodge Habermas' position is interesting— especially because of Ryan's position in the US academia as an eminent practitioner of (Marxist) deconstruction. Two passages illuminate this point:

The defect is also due to Habermas' commitment to a *conservative model of evolution.* According to this way of conceptualising history, any differentiation of a system into increasingly complex sub-systems must be seen as an advance in rational modernisation. But if the *entirety of modernity is seen as one large camp* in which a majority are obliged to spend all profit from their work-

ing so that a much smaller minority can accumulate profit from their labour (a very simple version of the Marxist description), then refinements in sub-systems are *merely contingent* responses to trouble in the system of domination, efforts at social policing of the kind necessary in domination systems founded on *radically contingent premises*, rather than signs of modernizing advance or of rational maturation [1989:29].

The legitimation of inequality under social democratic party rationalism is made possible by the privileging of cognitive activities over physical ones or over emotional processes. In such an abstracted framework, in which *reason has been made transcendent over contingencies of materiality* and the norm of social rationalisation has been elevated over the material needs and desires of the populace, 'intelligent parties' can be legitimately proclaimed justifiable managers of an economic system that assumes labour exploitation as a necessary and rational feature of its operations. Indeed, the theory of social reason could lead to no other conclusion. Intelligent parties must subsume the material energies of exploited groups in the same way that *reason must subsume the contingencies* of material feelings like need and desire [1989:32] (emphasis added).

Apart from the contradictory use of the category of 'contingency' in these two passages, they bear evidence of what can be called the Marxist neglect of the question of government. In its over-zealous attempt to reach a projected end, Marxist critique overlooks what lies on the wayside. The point about Ryan's passages is not so much whether the analysis of contemporary capitalism presented here is correct or not; the real issue is whether such analysis—total and abstract—has any effective target. Ryan and his colleagues can keep churning out this kind of critique—now as 20 years later; the US military-industrial complex, however, will remain, sadly but surely, unaffected by it. The more ineffectual, the more abstract and global its target, the more vehement is the tone of critique—its ineffectuality serving as its moral inspiration. Reinhart Koselleck diagnoses this variety of 'critique' nicely:

It is in the nature of crises that problems crying out for solution go unresolved. And it is also in the nature of crises that the solution, that which the future holds in store, is not predictable. The uncertainty of a critical situation contains one certainty only—its end. The only unknown quantity is when and how. The eventual solution is uncertain, but the end of the crisis, a change in existing situation—threatening, feared and eagerly anticipated—is not. The question of the historical future is inherent in the crisis [1988:127].

One thus perforce turns to a lower level and focuses attention on the local determinants of our various landscapes—ethical, political, medical, academic, etc,— or, what Weber calls the 'departments of existence'.[3] We do not face a coherent, single, foundational entity here. Instead, we come up, among other things, against the domain of

government which has its own range of programmes that are profoundly normative. The array of norms do not add up to a unified whole; instead, they set parameters for political judgment and political intelligibility, thus indicating ways and means for pragmatic, political involvement within a particular sphere. Borrowing terminology from modern-day warfare, today's critique needs to pattern itself for pin-point attack rather than to rely on carpet bombing. Admittedly, this is a pragmatic agenda but also a viable way to understand contemporary political engagements.

French sociologist Jacques Donzelot [1991] argues that both Marxist and liberal politics, in their respective ways, attempt to undermine the role of the contemporary state and government. What both these camps have as their target is the shift in the state's role from a simple external guarantor of progress of society towards that of a manager directly responsible for society's destiny. For the republican right, the exteriority of the state (as manager) and its inflated role wreck the effective sovereignty of society and induce a loss of civic sense. They also bloat social expenditure, leading to the growing discrepancy between social security expenditure and the gross national product, and also prejudice the requirements of the labour market. For the left, the target is precisely the reality of the supposed progress achieved under the auspices of the state and the technocrats. The unsavoury effects of progress on everyday life, the realms of frustration, unfulfilment and incompletion, the way changes are carried out over people's head, all these provide the fuel for leftist discourse. The left challenges the unitary language of statistics by the language of autonomy and highlights themes such as spontaneity and worker's control.[4] Donzelot argues that the lines of contestation of the right and the left ultimately attempt to dislodge the whole concept of the social and the project of the realisation of social harmony through the social promotion of the individual, and through the promotion of the social by the simultaneous enhancement of freedom and security. He concludes:

Satisfaction of the need for security obeys its own inflationary logic, by creating the expectation that the state will take responsibility for all problems. At the same time, freedom starts to work against a state which has emptied it of all substance by its control over the course of events. And far from complementing each other to make a harmonious society, these two tendencies gave rise to a spectacular conflict in 1968, where a freedom wrested from the weight of tradition was pitted against a security interpreted as renunciation of the perspective of revolution [1991:176].

A crucial aspect of modern government is that it negotiates with the citizenry on the basis of power and seldom on force. In other words, it addresses free individuals. This freedom is not complete (it never can be);

but it is also not mere simulacrum or sham. To a large extent, it is a reflection of the on going struggles in the society; so far as the state is concerned, the freedom in question is not concessional but historical and strategic. It goes back to the very early days of civil society and refers to a basic challenge for statecraft: namely, to ensure minimum conditions of existence to every political citizen while also minimising the threat of violation of economic citizenship by confiscatory nationalisations, both sides lobbying for support and willing to co-operate with the state only on the guarantee of state patronage for their respective programmes. It is little wonder then that both liberal-conservatives and Marxists target their attack on the state. The former denounce the pauperised masses as a veritable 'anti-society' and a hindrance to economic growth while the latter (we can recall Marx here) find precisely in this anti-society the seeds for a new society, taking diagnosis for cure [see Gordon, 1991]. To Marx, the state represents an obstacle to history's progress; civil society, by the same logic, matters to him because of its inherent contradictions. The Marxist scheme of history thus necessarily leads to an under-valuation of the governmental rationale of the capitalist state—its history, innovations, problems and talents.

It has been noted by scholars that the major sources of governmental crisis during the time Marx was theorising—society, state, property, right—have undergone profound strategic re-alignments. Gordon argues that over the last hundred years the liberal-capitalist western states have actively pursued a line that is close to what Durkheim calls 'organic solidarity', i e, a kind of solidarity that at once reinforces and overlays the (mechanical) solidarity based on identity of members' life-situations. If the latter kind of solidarity results in a tendency for people to identify themselves as individuals due to the increasing division of labour that industrialism brings about, the former then tries to create social bonds among differentiated wholes on the principle of interdependence. The concept of organic solidarity serves to define not only the framework but also the rationale for the modern state's specific mode of intervention into areas like the family, schooling, the protection of minors and of the aged, legislation on divorce, the management of the sick, etc, thus bringing the public sphere foursquare into the heart of the private.

Hence, a modern state is by definition both collective and individualistic; governing, as it does, on the principle of all and each, its concerns are at once to totalise and to individualise. The managerial aspect of the state does not, however, work principally or exclusively by repression and domination. Such practices also, and more characteristically, seek actively (through techniques of micro-power) to produce subjects of a certain form, to mould, monitor, and organise

the psyche, to fabricate individuals with particular desires and aspirations. By emphasising the productive, generative side of power, the modern state enables its members to construe a form of family life, education or production which while maximising the productive capacities of the individual also minimises social waste by bolstering the capacity and efficiency of the institutions. Foucault calls this 'bio-politics', where the life and conduct of the population—propagation, births and mortality, levels of health, etc—become the focus of the state's engagement. He points out that since the state's calculations are targeted at citizens who are not under any obvious compulsion or coercion (unlike in the previous disciplinary regime of 'anatomo-politics'), bio-politics becomes the prime site and rationale for 'the strategic reversibility' of power relations. By engaging productively in organising the lives of the citizens, the state actually encourages the individuals to make the micro-level needs and desires the new realm of political demands. This gives rise to an interesting situation which Foucault characterises as the 'tactical polyvalence of discourse'. What all this leads to is that modern politics is principally geared towards improving social bonds and very marginally towards the question of a thorough overhaul of social structures. The early paradox of civil society still remains in the sense that the economic citizen and the juridical citizen do not mesh into one. But the modern state, through its changing strategies, has been able to exploit this contradiction creatively towards the production of the participatory subject at every level of social life and thus achieve a degree of agreement between those who govern and those who are governed. Gordon analyses this trend:

Civil society is therefore not to be taken, primarily or fundamentally, as an aboriginal nature which repels and contests the will of government: it is (like police, or sexuality) a *realite de transaction*; a vector of agonistic contention over the governmental relation, of 'the common interplay of relations of power and everything which never ceases to escape their grasp' [1991:23].

The domain of government as we now know it is something that primarily emerged in Germany in the 18th century and is associated with an ultra-pragmatist, non-religious form of social organisation and justification for the use of power. Cameralists are the key figures in enunciating a form of politics that is best described as 'mundane'—mundane politics in that it gives up the notion that the role of government is to god's will on earth. The war of religion had shown Germany the devastating consequences of a politics that professes to express the highest moral truth. Catholicism and protestantism as competing denominations led to unprecedented blood-letting, partly as a consequence of which the government that emerged in 1771 made its pro-

nounced aim not to 'save' the souls of its citizens (and thus materialise god's will) but to maintain and enhance the prosperity of the state and the welfare of the population—a welfare conceived in the mundane and secular terms of standard of living, notably health, nutritional level, education and civil order.

The English interpretation of cameralism portrays it as a theory and practice of economics, when it is primarily a technique of government, a civil technology aimed at creating the foundations of an amoral, secular state placing a premium on the value of collective interests over and above the interests of the individuals. The economic principle that the cameralists followed was simple. Albion W Small, an American economic historian of early this century puts it in a nutshell:

If the conduct of the different strata of society could be so ordered by the state that the total activities of the people could be made to result in an increasing margin of material return, above the aggregate demands of the different class standards, the state might appropriate that surplus without injustice or hardship to the individual [1909].

Within such a broad framework, the cameralist gave detailed instructions for the policing of individual conduct while also maintaining that the prosperity of the ruler needs to be linked to the welfare of the subjects, since one without the other cannot exist permanently.

Admittedly, cameralism is not a class-neutral agenda. Not everyone benefits in the same measure from a successful rule of law—those who have little or no property benefit least. What cameralism primarily aimed to achieve is to bring together a disunited, vulnerable pre-bourgeoisie on a stable platform—in other words, a revolution from above. This is a task that had to wait for its full completion until Bismarck entered the scene; and he, in his turn, was aided by the international development of the productive forces eclipsing the emergence of a rudimentary local capitalism.

Insofar as the state protects a particular order of distribution of income and wealth, certain sections will benefit more than others. The class character of early state theories is palpable. Hobbes, for instance, maintains that people found a state to "defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly" [*Leviathan*]. Smith argues that the civil government insofar as it is instituted for the security of property is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor. Smith's characterisation is interesting, since along with this line of thought he also maintains that a self-regulatory civil society (*vis-a-vis* the state) is the key to prosperity and order of society at large.

The cameralist vision of an ideal state clearly finds its way into the modern period. Like its immediate brethren, the Panopticon follows a similar logic though in a localised and half-realised manner. Also, importantly, here the task of surveillance passes from the political sovereign to the entrepreneurial manager, constrained by private profit on the one hand and republican sanction on the other. The micro-techniques of the body (time-table, drilling, etc) that Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish* are gainfully employed by the entrepreneur to generate calculable minds and a disciplined labour-force. The management of souls becomes co-extensive with the management of bodies. Foucault argues that this is made possible by the passage of power from the ecclesiastical to the medical register, which occurs first within the church where the confession, increasingly codified, shifts from being an instrument of juridical forms of law—of infraction and of penalty—to constituting a series of mechanisms designed to correct and to cure, in short, to perform a medical function.

The rise of liberal politics acts as a check on cameralist tendency but if cameralism has aimed at creating citizens as disciplined soldiers, liberal governments have also pursued a policy of disciplining its staffs and apparatuses—their various branches forming the legislative and executive arm of the mode of mundane security. Liberal states from mid-19th century onwards have followed a dual agenda: to reduce government to economic structures and to make economic structures governmental. Gordon [1991] argues that this partly leads to the notion of the social which effects a hybridisation of the public and the private, and itself produces a repartition, an interlacing of interventions and withdrawals of the state.

The public and the private spheres of existence have never been separate affairs in history. In tribal and feudal societies, they have been intimately related, though in modern societies the nature and reason for this intimacy has changed. James Fraser [1923] details how with continuing social differentiations, magic is slowly ousted by religion—the old magical functions of tribal societies falling more and more into the background and being exchanged for priestly or even divine duties. Still later, Fraser argues, a partition is effected between the civil and religious aspects of kingship, the temporal being committed to one man and the spiritual to another. Modern societies, with their developed mode of mundane security, dislodge religion from its central place, though traces of the latter remain in various ramifications (like in the partly therapeutic touch of modern bio-politics). In the process, two distinct forms of freedom have emerged for the individual member—a negative freedom that encourages the individual to take safeguard against the state's interferences; and a positive freedom that urges the individual to collectively par-

ticipate in the functioning of the state. Modern government, here as elsewhere, encourages as well as restricts both of these trends.[5]

The recognition of modern government as a powerful department of existence (and the gradual secularisation of the social order) warrants a reconsideration of its problematic relation with the question of ethics. This is a vexed question with a long history and one which every ideology worth its name considers important for attention. Marxism, for instance, treats ethics at one level as a reflex phenomenon while at another level theorises the domain of politics as if it could be profoundly related to the sphere of personal ethics. Marx's notion that we can have a society in which human beings develop to perfection is a profoundly ethical agenda. Marx, however, is no lone traveller here. To Kant, for instance, narrative history proceeds according to the expression of a will and a moral teleology because the two aspects of the self, viz, the noumenal (i e, the object of intellection and philosophy, and, hence, eternal) and the phenomenal (i e, the object of history and, hence, empirical and ephemeral)—can get formulated only in terms of a moral subject. Many other forms of political philosophy—including liberalism—have attempted to think of social life or political organisation of society as if at some point it could be expressive of personal goodness. After all, this is the way the ballot box is seen—as a device of democratic polity that translates rational personal ethics into governmental policies. Habermas, standing between Marxism and liberalism, argues for a dialogical basis of politics, returning us once again to rational politics that in the end serves as an expression of the ethical. Not individual ethics but studied communitarian ethics.[6] The position has its own attraction and to reject it completely may lead to certain dangers. But the sort of critique that Habermas is drawn towards—of instrumentalism, of rationalisation of the public sphere, and so on—and the conception of (inter)subjectivity that underlies it still hovers around the idea of a social order which is ultimately valued for its ethical soundness. However, if the history of the last two centuries is any indication, governmental calculations and personal ethics have no analytical or necessary relation. The history of government is irreducible, if not autonomous, to the history of the personal ethical sphere. The reality of government is that it does not give a damn about human perfectibility. All that it wishes to do is to improve given populations from the perspective of limited normative developments and not from ethical positions. This is not to deny the negotiations of the governmental and the ethical. They certainly do negotiate but not from the perspective of any global understanding. Their negotiations may be more appropriately termed strategic political exchange involving pressure groups and what is known as 'sheer politics', and also a variety of

bridgeheads and translation devices.

The different departments of existence are necessarily non-related at the level of emergence simply because of the peculiar, almost *sui generis*, histories through which they emerge.[7] It is only in the course of living in the world that they develop linkages, articulating under certain circumstances. Hence, there can be only circumstantial descriptions of these articulations and not a theoretically driven one that aspires of meta-level deliberations. Also, the various negotiating departments may display markedly different interests and logics in these meetings. For instance, there are people in the government who think of the moralisation of the population through a wide dissemination of ethical techniques as essentially an ultra-pragmatist governmental objective, aimed at creating an orderly, self-governing and governable population. On the other side, many reformers privilege the same ethical techniques as a means for saving 'souls' and thus take a completely different view of what is occurring. Neither view explains what exactly happens in reality; nonetheless, these are effective means and once built into school systems, for instance, they indeed assure the creation of a self-monitoring, self-governing population. The process is open to contingencies and the results that accrue may be considerably different from what either party has in mind. With the articulation of various levels, a self-generating, highly expansive form of social organisation comes into being, offering scope for the exercise of political rule. The various programmes attain a degree of coherence through their articulations, which partly assure their sustenance. Regarding the so-called 'logic of capital' it may be noted that while a programme with a radically anti-capitalist agenda will find it difficult to survive in its existing form, it may manage to put pressure on other competing programmes; also, importantly, no programme is manufactured to serve the interest of capital—their main criterion is their effectivity within their respective spaces.

If the above analysis aims at a contraction of the territory of ethics, it is by no means to deny or undermine its importance in contemporary life. Rather, it targets the kind of obfuscatory, mystifying analysis that allows ethics to swallow up the whole of what we know as the social. Behind much of what passes for rationalist analysis lies a profoundly aesthetic-religious agenda that aims to engulf the entirety of social life. To delimit ethics is also to show its "very strong structure of existence, without any relation with the juridical *per se*, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure" [Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 2 35]. Foucault maintains that it is not necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge; the question of how we form ourselves, how we conduct ourselves are strictly ethical issues and should better be kept out of science. Arnold Davidson [1990] points out that much before Foucault,

Pierre Hadot—the French scholar of Hellenistic and Roman thought—has tried to find ways to read philosophy not as epistemology but primarily as work on the self. To achieve this purpose, Hadot returns to the early Greeks, particularly the Stoics. He claims that one does better to read classical philosophy not with the lens of modern epistemic concerns but primarily as an ethical investigation into the ways the person who knows may be formed. In other words the focus is on how to put oneself in a disposition through which one comes to know—a disposition aimed at attaining a certain kind of stasis and thus neutralising the competing sides of the self. Pre-Platonic classical antiquity views the ethical question as a stylisation of conduct directed towards the achievement of self-discipline. Philosophy to the ancients is a "mode of life...an act of living...a way of being...an invitation for each man to transform himself. Philo ...hy is conversion, transformation of the way of being and the way of living, the quest for wisdom" [Hadot in Davidson, 1990: 476]. Unlike much of critical theory where issues are immediately moralised and where theory is emphasised at the cost of meditation and action, ancient philosophy targets the self's relation with itself. Hadot observes that in modern times, philosophical discourse (aimed at producing critique through the construction of abstract language) has all but overtaken philosophy as a way of life—a metamorphosis of one's personality, spiritual exercises designed as an aid to living the philosophical life.

For Hadot, the Stoics and the Epicureans together provide a complete schedule for such a philosophical life, the opposed but inseparable poles of our inner being. Following a line of distinction between what depends on the individual and what does not, the Stoics developed techniques of memorisation and meditation intended to insure individuals against passions that do not depend on them. Conversely, the Epicurean subject exercises, not to enhance vigilance but to be able to relax and to maintain a conscious distance from the painful aspects of reality. Together they set an agenda which can be called a training scheme for the individual that liberates him from the illusions of individuality. Here ethics attains the status of philosophy—an art of living, a therapeutics for the passion, a form of moral subjectivisation (as different from study of codes of moral behaviour). This in a way offers an interesting parallel with the eastern understanding of yoga and also places it at a marked contrast with the Christian moral problematisation framed as endless deciphering of the soul. Late Foucault's interest in the early Greeks is well known. What is not equally known is that Foucault, in the very last days of his life, acknowledges his debt to Kant, in whose writings he finds the guidelines of ethics as an art of living. In a way, Kant's contemporary readers understood this, because he was read as much by the clergy as by pro-

fessional philosophers—the minor clergy who were primarily preoccupied with ethical problems and problems of spiritual guidance. What worried them about Kant was an element of agnosticism that pervaded his work. But they appreciated the religious significance of his labels—from the phenomenal to the numinal, for instance—which they saw, instantly, as a religious ladder, a mode to ascend through exercise to the point of vision. This aspect of Kant's work is being lost sight of in modern readings.

Getting back to the question of the governmental, the modern state (particularly since Keynesianism) represents a symbiosis—precarious but not fragile—between the care of ordinary citizens and the travails of a society exposed to the profit-maximising drive of a capitalist economy. In fact, the welfare state can be viewed as a site of contestation among different political forces over the manner in which the state can fulfil its vocation. Here it may be mentioned that the care of the citizenry and the state's socio-economic rationale need not be merely antagonistic to each other; they can be mutually supportive agendas of the modern state. This explains the enhanced importance of bio-politics in present-day government and along with it, the state's active encouragement of ethical questions. Here ethics does not refer to its usual Christian connotations, but rather ethics as style of life aimed at creating self-disciplining subjects, as discussed above. Also, increasing productivity allows the state more scope to extend the democratic limits of the public sphere and thus partially accommodate radical demands. Very much like the cameralist state, the social is the field of modern government; but unlike cameralism, it no more works on the basis of strict identification of the state and civil society but on the principle of isomorphism that stresses not only control but also, and primarily, the calculations of the possible and the probable. And in all this, as Gordon [1991] points out, the contemporary state to a large extent itself takes the role of the critique. At every juncture, however, there are limits to how far the state can go. This puts new responsibility on radical (ethical) demands—critique's acknowledgement of its strategic, tactical and historical limits exceeding which it exposes itself to the risk of severe right-wing backlash. A clear instance of critique's unchecked radicalism generating 'such a' backlash is the current conundrum and disarray in Europe over the issue of immigration. By putting pressure for more and more immigration on humanistic grounds, the radical left offered a space large enough for neo-Nazi politics to revitalise. Apart from such backlashes, there are bandwagon effects as well. For instance, with the green movement gaining momentum, industries have started responding to ecological issues by, in fact, making such issues special selling points (recycled paper is one of many

such instances). But ecological demands, when they threaten to upset the fundamental calculations of the state, are not tolerated. Admittedly, the limits of the state's tolerance is neither fixed nor pre-given. The state does respond to a variety of factors of which critique, unfortunately but surely, is only one.

All this puts very interesting questions to our traditional conception of the humanities: should the humanities remain locked up within a romantic ethical conception of critique or should the humanities start re-negotiating certain of the renaissance ideals (without discarding the romantic framework)? Should the humanities act as a bourgeois bastion by laying the grounds for massive introspection or should the humanities (as a gesture of response to the collapse of the giant 19th century social models) prepare its participants for specific targets and specific engagements? Both have their positive sides and their limits and if the two are not put together, we do not become politically able. In his essay, 'What is Enlightenment?', Foucault agrues that if practices make what we are, we have, perforce, some common footing from which to proceed, to understand, to act. But that foothold is no longer one which is universal, guaranteed, verified or grounded. In the post-Foucaultian space, critique can no more feel secured about its epistemological foundations, its universal truths or normative grounds. When the centre can no more hold, the need emerges to localise the universals by tying them to their ethico-practices and comparing them to other competing practices. If the 60s project was to expose the underlying dual structure of the welfare state, the 90s is faced with an equally important and far more difficult challenge: namely, to define and operationalise, what Gordon calls, a governmental logic for the left. It is for intellectuals to question their—secured and preferred—patriarchal role as supporters of the ideological chorus line and mould themselves as active interlocutors in the act of governing. A commitment to the changing shape of the thinkable calls for locating potential transformations inscribed in what is actually existing. Instead of being a routinised supplier of mere critique, today's intellectual needs to provide a more informed basis for practical choice and imagination.

Notes

1 Bourdieu considers Derrida the latest example of privileging philosophy with unflinching determination. Derrida's focus on writing and typography, he argues, is the result of putting content into form and a rejection in advance of any summary aiming to separate content from form. To Bourdieu, this amounts to a denial of the most fundamental intention of work and is part of a conscious strategy "to perform the epoche of everything by which the philosophical text affirms its existence as a philosophical text, i.e., its 'disinterestedness',

its freedom, and hence its elevation, its distinction, its distance from all vulgar discourses" [1985:495].

Derrida can, Bourdieu continues, only philosophically tell the truth about the philosophical reading, which is the best way of not telling it.

Bourdieu here plainly misreads Derrida. He operates with a restricted notion of Derrida's writing and attacks his notion of reading in the interstices on the basis of a hermetic ontology of outside. What Bourdieu fails to consider is that form is both rational and material. Form gives empirical reality to mental entities; as words or acts or representations, it embodies thought materially. Form negotiates the two realms of 'materiality' and 'ideality' while working toward an effective annulment of the logic that holds them in a neat binary opposition by showing 'each within each' and thus, finally, effecting its own effacement. Derrida points at the tie-up between reason and representation: the latter as a combination of the contingent or the indeterminate and the structuring rules of order infects the former. (Habermas, who also argues for necessary inheritance of reasoning in communication, fails to appreciate this point. Hence his project falls far short of the democratic openness it seeks.)

2 Foucault never chose or had time to work up in a final written form his researches on governmentality. His two lecture series, 'Security, Territory and Population' [1978] and 'The Birth of Biopolitics' [1979] are the only sources available in this area. Recently, Colin Gordon (along with Graham Burchell and Peter Miller) has translated and edited them in the form of a book entitled, The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality [London, 1991]. Apart from the articles of Foucault, the book also contains the contributions of fellow researchers in this area. Gordon's own long introductory piece makes excellent reading and is a substantial addition to this emerging field.

3 It is important to remember here that for Weber, 'departments of existence' is not an epistemological concept; in other words, they are not meant to solve problems of how we recognise the world. In the Weberian sense, bureaucracy, religion, agricultural labour are all departments of existence. Weber also calls them 'orders of life' (Lebensordnung). Not every order of life gives rise to an order of knowledge. Sometimes they simply give rise to practices of government that inter alia may have implications for knowledge. (For more in this line, see Wilhelm Hennis [1988] Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction.)

4 Nergi is a good example here. He privileges the postmodern lack of ontology and takes it as the basis of the political autonomy of the 'new revolutionary subject' of computerised capitalism. Taking clue from a relatively obscure argument of Grundrisse, he calls it the journey through the various 'figures of self-valorisation' (see, Antonio Negri, The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century, Cambridge, UK Polity Press).

5 Nationalist ideologies formed around the twin ideas of an existential enemy and a heroic martyr-leader [Blackburn, 1990:195] are far from being a spent force. A recent example is the alarming rise in popularity of the *Republikaner* in Germany which vows to free the country of aliens (defined in clearly racist terms). In many third world societies, such ideologies have assumed disturbing proportions since the 70s. Judaism and Islam are two such widely discussed instances. In India, the recent rise of militant Hindu cultural identity movement as a competing state ideology is another of such examples. All these ideologies, hooked as they are to versions of mythological pasts, banks on a politics of memory for their notorious rhetorical force.

6 For Habermas, language is an interest of reason, the key to the concept of a social order based on the autonomous responsibility (*Mundigkeit*) of individual actors. In his neo-Kantian scheme, the ideal gets related to the real as a condition of possibility while it may be argued that the gap between the ideal conditions and the actual circumstances exists only by virtue of a transcendental viewpoint or more appropriately in this case, a reconstituted a priori.

Not surprisingly, Habermas misreads Foucault. In his two essays on Foucault, Habermas [1987] blames Foucault's historiography for not having any intrinsic validity. Ironically, Foucault was aiming precisely this discourses as functions of power, tactical elements or blocks operating in the force-field of relations, existing only in the vicinity of other discourses.

7 For detailed research in this area in a German context, see Koselleck's *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* [1985] and *Critique and Crisis* [1988]. Koselleck demonstrates that as history as a field of knowledge gradually liberates itself from its earlier notion of unconnected segments into one secular whole, the various sectors of society (like industry, bureaucracy, police, educational apparatus, etc) which together create the fabric of modernity emerge in an unrelated, unorchestrated and contingent manner.

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